

Independent Review of Special Educational Needs Services and Processes

FINAL REPORT

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Glossary of Terms

A number of terms are used throughout this report, and a table has been provided below detailing the abbreviations and their associated meaning.

AHP	Allied Health Professional
CFF	Common Funding Formula
CYPS	Children and Young People Services
CYPSP	Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (used to be in HSCB)
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
DARS	Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service
Department / DE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
EA	Education Authority
EMS	Education Management System
EOTAS	Education Other Than At School
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
FE	Further Education
GMI	Grant Maintained Integrated School
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HSCTs	Health and Social Care Trusts
IEP	Individual Learning Plan
IM (E)	Irish Medium (Education)
LSC	Learning Support Co-ordinator (new term for SENCO)
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
NICCY	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PHA	Public Health Agency
PLP	Personal Learning Plan (replaced IEPs)
SARS	Statutory Assessment Service
SDP	The EAs Strategic Development Programme (for SEN)
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SIMS	Schools Information Management System
VGS	Voluntary Grammar School

1 Introduction and Background

Background to the review

In March 2022, the Department of Education (DE) commissioned Ipsos to conduct a review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland (NI). The over-arching aim of this project is to understand whether the SEN provision and current processes are fit for purpose, in terms of progress made by children, impact on children's outcomes and whether the services can be delivered more effectively and efficiently across schools. This review was commissioned following the publication of a number of reports which examined the effectiveness of the SEN system in Northern Ireland and identified a variety of issues and challenges with the structures and processes. Below is an overview of three relevant reports and studies and the key findings from these to provide the contextual backdrop.

Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) Special Educational Needs Reports (2017 & 2020)

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO, 2017) published a report on Special Educational Needs¹, highlighting that although the reported number of children and young people with SEN have increased steadily over time, there were no evaluations of the support provided to them. The report included a total of 10 recommendations, with one in particular noting that DE or the Education Authority (EA) should ensure that they are in a position to demonstrate the Value for Money (VFM) through focussing of resources to improve outcomes for children and young people². A follow up report (NIAO, 2020³), the Impact Review of Special Education Needs, stated that the 2017 recommendations had not been fully implemented and therefore VFM could not be demonstrated. It also noted that there remained a need for a review of policies, processes, services, and funding to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN.

Report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs, Public Accounts Committee (PAC), 2021

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), a standing committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly, took the NIAO 2020 report under consideration and expressed concern over inconsistencies stretching back to the early stages of the review 13 years previously. The PAC outlined various concerns including the number of children who have been failed and suggested this might be due to 'dysfunctionality' within the EA. The PAC also raised concerns regarding the extent of oversight from both the DE and the EA's Board in relation to SEN and called for an independent review on SEN provisions to build confidence in the EA in the absence of reliable information and a lack of evidence to ensure funds are being used effectively.

A main focus of the PAC (2021) report was a weakness in the DE governance and oversight, the Committee was concerned of the lack of progress made. The NIAO's 2017 report also showed that there had been issues with SEN for a significant amount of time. The DE advised PAC that implementation plans were in place to bring improvement, however they agreed that there had been a failure to achieve the 26-week statutory timeframe for assessment and statementing.

The PAC also noted weaknesses in the EA Board's governance and oversight arrangements. The main issue within this is that 'there had been difficulties in ensuring that members are fully sighted', this may be due to the sheer size of the Board, but also refers to witnesses that told PAC that they were aware of the increase in children with SEN, and also the delays in the system. Although Board members were questioned on issues and provided assurances, the PAC found it disappointing that this had not been done in more depth and that the EA was still experiencing challenges in adhering to the 26-week statutory target to complete SEN assessments.

The PAC report expressed concern that neither the DE nor the EA knew how many children with SEN in schools could benefit from Educational Psychology input or why the diagnosed SEN rate is higher in Northern Ireland compared to England. Conversations surrounding this issue are at early stages and possible explanations for this

¹ Special Educational Needs. NIAO (2017) [Special Educational Needs | Northern Ireland Audit Office \(niauditoffice.gov.uk\)](https://niauditoffice.gov.uk)

² NIAO Recommendation 6: The Department and the EA should review the current funding arrangements to ensure that available resources are used effectively to meet the needs of all children with SEN, with or without a statement. NIAO Recommendation 9: The Department and the EA must assess the quality of SEN support provided in mainstream schools by formally evaluating it in terms of the progress made by children. This will allow resources to be focused on types of support which maximise progress and improve outcomes.

³ Impact Review of Special Educational Needs. NIAO (2020). [Impact Review of Special Educational Needs | Northern Ireland Audit Office \(niauditoffice.gov.uk\)](https://niauditoffice.gov.uk)

include behavioural problems, attachment issues, higher child poverty and the legacy of the Troubles. However, the PAC report states that these are common issues across other jurisdictions and that there should be an in-depth explanation and examination on why SEN rates in Northern Ireland are higher, for example, the diagnosis of autism in NI is twice as high as the rate in England.

NICCY: Too Little, Too Late (2020)⁴

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) published a rights-based review of Special Education Needs provision in mainstream schools in Northern Ireland (2020). The report focused on issues such as unmet need, barriers that children with SEN may face when accessing education and how this impacts them. The report examined how the system supports children in schools and found that, due to overwhelming pressures, the system had difficulties meeting the needs of children with SEN. This review also highlighted the significant rise in children with SEN in NI over the last decade, with an increase of 48.8% between 2004/5 to 2018 and 78,917 children in school with some form of SEN. It sets out comprehensive recommendations in the following areas:

- **Accessibility, Availability and Effectiveness of Statutory Supports and Services**, this includes conducting a systematic review of all supports and services, and to ensure that access is always allocated on basis of need when accessing Stage 3 services;
- **Capacity Building in Schools**, this highlights that it is DE and EA responsibility that staff are fully trained and supported to be able to meet the needs of SEN children;
- **Strategic Planning for Behavioural Support Services**, making sure that there is early intervention in place and behavioural management;
- **Suspensions, Expulsions and Informal Exclusions**, encouraging an urgent review of informal or unregulated exclusions in schools such as sending a child home early from school or placing them in isolation;
- **The Role of the Educational Psychology Services**, this point sets out recommendations that all children have the right to an EP assessment and the possibility of a policy that ensures those of SEN have equal access and services regardless of socio-economic background;
- **Statutory Assessment and Statementing**, ensuring legal compliance and a transparent model of quality assurance and decision making at the assessment stage; Transparency of the SEN Process, this recommends an investigation of advice not being accepted from Educational Psychologists and an annual review of the effectiveness in improving outcomes;
- **Communication and Engagement**, this recommends a review of communication with parents and caregivers and how information can be provided;
- **Involvement of Children and Young People**, a recommendation based on keeping children at the heart of all involvement and ensuring their participation;
- **Multi-Disciplinary Working**, this entails a review and revision of planning, assessment, diagnosis and implementation of support and services so that key services are able to effectively work together; and,
- **DARS and Appeals**, this recommends that disputes must be resolved as early as possible, and information should be provided efficiently to parents.

The report urges the EA and DE to incorporate each recommendation into new policy and legislative context for children with SEN as an immediate priority. The Department accepted the recommendations in the report.

Industrial Action within the Education Sector

Another contextual factor that should be considered when reviewing any processes and services associated with the wider education sector in Northern Ireland is the ongoing, intermittent industrial action that has been taking place by teaching unions across Northern Ireland since January 2017. This long running pay dispute amongst teacher unions in Northern Ireland has limited the number and range of activities that many teachers in Northern Ireland will engage in beyond their standard contracted hours (action short of strike). A number of aspects of school life have been impacted, including the provision of extra-curricular activities, the participation of teaching staff in school inspections and engagement in various reviews and studies relating to mainstream and SEN. The NIAO Impact Review of SEN (2020) also highlighted that a full ETI evaluation regarding the quality of SEN provisions was limited due to industrial action by four teaching unions.

⁴ Too Little Too Late: A Rights Based Review of Special Educational Needs in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. (2020)

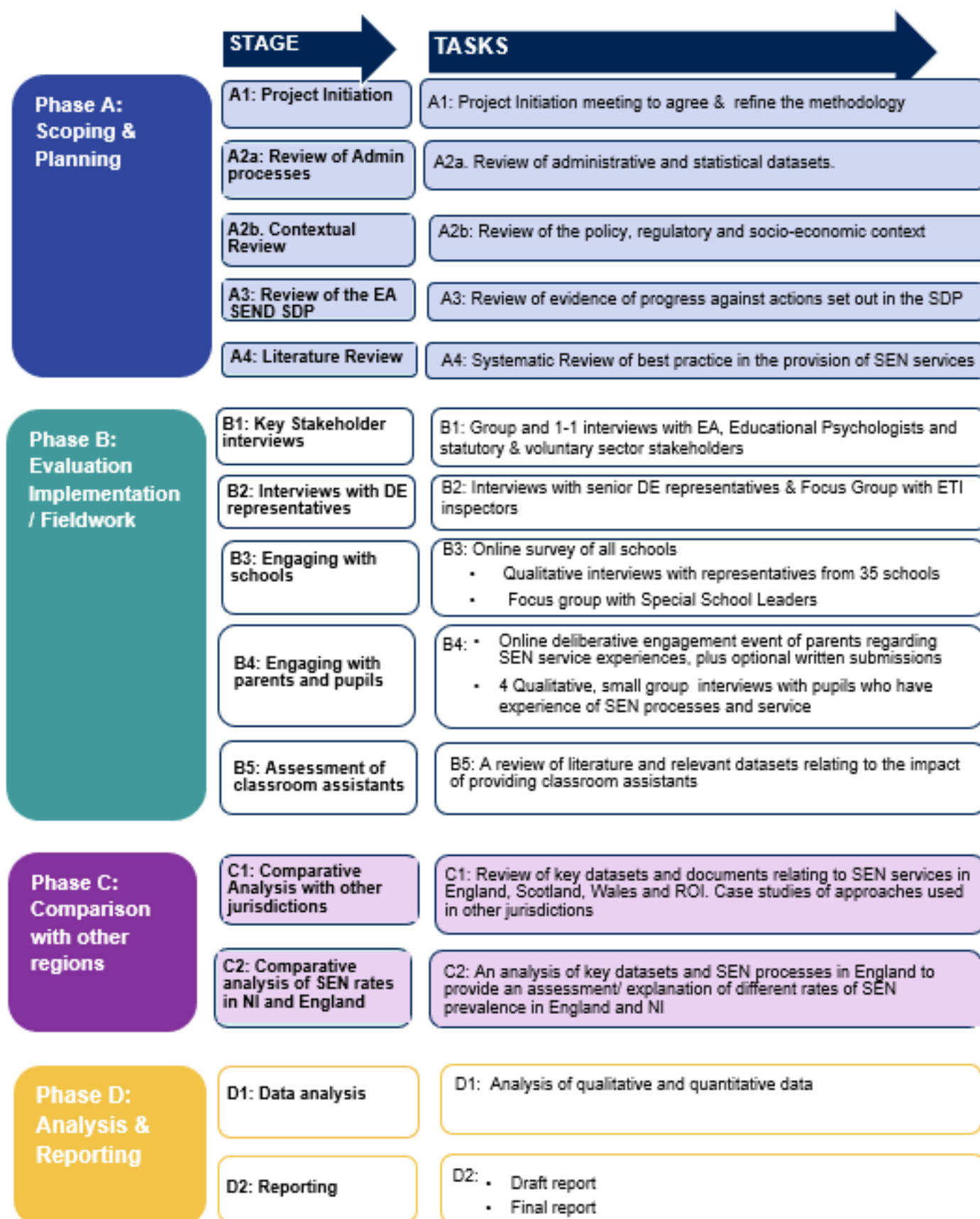
Aims and Objectives

The over-arching aim of this report is to understand whether SEN provision and current processes are fit for purpose, in terms of progress made by children, impact on children's outcomes and whether the services can be delivered more effectively and efficiently across schools. The terms of reference for the study notes that it must include:

1. An independent external evaluation of the work progressed so far under the EA's SEN and Disability (SEND) Strategic Development Programme (SDP); (at time of publication this is now known as the SEND Transformation Programme);
2. A review of the impact of classroom assistance on children's outcomes;
3. An external benchmarking exercise of SEN services with other jurisdictions;
4. Research into the higher proportion of children with SEN in Northern Ireland compared to England; and
5. An external review of funding of SEN services including the delegation of budgets.

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of this review, a multi-faceted approach was implemented, involving desk research, the analysis of administrative datasets and extensive primary data collection, as summarised in the diagram below. Further information is provided on the methodological approach taken in regard to specific elements of the review throughout the following chapters.

Figure 1.1: Overview of the Ipsos Methodology



2 Context

The number of pupils in Northern Ireland schools has been growing steadily since 2017, there are now 340,696 pupils in Primary, Post Primary and Special Schools. In addition to this the number of pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) has also increased steadily over the past number of years, for example in 2021/22 there were 21,956 (6.4%) children on stage 3 of the SEN register compared to 17,709 (5.4%) in 2017/18. Most children with SEN are educated within mainstream education (70.8%)⁵. This chapter of the report provides a detailed overview of the strategic, legal and operational context in which SEN services are delivered in Northern Ireland, detailing findings from key Government reports, key pieces of legislation, and policy.

Strategic Context

This section provides an overview of the strategic context in which SEN services are delivered in Northern Ireland.

A Fair Start – Final Report & Action Plan Programme for Government (2021)

The Minister of Education appointed an expert panel to examine the links between ‘educational underachievement and socio-economic background.’ A panel was created under the New Decade, New Approach (2020) agreement, which included various stakeholders such as parents, families, young people, policy makers and the voluntary and community sector with the aim to establish any links between educational underachievement and socio-economic background to create an action plan.

The Fair Start report outlined key areas that required action to ensure children and young people are receiving the support that they need:

1. Redirecting the focus to Early Years;
2. Championing Emotional Health and Wellbeing;
3. Ensuring the relevance and appropriateness of Curriculum and Assessment;
4. Promoting a whole community approach to education;
5. Maximising boy’s potential;
6. Driving forward Teachers Professional Learning;
7. Supporting the professional learning and wellbeing of school leadership; and,
8. Ensuring Interdepartmental collaboration and delivery.

Specifically, the final report and action plan noted that the SEN system is under extreme pressure and notes the need for additional teacher training in specialist areas, such as SEN, as well as the importance of early intervention.

Children and Young People’s Strategy 2020 – 2030

In line with the Children’s Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, the objective of this strategy is to improve the overall well-being of children in key areas such as physical and mental health, learning and achievement and living in a society which respects their rights. The strategy sets out three main aims:

1. Working together: meaning that Government departments listen to young people and parents or caregivers and ensure that everyone involved contributes to the delivery of the strategy and makes sure that services are provided;
2. Improving the wellbeing of children and young people living in Northern Ireland: ensuring all children in NI have a better quality of life and well-being as set out in Section 1(2) of the Children’s Services Co-operation Act. As well as recognising that some children and young people may face greater barriers and ensuring that the support needed is in place; and
3. Achieving positive, long-lasting outcomes: this focuses on policies and strategies that directly impact young people and identify what is working and what might need changed.

The Strategy has adopted an outcomes-based approach and focuses on the results and monitoring indicators that impact the well-being of children and young people. In particular the Strategy sets outcome indicators for children and young people to learn and achieve and notes the need to continue to ensure that all children with SEN receive a high-quality education.

⁵ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/school-enrolments>

New Decade New Approach (2020)

The New Decade New Approach (2020) is an agreement which restored Government in Northern Ireland following the collapse of the Assembly (2017-2020). It set out the agreed immediate priorities for the Executive which include the following: housing, education, childcare, infrastructure and services, climate change, ending sectarianism and tackling paramilitarism. Specifically, in relation to education, it is stated that the Executive will begin actions to address resourcing pressures in the education systems, examining the links between educational underachievement and socio-economic background and reviewing the issues. Also, the Executive will deliver a new special educational needs framework to support young people with special needs to achieve their full potential and highlights the NIAO review of Special Educational Needs (NIAO, 2017).

Making Life Better Strategic Framework 2013 – 2023.

This ten-year framework sets out to give the individuals, families, and communities a greater control of their lives and support for healthy lives. It also considers a broad range of social, economic and environmental factors. It sets out 6 key themes, the first being Giving Every Child the Best Start, the long-term outcomes are: good quality parenting and family support; healthy and confident children and young people; and children and young people skilled for life.

Each of these long-term outcomes refer to how early intervention in child's life is important for the outcomes in their adult life. Outcome 1 outlines the use of Early Intervention Programme from 2014 and the Children and Young People's strategic partnership to ensure that key agencies are planning and integrating children's services. Particularly in Outcome 2, actions and commitments 2013-2015, it indicates that there must be a high level of public health and social care services provided for all children and young people, with 'additional and tailored support to those who need it' referring to children and young people with SEN. Outcome 3 notes that, as with health inequalities, children also experience educational inequalities and that there is a need to address this in order to reduce social exclusion. Four actions and commitments are noted under this outcome all of which relate to improvements in English and Maths and educational achievements. DE are noted as a key partner.

Autism Interim Strategy (2021-2022)

The Autism Act (NI) 2011 places a statutory responsibility on the Department of Health to publish an autism strategy every seven years and the first Autism Strategy (2013-2020) was published in 2014. An interim Autism Strategy (2021- 2022) was published in 2021 which sets out priorities for action and is focussed on the aim of improving the lives of people with autism, their families and carers by enhancing access to service provision and support, increasing understanding of their specific needs and strengthening partnership working within our communities.

The interim strategy is based upon three strategic outcomes which will align to the PfG, thereby keeping actions within the core of Executive priorities, and also reflecting the vision for person centred health and wellbeing outlined in Health and Wellbeing 2026 – Delivering Together. Specifically, Strategic Outcome 2 states:

"A life with opportunities to live as an active citizen. We will support autistic people, their families and carers as they participate in all aspects of community and society through continued support in education and employment and as they transition throughout life stages."

The Strategy notes the need for greater integration between education and health and that the education sector should have a better understanding of autistic children and how they react to the environment around them. Under Strategic Outcome 2, the Strategy also notes:

"Through the phased implementation of a new Special Education Needs (SEN) Framework we will improve participation and empowerment for all children going through the SEN assessment process. We will ensure that autistic people are supported throughout their education."

Legislative context

Legislation that guides the provision of special education in Northern Ireland sits in the following legislative position:

Primary Legislation

1. The Education (NI) Order 1996 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (NI) 2016)
2. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SEND0)
3. Autism Act (NI) 2011
4. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016
5. Autism (Amendment) Act 2022.

Subordinate Legislation

1. The Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005
2. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal Regulations (NI) 2005

The main pieces of legislation and policy frameworks that relate to the provision of special education in Northern Ireland, are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Special Education Needs and Disability (NI) Act 2016

This Act places increased duties on Board of Governors, the EA and health and social services authorities. Furthermore, the Act requires the EA to publish an annual plan of its arrangements for SEN and to involve the voice of the child when making decisions that affect them involving special educational provision. However, not all sections of the 2016 Act have been commenced, as certain sections require supporting regulations to be passed by the NI Assembly.

Under the Act, school Boards of Governors are required to appoint a Learning Support Co-ordinator and the school will be required to complete a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) for children and young people who are on the SEN Register.

The Act also places an onus on increased co-operation between the EA and health and social service authorities to provide services they have identified to be of benefit in addressing a child's SEN.

Children's Services Co-operation Act (2015)

This Act requires "co-operation among certain public authorities and other persons in order to contribute to the well-being of children and young persons; to require the adoption of a children and young person's strategy; and for connected purposes." The aim being that it should improve co-operation between children's authorities and other children's service providers and focuses on the well-being of children and young people as outlined in the eight definitions of what 'well-being' includes.

The Act focuses on several duties on the Northern Ireland Executive. This includes making arrangements for co-operation between children's authorities and service providers, to report on the operation of the Act including actions taken by the Executive to achieve outcomes, progress made, how effective co-operation is, how funds and resources have been shared and, how the well-being of children and young people has improved.

The Code of Practice (1996) & Supplement (2005)

The Code of Practice is statutory guidance and it sets out the identification, assessment, and provisions made for children with SEN. It is issued by DE under Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1996 and schools must ensure that they are meeting arrangements for children with SEN and providing the support needed. It sets out essential procedures including identifying children with SEN as early as possible, Education Boards (now the Education Authority (EA)) completing assessments and statements surrounding the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing and producing an annual report.

To ensure that the continuum of need is met, the Code sets out a five-stage approach to special provision: the first two are based on providing support in schools; the third is the school provision and external support; and four and five are carried out by the EA. As progress is made within the first three stages at school level, it is possible that the child might not need to continue with stage four and five and that only a minority would continue. The stages themselves are as follows:

- Stage 1: teachers identify and register a child's special educational needs and, consulting the school's SEN co-ordinator, take initial action;
- Stage 2: the SEN co-ordinator takes lead responsibility for collecting and recording information and for co-ordinating the child's special educational provision, working with the child's teachers;
- Stage 3: teachers and the SEN co-ordinator are supported by specialists from outside the school;
- Stage 4: the EA considers the need for a statutory assessment and, if appropriate, makes a multi-disciplinary assessment; and,
- Stage 5: following an assessment, the EA consider the need for a statement of special educational needs.

Previously the Code of Practice set out seven broad areas to which SEN categories can be assigned. In 2019 DE amended the Recording of SEN and Medical Categories⁶ to provide five overarching categories⁷ and introduced a Medical Register whereby a child with a long-term illness or medical diagnosis should be recorded on the medical register. Pupils who have a medical diagnosis/es but do not have any associated SEN should only be recorded on the school's Medical Register. In addition, whilst children with SEN only should be recorded on the SEN register, there are cases where some children will be registered on both Medical and SEN register, for example children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may also be recorded on the SEN register due to their presenting educational needs.

This Code has influenced the development of practices and procedures such as the *EA Good Practice Guideline*⁸. The guidelines set out intend to support 'reasonable adjustment and relevant and purposeful measures' that the EA may expect of schools, particularly focusing on Stage 3 of the Code.

EA officials agreed with PAC that there should be easier access to the services needed to access Stage 3, as this acts as a form of early intervention. When implementing, monitoring, and reviewing Stage 3, this should last for a minimum of 2 period reviews. This requires a high level of collaboration between the teachers and EA's own judgment, as well as relevant support services when creating strategies for the child. Once all areas have been exhausted, this is when a request should be made for a statutory assessment.

In terms of the process of requesting a Statutory Assessment, the school complete a SAR 1 and include the actions that have taken place to meet the child's special educational needs, ensure curriculum access and the inclusion of the pupil in the life of the school. A statutory assessment cannot be conducted without appropriate evidence that the school has made every attempt to meet the needs of the child at the school-based stages of the Code. However, if they are met, the EA will take into account various factors, such as, school size to come up with a conclusion of what adjustments can be made at a school.

To ensure that there are relevant guidelines for the School and EA to follow, the EA has set out in their Good Practice Guidelines a breakdown of specialist support for various SEN. This includes details on relevant and purposeful measures, adjustments to the environment and curriculum materials and social settings for children and young people with autism, speech and language difficulties, specific literacy difficulties, visual and hearing impairment and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The guiding principles are:

- Pupils with SEN, including those with statements, should, wherever appropriate and taking into account the wishes of their parents, be educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools; and,
- The needs of pupils with SEN are identified, assessed and met by the EA and Schools.

The New Special Educational Needs Framework

The new SEN framework has three elements, Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016; the new SEN Regulations and a new Code of Practice.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 places new duties on the Boards of Governors, the EA and health and social services authorities and provides new rights for parents and children over compulsory school age (i.e. aged 16 to 19 years). Under the Act, the EA is required to publish an annual plan for its arrangements for Special Education and are also required to seek and take the views of the child into consideration when making decisions regarding the provision of Special Education. As part of the new Act, the EA has established a new, independent dispute avoidance and resolution service and mediation arrangements.

Also under the Act, Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools are required to ensure that a Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC)⁹ is appointed to co-ordinate services and support for children with SEN. Schools are also required to complete and review a Personal Learning Plan (PLP)¹¹ and to ensure that PLPs are transferred when a child moves from one grant aided school to another (with the necessary consents). The Act also provides for increased co-operation between the EA and Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCs) to enable the provision of services when then have been identified as beneficial in addressing a child's SEN. Sections 1, 6, 15, 16, 18 and 19 of the Act have been commenced. The remaining sections require the passing of the supporting Regulations.

⁶ Recording SEN and Medical Categories. Guidance for Schools. Department of Education 2019.

⁷ 1. Cognition and learning, 2. Social behavioural, emotional and well-being; 3. Speech, language and communication needs, 4. Sensory, 5. Physical needs.

⁸ <https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/SEN%20Good%20Practice%20Guidelines.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sen-and-medical-categoriesguidance-schools>

¹⁰ Learning Support Co-ordinators are teachers who are responsible for SEN in schools, previously entitled Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs).

¹¹ Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) will replace the current system of Independent Education Plans (IEPs).

New SEN Regulations

The absence of an Assembly (2017 to 2020 and 2022 – to date) and the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant delay to the passing of the new SEN Act. The DE has consulted widely on the new Regulations and has set out the legal duties of the EA and schools now have under the Act. The core elements of the new Regulations are:

- **Education Authority Annual Plan of Arrangements For Special Education Provision:** EA has a duty to prepare, consult and publish an annual plan setting out the special education provision it intends to make for children and young people with special educational needs. The plan should consider factors such as, the type of support needed, what staff training is required, what resources are required and how is going to provide it.
- **Boards of Governors:** The regulations set out the responsibilities of school Boards of Governors under the Act, including; informing the EA if a child with SEN is absent for more than four weeks and the requirement to ensure that LSCs are given enough time and training to do their job properly.
- **Assessments:** The EA has a legal duty to consider every request for a statutory assessment of Special Educational Needs. The Regulations also set out the timeframes that the EA is required to adhere to when making a decision, if an assessment is needed, the completion of the assessment and the completion of the Statement (if one is needed). The timeframes for the assessment and statement process is being reduced from 26 weeks to 22 weeks.
- **Statements:** The Regulations set out the format of a Statement and what information it should include. The EA are required to review the statement each year. For those children with a statement in year 10, schools are required to complete a transition plan which is to help children plan for adulthood and this should also be reviewed annually in conjunction with the annual review of a statement.
- **Children over compulsory school age:** The Act provides new rights for young people with SEN meaning they can make decisions previously made by their parents, it allows the young person to appoint an advocate to support them in making decisions about their education (for example, this could be a parent, a friend or, a solicitor).
- **Mediation and appeals:** The Act introduces a new mediation service which is an informal way to resolve disputes relating to the EA decisions on SEN. An independent Mediator (who does not work for the EA), will meet with parents (or the young person) and EA representatives to discuss the issues under dispute and to find a way forward.
- **Compliance with Tribunal Orders and Unopposed Appeals:** If a parent or a young person decides to appeal, the Tribunal will make a decision once it has listened to evidence from all parties concerned. The Regulations set out the timescales that EA must adhere to if they are required to comply with the Tribunal's decision or, take action if they no longer oppose the appeal.
- **Revocations and transitional arrangements:** the Regulations set out what the EA must do whilst changes to the new law are being introduced.

The new Draft Code of Practice

The new Code of Practice reflects the changes in the SEND Act and the new SEN Regulations. It is intended to provide practical guidance to Boards of Governors, schools, the EA and HSCTs on their statutory duties relating to the identification and assessment of SEN and the provision of services. In particular, the new Code aims to provide clarity and guidance on the key changes that are set out in the Act, mainly:

- The Act will strengthen the co-operation between education and health in the identification and assessment of children who have, or may have, SEN, and in the provision made for children who have SEN and in the preparation of a transition plan (to prepare a child with a Statement for adulthood);
- A reduction of 5 SEN stages to 3. Pupils who are going through the Statutory Assessment will be recorded as stage 2 and those who have a statement will now be stage 3;
- Each school will be required to have a Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC), the new name for a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). The code provides clarity on their role and the role of school's senior management teams;
- Every child on the SEN register is to have a Personal Learning Plan (PLP), which replaces the Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The code provides guidance and templates for the PLPs to increase consistency and provide a standardised format for the plans;
- Young people (aged 16 – 19 years old) are to be given their own rights in the SEN Framework;
- A new right of appeal at annual review of a SEN Statement is to be introduced;
- A new right of appeal of an EA decision not to make a SEN Statement for a child under two or about the content of a Statement is to be introduced;
- Strengthened independence from the EA of arrangements for dispute avoidance and resolution; and,
- New arrangements for independent mediation about EA decisions that carry a right of appeal.

It is worth noting that whilst the new Code of Practice is not yet operational as it needs to be commenced via legislation many schools now operate within this new 3 stage approach; children are recorded against the 3 stages on the SEN register.

The Autism (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Autism Act sets out the roles and responsibilities of government bodies including the Department of Education. The Act sets out that the Department of Health (DoH) must publish an Autism Strategy and that the Strategy must set out how services, support and information on autism will be provided. The Act also stipulates that the Minister for Health must provide an annual financial report for autism that will include the allocation of funding under the strategy that other departments are responsible for. The Act also states that the DoH must appoint an Autism Reviewer who will monitor the implementation of autism strategy across all of the NI Executive Departments, assess the effectiveness of the strategy and its funding and will advise the Assembly on matters relating to autism. In addition, the Act also states that the Autism Strategy must set out how consistency of practice is to be achieved across education services.

Education Authority Strategic Context

There are a number of key documents and reviews relating to the EA's own strategic context that should also be considered a part of this review.

The Landscape Review of the EA

The EA was established in 2015 following the merger of five separate Education and Library Boards. This is the first landscape review of the EA as a unitary authority. The first key finding from the review was that the EA was slow to transition into one single unitary body, which has created geographical differences in the delivery and quality of services. The review also highlighted the challenging financial circumstances that the EA is operating in and its reliance on in-year monitoring bids, due to the lack of a three-year budget and a funding gap of £155m. A common theme across the review were the issues associated with communication and engagement. The review notes that feedback from stakeholders, including schools, highlighted the difficulties in contacting relevant teams within the EA and the variation in the quality of engagement and communication.

The landscape review notes two specific functions of the EA that are relevant to this review of SEN:

- Identifying, assessing and, where appropriate, making provision for pupils with special educational needs; and,
- Providing appropriate supports for children with additional educational needs to ensure that they reach their full potential.

The Landscape Review collated feedback from staff and other education stakeholders. A number of stakeholders highlighted the high level of bureaucracy associated with special education. Particularly, it notes that the Children and Young People's Services Directorate that is responsible for Special Education (amongst other things) is a complex, multi-disciplinary Directorate. Another finding from the review is that the EA is too process focused and needs to become more child and pupil centric.

EA Operational Plan (2022 – 2024)

The EA published its latest Area Planning Operational Plan in September 2022, which incorporates both the Strategic Area Plan: Planning for Sustainable Provision (2022-2027) and the Special Education Strategic Area Plan: Planning for Special Education Provision (2022-2027). The EA's Area Planning Working Group is responsible for the monitoring of the Operational Plan. The plan notes that special education is an integral part of the education system and that all schools have a responsibility in this area.

EA Special Education Strategic Area Plan

This plan sets out the EA's intended actions to address future special educational needs through an area-based approach. The aim of the plan is "to ensure that all pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs have access to a placement that best meets their assessed needs." The plan sets out a suite of priorities for both special school placements and specialist provision within mainstream schools. Both sets of priorities notes that placements should be:

- Available at their nearest suitable school;
- Provide pupils with equitable access to excellent provision which meets the individually assessed needs of the child or young person; and,
- Responsive to changing educational, physical and medical needs.

The priorities for specialist provision within mainstream schools also noted that placements should be "inclusive, providing opportunities for education alongside mainstream peers".

The plan shows that despite a projected decline in the primary and post primary population over the next ten years, the demand for special school places and special provision in mainstream schools is projected to increase significantly over the next five years. A geographical analysis of population projections shows a growing demand for specialist places despite a decline in the population in almost all areas. The plan provides details of short and medium-term actions to address this demand such as the re-purposing of existing accommodation to create additional special school places in the Antrim and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon areas, additional specialist provision in Ards and North Down and the establishment of a new Special School in the Belfast and Mid-Ulster areas.

However, it is unclear the extent of consultation that EA has undertaken in developing their plan and the information on which it is based, including cost projections, expected outcomes and value for money implications.

3 Operational Context

Introduction

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the number of schools and pupils in Northern Ireland and the proportion of children on the SEN register. This data has been compiled from a range of sources including the school census data and EA administrative datasets. Further analysis of the SEN population in Northern Ireland is set out in section 9.

This section also provides an overview of trends of the number of children availing of additional EA services such as Pupil Support Services and school transport as provided by the EA.

Operational Context

Number of schools, Pupils and Teachers

There are 1,151 schools in Northern Ireland, with over two-thirds (68%) being primary schools.

Table 3.1: Schools in Northern Ireland

School Type	Number	%
Nursery	94	8.2
Primary	784	68.1
Prep	12	1.0
Secondary	126	10.9
Grammar	66	5.7
Special	39	3.4
Independent	14	1.2
EOTAS	16	1.4
TOTAL	1,151	100

The school census data reveals that in the academic year 2021/22, there were 340,696 pupils registered with schools in NI.

Table 3.2: Number of Pupils enrolled in NI Schools

Type of School	Number	% of all pupils
Primary	182,142	53.5
Secondary	86,588	25.4
Special	6,653	2.0
Grammar	65,313	19.2
Total	340,696	100

Source: NI School Census 2021/22

Over the past number of years the EA has established additional classes within existing primary or post primary schools to support children with additional needs, such as those who are on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register. EA data shows in 2021/22 there were 384 specialist provision classes with the capacity to support almost 4,000 children, as shown below.

Table 3.3: Specialist Provision Classes

School type	Number of classes	Total capacity
Primary	243	2,428
Post primary	141	1,522
TOTAL	384	3,950

Source: EA

As set out in the following table, an analysis of the school census data indicates that that since 2017/18 the number of children enrolled in NI schools has steadily increased and there are now 10,963 (3%) more pupils enrolled in NI schools than five years ago. The total number of children in the SEN register reduced by just over 11,000 between 2018/19 to 2019/20 due to a change in recording SEN, with many pupils being moved to the Medical Register. However, the number and proportion of pupils on stage 3 of the register (statemented) has increased over the past five years. In 2021/22 there were 4,247 more pupils with a statement (of special educational needs), than in 2017/18. In 2017/18 23% of pupils on the SEN register had a statement, by 2021/22 this had increased to 35%.

Table 3.4: Total number of pupils and SEN pupils

	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Total Number of pupils	329,733	332,443	334,970	338,400	340,696
Not SEN: Number pupils	253,089	256,053	269,628	272,397	278,046
Percentage	76.8%	77.0%	80.5%	80.5%	81.6%
Total SEN (all on any stage of SEN register)	76,644	76,390	65,342	66,003	62,650
Total SEN % of total number of pupils	23.2%	23.0%	19.5%	19.5%	18.4%
Stage 3 (statemented) pupils Number	17,709	18,313	19,105	20,331	21,956
Percentage	5.4%	5.5%	5.7%	6.0%	6.4%

Source: NI School Census

DE data also indicates that in 2021, there were 19,363 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) teachers in Northern Ireland and that the overall pupil teacher ratio has remained relative consistent, ranging from 18.0 in 2017/18 to 17.7 in 2021/22. The tables below provide an overview of the number of teachers by type of school and number of FTE teachers in Northern Ireland.

Table 3.5: Number of Teachers in Northern Ireland (2021/22)

Type of School	Number of teachers (FTE)	% of all teachers	Pupil Teacher Ratio
Nursery	190.4	1	25.5
Primary & Prep	8,425.7	44	21.4
Secondary	5,825.9	30	15.6
Grammar	3,900.6	20	
Special	1,020.8	5	6.5
Total	19,363	100	17.7

Source: DE Teacher Workforce Statistics 2021/22

Table 3.6: Number of Teachers in Northern Ireland FTE (2017-2022)

Type of School	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	5yr Annual change
Nursery	191.9	189.3	191.5	191.9	190.4	-0.8%
Primary & Prep	8,304.4	8,203.1	8,133.5	8,340.5	8,425.70	1.5%
Secondary	5,278.1	5,274.5	5,400.0	5,622.1	5,825.90	+10.4%
Special	889.5	889.6	927.0	955.1	1,020.8	+14.8%
Grammar	3,825.8	3,779.8	3,770.6	3,807.1	3,900.6	+2.0%
Total	18,489.6	18,336.4	18,422.6	18,916.6	19,363.4	+4.7%

Source: DE Teacher Workforce Statistics 2021/22

In addition to teachers, schools now employ significant numbers of Classroom Assistants (CAs). Data from EA indicates that the number of CAs employed in both mainstream and special schools to support pupils with SEN has been steadily increasing. For example, the number of CAs employed to support pupils with SEN has increased by 1,589 FTEs (44%) in mainstream schools and 366 FTEs (41%) in special schools over the past five years, as summarised below.

Table 3.7: Total number of FTE Classroom Assistants

Academic Year	Classroom Assistants FTE		Total
	Mainstream	Special	
2017/18	3,571	1,169	4,740
2018/19	3,801	1,263	5,064
2019/20	4,009	1,323	5,332
2020/21	4,490	1,407	5,897
2021/22	5,160	1,535	6,695

Source: EA

Pupil Support Services

The EA provides a suite of services to schools, parents and children for a range of special educational and medical needs. Although there are separate services, depending on the needs of the child, a child maybe referred to multiple services. These services are:

Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS): A regional service providing advice and support for pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Referrals to AAIS can only be made through the EA's Educational Psychologists. The EA noted that in 2020/21, 86% of NI school aged children diagnosed with ASD (Yr1-Yr12) also had a registered Special Educational Need, with just under 2,000 at Stages 3 & 4 of the Code of Practice and a further 7,600 at Stage 5. As noted in the table below the service is currently supporting over 10,000 children.

Table 3.8: Number of pupils supported and staff within the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service. (AAIS)

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Pupils Referred		*	256	1149	750	1,133
Number of Pupils Supported		*	*	*	*	10,937 (Registered as of 20 May 2022)
Staff / Resources FTE		65.3	65.3	67.3	66.3	71

Source: EA

*Data for these years not available

Language and Communication Service (LCS): supports pupils whose primary area of need is language difficulties in primary and pre-schools. The EA noted that the demand for the LCS has increased significantly since its establishment in 2018, with referral numbers nearly doubling within a year despite COVID restrictions in the final term of 2019/20. Covid restrictions limited referrals across 2020/21, although referral number picked up again quickly in 2021/22, when restrictions were lifted.

Table 3.9: Pupils Referral and Staffing Numbers in the Language and Communication Service

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Pupils Referred		n/a	223	414	281	405
Number of Pupils Supported		n/a	257	671	952	409
Staff / Resources FTE		-	27.9	27.9 *Additional temporary staff recruited to deliver service's Covid response	27.9 *Additional temporary staff recruited to deliver service's Covid response	28.23

Source: EA

Sensory Service (SS): A regional team of specially trained teachers who support pupils who are sensory impaired. This service is the smallest of the pupil support services, although it provides intensive support to pupils with visual

and hearing impairments. EA noted a decline in referrals during 2020/21 due to COVID restrictions, as shown below.

Table 3.10: Referral and Staffing numbers within the Sensory Service

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Pupils Referred	Vision	*	98	78	71	84
	Hearing Impaired	*	181	151	76	147
Number of Pupils Supported	Vision	*	*	*	1,656	764
	Hearing Impaired	*	*	*	1,765	
Staff / Resources FTE		*	39.1	38.2	37.8	35

Source: EA

*Data not available for these years.

Literacy Service (LS): supports children with learning difficulties in literacy/ dyslexia. Referrals can only be made through the EA's Educational Psychologists. As set out below the number of pupils referred to the service and the associated number of staff delivering the service has been increasing annually. The EA have also noted that demand is uneven across NI which has placed particular pressure on specific EA Literacy Service offices. However, it is expected that referral numbers will continue to rise in all areas.

Table 3.11: Pupils Referred and staff numbers in the Literacy Support Service

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Pupils Referred		1,488	1,690	1,195	1,139	1,789
Number of Pupils Supported	Teachers have an average caseload of 20 pupils per academic year				2,200 approx.	2,045
Staff / Resources FTE		101.6	105.5	113.7	110	130.4 (field staff only)

Source: EA

SEN Inclusion Service (SENIS): Supports the effective inclusion of children and young people with learning difficulties (such as Down Syndrome) and medical needs. EA have noted that the increasing numbers of children with cognition & learning needs in mainstream schools have created a growing demand for direct intervention and intensified pressure on two divisions of the service. This is compounded by growing numbers of young children referred to the service for whom an intensive intervention response is more likely. The table below provides an overview of the number of children referred registered with the service. There have been particular increases in the number of children with Mild Learning Disabilities (MLD) and Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) over the last five years specifically.

Table 3.12: Number of Pupils and Staff numbers within the SEN Inclusion Service

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Pupils Referred	MLD	97	91	168	124	170
	SLD & DS	43	125	75	62	56
	Medical	222	103	135	119	147
Number of Pupils Supported (*Registered with the service at year end)	MLD	-	-	429	617	134
	SLD & DS	219	341	397	450	379
	Medical	222	318	462	591	120
Staff / Resources FTE	MLD	2.4	2.4	7.4	7.4	17.8 across all 3 areas
	SLD & DS	7.4	7.4	7.4	7.4	
	Medical	1	1	1	1	

Source: EA

Behavioural Support and Provisions Service (BSPS): provides support, advice and training to teachers and other professionals working with children and young people with social, behavioural, emotional and well-being issues. The aim of the service is to reduce barriers to learning and to support young people in maintaining their place in school. Over 750 pupils were referred to the BSPS in the last academic year, a decrease from previous years.

Table 3.13: Referrals and staff numbers on the Behavioural Support and Provisions service¹²

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of Pupils Referred	Primary	656	616	404	262
	Post Primary	472	431	587	494
Staff / Resources FTE	Primary	-	106	108	357
	Post Primary	*	*	269 (including 20 Behaviour Support Assistants)	224

Source: EA

*Data not available

SEN Early Years Inclusion Service: Supports pre-school children with SEN, through referrals from paediatricians and Educational Psychologists. The service provides advice and support to children, families and pre-school settings as well as training for early years practitioners.

As set out below the costs to deliver the Pupil Support Services and the Behaviour Support Services have also increased over the last five years. Total costs have increased by £10m over the last five years, which is almost a 30% increase.

¹² Regarding the figures for the number of pupils supported, BSPS has only recently established (August 2021) a regional case database, therefore analysis of overall caseload is not yet possible, although it will be in future.

Table 3.14: EA SEN Expenditure of SENIS and BSPS

EA Expenditure (£m)	Financial Year				% change Over Period
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	
EA's SENIS Pupil Support Services	22	25	26	26	18.2%
Behaviour Support & Provision Service	13	13	16	18	38.5%

Source: EA Outline Business Case for the Transformation Programme 2022

Educational Psychology Service

Over the last five years there has been high levels of demand for the Educational Psychology Service. The total level of demand has increased annually since 2017/18, with the exception of 2019/20 when fewer Stage three reviews were completed due to the lockdowns associated with COVID.

Table 3.15: Number of Assessments and Reviews completed by the Educational Psychology Service

Academic Year	Stage 3 Assessment	Stage 3 Review	Statutory Advice (Stage 4)	Statutory Review (Stage 5)	Total (assessments & Reviews)
2017/18	4,418	1,021	2,677	2,306	10,422
2018/19	4,837	1,164	2,440	2,411	10,852
2019/20	3,310	978	2,996	2,453	9,737
2020/2021 (to July 21)	3,251	940	2,862	3,368	10,421
2021/2022	4,058	762	3,784	3,570	12,174

Source: EA

As shown below the number of Educational Psychologists in the EA has decreased by over one quarter since 2016. Interviews with EA staff highlighted the difficulties in recruiting Educational Psychologists however the team have been somewhat strengthened with the creation and development of the Psychology Assistant role. Although, even with the additional Assistant Psychologists the Psychology services have almost one-fifth (16%) fewer staff than in 2016/17. However, the total cost to deliver the Educational Psychology Services has only decreased by 4%.

Table 3.16: Specialist EPS Staff Numbers and Expenditure

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	% Change over Period
Educational Psychologist FTEs (including management)	136	118	129	106	101	-26%
Psychology Assistant FTEs	9.5	16	13.5	23.5	21.5	126%
Total Specialist Psychology Staff FTEs	145.5	134	142.5	129.5	122.5	-16%
EPS Expenditure (£m)	10.1	9.9	9.4	9.9	9.7	-4%

Source: EA SDP 2022

DE provide funding to Queen's University Belfast (QUB) for the DECAP programme, which is a three-year, full-time course leading to a professional qualification in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology. The programme is accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) as conferring eligibility for Chartered Status and approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) for the purpose of training educational psychologists. This is the only professional, Educational Psychology course in Northern Ireland.

Successful applicants may be offered training bursaries which carry a binding commitment to apply for educational psychology posts within the Education Authority in Northern Ireland and, having obtained a post, to work as an educational psychologist in the EA psychology service for a minimum period of three years.

Education Finance

The total budget for the Department of Education in 2021/22 was £2,323M, of this, £2,083M was allocated to schools and pupils¹³. Data provided by DE reveals that expenditure on SEN in mainstream and special schools was in the region of £417M, an increase of over £163M since 2017/18, as shown below. In 2021/22, this represented almost 18% of the total budget for education.

¹³ DE 2021/22 Opening Resource Budget. https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Department%20of%20Education%202021-22%20Opening%20Resource%20Budget_0.pdf

Table 3.17: Expenditure on SEN

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23 Forecast ¹⁴
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
EA SEN expenditure (since 2017-18 the EA is the funding authority for all grant-aided schools)	254	285	311	354¹⁵	417¹⁶	490
Broken down as follows:						
Special school expenditure	107	112	122	134	144	163
SEN funding to Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools	18	20	21	23	26	31
Support for children with a statement attending mainstream schools	91	101	113	136	179	216
Pupil Support Services	21	24	24	26	28	31
Transport	17	28	31	35	40	49

Source: DE Open Resource Budget 2021/22

*2020-21 includes £7.4m funding allocated to schools for the implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016 but excludes COVID-19 funding allocated for SEN in 2020-21.

** 2021-22 spend includes c£29.9m funding allocated to schools for the implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016 but excludes COVID-19 funding allocated for SEN in 2021-22.

A more detailed analysis of the finances associated with the provision of SEN processes and services is set out in section 12 of this report.

Spending per pupil

Analysis of spending per pupil (mainstream and special) across each the four UK Nations¹⁷ indicates that in 2021/22 core school spending per pupil is lower in Northern Ireland than in the other nations:

- England: £6,700
- Scotland: £7,500
- Northern Ireland: £6,400; and,
- Wales: £6,600.

This report estimates that despite increases in 2018/19 and 2021/22, in real terms the level of spending per pupil in Northern Ireland is about 3% lower than in 2011/12 and the lowest in the UK.

Summary

This high-level overview of the operational context in which SEN services are delivered in Northern Ireland reveals that whilst there are 1,151 schools in Northern Ireland, 39 of which are special schools, the majority of pupils with SEN are taught in mainstream schools. This includes those enrolled in mainstream schools with Specialist Support or Learning Centres. This will be further detailed in Chapter 9, part of which outlines SEN rates in Northern Ireland.

¹⁴ Forecast based on December 2022 MEMR position and includes £22m funding allocated to schools for the implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016 and £4.6m in funding to take forward the Special Educational Needs and Disability Transformation Programme.

¹⁵ 2020-21 includes £7.4m funding allocated to schools for the implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016 but excludes COVID-19 funding allocated for SEN in 2020-21.

¹⁶ 2021-22 spend includes c£29.9m funding allocated to schools for the implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016 but excludes COVID-19 funding allocated for SEN in 2021-22.

¹⁷ <https://ifs.org.uk/news/school-spending-pupil-highest-scotland-lowest-northern-ireland>

The school population has been steadily increasing over the past five years and now stands at over 340,000. In addition to this the number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (statemented) increased by over 4000 from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

In addition to mainstream and special schools and the specialist units attached to mainstream schools, the EA provide seven pupil support services to provide additional support to schools and pupils who are on the SEN register.

The EA Educational Psychology Service is core to the provision of SEN education processes, services and support to schools, pupils and parents. However due to a number of retention and recruitment issues there are now 23 fewer FTE staff than there were five years. Meaning that this much smaller team is now dealing with significantly more demand.

The EA provides a suite of Pupil Support Services for Children on the SEN Register, however most of these services can only be accessed once an assessment has been completed by an Educational Psychologist.

The SEN budget has been rapidly increasing over the last five years and the EA cost to deliver SEN services in 2021/22 was £417M, an increase of 64% (£163M) since 2017/18.

4 Review of the Literature Relating to SEN Best Practices

Introduction

This chapter provides a high-level overview of evidence relating to effective approaches in Special Education. It also provides an overview of the policies and processes implemented for SEN in other post-conflict societies. A review of the literature relating to SEN in other countries highlighted the difficulties in making any direct comparisons on the prevalence in each country, Wood and Bates (2020) noted, there is great variance in the definition and identification of SEN across the world. For example, in England a child is identified as having SEN if they have a learning difficulty that calls for special educational provisions to be made, whereas, in the USA, to receive special educational provision, a child must have a 'defined disability'.¹⁸ While, O'Connor et al (2022) noted that changes to policies, definitions and services within countries can also make meaningful comparison across years difficult.¹⁹

Early Intervention

It is widely accepted that early identification and intervention are crucial when addressing the challenges associated with SEN. There is an increasing body of literature which demonstrates the mediating impact of early intervention in a wide range of conditions that are associated with SEN.^{20 21 22} However, it has also been acknowledged that accurate early diagnosis can be challenging as children develop at different rates, excelling in some aspects faster than others.

Whilst complex or severe conditions are often diagnosed at birth, signs of SEN emerge when children are around three years old, when it becomes apparent that children are not meeting their developmental milestones. Indications of delayed development include delayed language development, rhyming, and difficulty in distinguishing colours, shapes, numbers, and letters. By age five, indicators of SEN include: signs of frustration when trying to learn, difficulty with coordination and noticeable difficulties with attention²³.

Early diagnosis and intervention are important to understand SEN characteristics and to establish a plan to help for future SEN cases.²⁴ Many children with SEN often experience emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Understanding that there will be frustration, from an early age, when trying to learn and the associated difficulties in certain aspects of development allows parents and health care professionals to develop plans and strategies to counteract these traits of SEN. For example, the Early Intervention Foundation has highlighted programmes aimed

¹⁸ Peter Wood & Sharon Bates (2020) National and international approaches to special education needs and disability provision, *Education 3-13*, 48:3

¹⁹ Una O'Connor, Caroline Courtney, Peter Mulhall & Laurence Taggart (2022) The prevalence of special educational needs in Northern Ireland: A comparative analysis, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*,

²⁰ Snowling MJ. Early identification and interventions for dyslexia: a contemporary view. *J Res Spec Educ Needs*. 2013 Jan 1;13(1):7-14.

²¹ Lovett, MW et al. Early Intervention for Children at Risk for Reading Disabilities: The Impact of Grade at Intervention and Individual Differences on Intervention Outcomes. 2016. *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

²² Shephard E, Zuccolo PF, Idrees I, Godoy PBG, Salomone E, Ferrante C, Sorgato P, Catão LFCC, Goodwin A, Bolton PF, Tye C, Groom MJ, Polanczyk GV; Drs. Shepard and Zuccolo are co-first authors of this work.. Systematic Review and Meta-analysis: The Science of Early-Life Precursors and Interventions for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*. 2022 Feb;61(2):187-226.

²³ Zubler. *Learning Disabilities and Differences: What Parents Needs To Know*. 2021: American Academy of Paediatrics.

²⁴ See Kodak, T. and Bergmann, S. (2020) Autism spectrum disorder: Characteristics. Associated behaviours and early intervention. *Paediatric Clinics*, 67(3); Sanfilippo, J., Ness, M., Petscher, Y., Rappaport, L., Zuckerman, B. and Gaab, N., 2020. Reintroducing dyslexia: Early identification and implications for paediatric practice. *Paediatrics*, 146(1).

at specific topics such as “Incredible Years preschool” which helps parents of all children to increase use of effective parenting strategies or “child first” which better equips practitioners to help children with developmental delay or emotional difficulties.²⁵ These programmes are evidence-based practices which have been established in randomised controlled trials. Additionally, specialists such as speech therapists can be introduced at these critical times of development when cognition is developing and neurotypical children would be exploring communication. Preschool intervention can pave the path for an effective education programme. Therefore, it is important for parents or caregivers who observe these issues to have access to and be able to inform the relevant health professional (e.g., health visitor, nursery teacher, doctor, or paediatrician) that their child is experiencing these developmental difficulties.

At 2-3 years, it is the health visitor's responsibility to review the development of the child, particularly communication, physical development, social and emotional development, and with permission, they should relay this back to the child's paediatrician. In Northern Ireland pre-school children can be referred to the Special Education Needs Early Years Inclusion Service by their paediatrician.²⁶ These services offer customised programmes for advice and recommendations to aid parents and family members assist their child.

The crossover of traits across various conditions categorised as SEN can create difficulties for an appropriate diagnosis. Identification that extra help is needed, is invaluable, but a misdiagnosis can lead to improper procedures being established that do not benefit the child. Diagnosis often depends on tests which are mostly observational. IQ tests, language evaluation and visual motor examinations are typical approaches used by doctors to detect a SEN.²⁷ These tests in conjunction with observations made will eliminate or highlight a specific condition such as ADHD or autism. For example, children with ADHD having difficulty staying focussed while autistic children seem to exclusively focus on things that interest them. Parents are usually the first to notice delayed development in the preschool years. However, as many conditions (such as dyslexia and dyscalculia) are often not apparent until a child begins formal schooling, it's frequently teachers who identify children displaying typical SEN characteristics.

Common issues in SEN systems

A review of the literature quickly highlighted a wide range of international studies that identified challenges with various SEN systems and processes across the world, a few of the most prominent ones are noted below.

Underfunding

Studies in the USA noted that the lack of funding for SEN education restricts the number and range of services that are available for children with SEN. Across some states in the US, such as Massachusetts, Colorado and Michigan, there is the emergence of education centres that localise the expertise of specific therapeutic professionals to that centre. This pools resources to a general area and reduces the burden of costs for individual schools, especially those with lower budgets, to provide critical and effective education for students with SEN. For example, children who require speech or behavioural therapy can attend an accessible institution. These institutions contain specialists collaborating to provide SEN resources instead of being scattered across schools where children attending less equipped facilities are at risk of marginalisation.²⁸

Teacher Training

Studies have shown a positive impact on SEN when teachers are trained and equipped to educate children with dyslexia, focusing on phonological skills to improve reading. Although it is not a teacher's duty to diagnose SEN, it is important that they know the fundamentals behind the disorder to offer the most effective differentiated teaching.²⁹ However, approximately a third of teaching staff feel underprepared and have not had proper or adequate training on the matter (Webster and Blatchford, 2015).³⁰

Knight (2018) highlights further that teachers have insufficient understanding of dyslexia as they are aware of how it can affect behaviour of those students, but not of the deficit in cognitive skills which can be addressed and

²⁵ Early Intervention Foundation. Evidence-Based Early Intervention

²⁶ Education Authority. SEN Early Years Inclusion Service (2022)

²⁷ Logsdon. Types of Tests Used to Diagnose Learning Disabilities. 2020: Very well family

²⁸ Rhim et al. Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. 2017. American Progress.

²⁹ Knight, C. What is dyslexia? An exploration of the relationship between teachers' understandings of dyslexia and their training experiences. 2018, Dyslexia

³⁰ Webster, R. Blatchford, P. Worlds apart? The nature and quality of the educational experiences of pupils with a statement for special educational needs in mainstream primary schools. 2015, British Educational Research Journal

improved through teaching practice. This indicates the insufficient SEN training that teachers receive. The teachers in this study who had additional training had a wider understanding of dyslexia which covered the cognitive aspects, whereas teachers who had basic training, did not make note of.

Segregation and Inclusion

Despite the drive towards inclusion many countries still practice exclusionary policies (i.e. separate SEN and mainstream school systems), UNESCO (2020) notes that 40% of the poorest countries did not have the resources to implement inclusive education throughout COVID leading to disadvantaged learners feeling alienated. There is a stigma around learning difficulties which may generate a negative self-image and loss of enthusiasm for education. In non-inclusive settings, availability of the general curriculum is restricted, and students with SEN can miss out on core life skills. This is why the plan for inclusion and teachers' positive attitudes and heightened expectations for students with SEN is essential to perpetuate an environment of meaningful interactions and safe effective education.³¹

In addition to these, other studies have identified that schools and educational professionals have different perceptions of what inclusive education actually is. For example, Cullen et al (2020) undertook an assessment of systematic reviews relating to SEN and found four general themes in professionals' perceptions of inclusive education:

1. Adaption of the learning environment to meet the child's needs;
2. School commitment and willingness to accept students;
3. Beneficial to students with autism, their peers and teachers; and,
4. Students with autism gain academic opportunities, all students benefit from use of class wide strategies to address behaviour and social issues.

False diagnosis/ income disparity

It has been suggested that with an increased awareness of learning difficulties in mainstream schools there is the risk of overuse of SEN as excuses for help and benefits. This allows parents with the funds to secure their children extra help where it may not be necessary or totally fitting. The danger in this is the lack of recognition for lower income families where students with SEN may go unnoticed. This is seen in other countries where children in rural areas do not have the same spotlight and needs are overshadowed by those from richer background such as that in South Africa³².

There is a significant body of literature highlighting that children from low income families and ethnic minorities are overrepresented in Special Education statistics due to inherent system biases³³. A US study noted that misdiagnosis or, inappropriate placement of children in special education classes denies them opportunities and access to the full curriculum. In the UK there is also a correlation between poverty and SEN. There are two potential aspects of this. Firstly, because of the specific circumstances associated with poverty, children with SEN may face additional challenges in accessing additional support for their education.

Taberner (2020) noted that children from a low socio-economic background were most affected by the hidden curriculum and were typically excluded through smaller group allocation with minorities.³⁴ Secondly, some researchers have suggested that children may be misdiagnosed potentially as parents rely on the social security benefits associated with the learning difficulty or because they provide an excuse for unmet expectations in school. In a poll conducted by GL Assessments, "Hooked on labels not on needs", over half of the 800 teachers participating believed that there was misdiagnosis of SEN and 54% of them believed that this was the result of parents "pushing for a label".^{35 36}

³¹ UNESCO. UNESCO report on inclusion in education shows 40% of poorest countries did not provide specific support to disadvantaged learners during COVID-19 crisis. 2020.

³² Adewumi et al. Experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs in selected Fort Beaufort District primary schools, South Africa. 2019.

³³ National Centre for Learning Disabilities. Significant Disproportionality in Special Education: Current Trends and Actions for Impact (2020)

³⁴ Taberner, Joanne. (2022). "There are too many kids with special educational needs" (Squires, 2017). 10.13140/RG.2.2.24896.25604.

³⁵ Tirraoro. YouGov survey: Teachers blame "parental pressure" for misdiagnosis of SEN. 2017

³⁶ Vaughan. R. Pushy parents 'fuelling special needs misdiagnoses in pupils. Feb 2017. <https://inews.co.uk/news/education/pushy-parents-fueling-special-needs-misdiagnoses-pupils-48920>

Multisensory Learning

A number of studies have shown that teaching the alphabet is an effective starting point for children experiencing difficulties with reading and writing. Maliki et al³⁷ used a multisensory approach to teaching the alphabet to primary school children with SEN. Multisensory teaching includes the use of the different senses, sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell for a more interactive and novel experience. These results showed an improvement in test scores after this teaching method and indicates a successful intervention for improving letters and holds potential to improve further, for example, words and sentences etc. This method can be tailored to what individuals respond best to through observations made by school staff.

Cognitive training

Working memory plays a role in the retention and manipulation of information in the brain to enable effective learning. Peng & Fuchs (2016) highlighted that all individuals involved in their studies with a learning disability had a deficit in working memory³⁸, contributing to difficulties in learning and memory, critical thinking and judgement, concentration and learning capabilities. These include games tailored for memorisation of numbers or patterns, puzzles and jigsaws, numeracy games or spot the difference. For children with SEN these two-dimensional activities may not be engaging enough to spark or hold attention. However, there are a number of digital based training programmes that have been designed specifically for individuals with SEN which show promising results. Students who were assessed before and after this game based cognitive training showed an improvement in results compared to those with conventional methods.³⁹

Occupational Therapy

A new system of paediatric occupational therapy has been suggested for schools in the UK including Northern Ireland. This has been adopted from schools in the US who have observed increased improvement in executive functions in children with SEN. This is an integrated approach to benefit all children and to identify those who require intervention. It is recommended that occupational therapists work together with school staff and parents, in a familiar setting such as their classroom, instead of traditional occupational therapists' offices.

This new system is a three tiered system⁴⁰. Tier 1 involves universal observation, which provides key insights into the school environment and provides suggestions on how activities can be integrated into lessons to bolster participation. Tier 2 focuses on classroom-based solutions, such as subgroups of like-skilled individuals, modified teaching methods or increased support. The occupational therapist is able to observe and track progress of these methods and arrange for appropriate training for classroom staff. The final tier focuses on SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) goals in academic, speech and behavioural aspects. This is the most individualised step which arranges for specific intervention from specialists, e.g., speech in conjunction with the already used Individual Education Plans (IEP), soon to be PLPs.

This method differs from the current one-to-one in-house sessions and may require a restructuring of current practices and a more flexible approach to occupational therapy. This new system has been shown to have the potential to improve behavioural, academic, and other essential skills as well as promoting inclusivity for children with SEN. It has been reported that parents observed improvements in behaviour and that the clinical symptoms of ADHD appear to reduce to some extent. However, a system for rating and evaluating outcomes is necessary.

Inclusive Education

UNESCO define inclusive education as education that *“works to identify all barriers to education and remove them, it covers everything from curricula to pedagogy and teaching.”*⁴¹ There are a number of studies that demonstrate the benefits of inclusive education on social interactions where children with SEN are taught in mainstream classrooms instead of segregated in special schools. These studies highlight that students with SEN are more

³⁷ MD MALIKI, Noor Syamilah Bt; YASIN, Mohd Hanafi Mohd. Application of Multisensory in Learning Alphabets Identification Skills for Special Education Students. Journal of ICSAR, [S.I.], p. 150-154, Feb. 2017.

³⁸ Peng P, Fuchs D. A Meta-Analysis of Working Memory Deficits in Children With Learning Difficulties: Is There a Difference Between Verbal Domain and Numerical Domain? J Learn Disabil. 2016 Jan-Feb;49(1):3-20.

³⁹ Kim, Seon-Chil & Lee, Hyun-suk. (2021). Effect of Game-Based Cognitive Training Programs on Cognitive Learning of Children with Intellectual Disabilities. Applied Sciences. 11. 8582. 10.3390/app11188582.

⁴⁰ Chu, Sidney. (2017). Supporting children with special educational needs (SEN): An introduction to a 3-tiered school-based occupational therapy model of service delivery in the United Kingdom. World Federation of Occupational Therapists Bulletin. 73. 1-10. 10.1080/14473828.2017.1349235.

⁴¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/inclusion-education>

likely to initiate interaction and communication with their peers regardless of skill level or whether they also had SEN.

The combination of increased peer communication and, availability of communication, aids interaction in the preschool classroom and allows exposure to natural exchanges. This inclusive strategy can improve academic skills as other students naturally assist and to an extent teach children with SEN the subject while bolstering confidence in opening a discussion and asking questions.^{42 43 44}

Another review of the literature relating to inclusive education found substantial social and academic benefits associated with inclusive education for all pupils, including stronger skills in reading and mathematics, higher rates of attendance, fewer behavioural problems, and students are more likely to complete secondary school⁴⁵. A number of studies have highlighted the benefits of inclusive education and have noted its contribution to the reduction in educational and social inequalities⁴⁶.

Several studies relating to inclusive education have highlighted that all students benefit from the improved teaching practice that is required for inclusive education⁴⁷. Evidence shows that the quality of teaching has one of the largest impacts on learning for all students and teachers require specific competencies for inclusive education⁴⁸.

Alquraini and Gut, (2012)⁴⁹ describe an effective method for inclusive teaching which is used in the US. The method breaks the classroom up into subgroups of students with different skill levels to offer specialised education for their specific needs. It allows for general and specialist teachers to collaborate and generate a cohesive environment for all students. This environment also helps to identify those who children who are struggling but are not registered as SEN.

Studies show that children with mild or severe learning disabilities who are integrated with their peers show improvement across multiple aspects. It has been observed that reading and mathematical skills have improved 15-30% in primary schools while also showing improvement in communication and social competence.

Hornby⁵⁰ (2014) noted that full inclusion is not always attainable as some children with SEN may/will not be successful in mainstream education. There is some controversy over the idea of inclusivity as just being present in a classroom does not directly correlate to being socially and educationally included. There is confusion over inclusivity as special education is focused on the individual and is a separate learning environment, but inclusivity conveys a sense of collaboration and community. Therefore, Inclusive Special Education is a useful terminology. Hornby (2014) goes on to highlight that when schools have identified children with SEN, it is necessary to incorporate evidence-based techniques into the mainstream classroom. There are benefits to children with SEN being included with their peers as children feel most comfortable and have a sense of belonging, whether it is in mainstream classes, subgroups of children with SEN and special needs classes or schools.

Additionally, Hornby suggests that intervention models should not focus solely on medical and psychological means as they have done in the past but should cater to the needs and strengths of the child. Goals should not exclusively focus on academic achievement but also on skills for life, social and independent living. Regardless of environment (mainstream or, special schools) the curriculum should not be overly simplified; lessons should still be challenging in order to provoke thought and improvement.⁵¹

⁴²Ferguson EF et al. Social language opportunities for pre-schoolers with autism:

Insights from audio recordings in urban classrooms. *Autism*. 2020 Jul;24(5):1232-1245

⁴³ Jing Chen et al. Exploring the mechanism through which peer effects operate in preschool classrooms to influence language growth, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Volume 53. 2020; 1-10

⁴⁴ Bauminger-Zviely N, Shefer A. Naturalistic evaluation of pre-schoolers' spontaneous interactions: The Autism Peer Interaction Observation Scale. *Autism*. 2021 Aug;25(6):1520-1535.

⁴⁵ Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Norquaye, Y., and Burke, S. (2016) A summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education. (Alana, 2016)

⁴⁶ Kefallinou, A., Symeonidou, S. & Meijer, C.J.W. Understanding the value of inclusive education and its implementation: A review of the literature. *Prospects* **49**, 135–152 (2020)

⁴⁷ Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y. and Burke, S., 2016. A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education. *Abt Associates*.

⁴⁸ Alina Georgeta Mag, Sandra Sinfield and Tom Burns. (2017). The benefits of inclusive education: new challenges for university teachers. *MATEC Web Conf.*, 121 (2017) 12011

⁴⁹ Alquraini et al. Critical Components of Successful Inclusion of Students with Severe Disabilities. 2012

⁵⁰ Hornby, Garry. (2014). Inclusive special education: Evidence-based practices for children with special needs and disabilities. 10.1007/978-1-4939-1483-8.

⁵¹ Hornby, Garry. (2014). Inclusive special education: Evidence-based practices for children with special needs and disabilities. 10.1007/978-1-4939-1483-8.

Constructive Teaching Model

Constructivism in this context is the idea that knowledge and learning is acquired through the connections made between teaching and experience. The Northern Ireland education curriculum is based on a constructivist model, and it aims to benefit all children. It proffers that children learn through associating their own individualised experience with what they are being taught. Hence, a static and unenthusiastic lesson will have much less of an impact than a novel or creative one.

Akpan et al⁵² (2016) calls on educators to understand that education should open the doors to exploring, questioning, and preparing for the future, and not to regurgitate what is on the curriculum. They suggest this is done through guided discovery learning tailored to how the student thinks and responds to activities, which should be observed and noted by the teacher. Especially for younger children with SEN, this model highlights the need for specific activities and exercises per topic. This then allows children with SEN to interpret the information in their own way which is theorised to facilitate critical thinking and problem solving. This research also proposes that learning should be social and introducing multiple activities in lessons can be engaging and build a relationship between students and peers or students and their teachers. This in turn then creates an environment of trust and comfort, constructing the idea that learning is enjoyable and not intimidating.⁵³

There is evidence that further training is needed for teachers to effectively educate students with SEN. Rodríguez-Oramas et al⁵⁴ conducted a study on dialogic training with teachers which focussed on mindfulness, inclusivity and the most appropriate communication and activities for students with SEN. The results at the end of this training led to an initiative-taking stance from the teachers to embrace evidence-based knowledge and put it into practice. They created more interactive lessons, dialogic literary gatherings and encouraged all students to participate which was successful with students with SEN who they saw an improvement in attention and interactions.⁵⁵ Avissar (2012)⁵⁶ states that low expectations cause a loss of confidence from both the educator and student. Many teachers feel they cannot teach children with SEN due to: “inadequate training, difficulties adapting; a lack of funding, time, knowledge, and support. This research also highlights that an introduction of a new policy is not necessarily enough to ensure the implementation of inclusive education. Many factors affect the outcome, including parents of children with SEN. Parents, the research suggests, must also be committed to communication with the student and school staff. Avissar concludes that many educators felt under pressure from taking on a social worker role with the additional difficulties of less-than-ideal home lives, potentially indicating the need for some sort of mental health service to allow teachers to focus on inclusive education.

Universal Design for Learning

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework which is designed to assess individual learners performance in order to design learning approaches to meet their needs, is defined as the “process of gathering information about a learner’s performance to make educational decisions”, which is designed to ensure that all learning can access meaningful learning opportunities.⁵⁷ A key aspect of the UDL approach is that it requires educators to consider what barriers students may have to learning and how they could be overcome. UDL recognises that all learners react differently to instruction and provides a framework for teachers to be flexible in how they instruct. A number of studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of UDL and it has been found to be an effective teaching methodology to improve the learning process of all students.⁵⁸

⁵² Akpan, Joseph & Beard, Lawrence. (2016). Using Constructivist Teaching Strategies to Enhance Academic Outcomes of Students with Special Needs. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*. 4. 392-398. 10.13189/ujer.2016.040211.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Rodríguez-Oramas A, Alvarez P, Ramis-Salas M, Ruiz-Eugenio L. The Impact of Evidence-Based Dialogic Training of Special Education Teachers on the Creation of More Inclusive and Interactive Learning Environments. *Front Psychol*. 2021 Mar 3;12:641426.

⁵⁵ Rodríguez-Oramas A, Alvarez P, Ramis-Salas M, Ruiz-Eugenio L. The Impact of Evidence-Based Dialogic Training of Special Education Teachers on the Creation of More Inclusive and Interactive Learning Environments. *Front Psychol*. 2021 Mar 3;12:641426.

⁵⁶ Avissar, Gilada. Inclusive education in Israel from a curriculum perspective: an exploratory study, 2012; *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, v27 n1 p35-49 <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=inclusive+education+israel&id=EJ955523>

⁵⁷ UDL Tips for Assessment. CAST 2009

⁵⁸ Matthew James Capp (2017) The effectiveness of universal design for learning: a meta-analysis of literature between 2013 and 2016, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21:8, 791-807

School Building Environments

It is increasingly recognised that the quality of the indoor, physical environment can impact on students' abilities to learn. The design and arrangement of furniture, acoustics, lighting, temperature and air quality can all impact on learning⁵⁹.

Whilst well designed classrooms have been shown to have a positive impact on all students, those with autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, anxiety disorders, learning disorders, and sensory processing disorders specifically require a supportive environment in order to function well. Barrett et al. (2015)⁶⁰ found that specific considerations such as lighting, temperature, and colour that significantly impact student learning outcomes, factors to consider include:

- Light – Allow natural light into the classroom whenever possible but be careful to not have a lot of sunlight glare where students are working. Higher quality electrical lighting is beneficial, which may mean using lamps with non-florescent bulb.
- Temperature – Control over individual classroom temperature is key to ensuring a supportive environment. A thermostat in each room allows for appropriate temperature control, as opposed to controls that manage the temperature in multiple spaces at once.
- Air Quality – Classrooms should have appropriate ventilation to allow for good airflow and quality.
- Colour – Walls should be a light neutral colour such as white or beige. Vivid colours should be used only as accents to draw the eye to important things.
- Complexity and Organization – Rooms should be organized in a logical fashion, with good paths for traffic flow. Zones of the room, such as those for group activities and individual work, should be clearly defined. Storage areas should be clearly marked and accessible to students in order to keep their belongings organized.
- Ownership – The more ownership teachers and students feel over their learning space the better. Quality desks, chairs, and other furnishings promote a sense of student pride and ownership. Using student work to decorate the space also creates an inclusive environment that allows students to take ownership.

The OECD have also recognised the importance of good quality learning environments. Their Learning Environments Evaluation Programme (LEEP) was launched in 2013 to develop instruments and analyses to inform school leaders, researchers, designers, policymakers and others about how investments in learning environments translate into improved education, health, social and well-being outcomes⁶¹.

Approaches to Special Education in other post conflict societies

As required within the terms of reference for this review, the following provides a brief overview of approaches to special education in other countries, who, like Northern Ireland could be defined as 'post-conflict'.

Israel

The legislation in Israel (Special Education Law, 2002) states that students with special needs are placed (when possible) in 'regular schools' instead of segregated institutions. The aim of this is to empower the child with special needs to be an active part of society. It also teaches the 'regular students' to understand what the needs of their peers with different impairments are; hence fostering equality, respect, and solidarity⁶². Here students with SEN are defined as those who require extra educational services. The Special Education Law provides for integration through teaching and systematic learning and treatment (e.g. physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy). Like Northern Ireland, pupils are deemed eligible for Special Education services in Israel once they have been assessed by a 'licensed school psychologist'.⁶³

Similar to Northern Ireland, Israel has experienced an increase in the total number of students and the number of students with 'special needs'. Between 2005 and 2019, the total number of students in Israel's education system

⁵⁹ Mitchell, D. (2013) What Really Works in Special Education. 2nd Edition.

⁶⁰ Barrett, P., Davies, F., Zhang, Y., & Barrett, L. (2015). The impact of classroom designs on pupils' learning: Final results of a holistic, multi-level analysis. *Building and Environment*, 89, 118-133

⁶¹ [Effective Learning Environments \(ELE\) - OECD](#)

⁶² <https://education-profiles.org/northern-africa-and-western-asia/israel/~inclusion>

⁶³ <https://www.science.co.il/education/articles/Special-Education-in-Israel.pdf>

increased by 29%, whereas the number of special education students increased by 122% – from 111,515 students in 2005 to 248,488 students in 2019. Around 11% of Israeli children classified as SEN.⁶⁴

Multidisciplinary teams at special schools develop an individualised education plan that focuses on the characteristics of each child. Parents have the right to choose the type of setting (regular class, special education class in a regular school or special education school) their child attends. However, the mandate to include children with special education needs into general education is emphasised. Israel developed a plan for inclusion which aims to gradually reduce the number of children in special schools and special classes and increase the number of children in mainstream, regular classes. Special Local Support and Resource centres have been created in each district to provide peripatetic support to children by visiting the schools. In addition to specialist educational support they provide other Allied Health Professionals (AHP) support such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, art therapy and communications clinicians. However, these centres have been criticised for only supporting children with a ‘mild disability’.

This plan for inclusion also includes IEPs for students with SEN which the teachers are expected to implement. If needed, students with SEN could be put into smaller special classes or extra SEN assistants be placed in mainstream classes. Teachers are to teach the core curriculum using alternative curricular activities to accommodate students with SEN. Around 80% of students with SEN are in inclusive education with enrolment in mainstream schools, where most are in mainstream classes and special classes for those who require it. Special education teachers who have been trained to work with children with SEN, are responsible for creating and implementing the IEP which is also derived from the general curriculum to ensure academic needs are being met. These special trained SEN teachers are more likely to explore alternative teaching methods which focus on clarity, visual aids and checking in with students with SEN between tasks. Moreover, Avissar (2012) also reports that mainstream teachers are now more accommodating and open to adapting to teaching those with learning difficulties but require more specific training, evidenced by the better equipped SEN teachers.⁶⁵

South Africa

A number of studies have noted that historically South Africa has not effectively delivered educational services for children with SEN and disabilities⁶⁶ and that during apartheid children with SEN and disabilities were often excluded from education. Therefore, the development of education for children with SEN and disabilities in South Africa started from a very low base. The estimate rate of disabilities amongst school age children in South Africa is between 2.6% and 10.8%.⁶⁷

A number of significant policies have since been introduced; the South African Schools Act (1996) sets out the right to education for children with special needs in mainstream school with relevant support services where practical. The 2001 Education White Paper outlines the strategy to make the education system more inclusive and equitable and that all learners have the right to attend their local school and to receive the support they require⁶⁸. A Directorate of Inclusive Education was established within the Ministry of Education to oversee and evaluate the policies, programmes, and systems for pupils with SEN⁶⁹.

To further implement inclusion in schools in South Africa, district support teams were established. These teams consist of professionals such as psychologists, social workers and therapists and act as a multi-disciplinary support team for local schools.

A system of inclusive schools has been developed, ‘Full-Service Schools’, which are designed to reflect the local communities that they serve, including learners of all abilities. These schools are required to identify and intervene if they discover individuals with learning barriers. It is the government’s goal that eventually all 22,000 local schools will become full service, inclusive schools⁷⁰.

The schools in South Africa have Institutionalised Level Support Teams (ILST) to coordinate teacher and student services to help create more flexible teaching methods. ILST are responsible for “managing and supporting

⁶⁴ Students in special education in Israel: rising numbers but the share of mainstreamed students is low. Taub Centre for Social Policy Studies in Israel, April 2022.

⁶⁵ Avissar, Gilada. Inclusive education in Israel from a curriculum perspective: an exploratory study, 2012; European Journal of Special Needs Education, v27 n1 p35-49

⁶⁶ For example, see: <https://japari.co.za/special-needs-education/>

⁶⁷ Vergunst R, McKenzie J. Introducing the Including Disability in Education in Africa Research Unit at the University of Cape Town. Afr J Disabil. 2022

⁶⁸ Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System <http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/2001/educ6.pdf>

⁶⁹ <https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/south-africa/~inclusion>

⁷⁰ http://www.included.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/WEB_IESA_EU-Factsheet-03_Full-Service-School.pdf

curriculum differentiation, access to appropriate resources, developing suitable staff and ensuring the sustainability of these methods.” Along with the parents and the teachers, the ILST creates Individual Support Plans (ISP). Teachers are also trained on Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) where they should assess students, identify the presence of a learning barrier and its nature. Depending on the severity, they help students with the ISP and review the effectiveness. If ISP is unsuccessful, ILST will conduct SIAS, reassess and intervene with a new ISP and relevant action.

Another interesting aspect of the South African model is that Special Schools are being supported and resourced to act as specialist resource centres, who can work with the District Support Teams and advise local schools⁷¹.

Example of good practice in SEN systems and processes

Finland is widely acknowledged as having one of the world's best education systems, particularly because of its high level of success in educating the least academically able students and its high level of inclusivity.⁷²

Under the Basic Education Act (2011), learners have the right to receive instruction and guidance in accordance with the curriculum and sufficient support in learning and school attendance as soon as the need arises. Within the Act every learner has the right to receive support and counselling. Support is regarded as collaborative between school, parents, and other welfare agencies. Special needs education is provided, taking into consideration the learner's interests. Finnish policies state that children with mild difficulties with learning or adapting are classified as having SEN. It is compulsory that they are offered any and all assistance in which they require, with permission of the parents. The level of resources available increase with increasing need, with supportive teaching, then part-time special education, then full-time special education, either segregated or in mainstream schools, and allocation of IEP. This service is offered at all stages of school including university, but policy changes depending on the institute.

In conjunction with the needs and wants of the learner, it also considers the facilities for providing education and whether the student requires to be partly or totally in a special needs' classroom or another appropriate facility. Class sizes in Finland, in both primary and secondary education tend to be below the OECD average at around 20 and 19 per class, respectively⁷³.

Finland's education system has three layers of support: general, intensified, and special⁷⁴.

- General Support: encompasses practices that have been implemented for the whole classroom, even if there are no children with SEN in the classroom. This includes designing activities for all abilities;
- Intensified support: includes extra support that teachers provide for children with additional needs. This includes regular, individually planned support measures. The educators plan such measures with the child's guardians, and they can sometimes bring in specialists when needed. Even when providing intensive support teachers strive to keep their children all in one group; and,
- Special support is often required if a child has a severe disability, illness, or developmental disorder. In these cases, the support is usually, full-time, long-term, and highly individual. Teachers may also bring in specialists and the child's parents to form a working team that can address all aspects of the child's needs.

The European Agency for Special and Inclusive Education⁷⁵ noted specific examples of effective practice in the Finnish education system, including:

- Individual planning: every child receives an individualised plan regardless of their ability and teachers meet with parents annually to discuss the child's progress;
- Education and Care: supporting self-care and healthy eating habits are part of young children's education; and,
- Support requirements do not determine placement: the core principle is that children should not be placed in special schools or classes to access support. Only in the most extreme cases where a child has significant care of educational needs are they placed in separate schools or classrooms.

Qualifications

Finnish teachers' roles are highly competitive and as a result those in the roles are highly trained, with teachers receiving five years of training including a qualification at Master's level. They must have a university degree and

⁷¹ <http://www.included.org.za/R2ecwdsite/docs/Factsheet%203.pdf>

⁷² Mitchell, D. (2013) What really works in Special and Inclusive Education. 2nd Edition. Routledge.; <https://www.oecd.org/education/highlightsfinland.htm>

⁷³ <https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.heischools.com/blog/finlands-approach-to-special-needs-inclusion>

⁷⁵ <https://www.european-agency.org/>

acquire the skills and knowledge to identify and provide individual support to children with different needs. Some Finnish universities offer special education training following the Master's degree and all offer training for schools and pre-schools as part of the course. The core of the special education does not focus on inclusivity but is very individualised and stresses the importance of communication and involvement of parents⁷⁶. There is importance placed on professional collaboration and a unified special education approach where official requirements match SEN curriculum to offer an effective system producing high quality and equipped special education staff.

Summary

There is a significant body of literature from across the world that demonstrates early intervention is a key element of addressing issues associated with SEN. Associated with this is the need for accurate diagnosis which should in turn inform the level and type of interventions and supports that are required. A number of studies have noted that due to co-morbidities and different stages of development this can be challenging.

A review of pedagogical techniques for children with SEN has shown a wide range of useful practices that teachers should be able to implement depending on the needs of their class. As an overall model, inclusive education is becoming more prevalent with decreasing emphasis on the use of special schools. Studies have shown specific benefits of inclusive education including improvements in behaviour, social skills, and academic achievements.

A review of processes in relation to SEN in other post conflict regions also showed a move towards inclusive education. For example, although comprehensive provision of SEN education is relatively new in South Africa it has taken an inclusive approach with a wide range of supports being developed for schools and children at a district level.

Many studies have highlighted Finland as an example of best practice which has had a system of inclusive SEN education in place for many years. Under the Finnish model, teachers are expected to teach children of all ability and the placement of children should be dependent on the supports and services available in a specific setting at that time.

Whilst still emerging, the processes that have been established in South Africa are also interesting. South Africa has also developed an inclusive model of education with area based multi-disciplinary teams who provide support and advice to local schools, although these are still in development.

⁷⁶ Hausstätter, Rune & Takala, Marjatta. (2008). The core of special teacher education: A comparison of Finland and Norway. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*. 23. 121-134. 10.1080/08856250801946251.

5 Interviews with Key Stakeholders

Introduction

An extensive suite of interviews was conducted with key stakeholders from the statutory and voluntary and community sector who have a specific role associated with SEN in Northern Ireland. In total, 53 interviews were completed with representatives from 26 organisations, including:

- DE Senior Management Team;
- EA Senior Management Team;
- Department of Health representatives;
- Teaching/ Teacher Union representatives;
- Political representatives; and,
- Voluntary and Community Sector advocacy groups.

A list of organisations that participated in the interviews is set out in Appendix A. Interviews were held either face-to-face or via Microsoft Teams. The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the key themes that emerged from these interviews.

Challenges within the system

Throughout the interviews conducted with stakeholders from the education sector, it was clear that a number of challenges exist within the current system, including the increasing number of pupils presenting in schools with special educational needs or additional learning needs, the administrative burden on schools related to current SEN process, the lack of flexibility around the time-allocation model alongside the demand for Educational Psychology resource, limitations of finance and budgets, lack of communication between relevant agencies, and leadership and accountability within DE and EA.

The remainder of this section addresses each of the emergent challenges and provides detail as to why these issues exist.

Pupil Numbers

All stakeholders highlighted a significant increase in the number of children with SEN in schools and also an increase in the number of children with complex problems. It is recognised that the increase in the number of children has placed additional pressures on all aspects of the education system, amongst both special schools and mainstream schools, leading to increased demand for assessments by Educational Psychologists, growth in class sizes, a surge in the workload of school and EA staff, and increased demands on the school estate and transport system.

An analysis of the school census data supports this view. the school population has increased by 3% over the last five years. In 2017/18 17,837⁷⁷ pupils were recorded with a statement of SEN. This has increased to 22,187 in 2021/22 an increase of 24% over the five years.

In addition to this, there is a perception amongst stakeholders that mainstream schools are seeing an increase in the number of pupils with complex needs. There are mixed views as to why this was happening. Many representatives from statutory sector bodies note the increasing pressure on places in special schools, that over the last number of years, there has been a need to place pupils in mainstream schools who previously may have attended a Special school.

“Special schools are very busy, they are too full. Space is a huge challenge.”

Stakeholder interview

“More and more mainstream schools are taking children with complex needs because the special school resource is not there anymore. But special schools have a very special skills set.”

Stakeholder interview

⁷⁷ Figures include voluntary and private schools, pre-schools and nursery schools

Representatives from the voluntary and community sector also highlighted that often it is parental preference that their child is educated at a local school within their own community, regardless of academic ability. Therefore, in addition to a general increase in the school age population, there appears to be increasing parental demand for inclusive education in mainstream education settings.

Administration of SEN Processes and workload

The administrative burden on teachers and Classroom Assistants, SENCOs and schools of the current SEN processes is a key challenge recognised by all stakeholders, with many acknowledging the repetitive nature of the SEN administration processes and that the EA often ask the school to provide information that they already hold. There was a high level of agreement amongst stakeholders that the administration of SEN could be significantly streamlined.

While guidance states that SENCOs should have protected time to undertake their SENCO duties, the majority of stakeholders acknowledged this is not always the case, and a variety of factors influenced this such as the size of the school, the school leadership, and other school pressures.

There were mixed views on the extent to which the introduction of Personal Learning Plans (PLPs), to replace Individual Education Plans (IEPs) would help to reduce the administrative burden. It was recognised that one of the aims of the PLPs was to reduce the administration burdens, but many stakeholders reported that in practice the PLPs are unlikely to make any significant difference. Some regarded the PLPs as a desk exercise that further added pressure to teachers but had little direct benefits for children with SEN. Interviewees highlighted that they were aware that the EA were introducing training on the new PLPs but did not know how effective that will be.

Demands on Educational Psychology resources and the time allocation model

The shortage of Educational Psychologists within the school system is a core challenge recognised by many stakeholders. Those from the statutory sector highlighted the challenges that the EA have in recruiting and retaining Educational Psychologists. Historically, the number of Educational Psychologists trained at local universities has not been sufficient and it has not been possible to attract Educational Psychologists to Northern Ireland who have trained elsewhere in the UK. Added to this a number of Educational Psychologists who trained in Northern Ireland have chosen to work in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) where the employment packages are generally more attractive. This perception is supported by data from the EA which shows there are now around 15 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) fewer Educational Psychologists than in 2017.

Challenges also exist with the length of time from referral to an assessment by an EA Educational Psychologist, according to stakeholders. The length of time to get an assessment by an Educational Psychologist and the length of the time from referral to provision of a statement of Special Educational Needs are regarded as significant issues for schools, for parents and for children. Currently, schools, the EA and parents can request an assessment for a statement of Special Educational Needs for children who are on the SEN register. All SEN assessments are conducted by the EA's Statutory Assessment and Review Service with input from Educational Psychologists. Once the statutory assessment process has been initiated, the EA has a statutory duty that it is completed within the 26 week statutory timeframe. Stakeholders highlight that for many years the length of time to get an assessment by an EA Educational Psychologist⁷⁸ has been much longer. Whilst it has been recognised that over the past year the EA has focused on meeting the 26 week deadline and their performance against this target has improved considerably, many question the extent to which the EA Psychology Service can maintain this. EA staff highlighted that the greatest demand on Educational Psychologists time is now the statutory assessment process and annual reviews.

Currently, the amount of Educational Psychologist time allocated to each school is based on a range of factors, such as, the number of pupils enrolled and the number of pupils with Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME), this is called the Time Allocation Model. For many schools, this means that the number of children who can be assessed in any one school year is usually much fewer than the number of children who would benefit from support from the Educational Psychologists.

“School don’t have enough Educational Psychology time.”

Stakeholder interview

The limited amount of Educational Psychology time means that schools are required to prioritise children who require an assessment. Stakeholders highlighted that there a number of flaws with this process as two schools in the same catchment area, with similar levels of allocated Educational Psychology time, may have very different

⁷⁸ Parents can pay for an assessment by a private educational psychologist and whilst this assessment is considered as part of the overall evidence of the child's needs it is not relied upon by the EA.

rates of children on their SEN register. Also, as the prioritisation is delegated to the school, other factors than the child's need may influence this, such as parental pressure or, the level of disruption in the classroom. Another issue highlighted by the stakeholders, is that, currently it is not known how many children would benefit from Educational Psychology input. Due to the way the Time Allocation Model is operated, schools only nominate children in their school who are most in need of assessment, in line with the amount of time they have been allocated. No further information is collected on other children who should be assessed above and beyond the time allocated to their school. Therefore, there is no information on the total and actual level of need.

“Educational Psychologists are vastly underutilised and have become too focused on admin.”

Stakeholder interview

Planning

Another factor that was discussed by key stakeholders is the apparent lack of strategic planning within the EA. Many, particularly those from the statutory sector, highlight that the EA does not seem to have sufficient data on the number of children with SEN in the system. This was emphasised by the fact that over the past three to four years there have been hundreds of SEN children transitioning from primary to post primary school, without a post primary place by the end of June. This is a great frustration for staff in the statutory sector, schools, as well as for parents and children.

A number of stakeholders note that in order to accommodate these children and to meet the parental requests for mainstream education the EA has established a growing number of Specialist Provisions in Mainstream (SPiMs) (formerly known as Learning Support Centres). These are typically an additional class of children enrolled in the school all of whom have statements of SEN. These classes typically have a much lower pupil: teacher ratio than the rest of the school. Concerns are expressed that the SPiMs are potentially being established with insufficient levels of support and training for the staff in the mainstream schools.

“The EA have established Learning Support Centres because there are insufficient places in special schools. But the teachers need intensive, practical support to cope with Severe Learning Disabilities.”

Stakeholder interview

One stakeholder highlighted that due to the number of places that are required, SPiMs are being created in schools that were already struggling.

It was noted that the EA now have a Special Education Strategic Area Plan⁷⁹ although the effectiveness of the plan is not yet known.

Communication within and between agencies

A common theme amongst those who were consulted with was the difficulty in communicating with the EA. It was widely recognised that the EA is a very large organisation with each team working to specific roles and responsibilities and therefore it can be difficult to find the right person to talk to. The COVID lockdowns and the shift to home working are considered to have made it even more difficult to communicate with EA unless you had the phone number and email of the specific person who you wanted to engage with.

The issues with communication and lack of engagement with external agencies was also highlighted in the recent EA Landscape review⁸⁰, which noted that communication between EA and other parts of the school system is not effective.

There is an additional perception that better communication and co-operation is required between education and other agencies, such as Health and Social Care Trusts (HCTs). Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) are regarded as key to the overall package of support provided to many children with SEN and often have a role in providing evidence and advice as part of the overall statementing process as well as therapy to the children. Many of those interviewed highlighted the challenges experienced by schools and parents, when attempting to contact AHPs for therapy or advice. Difficulties in finding the right team or individual to contact within the HSCTs were voiced by stakeholders and it was suggested that each school should have a named point of contact. A small number of interviewees (from both the statutory and voluntary sectors) stipulate that there is a requirement for statutory health and education bodies to co-operate with each other under the Children's Services Co-operation Act (2015) and

⁷⁹ Special Education Strategic Area Plan (2022 – 2027). Education Authority NI. (June 2022).

⁸⁰ The Education Authority Northern Ireland Landscape Review. Baker Tilly Mooney Moore. 2022 Department of Education.

there is a belief that both the Department of Health and the Department of Education should be encouraging more co-operation between their Arm's Length Bodies under this legislation.

Around half of those consulted with (from statutory and voluntary agencies) highlighted that the RISE initiative which is a multi-disciplinary programme that was established to support pupils following the COVID lockdowns provides a good model for co-operation and inter-agency working across education, health and the voluntary sector.

“There needs to be more multi-agency working to meet complex needs [of pupils]. RISE is a good model but, it lacks capacity.”

Stakeholder interview

“The EA need to do more work on support services, [they] need to be more integrated into school, the services are not connected, and the children have complex and multiple needs. The RISE model is more effective.”

Stakeholder interview

Leadership and accountability

Issues associated with leadership and accountability in schools and in the EA were discussed by stakeholders. There was a perception that many schools are unsure about their roles and responsibilities in relation to making reasonable adjustments for children with SEN and additional learning needs and that more needed to be done at a school level. For example, schools should be making reasonable adjustments to their curriculum and teaching materials to include children of all abilities and needs. There was a perception that whilst some schools have been good at making adjustments, many schools are not actioning these and do not know where to get advice.

“Reasonable adjustments are just not being done.”

Stakeholder interview

There is a high level of consensus among stakeholders that mainstream schools need support to make schools more inclusive and to take ownership of their SEN responsibilities and there is a belief that if more support was provided at a school level, this would reduce the level of requests for assessment.

“Mainstream schools need to be supported and equipped to deal with disability and inclusion”.

Stakeholder interview

“Mainstream schools need more support to be inclusive. Too much money is spent on individuals and not on improving the overall system to be more inclusive”.

Stakeholder interview

A small proportion also highlighted that schools' Boards of Governors also have a role in ensuring that schools are making reasonable adjustments, that they have an SEN policy and that the appropriate steps are taken to implement the SEN policy. In addition to this, SENCOs / Learning Support Co-ordinators should also be part of the school's Senior Management Team, to raise the profile and importance of SEN in schools and there was a perception that this does not happen in all schools.

Finance and budgets

The rapidly increasing and unsustainable costs associated with the delivery of services for SEN were a common issue discussed by stakeholders from the statutory sector. The Education budget is under significant pressure and SEN now accounts for around 50% of the overall EA block grant.

The lack of clearly defined and uncertain budgets, in addition to, the reliance on in-year budget allocation has created challenges for statutory bodies and schools. Statutory sector stakeholders note that each year the EA begins with a funding gap and that the current model of service provision is unsustainable.

Budgets and finances within individual schools are also a challenge in the provision of SEN. Many stakeholders agree that the lack of clarity around budgets is difficult for schools and makes planning very challenging. However, many also believe that schools would not wish to move to a model of fully delegated budgets for SEN, due to an associated increase in administration, which is already a burden.

Early Intervention and Pupil Support Services

Intervening as early as possible, when an additional learning need is identified is recognised as best practice. Many recognise that early intervention is often difficult, as many pre-schools and schools do not have the

resources to provide support to children with additional needs and accessing additional support from the EA without a statement is often very difficult.

“Schools need more and earlier access to the Pupil Support services. The service is outstanding, there just isn’t enough of it”.

Stakeholder interview

“We need a huge investment in pupil support services to meet the level of demand.”

Stakeholder interview

There is a general perception amongst interviewees from both the statutory and voluntary and community sector that the only way for many children with SEN to access additional help and support in school is through the statutory assessment process, i.e. to get a statement of Special Educational Needs. Therefore, increased access to pupil support services is regarded as a crucial part of early intervention and could potentially reduce the need for a statement for many children.

There is an acknowledgement that schools need additional help to meaningfully support children with SEN, but it can be hard for them to access that support and the perception exists that teachers needed additional support and training to allow them to meet the needs of all the children in their class.

Adult Assistance in the classroom

Many children with physical or medical needs require one-to-one support in the classroom and many Classroom Assistants (CA) provide a vital role in a child's education and development. That was clearly recognised by stakeholders. However, there is a great deal of variability in the quality of support provided to children, the experience and expertise of CAs and how they are deployed in the classroom.⁸¹

There was a high level of agreement that the CA role should be professionalised and whilst there were many examples of excellent CAs, many also need additional training and further support from the school to fulfil their role more effectively. One issue that emerged is that often CAs are appointed on a short-term basis meaning that it is difficult to attract and retain good quality staff.

Assigning classroom assistants on a one-to-one basis is not perceived to be an efficient way of supporting children, unless they have a physical or medical need, as this does not help children develop independence and is not the most effective way to help pupils meet their learning goals.

“Classroom Assistants should be Learning Support Assistants, who are not attached to a specific child”.

Stakeholder interview

However, interviewees noted that there is often confusion around what the statement actually means and that there is an expectation from parents that any additional assistance in the classroom, that is provided as part of a statement, will be on a one-to-one basis.

“It is a misnomer that the allocated hours must be provided by the same person.”

Stakeholder interview

It is clear from these findings that the role of a classroom assistant should be professionalised, meaning that they should have a higher level of qualification, should have greater training and skills, have opportunities for career progression and be better paid.

“Classroom Assistants [the role] needs to be more professionalised”

Stakeholder interview

“Classroom Assistants need a career pathway. There should be different levels of CA with extra pay when there are more responsibilities”.

⁸¹ Ulster University and Angel Eyes NI conducted an evaluation on classroom assistant and level of training in supporting children with visual impairments. There was evidence that CAs had limited experience and training prior to beginning this role, which would have undoubted impact on the quality of support the child would receive. Ulster University and Angel Eyes NI. (2020) “Classroom assistant Qualification Evaluation Report” (<https://www.angeleyesni.org/our-reports>).

Stakeholder interview

Measuring Outcomes of Children with SEN

Stakeholders were asked their views on how educational outcomes for children and young people with SEN should be measured. A common theme that emerged was the lack of process to collect common data on the achievements of children with SEN. Much of this information is held at an individual school level, and schools often use different approaches to measure the progress and achievements of their pupils. Furthermore, whilst there is available information on GCSE and A-Level achievements for all pupils, this is not linked to pupils with SEN status. Should the link be made between exam results and SEN status this would allow for more informed measurement of outcomes for pupils with SEN.

Agreement exists that children's outcomes should be measured on much more than achievements in academic exams and that a common system to measure a child's progress should be introduced. Examples of other areas that could be included in an overall assessment of progress include:

- attendance: the current acceptable level of attendance (85%) is very low and that schools should expect a minimum of 95%;
- Extent of suspensions and exclusions from school;
- individual progress – standardised assessments to align with measures of progress at different education levels, e.g. KS1, KS2, KS3, etc; and,
- Vocational qualifications.

Examples of good practice

A small number of interviewees highlighted examples of processes or programmes that they believed to be good practice or to be effective, Nurture Units and Engage.

The multi-disciplinary approach to providing support under the RISE programme is regarded by many interviewees as a good example of how schools and other agencies can work together to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to meeting children's needs. There is recognition that many children with SEN have complex needs that require a multi-disciplinary approach and the way this is integrated into schools is regarded as highly effective.

Training

Almost all stakeholders identify the need for further teacher training in relation to SEN. Teacher training was discussed in relation to initial teacher training in the universities and colleges and also Continuing Professional Development. There is general agreement that given the growing proportion of children in schools with additional needs, SEN should be a core part of the teacher and Classroom Assistant (CA) training courses.

However, it is also recognised that this will only impact future teachers and there is a need to upskill the current workforce within schools. Although it is acknowledged that it would be difficult to deliver and enforce, many stakeholders believe that CPD and teacher and CA education in relation to SEN should be mandatory.

“Mandatory training is important but, it needs to be resourced.”

Stakeholder interview

It was also noted, that although early intervention is identified as a key to addressing SEN many Nursery Schools struggle to access EA training.

Built environment and the school estate

The built environment is of vital importance for all children, particularly those with SEN. Stakeholders (primarily those from the statutory sector), noted that the increased number of children with SEN has put pressure on the school estate and, in order to accommodate them in mainstream schools the Education Authority has created Specialist Provisions in Mainstream (SPiMS) (formerly known as Learning Support Centres (LSCs)) in existing, mainstream schools. These are often modular buildings, which are constructed within the schools' grounds or minor works to existing classrooms. While these SPiMS are usually of a very high standard and provide useful additional class space, stakeholders identify a small number of issues associated with them. Firstly, some schools now have very limited outdoor space, due to the increased number of modular classrooms on the grounds, which has a negative impact on all pupils. A further issue discussed is that SPiMS are often very separate from other school buildings and therefore children attending the LSCs are still not fully included within the school.

Another issue associated with the school estate is that as children with a statement are classified as supernumerary and therefore schools are often required to admit pupils with statements of SEN in addition to their allocated enrolment. This means that many schools are now operating with an enrolment significantly above what the school was designed for, which reduces the space that is available for things like sensory rooms, staff rooms and staff offices making the day-to-day running of the school more difficult.

A number of stakeholders highlighted that the classroom environment is important for all children but particularly so for children with SEN. For example, an uncluttered classroom, that is painted in muted colours can create a calm learning environment, which is particularly helpful for children who experience sensory overload. However, schools are not always provided with advice or guidance on this.

Improvements to the system

All stakeholders recognise that the current systems and processes around SEN are cumbersome and unwieldy. When asked what improvements to the system could be made to enhance outcomes for pupils a number of common themes emerged.

Educational Psychologists should not be gate keepers to pupil support services. There was a high level of consensus that if additional support was available to pupils, as early as possible, this should reduce the need for Educational Psychology intervention and assessment. This included having increased access to the EA Pupil Support Services. Better access to Pupil Support Services should reduce the demand for assessments and free up time to work more closely with schools and pupils.

All of those interviewed highlighted that teachers and other staff should all complete good quality, evidenced based training. Whilst many stakeholders believe that SEN training should be mandatory, a small number also highlight the challenges for schools in making training mandatory.

Improved communication channels between the EA, schools and parents are also a key issue that stakeholders believe needs to be addressed, alongside making changes to the SEN system needs long-term, taking more joined-up approach and identifying long term funding.

Summary

Stakeholders discussed many aspects of SEN processes and services and its challenges. There was a high level of agreement regarding the key challenges and areas that need to be addressed. There was also a high level of consensus that the challenges facing SEN in Northern Ireland are significant and the current systems and processes are ineffective and unsustainable. The main issues that emerged include:

- Schools have a very high level of administration associated with SEN. The administrative burden has increased significantly as the number of pupils with SEN has increased.
- There are not enough Educational Psychologists within the EA to meet the current levels of demand for support and advice to schools. This has reduced the level of support that they can provide to pupils, schools and parents.
- The Educational Psychologists role has become very administrative due to the high level of requests for assessment.
- Schools and parents are reporting a lack of support for children who are at stage 1 or 2 on the code of practice. This driving the high level of demand for an assessment of Special Educational Needs and placing increased pressure on the educational psychology resources within the EA.
- Over the years, there has been a lack of strategic planning within the EA which has led to hundreds of children not knowing which school they will attend in the next school year until the last minute. The fact that pupils with statements of SEN are supernumerary creates challenges across the system but particularly for schools.
- The quality and deployment of Classroom Assistants varies considerably across and within schools.
- The way in which classroom assistants are funded and employed is resource intensive for schools and makes it difficult for school to recruit and retain Classroom Assistants.
- Stakeholders acknowledge that early intervention is the most effective approach to supporting children with SEN, it was also recognised that the current systems and processes make early intervention difficult. For example, the limited access to pupil support services and the inability for some pre-schools to refer children to EA services creating early intervention challenges.

6 Engagement with Parents and Children with SEN

Introduction

A key part of the review process was to engage with parents and children and young people who had experience of the SEN processes and services. The Ipsos review team hosted an online Deliberative Engagement event with 49 parents who have experience of the SEN system in Northern Ireland. Deliberative Engagement methods aim to involve the public in decision making processes in a meaningful way, by facilitating deliberation over key issues, usually presented through expert presentations. The event was widely advertised on DE social media and through a wide range of V&C sector organisations and advocacy groups. Eighty-nine parents registered their interest for the event and 49 were able to attend.

At the end of the Parent's Deliberative event, parents were asked to provide their consent for their child to participate in small group or one-to-one discussions regarding their personal experiences of SEN support in school, if appropriate. In addition to this, V&C sector organisations and advocacy groups shared information about the review with their members inviting them to participate. Following this, 14 young people participated in online, small group discussions and one young person opted for a one-to-one interview.

This chapter provides a summary of the key themes that were discussed with parents and young people. It initially explores the importance of early intervention and parents' experiences of SEN processes and then it moves to consider three alternative models of classroom assistance provision for children with SEN. Finally, it concludes by discussing how confidence can be rebuilt in the SEN system in Northern Ireland to ensure that all children can reach their full potential.

What we heard from parents

During the parent's deliberative event, parents were initially asked to discuss early intervention and their overall experiences of SEN processes. The discussion then focused on adult assistance in the classroom for children with SEN and the advantages and disadvantages of different models of assistance. Finally, the session concluded by discussing how confidence can be rebuilt in the SEN system in Northern Ireland to ensure that all children can reach their full potential.

The struggle of getting a child with SEN support

For many parents, the journey through SEN processes, from initial diagnosis through to intervention, is one **characterised by struggle**. A key theme which emerged from discussions is the sense that SEN parents have **had to fight** for the support they require for their child at each stage of the journey. For many, this sense of struggle has had a subsequent impact on the mental health and wellbeing of not just them, but the whole family.

"We have all had a journey. My oldest is nearly 10 and we've been on this since nursery. There are no quick fixes, but to achieve anything you feel like you have to push and fight for everything, and I don't think they realise how frustrating that is, how it affects the family, and takes the parent out of their comfort zone. Everything's been a battle."

Parent, Primary School, Mainstream

At the early stages of intervention, experiences diverged according to whether parents could obtain a concrete diagnosis for their child. Parents whose child had a definitive diagnosis, at a very early stage, tend to have had a quicker and smoother journey through SEN processes. For example, a parent of a child with Down's Syndrome reported a positive experience, as their child had a disability no one can 'argue' with. Without hurdles to confirm diagnosis, this child was able to complete the statementing process as soon as he started pre-school and had his first educational psychology report before he turned three. This parent believed that the early intervention enabled the child to have the necessary support in place to access the curriculum within mainstream education.

"We're so blessed we didn't have any fight for diagnosis. It's chromosomal, it's in his blood and nobody can argue he doesn't have educational needs... We've had a pretty positive experience so far. I say that candidly because I know things can change quickly... So far so good for us."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

In contrast, parents who have had a longer and more difficult route to diagnosis tend to report more negative experiences with SEN processes overall. The long waiting time for a diagnosis is perceived to have delayed children developmentally, and some highlight that their child had to struggle without intervention for many years while they 'fought' for a diagnosis. Meanwhile, others have paid to privately obtain a diagnosis due to long waiting times or after they exhausted statutory support to no avail.

"I had to spend £1,500 for my diagnosis for my eldest child in 2014. This was simply where they told me there was nothing further, they could do for my son until he had a diagnosis. You know the waiting times; he would not be assessed by the time he started P1. They forced our hand down the private route."

Parent, Primary School, Mainstream

It is evident that early diagnosis is essential for enabling early intervention. However, many parents report a chronic implementation gap, even when diagnosis is confirmed, and a statement is in place. The support included within a child's statement is generally not perceived to be adequately provided in schools. For some, the number of one-to-one support hours does not match the recommendation in the statement, for others a range of specialist intervention was lacking. For these parents, there was a palpable sense of frustration, and in the more extreme cases, trauma.

"We had 25 hours of classroom assistance support- that was written on his initial statement... He didn't get the statement support. My son was in a mainstream school because of no support, and that is trauma we are still recovering from. He was in the wrong placement for years and wrecked. I don't know if he will ever recover from it."

Parent, Special school

It became apparent that parents view early intervention as being undermined, at various stages of the SEN journey, from diagnosis through to implementation. Furthermore, early intervention is perceived as being undermined by **a lack of adequate training for staff**. Even when the correct number of statemented hours of support are being provided in schools, many parents have experienced **inadequate specialist staff training** as a barrier to their child's progression. From the perspective of some parents, school staff did not understand the emotional needs of their child, or what they needed to establish psychological safety. For example, one parent described that the classroom assistant and teacher were not trained to deal with their autistic son's behaviour, meaning that their emotional distress was expressed as violence. This led to the parent making the difficult decision to remove their child from school.

"He couldn't understand a word being said or what was expected of him... nobody came in to help the school in how they would keep him calm... staff weren't trained, my son ended up violent. Chucking chairs at teachers."

Parent, Special school

Improvement of SEN processes for early intervention

Parents were very vocal about the ways in which SEN processes could be improved to ensure that early intervention becomes a reality. However, it is important to note there is a profound sense of frustration that these improvements have not been implemented to date, given the number of reviews and consultations already undertaken by the EA. This, in turn, creates an undercurrent of scepticism that these steps towards improvement will be actioned.

It was apparent that many parents felt on the 'backfoot' of SEN processes, including the steps to getting a statement. This is an essential first stage of the journey and so **parents want clear, transparent and timely communication about SEN processes**. Clearly outlined **pathways** are of huge importance to parents, with all information being **easily available online, on EA's website**. Given the wealth of information parents need to digest, many feel that the communication process should be digitised, so that information can be accessed easily and progress through the process can be tracked.

"Communication is the biggest issue. It's [been] a number of years since I've been through the process, but I don't know why it can't be digitised with a tracking system, so you know where you are. Or a point of contact."

Parent, Special school

Additionally, considerable value is placed on accountability and transparency therefore parents would appreciate a named point of contact for the process of statementing and a clear indication of what the timescales are, and progress against these timescales.

Parents also emphasise the importance of timely support, which is perceived to require investment in staffing levels to speed up the process. Crucially, there is also a need for some level of support and intervention while they are waiting for a diagnosis or a statement.

The wording of statements themselves need to be reviewed and monitored to ensure that they are explicit about the support required. In some instances, where the wording on the statement has been vague, this has often translated into support not being implemented. One parent raised the difference between the word 'should' and the word 'must' being included in a statement, with the former creating the conditions for recommendations to be ignored, constituting a barrier to support. From their perspective, wording should be explicit and the drafting standardised and subject to review and accountability.

"My daughter's statement is very vague. My son's statement is written in such a way that there are certain provisions that still aren't being provided, that are supposed to be enshrined in law."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

An understanding exists that the wellbeing of their children is not confined to their experiences within school. Children with additional needs also require support from other allied health professionals, from speech and language to health and social care. Currently, **parents experience a disjointed system which leads to a 'duality of difficulty.'** Therefore, many cited the need for a more **joined up approach between education and other healthcare practitioners, and for other health professionals to input into the statementing process in a more meaningful and systematic manner.**

"I think there's an issue that there's a duality of difficulties. My son had meltdowns in nursery every day, the stammer was being seen by paediatrics, but couldn't be seen by the health service in school because he was being seen in the community. Nobody is joining up the dots. My oldest was told her IQ would compensate for her difficulties, but that didn't happen and was diagnosed with Asperger's at secondary. CAMHS wouldn't see her and sent her back to the autism service. There's this comorbidity and they don't acknowledge that."

Parent, Post Primary, Mainstream

Additionally, to overcome the current implementation gap between support cited on a statement and reality, parents felt that further training should be required for teachers to implement strategies. Furthermore, this should be subject to greater levels of accountability, so that support is implemented consistently.

Services and supports

A range of services and supports were referenced by parents which have been put in place to meet their child's needs, including: speech and language support, 1:1 support/ classroom assistant, a sensory room, literary service and paediatric assessment.

However, support seems to be variable according to the particular additional need. Some parents felt that their child had received no additional support, especially if they have a 'low incidence' special educational need, for example Tourette's Syndrome. Other parents highlight the variability of support based on geographic location, bemoaning the inconsistent SEN provision across Northern Ireland.

"[Support] varies weirdly across Northern Ireland and that's one of the main issues. It varies amongst different departments of education (authority)."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Overall, classroom assistance is the most commonly cited source of additional support. Some parents have a classroom assistant assigned to their child, and most have had a very positive experience with this kind of one-to-one support. It was evident that when this type of provision works well, it can have a positive impact on a child's progression and learning outcomes.

"We've been very fortunate, she's so good and knows him so well, she is very tuned into him."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

However, there are issues and challenges with the current model of classroom assistance support. For some, there has been a sense of struggle in securing the amount of hours the feel their child requires, again referencing the fact that they had to 'fight' to ensure that the number of hours outlined on their child's statement, or by the educational psychologist, was implemented fully.

Parents also expressed concern about the lack of dedicated SEN training that classroom assistants have received; while dedicated support is beneficial for their child, their classroom assistant is not a specialist or trained in developmental needs. One parent explained that their child with autism receives 20 hours of classroom assistance support per week. However, their child does not have adequate 'executive functioning' to be able to focus and so their progression is limited, even with one-to-one support.

There is a perception, among some parents, that their child gets no additional support, even after securing a diagnosis. Others describe the support their child gets as being insufficient and not in line with what Educational Psychologists and other assessment teams had recommended their child needs.

"They said he had a language and communication difficulty and needed speech and language therapy, yet in 2.5 years we had 8, 30 minutes sessions that I had to fight tooth and nail for."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

As demonstrated above, there is a strong undercurrent to the discussions that parents have to fight to secure the services and support their child requires, even if a statement is in place.

Ideal support

As would be expected, what parents regarded as ideal supports and services for children vary considerably, depending on the child's particular circumstances. However, there are a number of cross-cutting themes. Most prominently, parents wanted equality and inclusion for their children- meaning that sufficient adjustments are made so that their children can access mainstream education.

"We want equality and inclusion. He has autism. He should be able to access the curriculum the same as his peers. And they should be providing whatever he needs to allow him to live the same life as his peers."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Strong views were expressed that children should be supported to access the curriculum in a manner which is tailored to them and enables them to thrive and progress academically. Further, if this is to be a reality, schools need to be adequately funded to ensure that all of these additional pathways and measures, which enable children with SEN to access mainstream curriculum, are put in place.

"In an ideal situation, the support and the service [my child needs] are those to ensure he is safe, happy and learning at his own level. At his own level, he must have access to the curriculum."

Parent, child not yet at school

It is evident that improved access to the curriculum for children with SEN is predicated upon the need for specialist staff training. Parents cite the need for dedicated SEN training for teachers as standard, highly trained classroom assistance staff, as well as more regular training opportunities for staff within school so that learning for these staff members is continually up to date.

Furthermore, parents also recognise the role of other healthcare professionals in helping their child access the curriculum within schools and believe that Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and physio should be more readily available. If these services are mentioned in the statement, parents feel strongly that they should be made available to the parents and the school. This also demonstrates the perceived importance of a multi-disciplinary approach, rather than different services being delivered in parallel.

In addition to ensuring children with additional needs can access the mainstream curriculum, parents whose children attend special schools cited the need for a more academic 'push.' One participant explained that there is currently limited academic emphasis within the curriculum, and that this in turn impacts her child's sense of wellbeing and purpose.

"He's probably one of the more capable people and will leave school at 19 with absolutely no qualifications whatsoever even at a basic level that he is more than capable of."

Parent, Post primary, Special school

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

The majority of children represented had an IEP in place, apart from a small number who are at the beginning of the journey and have only very recently had an additional need identified. Generally, parents are highly sceptical towards IEP's, with many commenting that they are *'not worth the paper they are written on.'*

Negative views towards IEPs tend to be underpinned by a gap between paper and practice; many expressed frustrations that the plans detailed in their child's IEP have not been implemented properly, or at all. This has led parents to view them as simply a 'paper pushing' exercise.

"The IEP was not implemented, the statement was not implemented. We went to the school repeatedly, nothing happened. Even at the end of year reviews, I specified that it wasn't happening, and there was no follow-up. Nothing was changed."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Additionally, parents feel that the SENCO just 'copy and paste' for each IEP and that there is very little differentiation between the children. It was also reported that the goals for children seem unrealistic or not ambitious enough, and the targets are not meaningful or tailored to the child's progression.

"In my experience as a classroom assistant with children, my SENCO is very fond of copy and pasting. There's little differentiation between the children. You read a boy's IEP and it still says 'she'."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Some parents link the inappropriateness of their child's IEP to a lack of consultation and parental involvement in their development. While there is a view that parents should be consulted and actively involved in the development of IEPs, this is not always happening, in reality. Some had better experiences than others, and when the parent and child are both actively involved in setting targets, this results in a more positive experience and achievement of outcomes.

Moreover, while IEPs should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are effective and that progress is being monitored, parents are not confident that this is happening in reality. This leads to a consolidation of mistrust in SEN processes more widely.

"My child has an IEP. Especially over Covid and stuff it hasn't been reviewed. It's supposed to be done every 3 months, it just isn't reviewed. A couple of years ago it was produced in June for me to sign off for paperwork. They're not reviewing and meeting targets and moving on. [It's] just a paper-pushing exercise."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

To improve the effectiveness of IEPs, there is a consensus that they should be living, breathing documents, with meaningful input from the parent and child, which are regularly reviewed. Parents are passionate about the individuality of their children and therefore want IEPs to reflect this- as individualised, tailored and unique documents.

Finally, many expressed that the most important improvement which could be made to IEPs is to ensure their implementation. Parents want to be reassured that the current implementation gap is overcome through systematic processes, mobilisation of sufficient resources and evidence of meaningful change within the system.

Home and school links

Parents want strong links between home and school life, underpinned by effective communication. However, parent's experiences were highly variable and dependent on individual school culture, or particular teachers. While some parents reported positive experiences, it was clear that these were school- specific rather than a reflection of systematic and consistent implementation of processes and procedures.

"I'm the only one with a positive, my school has been amazing, they keep me informed of everything. Seesaw⁸² is amazing, or the teacher will come over at the end of the day and tell me. The school has been great with that."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

⁸² Seesaw is an app that allows parents to keep up-to-date with their child's progress, homework and allows direct communication between parents and teachers.

Some parents have experienced inconsistency in their school's communication, and some mentioned only hearing about negative instances with their child, rather than any of their positive achievements. Additionally, some expressed frustration about only being informed when something has become an issue and not beforehand, for example, if a child is struggling with behaviour. It is clear that parents want opportunities to input into the management of these areas.

In order to improve home and school links, effective communication is key. Given their child's additional learning needs, parents expressed a desire to be kept informed about their child's wellbeing and progress. They also wanted improved communication processes between parents, schools and the EA to confirm support plans are being effectively implemented.

Alternative models of support in the classroom

At this stage in the discussions, parents were presented with three potential alternative models of adult assistance in the classroom, as outlined below:

- The first model involves provision of additional teaching hours, through the use of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), rather than one to one classroom assistants. This is currently being trialled in schools in Northern Ireland;
- In the second model, the school holds the budget for all additional support required for children with SEN. This model is used in England; and,
- The third model is being piloted in California and involves fully inclusive education in which there are a limited number of special schools and children of all abilities are taught together. Under this model Classroom Assistants who work with children with SEN are required to have higher levels of qualifications and training.

Initial views on alternative models

Awareness of alternative models to the current classroom assistance structure varies with some more familiar with alternatives than other. The English model being the most familiar to those aware of alternatives. Generally, parents were unsurprised at the discussion around alternative models of support, as they were aware that Northern Ireland has some of the highest numbers of classroom assistants. However, there was scepticism about the motives behind this discussion, surmising that it was all intended as a cost-reduction exercise.

Broadly, parents have strong views on classroom assistance support, whether positive or negative. Some have experienced excellent assistants and witnessed their child progressing due to the one-on-one support, and so struggled to imagine that an alternative would be better.

"She was like his second mum, from his first day in school. I'm in no doubt that he wouldn't be able to read, write, spell and do all the things he can, even though he's in a school for severe learning difficulties, she pushed and just wanted the best for him. I know we are so, so lucky to have got that. It shows the difference it can make. She also knew when to pull back so not sitting on his shoulder 24-7. "

Parent, Post primary, Special school

However, despite some positive experiences, there is a general consensus that the current system is not working as it should. While parents contend for one-on-one support, if it is recommended in a statement, that does not mean that they are always the best solution. It is clear that parents do not believe classroom assistants have the necessary level of training to deal with SEN, and more specialist support is required.

"I had to ask for my girl's 1:1 to be trained because they were telling my very ADHD child to sit down and behave. I had to ask the school to put her on a course, to find out about ADHD and to look at other ways of trying to contain my daughter so she is sitting and listening in the classroom. They did send her on training, but I had to be the one to do that. There is a lack of assistants out there as well, and she was fresh out of college."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

There is also acknowledgement that the current model may not be working effectively, given the high numbers of assistants, but the prevailing high level of need for additional support for children with SEN. For some, this generates interest in understanding how an alternative model of classroom support might work.

"I don't know how feasible 1:1 assistants are with the need growing so fast, and the employment environment at the moment. Those other models are really interesting to hear."

Parent, Primary and Post primary, Mainstream (multiple children)

Newly qualified teacher model (NQTs)

Overall, there are a number of potential benefits to this model, but parents also have some concerns about how it would work in reality, and whether there would be any adverse outcomes for children with SEN.

The idea of having NQTs as support was appealing in that they are more traditionally qualified and are more likely to have specific SEN training than a classroom assistant, especially given the increasing prominence of SEN within the teacher training curriculum. Further, there is a perception that NQTs often complete their training with a sense of enthusiasm and zeal, which can be very beneficial for supporting children with SEN.

"The teacher that took my child last year was fresh out of university, knew exactly what to do and how to calm her, and I thought, are they teaching them now what to do? She'd done her thesis on SEN. But, she was brilliant, and took my daughter on leaps and bounds."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

However, others are sceptical of the amount of dedicated training that teachers get with SEN and believe that classroom experience can be the most effective training ground, especially when dealing with complex behavioural problems. Additionally, concern exists about how resource would be divided among children with SEN to ensure that all of their needs are met in the absence of one-to-one support. As one participant highlights, some additional needs, for example anxiety, can strike unexpectedly and require immediate intensive support.

"You can't timetable when they will need the most support."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Under this model, parents express concern that NQTs could see this as a short-term solution, or type of work experience, while they look for other jobs. This could make it difficult to ensure consistent support, which would be problematic for children with SEN who require more stability. Further, some parents note that it takes time and intention to build the necessary relationship between children and those providing adult assistance, and this model may not provide sufficient time for this to develop. Other concerns relate to children no longer having one-to-one support under this model and that children with more complex needs would not get the level of support they need in the classroom.

"An extra, newly qualified teacher in the classroom would be of no benefit for my son, he needs an extra pair of eyes on him individually."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

More generally, some parents were frustrated that this model did not address deeper problems with SEN support; providing children with the most appropriate school environment and ensuring that all recommended support is implemented fully in schools.

English model: school holding SEN budget

Similar to the NQT model, parents acknowledge that there could be some benefits to this model but express some concerns about its implementation.

The potential advantages to this approach centre on the ability for schools to invest in specialist support staff. Some parents feel that if schools are given autonomy and adequate budget, they could put in place the best package of support for the needs of children with SEN in their school. They recognise that basing specialist staff within schools could help enhance integration between health and education, which would be beneficial and constitute a more joined-up approach. Some parents are familiar with schools in England, who have dedicated members of staff, for example dyslexia specialists within schools who run their own interventions. This is considered a positive approach, in contrast to NI where there is one dyslexia service that come in occasionally a few times a year.

"Some schools in England, their approach is quite good. They have dedicated members of staff who are highly trained. They are able to set aside specific staff like dyslexia specialists who do receive further training and can run their own interventions in school. Here we have a dyslexia service...who come in occasionally for 2 weeks a year. If schools are given more autonomy to use funding to train your own good staff - not any blow-ins - that you can keep hold of them and use them for specialist areas in your school."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

The main disadvantages about this model are underpinned by concerns about accountability, governance and authority. Parents felt that this model creates a lot of scope for schools to abuse the system and are concerned that children who are most in need would not get the support they require. Some highlight from their experience that not all schools have integrity and feel that some would implement this very well and others would not. This approach could therefore lead to inconsistency of SEN support across schools in Northern Ireland.

"We're striving for consistency across schools that means every child will get the same. To do that, it just brings in so much uncertainty. Will one child get the same as the other and will parents be fighting because some children got support and some didn't."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Additionally, some parents are apprehensive that this model could make it difficult to challenge decisions taken by schools on the support they put in place. Within this model, there is a lack of confidence that processes for challenge and appeal would be effective, given parents limited opportunity for recourse under the present system.

"There's no governance for the schools, there's no avenues except to go to the principal, then if he doesn't agree with you you're snookered."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Thus, parents feel strongly that mechanisms for oversight and accountability over how schools are spending the budget would need to be implemented if this model was to become a reality in Northern Ireland.

California model

This model generated the most controversy. While parents recognised some advantages, these are perceived to be for the social benefit of the wider peer group, or the professional development of adults, rather than for children with SEN.

Parents acknowledge that it could be valuable for the wider school class to include children of all abilities, as this could help children become more accepting of others and understanding of difference. In an ideal world, parents would want to see some elements of this within mainstream schools.

"They should be teaching children in mainstream schools about children with special educational needs. And teaching them how to deal with their peers."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

However, others are more sceptical that difference would be well managed in this environment. One participant shared an example where her son's teacher did not recognise his stimming behaviour. They removed the child's break/lunch times because their work was not complete but failed to recognise that he had sensory overload. This parent felt that if a teacher is unable to recognise and manage additional needs, this will not create a space where other children are tolerant and accepting.

"If teachers can't cope with it, how are they meant to educate children to be accepting?"

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Given the concern expressed about the level of specialist SEN training for teachers and classroom assistants, parents find the emphasis on professional development to be appealing. The distinction between different grades of assistants is reassuring to some, and others emphasise the benefits of having clear pathways for learning and training. However, this emphasis on staff training is perceived by some to be motivated by the adult's needs and development, rather than by the needs of children with SEN.

On a practical level, parents are very dubious about the ability of any teacher to manage a class with a broad range of abilities and additional needs. This led to concerns that children with additional needs would get left behind, both

socially and academically. Further, some parents feel strongly that particular additional needs are only able to be managed within a special school, and that their child's needs would not be met in a comprehensive environment. According to parents, this model would be difficult to implement in Northern Ireland because there are different types of mainstream and SEN schools at primary and secondary level, who all work in different ways and have different priorities for education. Therefore, it would require a total overhaul of the current system, which parents would only want to see if they were certain it would benefit their children.

Conditions for making changes

Regardless of the potential model, parents want to see results. If a new model of classroom support is to be introduced in Northern Ireland, parents want evidence, in the form of data, to indicate that it would be effective and would improve learning outcomes for their child. Some parents highlight that an overhaul to the current system would be significant and could potentially be unsettling for them or their child. Therefore, in advance of any change, parents want evidence that the current system is not working in order to justify the potential disruption that would come with such large scale change.

"I'd like to quantify why the current process doesn't work. We're fond of change. But what exactly doesn't work? What measure have they put in place to quantify it doesn't work? What other steps have been taken by the Education Authority before we throw the baby out with the bathwater?"

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Additionally, if changes to classroom support were to be introduced, parents expect to be meaningfully consulted and kept informed. It is clear that parents of SEN children want to be communicated with in a tailored and individual manner and given evidence to support the proposed changes. For some, the most effective way to communicate this information would be through a face-to-face meeting with the school principal, with the opportunity for parents to provide feedback on any proposals.

"Every school could do that, the principal has access and could invite every parent for a meeting to discuss the proposals. Then everybody would have their say and the principals can feed that back. It can be each school doing that themselves. That could go into health as well, I would be only too happy to do that within my role in the GP practice doing early intervention."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Few identify classroom assistant support as the root cause of their issues with SEN provision. Therefore, parents are not necessarily confident that changes to classroom support would lead to better outcomes for their child. Rather, they feel that the perceived crisis in the EA and the need for increased accountability should be the priorities, rather than changes to adult support.

Re-building confidence in the system

There is strong consensus among parents that the current SEN system in Northern Ireland is not fit for purpose. Therefore, it is acknowledged that any changes to SEN processes and provision must involve steps to rebuild parents' confidence in the system as a whole.

The most important step would be for meaningful communication with parents to be integrated within the whole SEN system. Parents want to be listened to at each stage of the process and feel confident that what they communicate is being taken on board, most importantly, put into action. Crucially, parents also want this communication to be responsive, with transparent information easily accessible rather than them having to go 'scrabbling' for information.

"Listen to us. And show us you've listened to us. From the classroom assistants to the receptionists, [try to] understand the lives of parents and carers... Just listen. As soon as you start listening, we start to heal. Overnight. If you feel heard, you will heal from the trauma."

Parent, Special needs school

To be convinced of a changing system, parents want policies and procedures to be documented and transparent, and then for the EA and schools to be held accountable to them. Some would need to see a clear plan from the EA on what provision they will provide in light of the new code and that a published annual plan - with progress against targets - would help rebuild confidence. Some parents believe that the EA needs to take a further step to acknowledge previous failings, in order for parents to trust that any new policies or processes are being followed.

"Admit you're making mistakes and fix it. If they turned around and said, listen we got this wrong and we made mistakes, we know what we've learned from it and this is what we're going to do, it would make me at least feel like at least you're listening and trying to do something."

Parent, Primary school, Mainstream

Other important elements were referenced by parents, which they feel need to be in place to restore confidence. Where parents currently experience variable service provision based on geography, they want to see steps taken to standardise SEN provision to ensure 'parity' between each area. A fundamental ingredient of a trusted, standardised system is a joined-up approach between education and wider social services, including holistic integration of health.

"It's not just the school, but also social services and health services. We can't do one without the other. School, education and health are completely parallel pads and parents are stuck in the middle."

Parents, Special needs school

Summary of parent's views

To close the session, parents were asked the one thing they would change about SEN provision for their child. Responses were highly individualised based on their child's particular need and unique circumstances; however, they reflect parents' main priorities for the SEN system in Northern Ireland.

Some emphasise their child's experience within school, suggesting that class sizes are cut in mainstream schools and that small accommodations to be made so that their child can access the curriculum, and for professionals to understand the medical needs of their child.

Others want to see change in the links between home and school, by improving communication between parents and teachers and trusting the parent's views as an expert on their child.

Finally, parents express a desire for reform of processes and structures to ensure that their child was able to thrive. Parents also emphasise the essential nature of early intervention, improvement in EA accountability and internal processes, a radical improvement in the timeliness of responses from EA, and a more joined up approach within the system - within EA itself, and also between health and education.

What we heard from children and young people

The children and young people who participated in interviews all have direct, lived experience of the SEN system in Northern Ireland. Whilst most of the young people who participated are still in school (mainstream and special), a small number were now in college or university. The remainder of this section provides an overview of the key themes that emerged.

SEN processes in school

Young people were asked about their experiences of the various aspects of the SEN processes in school. A common theme amongst the young people is that their **parents have had to "fight", to ensure that they got the support they needed in school.** A small number of the young people highlight that their parents have engaged with the EA for a long time to make sure that their statement accurately reflects their needs and then have had ongoing engagement with the school to ensure that their needs are met. They also note that schools do not always take onboard advice from other professionals.

"Schools should be better at doing what they are told by experts."

Child/young person interview

"The school SENCO wouldn't engage with the Educational Psychologists or the Trust's Psychologist".

Child/young person interview

A number of the young people discussed their IEPs and the processes that were in place to develop them. All of the young people noted that they had **no input or involvement in the development of the IEP**, it was something that their teachers created for them and as far as they were aware their **parents were not involved in setting the goals and targets within their IEPs** either. Many young people argue that the targets set in their IEPs are not challenging enough and that because they are on the SEN register, their teachers have low expectations for them.

“The IEPs could have been more challenging. The teachers had low expectations [for me], I got bored.”

Child/young person interview

“I felt very unprepared for my exams, they have very low expectations for us.”

Child/young person interview

There is a general perception among the young people that the IEPs are not specific to their needs and abilities.

“The IEPs are not person-centred, I had no input.”

Child/young person interview

Young people have mixed views about the extent to which their parents are engaged with teachers. Most note that their parents only meet the teacher once a year, as part of their annual review but, believe that they could be more involved, as this would provide a space for their parents to advocate for them.

“There should be better communication between school and parents.”

Child/young person interview

“Parents need to advocate for their child, but parents are afraid of making a big fuss.”

Child/young person interview

Technology and equipment

Many of the young people highlight the range of software and hardware that they used in school to make school and their curriculum more accessible (e.g. reading software, iPads, reading/scanning pens). It is clear that young people with sensory impairments, physical disabilities and literacy issues value the equipment and software and recognise how beneficial it is for their education. However, almost all of the young people who use equipment or software also note challenges associated with it. The most common being that, although, the EA often provides the appropriate equipment they do not always train teachers how to use it.

“Teachers didn’t know how to use the equipment properly”.

Child/young person interview

“The EA gave me equipment that didn’t meet my needs and I had to fight to get the right software. But the teachers didn’t want to use it and the EA wouldn’t pay for the teachers to train to use the equipment.”

Child/young person interview

The young people note that not all the challenges with equipment and software are due to the school, sometimes the problems are with the EA and there are issues with firewalls blocking software and software not being updated. However, young people feel that the EA are very unresponsive and do not make any effort to resolve the issues with their technology.

“The ICT Technician [in school] was very good, but the issues were with C2K and their firewalls, this has been going on for a year and a half now.”

Child/young person interview

“The problems are with C2K, my software needs an upgrade, my screen reader is running off old software.”

Child/young person interview

When the technology or software that the young people are provided with was not suitable or, unable to be used effectively, this made it more difficult for the young people to follow what was being taught in the classroom and often made their homework more difficult and/or took longer to complete.

Reasonable Adjustments

A common theme amongst the young people is the huge variation in the extent to which schools and teachers made reasonable adjustments to allow them to access all aspects of the school curriculum. Many young people recounted stories relating to physical access to certain parts of the school estate or being unable to participate in some subjects. One young person, who had moved from a special school into mainstream, notes that the

mainstream school would not let him participate in Physical Education classes, even though he had done so in his previous school.

“I was told that I couldn’t do PE because the insurance didn’t cover it. I felt very left out. They could have made an effort, they could have contacted Disability Sport NI or, something.”

Child/young person interview

Other young people note that they had to choose their GCSE and A Level subjects based on how accessible they were.

“The science curriculum was just not accessible for me... I had to change to humanities.”

Child/young person interview

Getting the additional support required that allows young people to participate in all aspects of school life often came down to the attitude and willingness of individual teachers.

“Getting the support depended on the individual teacher.”

Child/young person interview

“Some teachers just don’t care enough, it’s a chore, its not part of their job.”

Child/young person interview

“SEN support was always presented as a luxury that could be taken away at anytime.”

Child/young person interview

Although young people are aware that the school could and should be doing more to support them in school, they did not feel they have been able to approach teachers and explain to them what they really needed to access the curriculum.

“I’m hardly going to walk up to a teacher and say – this is what I need.”

Child/young person interview

Adult Assistance in the Classroom

There are mixed views about the use of Classroom Assistants, among the young people. Some have a one-to-one Classroom Assistant; this was primarily for medical or physical reasons. The young people generally agree that, except where required for medical or physical reasons, one-to-one Classroom Assistants are more appropriate for younger pupils. Those who are older feel that as you started to mature in secondary school, you do not necessarily want to feel different from the other pupils by having an adult with you all the time. Furthermore, some young people believe that this does not help you to develop independence and prepare you for leaving school. Some of the young people also highlight that their Classroom Assistant was not sufficiently trained or experienced to meet their specific needs.

“I got reader software from the EA but, my Classroom Assistant couldn’t use it and he ended up just taking notes for me.”

Child/young person interview

Staff Training

There is a general feeling, among young people, that all staff in schools need to be trained to understand their additional needs, not just teachers. Some young people noted that their Classroom Assistant and teachers were not trained to support them properly, as they had no real understanding of their condition.

“I think teachers think that the EA is just making it all up.”

Child/young person interview

Others note how the lack of training in the equipment they require has created challenges for them in the classroom. For example, one young person claims that their Classroom Assistant was unable to use the equipment and software that the EA had provided.

Another young person with a visual impairment reported how the Classroom Assistant would photocopy worksheets for her but did not enlarge them, making her class work very difficult.

However, there is recognition that their teachers are also under pressure and that they are likely not given enough time to support pupils with SEN.

“Teachers are not given enough support, never mind the disabled students.”

Child/young person interview

“Teachers need to be given more admin time.”

Child/young person interview

Liaising with other agencies

Almost all the young people have received help and support from a wide range of agencies from outside of school. This includes specialised Voluntary and Community (V&C) sector organisations, Allied Health Professionals within the HCSTs and condition specific experts. The input from other agencies is often very helpful and sometimes vital but, the extent to which schools engage with other agencies is very variable. Some have experience of both special and mainstream schools, and it is their perception that the special schools are better at liaising with outside professionals to ‘bring in’ expertise into the school. For example, one young person who attended a special primary school received Physiotherapy in school but, when he moved to a mainstream secondary school the physiotherapy stopped and as a result his movement has become much more restricted.

“There was a lack of engagement with other agencies, which meant I didn’t get my physio.”

Child/young person interview

There is also a general perception, among the young people, that special schools are better at accessing specialist support for physical or emotional needs than mainstream schools, but they did not push children academically. Some young people argue that special schools should support children academically, as well as physically and emotionally.

Improving SEN processes

The young people were asked how the SEN systems and processes could be improved to make their experiences and outcomes in school better. There is high level of agreement that staff should be better trained to understand their condition and how to meet their needs.

For young people who rely on technology to access various aspects of their education, there is a great sense of frustration about the lack of training and support that schools get with the necessary technology was provided. By not making best use of the equipment meant that it was harder for young people to learn in class and that it took them longer to do their homework or, parts of the curriculum were not accessible.

Many of the young people recognise that their teachers were also very busy and that they needed additional support and training to meet the needs of all their pupils.

Summary of children’s views

A number of key themes emerged from the interviews with children and young people including:

- All staff in school should be better trained to understand the needs of children with SEN and to support them better;
- Young people highlighted great variation in the extent to which schools and individual teachers made adjustments in relation to their SEN, at times this impacted on the extent to which they could access the curriculum;
- One-to-one classroom assistance was generally considered to be more appropriate for young children but, when Classroom Assistants are provided, they should be fully trained, including on the use of technology that the young person requires;
- Technology could be used more and used more effectively in schools to make the curriculum accessible; and,
- Schools and other agencies (such as Health and Social Care Trusts) should liaise more closely to ensure that a child’s need are met when a multi-disciplinary approach is required.

Summary of feedback from parents and young people

A number of common themes arose from the feedback provided by parents and young people:

- Both parents and young people often have had to **‘fight’** to get the right type of educational support, even when they had a specific diagnosis.

- There is a perception that all **staff in schools need more training and support** to understand the children's specific conditions and their needs, this includes teachers and classroom assistants.
- Both parents and young people have very mixed views on the impact of Classroom Assistants, and many have had both good and bad experiences. There is a high level of consensus that **Classrooms Assistants should be better trained and have a better understanding of the young person's condition and specific needs**. Those children and young people who are slightly older tend to agree that unless there is a specific medical or physical need one-to-one Classroom Assistants should not be encouraged, as it differentiates the young people from their peers and does not foster independence.
- Parents strongly believe that the **current SEN systems are not working** and more should be done to support their children as soon as an issue is identified.
- Both parents and young people provide examples of when schools have not made reasonable adjustments to make the school or the curriculum more accessible. There is a general perception that access to support in school is often down to the good will of individual teachers.

7 Views of Schools

Introduction

In undertaking this Review, two separate processes were used to engage with schools in order to gather their feedback on the challenges associated with the current SEN processes and services. Thirty-five schools agreed to participate in in-depth interviews to discuss the challenges faced by their school. The interviews were held with the school Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC) and/or the Principal and were held either online or face-to-face, depending on their preference. In addition to this, a focus group was held with the Special Schools Leaders Group.

In order to collect high-level and up-to-date information from schools regarding their SEN pupils and their experiences of the service an online survey was also issued to all 1,151 schools in Northern Ireland. This methodology ensured an inclusive approach and provided all schools with the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation. The survey was issued to schools via an email which outlined the nature and scope of the evaluation and contained a link to the survey which was unique to each school. This was preceded by an email from DE to alert schools that the invitation was imminent and encouraging their participation. Following the launch of the survey, five reminder emails were sent by Ipsos at regular intervals, along with reminders from DE and EA. The response rate to the survey was 16%, with a total of 182 completed, useable responses. The following table details the response rate from the survey by type of school and the comparison with the actual school population. Details of survey responses to each question are set out in the technical paper in Appendix B. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the key themes and salient findings.

Table 7.1: Response rate by school type

	Survey Response Rate		All Northern Ireland Schools	
	Sample size	%	Actual size	%
Nursery	16	9%	94	8%
Primary	105	58%	784	69%
Secondary	22	12%	126	11%
Special	13	7%	39	3%
Grammar	18	10%	66	6%
Preps	5	3%	12	1%
Independent	2	1%	14	1%
EOTAS	1	1%	16	1%
Total	182	100%	1,151	100%

The response rate by school type broadly reflects the actual proportions in the school population and, therefore, we are confident that the survey findings are reflective of the whole school population. The schools that responded were also located throughout Northern Ireland, reflective again of the school population and provide an adequate reflection across the region. The recipient of the survey was able to also send it to a colleague if they were not the most appropriate person to complete the survey. The following table outlines the role of survey participants within their school. The survey was largely completed by either the principal/teaching principals or the LSC.

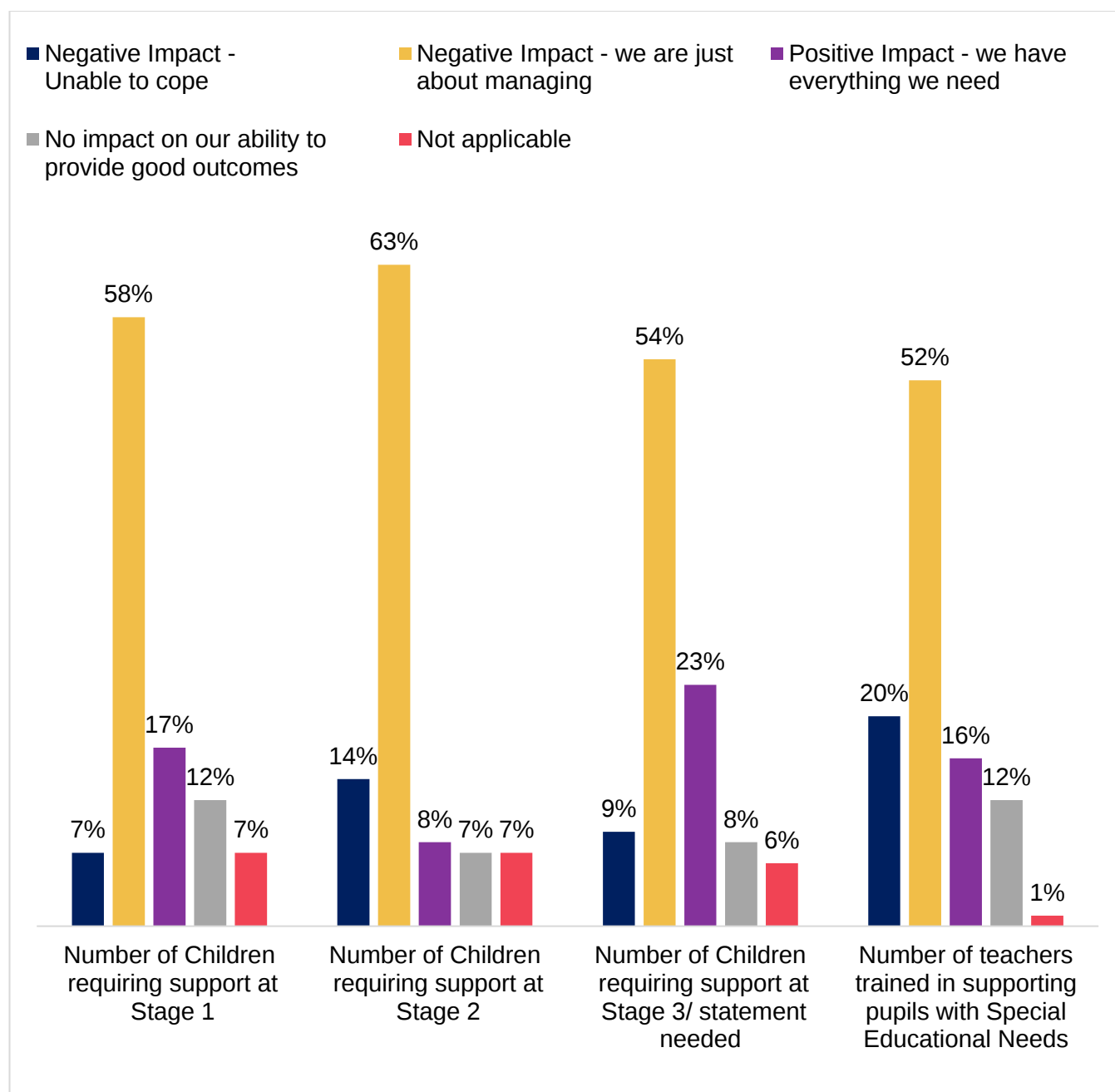
Table 7.2: Survey participants' roles within the school

Role within School	Percentage of respondents
Principal	35%
Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) (previously SENCO)	43%
Teaching principal	9%
Teacher	3%
Other	9%
Total	100%

Challenges within schools – number of pupils on the SEN Register

Schools revealed that they face a multiplicity of challenges which results in a negative impact on their ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children in their school. Most schools report that the increasing number of children requiring support (at stages 1-3)⁸³ has a negative impact on the school's ability to provide good outcomes for SEN Children. In most cases, the impact is negative, but schools claim they are just about managing. Although, on average, with the volume of children at stage 1, 2 or 3 with SEN around one in ten schools report that the impact is negative to the point that that they are unable to cope. If this is extrapolated to all schools that means that more than one hundred schools are unable to cope with the number of children requiring support at stages 1, 2 or 3. It is also worth noting that schools are more negatively impacted by the number of children at stage 2. More than one in eight are unable to cope and more almost two thirds are just about managing. This may be due to some children at stage 2 waiting for an assessment who may become stage 3 and be statemented. In that case, the school is spending significant time supporting the stage 2 children until they are assessed and receive help as detailed in their statement.

⁸³ Under the SEN Code of Practice (2016) schools are required to record SEN children as being at stages 1, 2 or, 3. Stage 1 meaning that the school provides additional support to the child, stage 2 that the child has been referred (or is being referred) for a statutory assessment of Special Educational Needs by an EA Educational Psychologist and Stage 3, the child has a statement of Special Educational Needs. See: <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/special-educational-needs-sen/stages-of-the-code-of-practice>.

Figure 7.1: Impacts on ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Allied to the negative impact, the number of children requiring support at stage 1-3 has on the school's ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children, is the negative impact the number of teachers trained in supporting pupils with SEN has on the school. The small number of teachers trained in supporting pupils has a negative impact for the majority of schools. One fifth reports the negative impact is such that it leaves them unable to cope and half are just about managing.

A common theme emerging from the in-depth interviews with schools was the perception that parental demand is driving the increase in the numbers of children on the SEN register. Most schools note that as parents have been made aware that they can self-refer for an assessment, this has moved children through the three stages of the SEN process faster than in the past. Schools claim that many parents believe that the only way to get additional support for their child is to get an assessment by an Educational Psychologists and get a statement.

“Parents see a statement as a fast track to support.”

School interview

“There is a perception that if you don’t have a diagnosis or, a statement you can’t get services.”

School interview

Given the perception that the only way to access additional support for children is by getting a statement, some teachers believe that some children who have statements who should not be statemented.

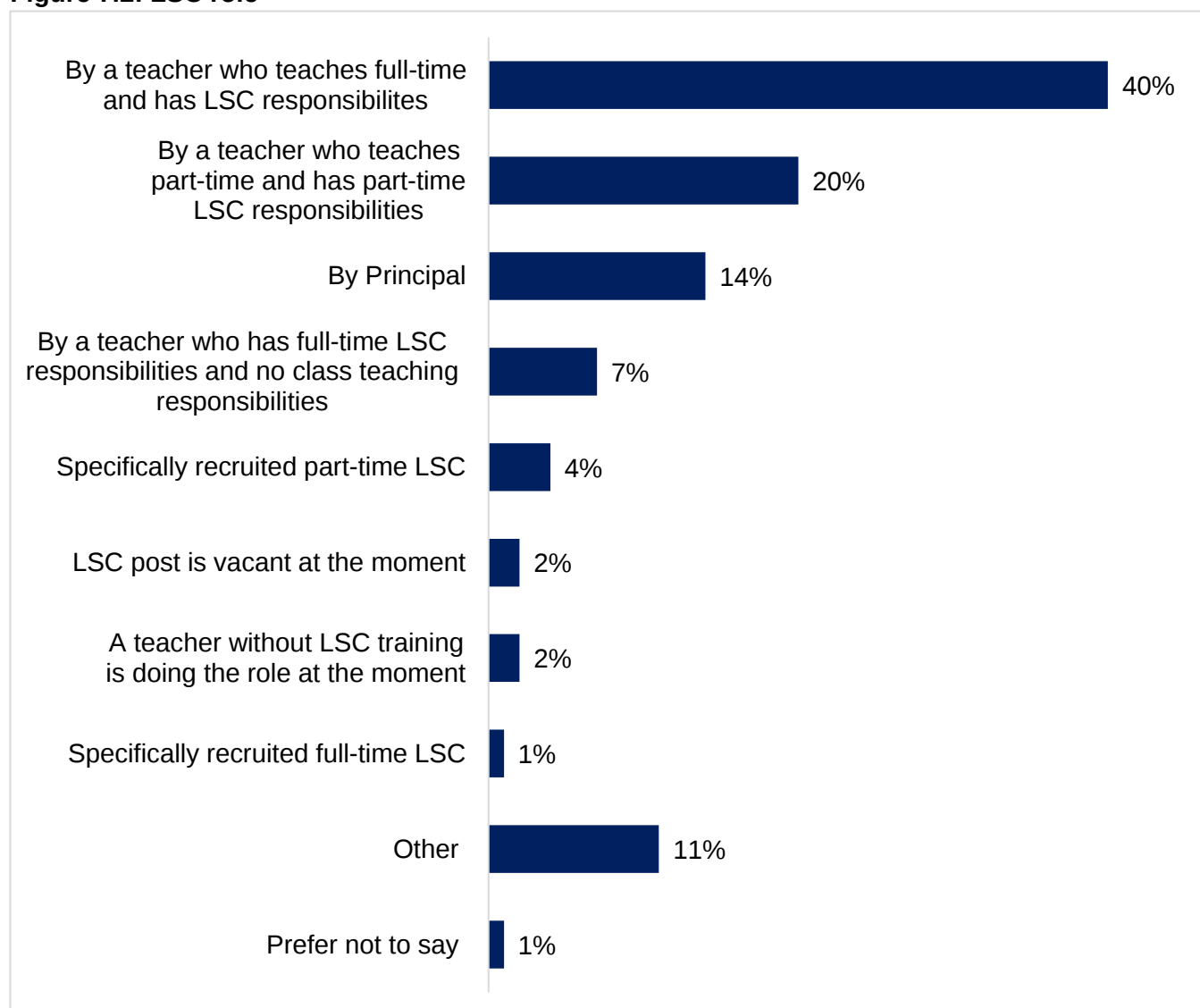
“There is a lack of understanding of what SEN is...there are lots of children with a statement who do not need it.”

School interview

Challenges – the role of the Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC)

The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) or LSC in most schools is a dual role. Either it is delivered by the Principal (14%), or a teacher who is also teaching part-time (20%) or teaching full time (40%), with fewer than one in ten schools (7%) having a LSC who is a full-time and has no teaching responsibilities. One in twenty (4%) have a specially recruited full- or part-time SENCO/LSC. It would appear that there is also about one in ten (11%) schools who are delivering this role through an assortment of staff (LSC, Principal, other teachers, office staff and these staff many be working part- and full-time).

Figure 7.2: LSC role



Source: Ipsos School Survey

Administrative burden

The focused, one-to-one conversations with schools, highlighted the significant administrative burden on LSCs, many of whom are principals and teachers with full-time teaching responsibilities, who are struggling to meet the demands of the role given that the other functions they also perform. Within the survey, the array of staff who may be involved in fulfilling the LSC responsibilities is diverse and can be demonstrated by the variety of arrangements in their schools outlined below.

“Class teacher provides reports and education plans, and the principal manages the administration and annual reviews and appeals etc...”

School survey comment

“Combined approach with LSC, support assistants and office.”

School survey comment

“In [this] school we complete the paperwork on the children in our class - after the daily duties are completed and are unable to source sub cover to allow teacher release in the current times.”

School survey comment

“LSC does 90% of admin but Principal takes on some sensitive cases associated with Social, behavioural, emotional and well-being which also involve child protection.”

School survey comment

“LSC does main admin assisted by class teachers and Principal.”

School survey comment

“LSC does this, but class teachers may sometimes contribute.”

School survey comment

Recruitment and allocation of time challenges

Just under a fifth of schools (18%) have faced difficulties recruiting or are currently facing challenges recruiting for the role of LSC. The main challenge facing schools on this matter, is a lack of time or time commitment allocated to the role, in addition to the teaching role. There is also a lack of interest or a lack of staff not wanting the role as it is perceived to be too demanding given the heavy workload it is considered to bring. For some, it is too much responsibility and there is lack of remuneration for the role.

“I am the Principal and LSC. No one else wants to take on the role - job share teachers, family commitments, other curricular responsibilities, workload.”

School survey comment

“Too much time commitment for full-time staff.”

School survey comment

“Balancing time to carry out role with duties as full time class teacher, particularly difficult in 21-22 due to ongoing staff shortages and lack of available substitute teachers.”

School survey comment

“The role carries too much work and responsibility for a teacher who is already teaching full time and taxed to their capacity. It is impossible to fit everything into the allocated time-budget.”

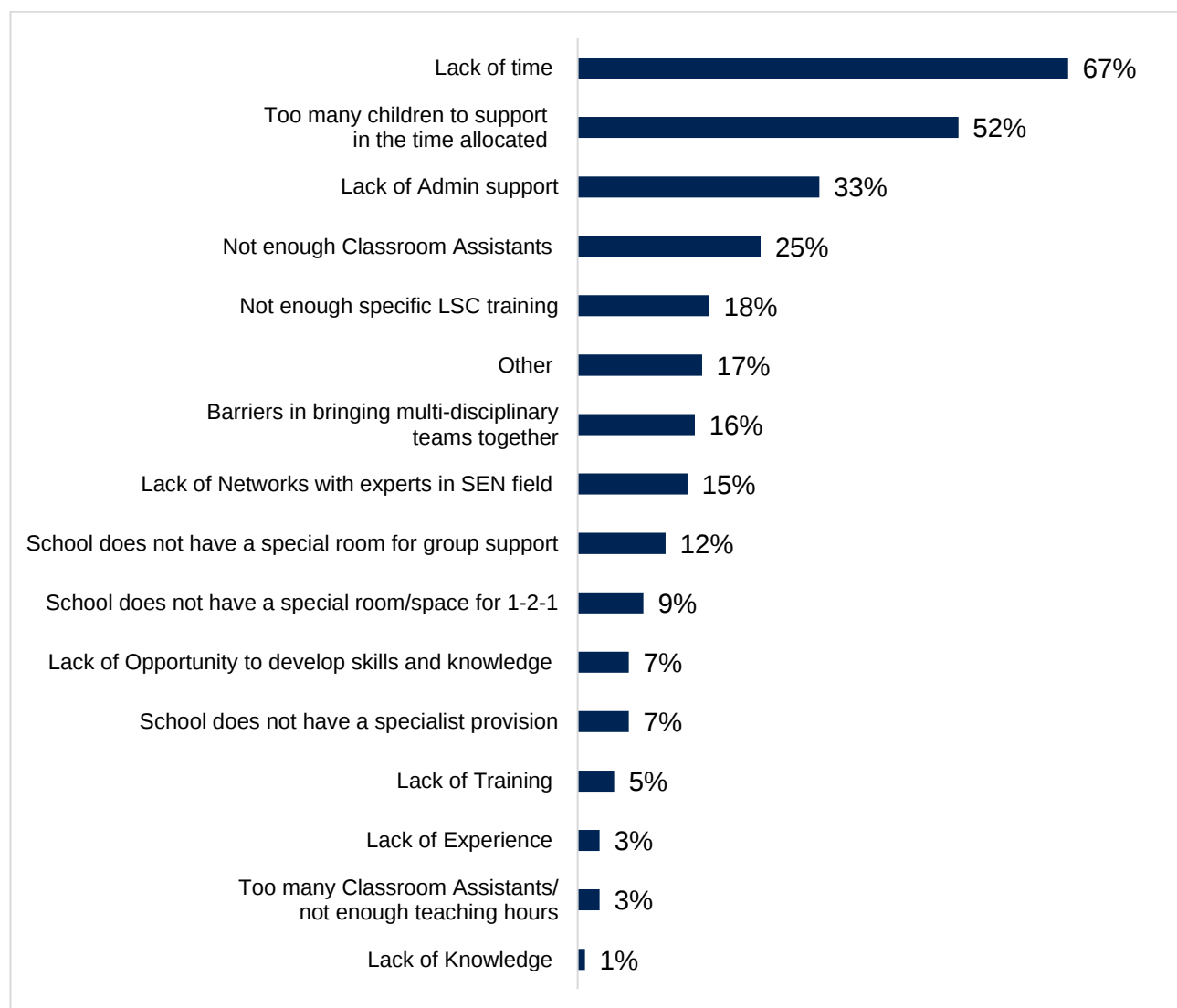
School survey comment

“Too much paperwork. Uncertainty and delay of new roll out of PLPs, stages etc Not enough ed psych hours not enough support from Literacy Service and other peripatetic services.”

School survey comment

Three quarters of schools (75%) allocate teaching points to the LSC role and for those who do allocate points, more than half (56%) assign one point with just under three in ten (29%) allocating two points and just over one in ten (11%) allocating three points. However, the majority (81%) think that there should be a career pathway for an LSC. Despite the view that a career pathway should be a requirement, just over half (57%) have the LSC as a member of their Senior Management Team within their school. Lack of time (67%), having too many children to support in the time allocated (52%) and lack of admin support (33%) are the main issues which are currently facing the LSCs in the schools.

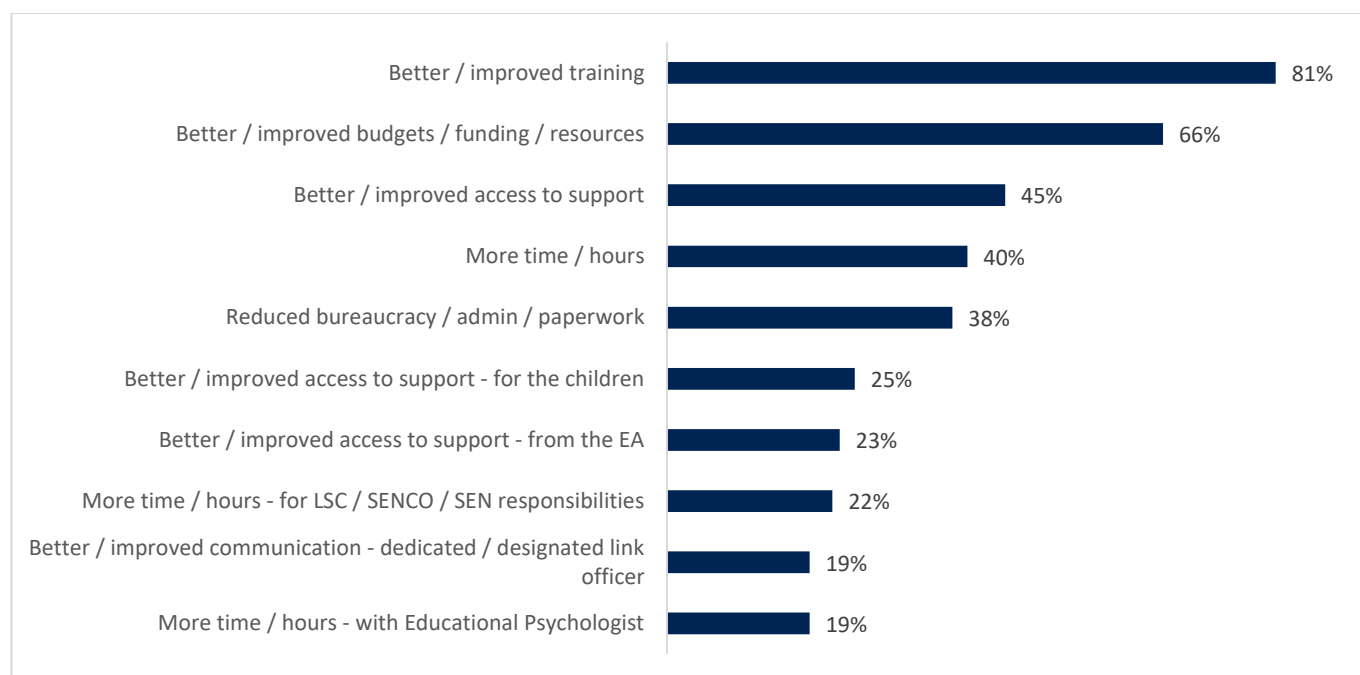
Figure 7.3: Issues facing LSCs in the schools



Source: Ipsos School Survey

Schools were offered an opportunity to suggest how the EA could support their school to develop the role of the LSC. Schools carefully considered this, with a variety of responses offered and schools provided on average 3.38 responses to this question. Almost nine in ten (87%) made at least one suggestion.

Better and more improved training is the most common ask of the EA (81%). This is followed by better/ improved funding or resources (66%), better or improved access to support (45%) and more time/hours for the LSC role (40%) along with a reduction in administration (38%). The table below outlines the ten most common themes that emerged from the suggestions.

Figure 7.4: Top 10 suggestions to develop the LSC role

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Other examples of ways in which EA could help schools included examples such as:

- More clusters/groups (14%);
- Improved communication and sharing of best practice (11%);
- Improved access to support for parents (10%); and,
- Improved access to support for literacy or numeracy (7%).

Better/ improved training

Schools' feedback relating to training was analysed in more detail, which revealed some specific needs. For the EA to support schools to develop the role of the LSC, comprehensive and continuous training is required to support the LSC role. Whilst schools suggest a need for specific funding for the role that allows the LSC out of classroom to support staff and to allow the LSC to complete training to update their own knowledge. DE stakeholders also noted that funding is already provided for LSC training. This would suggest that either the respondent to the survey was unaware of the funding or, they consider the current level of support as insufficient.

Having the ability to disseminate training to other staff is also considered to be valuable and could assist in sharing the SEN tasks across school staff. There is a significant call for PLP and specific SEND training from the EA for LSCs. This aligned with the focused one-to-one conversations in the schools, where many LSCs report that PLP training has not been completed and they had no indication when that might happen. LSCs would also like more training on SIMS/ IT in order to be able to use the systems effectively and efficiently to manage the administration workload. There is a sense that schools, like their pupils, might benefit from small group training. In addition, mandatory training for Principals is also perceived as necessary, albeit many schools recognised the challenges associated with mandatory training. A key suggestion is that some training should be face-to-face, particularly for the PLPs.

Better / improved budgets / funding / resources

Better / improved budgets / funding / resources is another important area where schools want more support for their LSC role from EA. Schools believe that increased funding would be important to allow the LSC to be released to focus specifically on that role and not have teaching time or to allow for a full-time LSC. To avoid this coming from the school budget, there is a view that this funding should come from EA instead. This is also reflected in the one-to-one focused conversations with schools, where there was a suggestion among those managing classroom assistants, that human resources assistance from EA would be very beneficial.

“Ring-fenced money that is specifically for LSC release (as it stands LSC release is dependent on the health of the school's own budget). The context and size of school could determine how many days release the LSC gets.”

School interview

“Funding to allow LSC out of classroom to support staff and complete training to update their own knowledge.”

School interview

“More appropriate allocation of resources to complete the job required.”

School interview

“More money in the school budget to support LSC 's role to allow time out of teaching role.”

School interview

Better/ improved access to support

Better/ improved access to support is also a suggestion, as to how the EA can support the LSC role. Concerns are again reiterated regarding the inadequate PLP training and in some schools, there was a request for EA to be cognisant of the burden in completing the administrative process. A common suggestion is the introduction of a dedicated helpline or helpdesk, within EA, to assist schools and support them. This should be accompanied by a simple list of available resources would be helpful. On-site visits from EA are requested to work with the LSC, along with a training directory for all services available, so that there is a “joined up approach that LSC could access”.

It would appear from the comments about better/ improved access to support, that there is a lack of support networks and schools feel that they are alone in managing PLPs, trying to find the services required to support pupils and needing support to manage classroom assistants. There should be a standard approach for all schools, to some degree, and EA should support and provide a greater level of outside agency support for pupils and remove barriers to this support, e.g. educational psychology being the gatekeepers of all services.

A better pathway of support for children and young people with a SEND diagram would be important, but it must be easy to read, e.g. what to do for a child with social, behavioural, emotional and well-being issues. Added to this, a very practical resource could be to have an LSC app with template forms, letters, policy documents and contact details readily available. It is also felt that it should be easier to get access to agencies etc. and that a readily available list of suggested intervention programs and training on how to implement them

Challenges – administrative workload relating to SEN

Schools have highlighted the challenging, administrative workload associated with SEN, and the lack of administrative support as the third biggest issue currently facing LSCs. Also, the administrative workload associated with managing Classroom Assistants (CAs) has also been mentioned, with it being noted that teachers are unlikely to have had training in this area and it can prove challenging if you are trying to manage a classroom of children with a number of CAs alongside this. The challenges that LSCs/ SENCOs have is in providing adequate support to pupils and teachers alongside their own teaching responsibilities was also raised as a significant issue. Hence, it is no surprise that almost every school (97%) describes the amount of SEN administration as too much. Almost three quarters of schools (73%) describe the amount of SEN administration as far too much and a quarter (24%) consider it somewhat too much.

The administrative workload associated with SEN tends to fall to the LSC alone. Overall, for six in ten schools the administrative workload is completed by one person, either the LSC or the principal. Half of schools (50%) report that the LSC does all the administration and a small proportion (11%) of principals do all the administration. In a third of schools, the administrative workload is managed by a combination of staff some of which are administrative staff.

The significant administrative burden associated with SEN is also a common theme that was highlighted by teachers and principals during the one-to-one interviews with schools. There are a number of key areas that have caused a significant burden including the completion of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), frequent engagement with parents (planned and ad hoc) and annual reports/reviews.

“Between the meetings and the forms, it takes weeks to do the annual reviews and I have 55 to do.”

School interview

“If EA hold the statements, why can’t they collate all the data from the other staff [and agencies]. That would be more streamlined, teachers doing all this is a misuse of resources”.

School interview

In addition, there is a perception amongst schools that moving from IEPs to Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) will not remove any of this burden.

“The PLPs are going to be burdensome.”

School interview

In many cases, the level of administration is deemed unnecessary and is seen as being caused by a lack of organisation within the EA. Many teachers and principals highlight how the EA often requests the same information from schools' multiple times or, ask school to provide information that is held by EA.

Management of CAs

The management and administration associated with Classroom Assistants (CAs) is another important issue raised by teachers and principals, with almost all identifying the significant Human Resource and Management burden associated with recruiting and managing the increasing number of CAs.

“[We have] 30 Classroom Assistants, some of whom are shared across different children, it is a big administrative burden. Also we have three Learning Support Teachers, the whole thing is a big management issue.”

School interview

“We have 55 FTE CAs... it is a massive HR burden and we had to develop our own less laborious approach.”

School interview

Training

Awareness of training

Awareness of training and support services among schools is variable. In the school survey, awareness of the training offered by the EA Children and Young Person Services (CYPS) (88%) is high, and a similar proportion of schools are aware of the Middletown Centre training (82%). However, fewer are aware of other professional SEN training (34%) and even fewer of other voluntary and community SEN training (24%). There is also a degree of crossover within training as some schools are aware of this offering, however they do not know whether this is provided by EA, voluntary and community sector or other Professional Services which is why the same courses are listed as both voluntary and community sector and other Professional services.

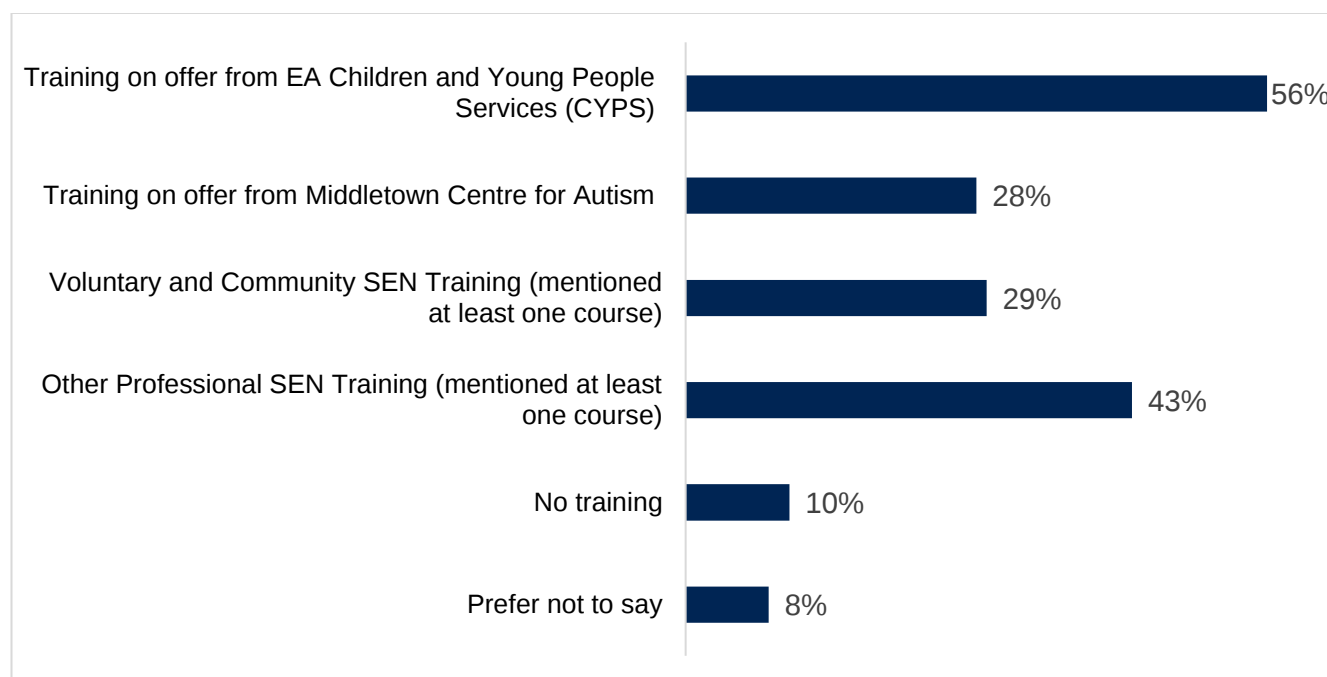
Those who are aware of voluntary and community training mention approximately 38 different courses with the main courses mentioned being RISENI, Autism NI, Down Syndrome Association, Empowerment Project and Mental Health Training and Early Intervention Lisburn.

Within the professional training that schools are aware of, the main course mentioned again was RISENI, followed by AAIS (Autism Advisory and Intervention Service) and unnamed courses completed at Stranmillis College and other Diplomas, degrees and a Master's degree in SEN.

Schools also mention training, such as, Learn Spark, Makaton and PECS (Pyramid Educational Consultants), TEACCH, CAMHS (children and adolescent mental health services), Patoss, SEN EYIS (SEN Early Years Inclusion Service), training from MENCAP.

A few schools are not aware of any SEN training available or declined to provide a response.

Most of those schools who are aware of any kind of SEN training availed of some or multiple training courses specific for SEN over the last year. In the last year, almost six in ten schools (58%) reported that staff in their school had completed training offered by EA CYPS and just over a quarter had availed of training offered from Middletown Centre for Autism. Almost a third (29%) have availed of at least one SEN Courses from the voluntary and community sector, and of these, about half had availed of more than one course. On average, the schools had availed of 2.19 courses. The courses that had been availed of most were ASD/ Autism Training followed by RISE NI.

Figure 7.5: SEN training

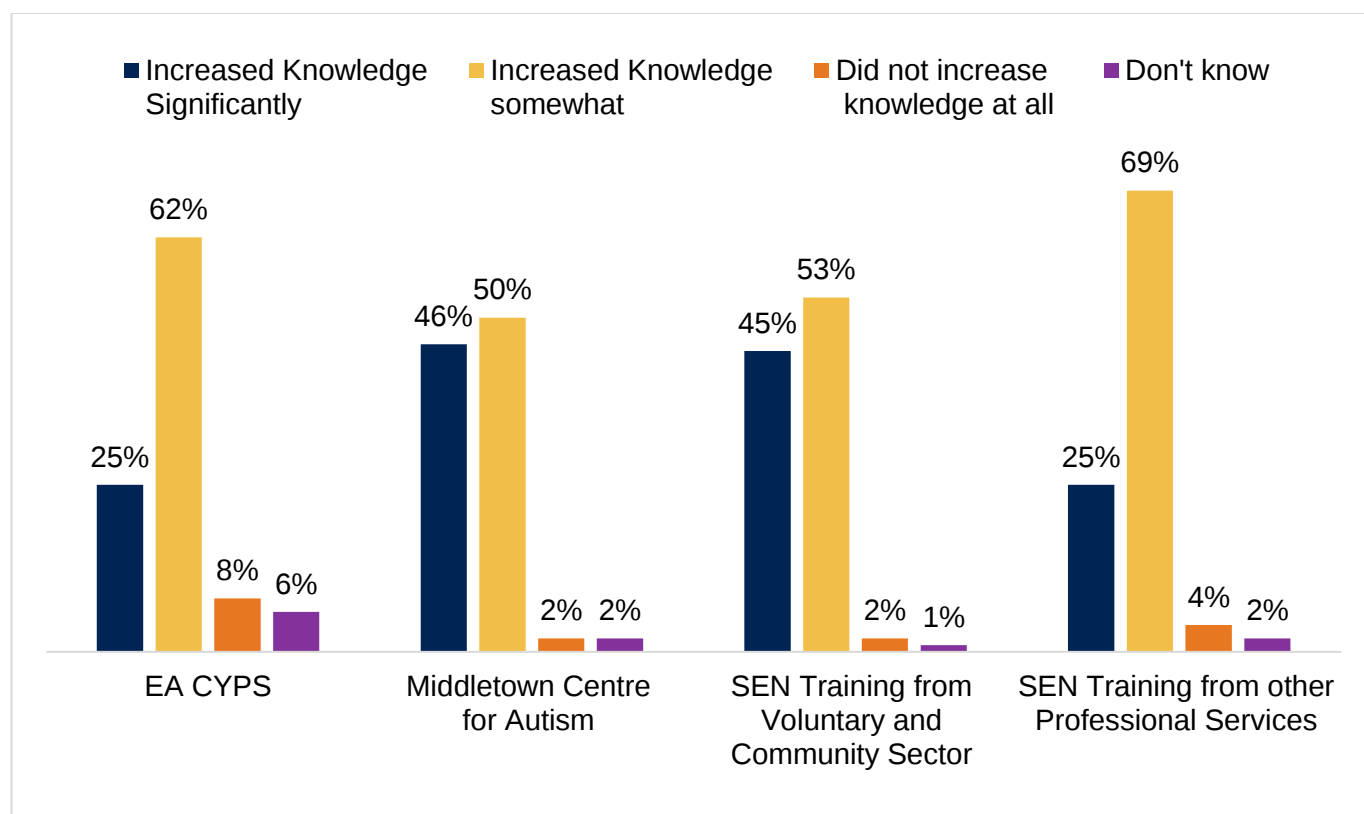
Source: Ipsos School Survey

Training increasing knowledge, improving practice and impact

Increasing Knowledge

When school staff engage in SEN training it has a positive impact on their knowledge levels on the subject, regardless of the training provider. The majority of schools report that the SEN training availed of from different providers, whether that is EA, Middletown or voluntary and community sector or Professional Services has increased staff knowledge. There is some variance between the extent to which training increased knowledge significantly or somewhat. Training from the Middletown Centre and the voluntary and community sector has more impact than training from other sources, with almost half (46% and 45% respectively) of those receiving training from these saying it increased knowledge significantly, compared to those using EA CYPS and other Professional services (25% for both). Although, knowledge was still gained from EA CYPS and other Professional services, with 62% and 69% respectively noting that knowledge had increased slightly.

Very few report that knowledge has not increased because of training, regardless of the source of training. However, it is important to note that the extent of staff's existing level of knowledge and pre-training already undertaken is unknown.

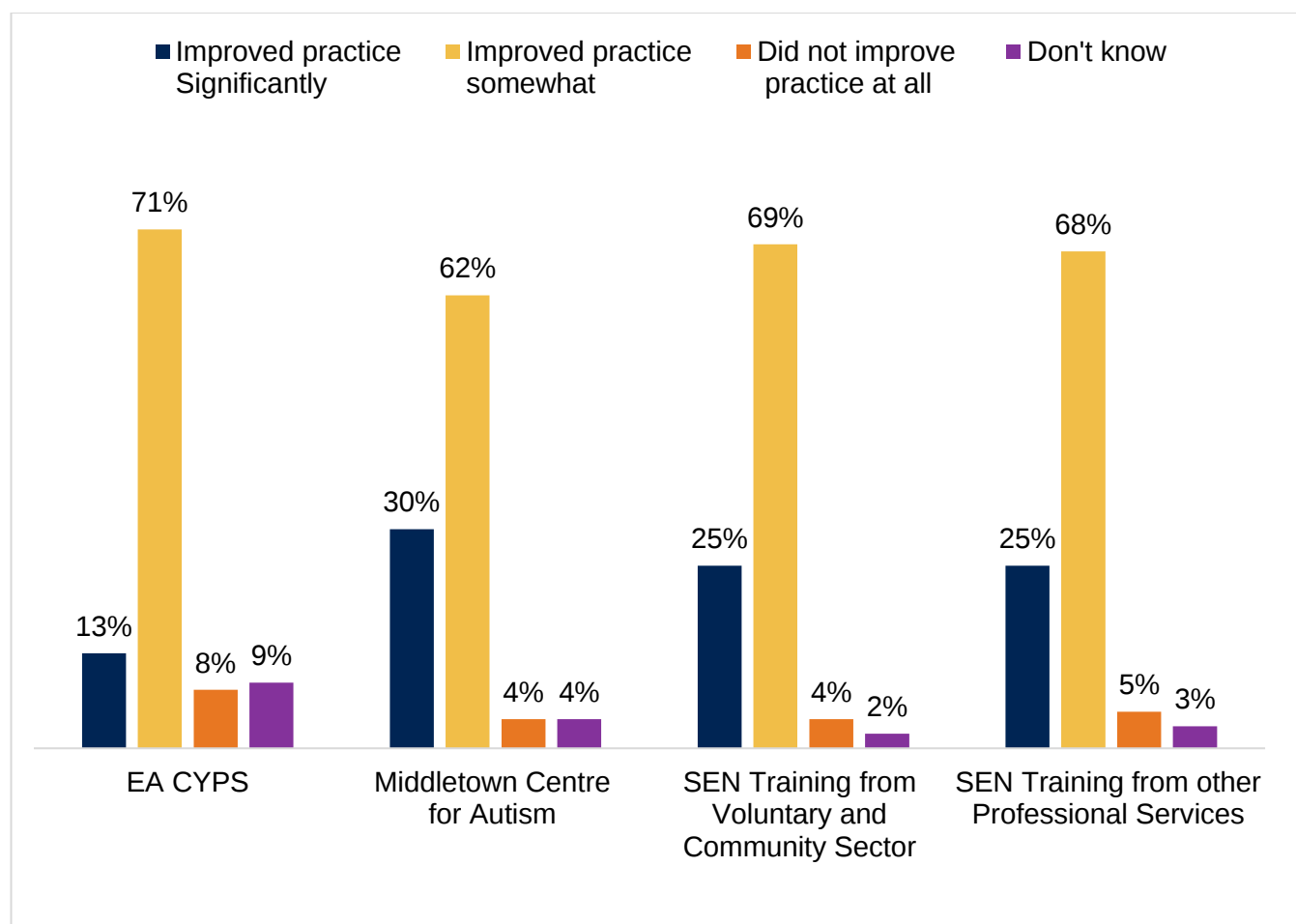
Figure 7.6: Increased knowledge from SEN training

Source: Ipsos School Survey

When schools were asked how the Education Authority could support their school to develop the role of the LSC in their school the number one ask was better/ improved training for the LSC role. The training schools are receiving is increasing knowledge, therefore the right training focused to the right staff could have the desired increase in knowledge throughout, but it needs to be specific.

Improving practice

The majority of schools who availed of training believe that it has improved practice as well as knowledge. Across the training providers, over 90% claim that their practice has improved at least somewhat, and very few believe that practice has not been impacted following training. Those who have availed of training from Middletown Centre for Autism are more likely to have experienced a significant improvement in practice, but it should be remembered that only 28% of schools have availed of this training, which is ASD specific. Again, training from EA CYPS is less likely to have improved practice significantly compared to other training providers. However, it should be remembered, again, that this includes all EA CYPS training, and the level of previous training and knowledge is not known.

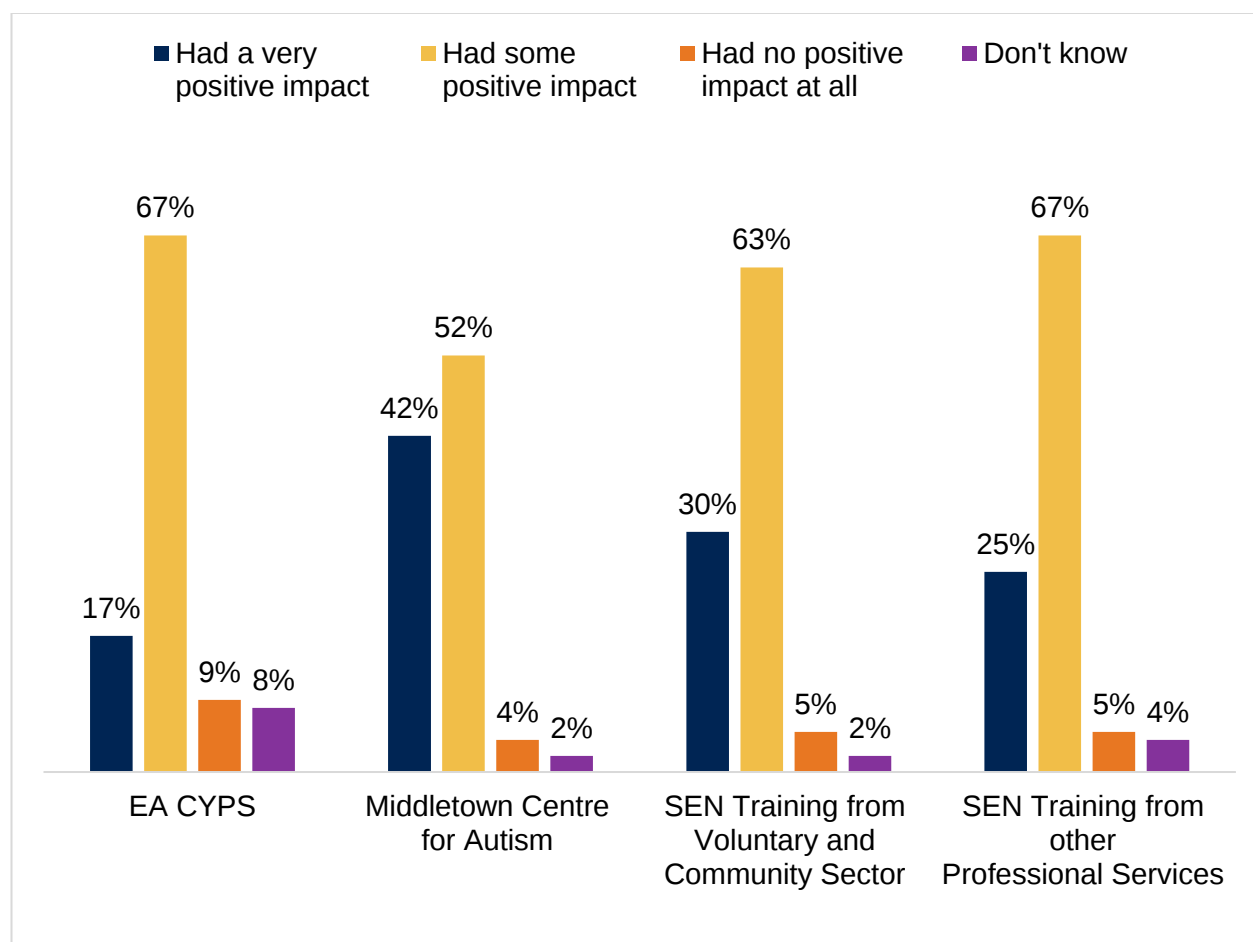
Figure 7.7: Improved practice from SEN Training

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Impact of training

It is evident that the training schools have availed of to date is increasing knowledge and is also improving practice for the majority. However, the acid test of the training is whether knowledge learned, in the training, has had any impact on children with SEN in their school.

Overwhelmingly, schools describe the impact of the training on the children in their school with SEN as positive to some degree. Again, the specific training provided by Middletown Centre for Autism is reported as having a significantly higher positive impact compared to all the other training providers. However, the majority of schools also state that the other training has had a positive impact on the children.

Figure 7.8: Impact from SEN training on children with SEN

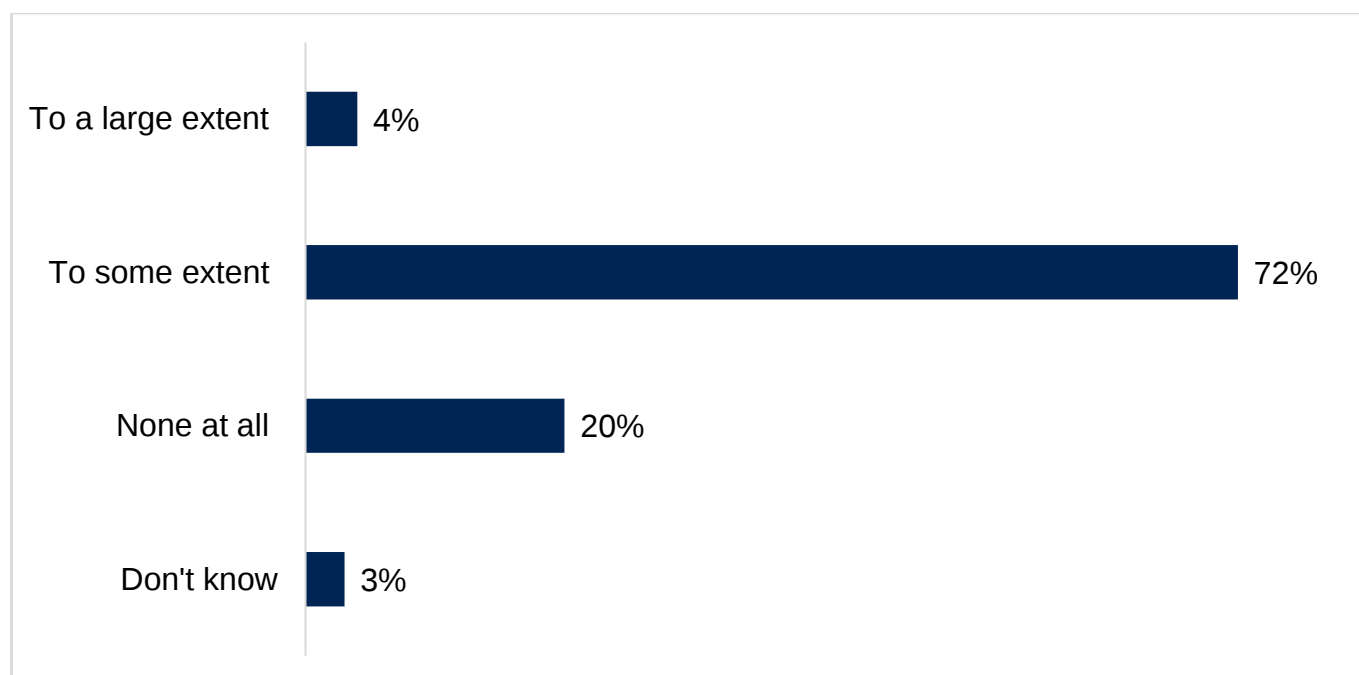
Source: Ipsos School Survey

No training since September 2021

Despite the fact that training has at least some impact on the knowledge of staff and improvement in school practices, only 4% of schools have availed of any training during the 2021/22 academic year. The top three reasons for this are cost, not enough time, or not being to backfill while staff go on training. In some cases, staff feel they have had enough training and do not need any more while other cannot find the right course or do not know how to access SEN training. A variety of other reasons are offered including, no dates available, training offered not being relevant, or training offered during school holidays. Schools are waiting to avail of training in SEND and PLP when they happen.

Enough time for training in directed time budget

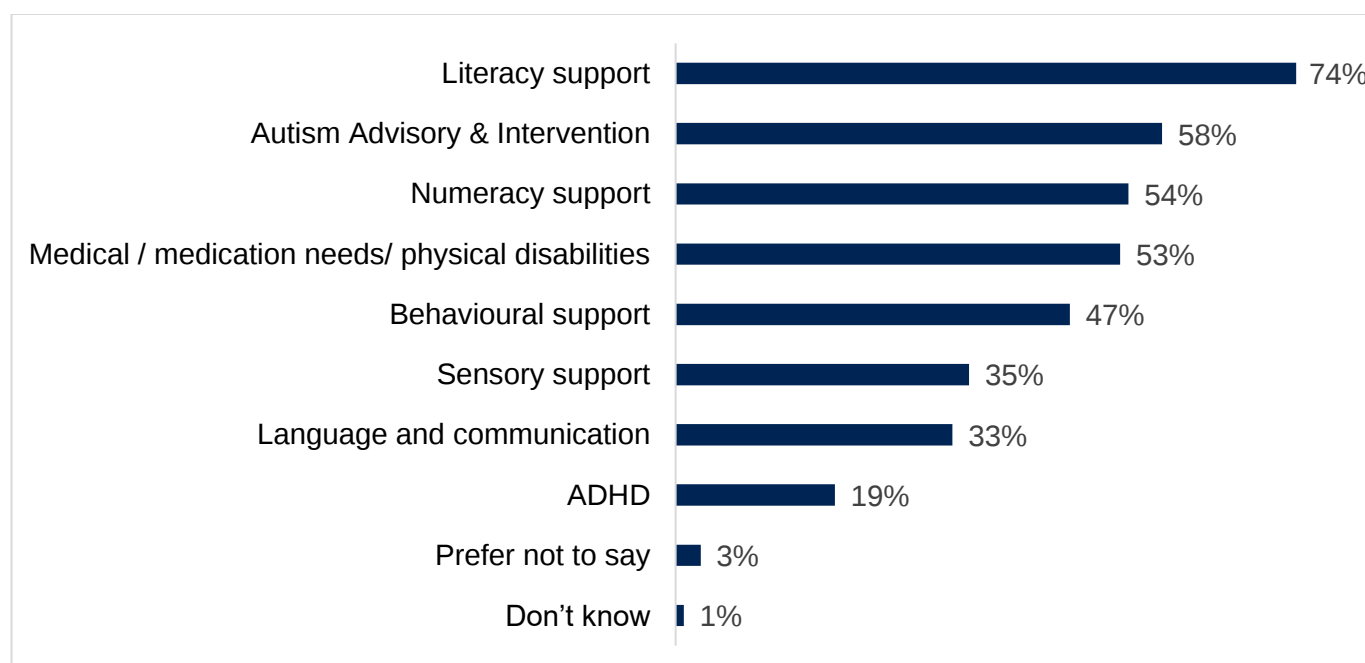
Three quarters (76%) of schools can allocate enough time from their directed time budget for staff training to support pupils with SEN, but 20% are not able to allocate any time from their directed time budget for staff SEN training.

Figure 7.9: Able to allocate time from directed time budget for staff SEN training

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Trained staff who provide support

There is variance among schools regarding the teachers or staff in school who provide support across several SEN areas. Three quarters of schools (74%) have teachers or other staff trained in their school, who are able provide support for literacy support, while over half of schools have teachers and staff who can provide help with autism advisory and intervention (58%), numeracy support (54%) and medical/physical disabilities (53%).

Figure 7.10: Teachers or staff in the school who provide support

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Almost half (47%) have teachers or other staff trained in behavioural support (47%). To a lesser extent, approximately one third of schools have teachers or other staff who can provide sensory (35%) and language and

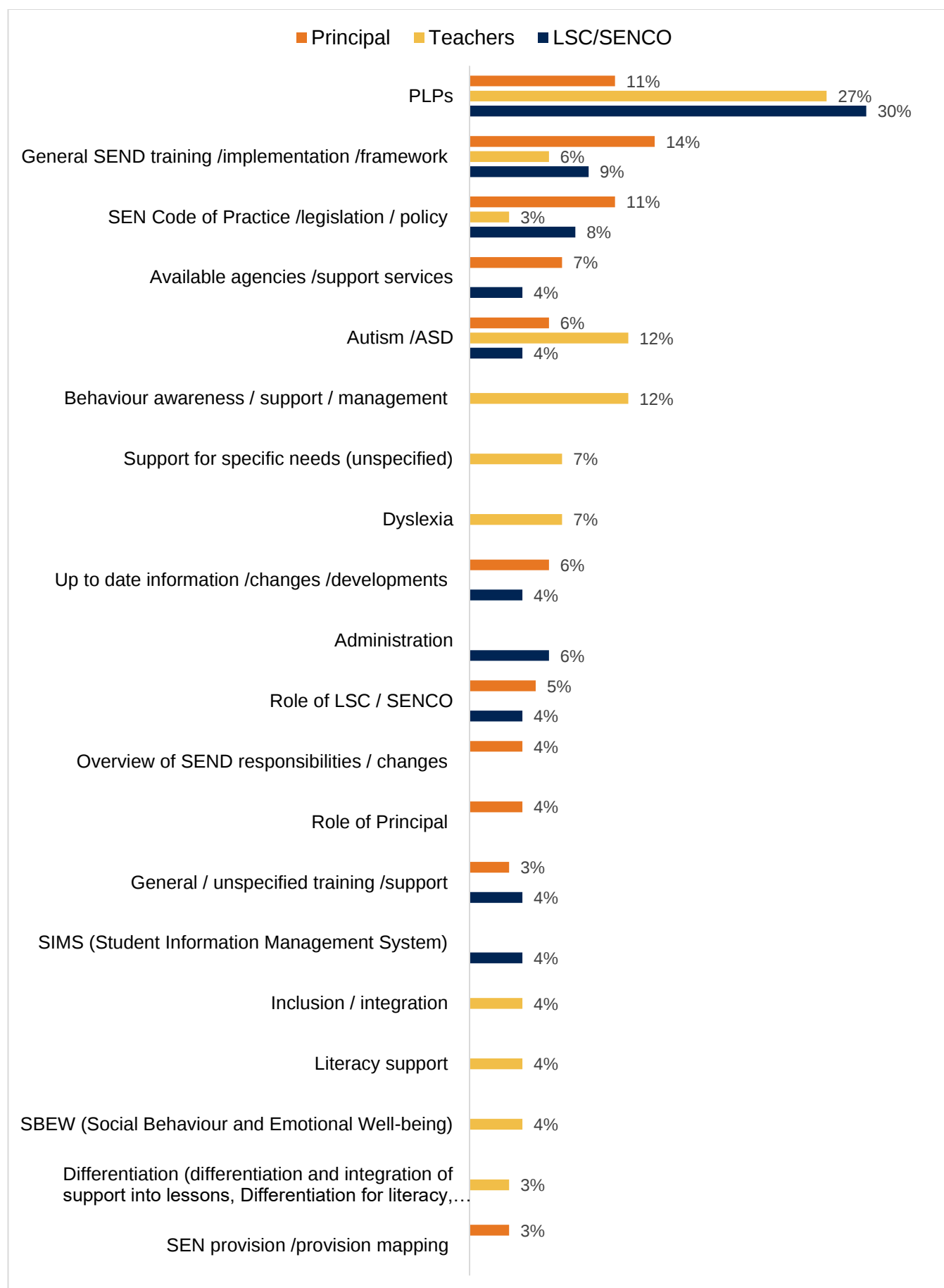
communication support (33%), with fewer schools having teachers or staff who are trained to provide support for pupils with ADHD⁸⁴.

Specific training needs

The survey sought to explore the specific SEN training needs of schools across principals, teachers, LSCs, Classroom Assistants and non-teaching staff. Across the groups, there are a multiplicity of SEN training mentioned. This number varies by group with schools suggesting the different types of training for teachers and then for LSCs. Schools suggest 53 and 49 different types of training for teacher and LSCs respectively and 45 different types of training for principals. There was less variance in the range of training for classroom assistants and for non-teaching staff.

As shown below there was some commonality across each of the five groups of school staff in relation to training needs, with training relating to the new framework and code of practice, writing PLPs and implementing them and training for behaviour awareness and supporting and managing children with SEN being the most common.

⁸⁴ The estimated prevalence of ADHD is 2-5%.

Figure 7.11: Most common training needs for Principals, Teachers and LSCs

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Training for principals

It is clear from the chart above, that principals have a variety of training requirements. The most frequently mentioned training which principals require are general SEND training and implementation, followed by training in PLPs and the SEN code of practice/ legislation and policy. After the top three the next layer of training required is more specific and centres around available agencies and support services, training in Autism/ASD and training to update them on information about SEN and the changes and developments.

Specifically, when schools mention general SEND training/ implementation/ framework, the schools mean that principals require overall “*SEND training*” and that they are also requesting specific training on the new framework and how to implement the new requirements. For some, it relates to training around a range of SEN issues, which have not been specified. The training requirement related to PLPs is simply a focus on the implementation training and understanding of the PLP system. For the SEN Code of Practice / legislation / policy, there is a lack of information about the new code of practice and what the implications are of the new code. The following gives a flavour of these issues some schools are grappling with regard to their training needs for the new SEN Code of Practice:

“Training on the changes to the SEN legislation”

School interview

“Code of practice and referrals”

School interview

“SEN legislation and how to lead and implement it within the school setting and statutory requirements on school in relation to SEN. Best practice in the management of SEN in the school setting.”

School interview

Training for teachers

The list of training needs for teachers provided by schools had the most individual training elements compared to the other four groups. There number one requirement was training on the writing of PLPs. One school stated

“PLPs!!!!!!!”

Schools also noted specific types of training to better support pupils with different special needs specifically training in Autism/ASD, behaviour awareness and dyslexia, specifically **“Strategies for Children with ASD”**

Some schools mention support for specific needs, which were largely unspecified. However, where schools specified the training centred around children with complex needs or around specific difficulties which they face in the classroom, for some that meant they would need ongoing training as and when situations arose. For others, the training needs are more basic in that teachers want training in how to support children with SEN and manage that within the classroom environment.

Support pupils with complex needs.”

School interview

“Training for specific types of additional needs. There are so many variables in school now.”

School interview

“Training to be able to teach a child with specific needs.”

School interview

“A course in relation how to deal with SEN in classrooms.”

School interview

Training for SENCO/LSCs

For LSCs, by far the most pressing training need for schools is training on the writing and implementation of PLPs (30%), which is followed by more general SEND training on the implementation and requirements in the new framework. In addition to this, schools are also asking for LSCs to have training in the code of practice, legislation and policy.

A key issue raised by schools in the one-to-one conversations is the administrative burden they feel with regard to SEN provision in their school and this echoes many of the school survey findings. In terms of training, this has been raised as a training requirement for LSCs. Schools require training on how to deal with the paperwork, the administrative burden and the administration of the new arrangements.

“Dealing with administrative burden.”

School interview

“Increased Admin Support.”

School interview

“SEN admin.”

School interview

“[Training] dealing with paperwork.”

School interview

“Completing referral forms accurately.”

School interview

Training for Classroom Assistants

The training needs of classroom assistants is more specifically focused on their day-to-day role. The most frequently requested training or classroom assistants is in behaviour management, which includes behaviour difficulties and strategies to deal with this. There are additional requests for training in supporting children with ASD/ Autism and/or dyslexia.

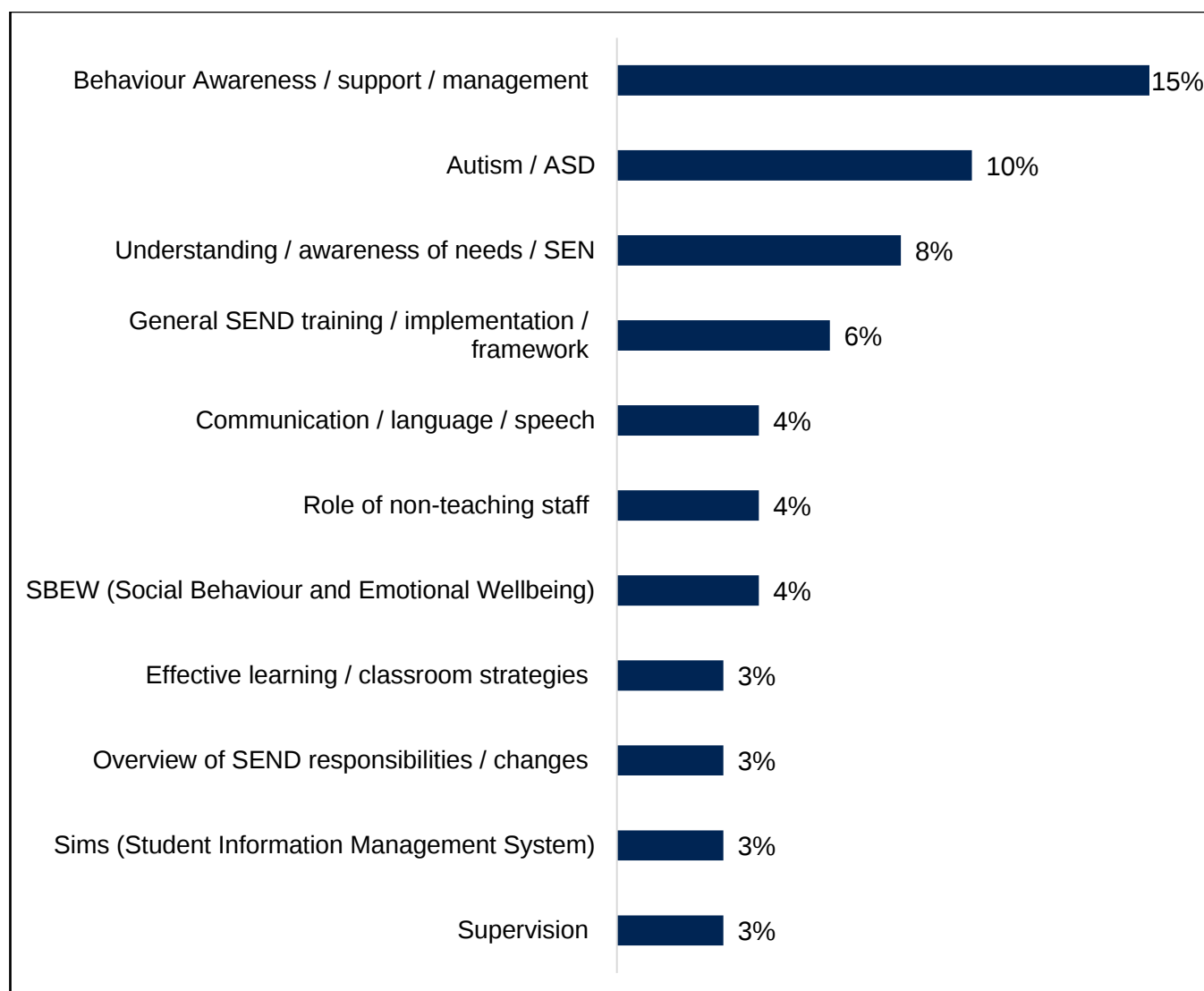
Training of classroom assistants, to deal with specific needs of children, is something that has been voiced by parents in the deliberative event and by the children themselves in the focus group. The one-to-one conversations in schools also discussed how classroom assistants lack training for the specific children they are supporting. Which means they do not know how to best support the pupil and deal with behavioural issues or how best to support the children with autism. There are reports of classroom assistant saying things that “*were not helpful*” but once training was provided the situation was much better and the classroom assistant is now enhancing the pupil's school experience.

Some schools are asking for training for their CAs across a range of specific issues associated with the children they are supporting, such as ASD/ Autism, dyslexia, ADHD, speech and language, attachment disorder. Some schools are asking for training in strategies to help the CAs be more effective and some just want any SEN training that is available for classroom assistants.

Feedback provided by teachers and Principals shows that although the training of Classroom Assistants is essential, there are a number of issues associated with it. For example, schools highlighted that there is a high level of turn-over amongst Classroom Assistants meaning that there is a need to keep re-training.

Training for non-teaching staff

Schools are also requesting training for non-teaching staff in areas such as behaviour awareness and management, which includes behaviour difficulties and strategies to deal with them. This is followed by requests for training in supporting children with ASD/ Autism. However, at a more fundamental level schools are requesting training for non-teaching staff, in understanding and being aware of pupils needs and awareness about SEN.

Figure 7.12: Top 10 training needs for non-teaching staff

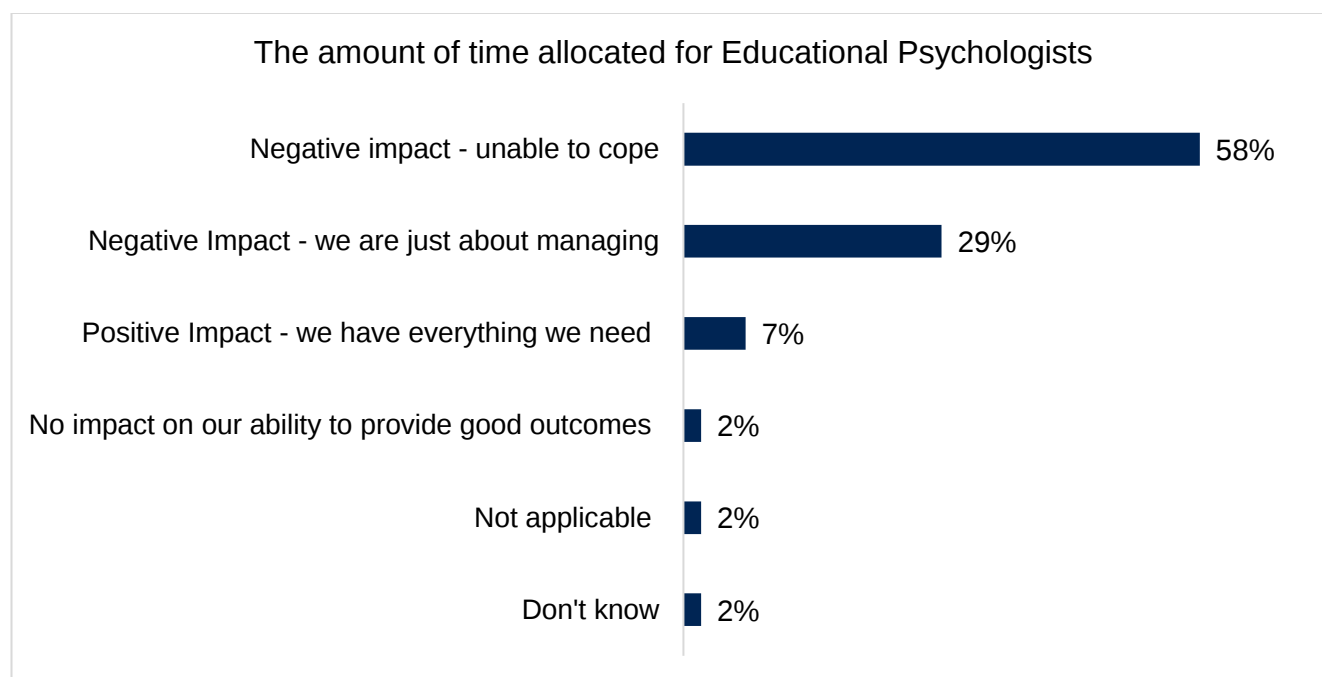
Source: Ipsos School Survey

With regards to training in understanding/ awareness of SEN, schools are specifically requesting general SEN awareness training, providing training so non-teaching staff of more understanding of the pupil's needs and, also understand that there is a wide variety of SEN.

Training requests from schools are in two parts. The first part for Principals, Teachers and LSCs are immediately concerned with the new code of practice and SEN framework and training relating to the PLPs. The second part relates to CAs and non-teaching staff where the most immediate training need relates to day-to-day support for pupils and being adequately aware and informed to appropriately support the range of SEN within the school. This includes training in relation to ASD/Autism, Dyslexia and behavioural support.

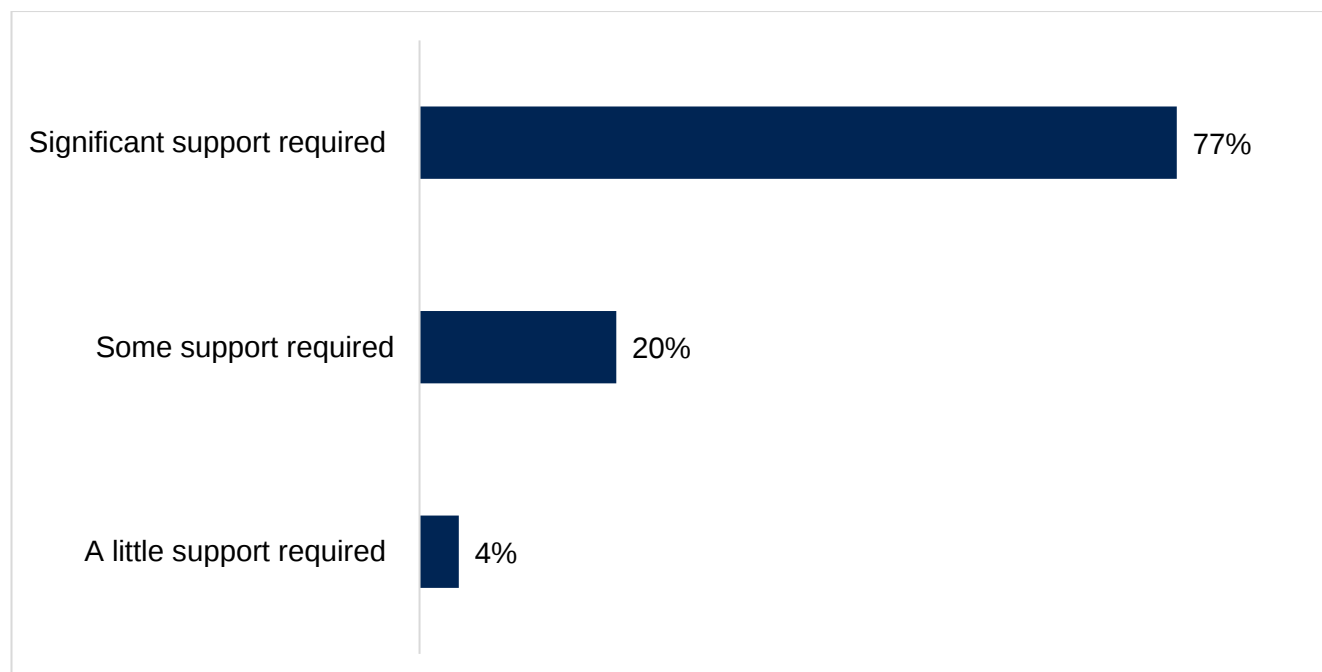
Educational Psychology

The amount of time allocated for Educational Psychologists has a negative impact on the school's ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children in school. Most schools believe that this has a negative impact, such that, they are unable to cope (58%) and a further three in ten (29%) think that the amount of educational psychology time they have has a negative impact, although they are just about managing.

Figure 7.13: To what extent do you think the following impacts positively, negatively or not at all.

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Of those who report that the time allocated for educational psychologists has a negative impact on their ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children, they think they need significant support. More than three quarters (77%) say that significant support is required due to the amount of time allocated for educational psychologists. We know from the interviews with schools, parents and the Educational Psychologists themselves that there is a consensus these professionals do not have enough time working in the schools.

Figure 7.14: Thinking about SEN areas you identified as having a negative impact on your ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children in your school, what level of support do you think your school needs?

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Feedback provided by the Educational Psychologists also highlights that they would like to work with schools more, on interventions to enhance the outcomes for SEN pupils. However, most of their time is dedicated to the statutory requirements of assessment to meet the time scales of 26 weeks.

Equally, the in-depth interviews with schools highlights that they are not receiving enough Educational Psychology time for all the children they would like to refer for assessment, nor enough time for intervention and implementation with the support of the Educational Psychologists.

“Our major challenge is the access to Educational Psychologists, we have over 1,300 children... only 3 can get assessed each year. We see lots of kids who have dyslexia, but we can’t get the assessed, so then they can’t access the service”.

School interview

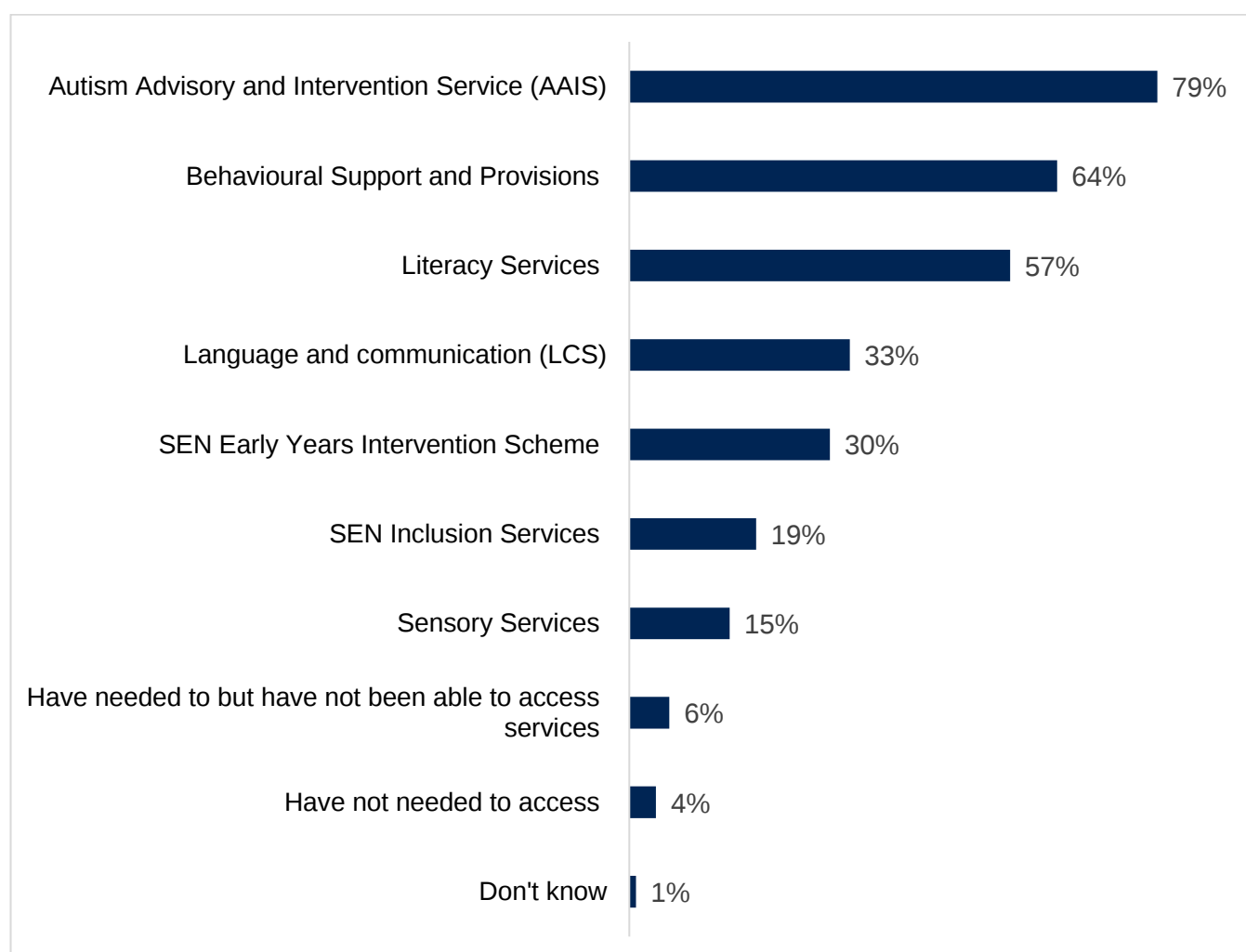
“We are at crisis point, we know lots of children who should have a statement and can’t get assessed”.

School interview

Accessing Services

Most schools have been able to access Autism Advisory and Intervention Services (AAIS), Behavioural Support and Provision and Literacy Services from the EA Pupil Support (New Code Stage 2). To a lesser degree, about a third have been able to access Language and Communication Service and SEN Early Years Intervention Services (30%), but considerably fewer (19%) have been able to access SEN inclusion services and Sensory services. However, there is a much smaller proportion of pupils who require the two latter services, and these are smaller services. A very small proportion of the schools needs some or all of these services and were not able to access any services.

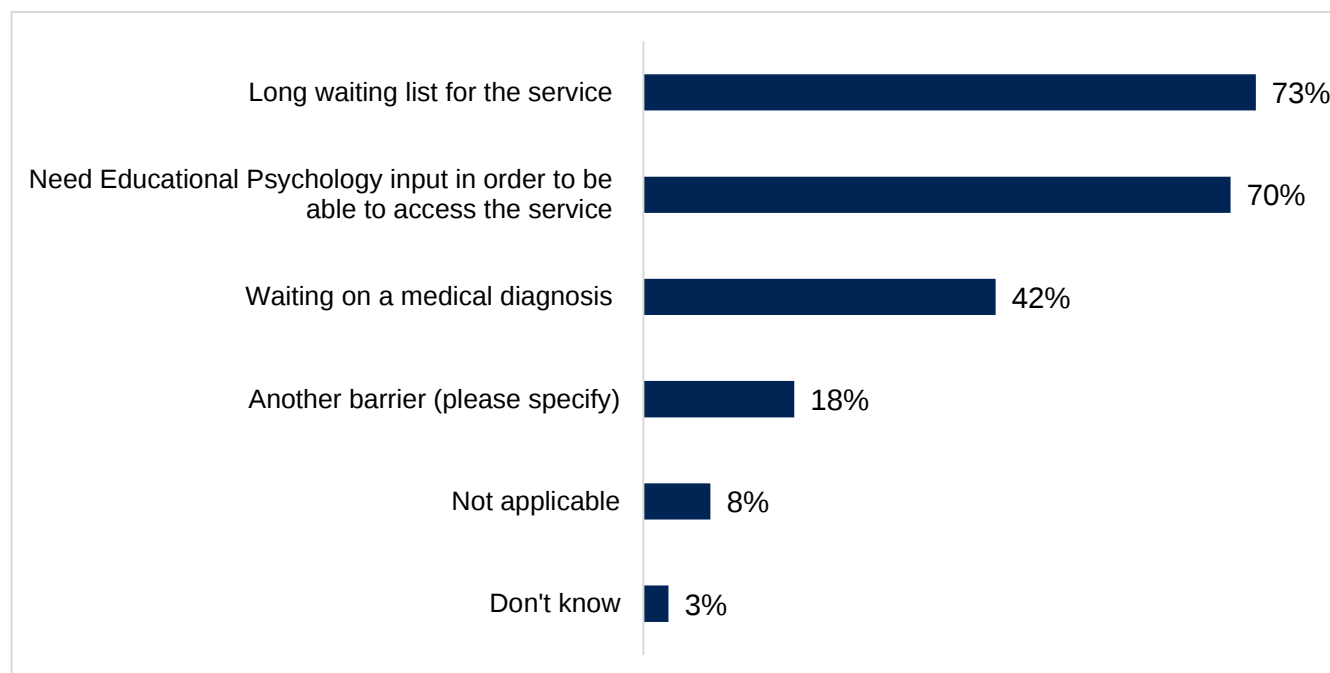
Figure 7.15: If you have needed to, which of the following service have you been able to access?



Source: Ipsos School Survey

Several barriers are identified when schools try to access services, which include long waiting lists for the service, need Educational Psychologist referral, waiting on a medical diagnosis input in order to be able to access the service or another barrier.

Figure 7.16: Barriers to accessing services from EA pupil Support (New Code Stage 2)



Source: Ipsos School Survey

The barriers to accessing the CYPS SEN Pupil Support Services are broadly similar across each service, with waiting lists and Educational Psychologist input being the main barriers. There is no difference between waiting lists and Educational Psychologists input for those who need to access AAIS. However, for Language and communication services long waiting lists are a more significant barrier, as it is for SEN Inclusion Services and SEN Early Years Intervention Service. It is clear that more timely input from Educational Psychologists and that from Allied health professional would reduce waiting lists significantly.

Feedback provided during the school interviews was consistent with the findings from the survey and emphasised the challenges faced by schools in accessing support services for pupils with SEN.

"Going through the Educational Psychologists [to access CYPS] is unnecessary and complicates the process".

School interview.

"Pupil Support Services are outstanding but, there isn't enough of them".

School interview

Table 7.3: Barriers to accessing services by Education Authority Pupil Support (New Code Stage 2) service

	Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS)	Language and communication service (LCS)	Literacy Service	Sensory Service	Behavioural Support and Provisions	SEN Inclusion Services	SEN Early Years Intervention Service	Have needed to but have not been able to access any services
Waiting on a medical diagnosis	47%	43%	50%	54%	49%	54%	51%	9%
Long waiting list for the service	78%	85%	81%	71%	79%	86%	89%	55%
Need Educational Psychologist input in order to be able to access the service	75%	72%	79%	79%	76%	74%	76%	45%
Another barrier	17%	8%	16%	18%	16%	9%	13%	55%
Not applicable	5%	5%	4%	4%	6%	3%	2%	0%
Don't know	2%	2%	3%	4%	2%	3%	2%	9%

A small number of schools identify other barriers, such as services being understaffed, a general slow response or lack of applicable services, services not available in their area, the service does not provide support only advice and, the services do not provide support to their type of school.

Schools also report that the lack of time for Educational Psychology support negatively impacts their ability to achieve good outcomes for SEN children and that they need significant support from for educational psychology services. Lack of input from Educational Psychology is one of the main barriers to accessing the services required. Many schools who participated in one-on-one interviews comment that they would like considerably more engagement with their Educational Psychologist but, recognise that the Psychologists are a limited resource and are under significant pressure to the unprecedented demand for assessments. The schools also highlight that the lack of Educational Psychology input means that children's needs are not being identified early enough and there is not early intervention.

“We struggle with the Educational Psychology Service. There is not enough on the time allocation model and children are not being identified early enough, post primary school is too late.”

School interview

Classroom Assistants

The majority of schools perceive the main duty of CAs to assist the teacher with the support and care of pupil(s) with SEN e.g., enable access to the curriculum (88%). After that, the other main duties that are undertaken by a sizeable proportion of classroom assistants are developing an understanding of specific needs of pupils (40%), contributing to the inclusion of SEN pupils into mainstream school (38%), attending to pupils' personal needs where necessary (37%) and assisting in motivating and encouraging pupils (37%).

Table 7.4: Classroom assistants' duties

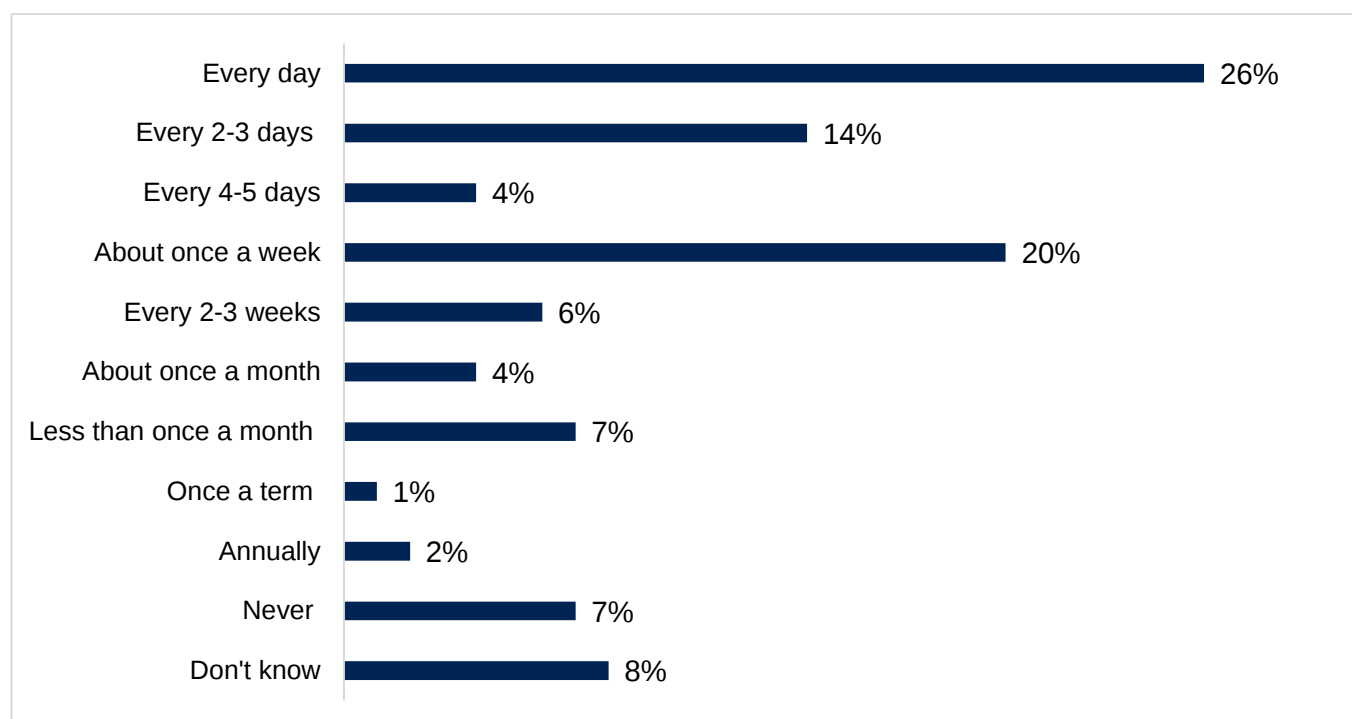
Assist the teacher with the support and care of pupil(s) with special educational needs e.g., enable access to the curriculum	88%
Develop an understanding of the specific needs of the pupil(s) to be supported	40%
Contribute to the inclusion of the pupil in mainstream classes under the directions of the Learning Support Coordinator	38%
Attend to personal needs of the children with SEN including dietary, feeding, toileting, etc.	37%
Assisting in motivating and encouraging the pupil(s)	37%
Promoting the independence of pupils to enhance learning	29%
Assist with authorised programmes (e.g., Education Plan, Care Plan)	29%
Clarify and explain instructions	27%
Helping pupil(s) stay on work set	26%
Building a trusted relationship and rapport with the child and family	25%
Support in implementing behavioural management programmes	23%
Participate in the evaluation of the support for SEN children	19%
Meeting physical/medical needs as required whilst encouraging independence	14%
Assisting in areas requiring reinforcement or development	13%
Encourage pupil(s) participation in such programmes	12%
Assist pupil(s) in moving around school and on and off transport	9%
Administrative duties e.g., prep of documents, photocopying, which are whole class rather than specifically for the children with SEN	7%
Assist with operational difficulties and non-invasive medical/clinical difficulties pertaining to pupil(s) disabilities	7%
Ensure the pupils can use equipment and materials provided	5%
Other (please specify)	5%
Ensuring understanding of SEN and inclusion throughout the mainstream setting	2%

Source: Ipsos School Survey

However, schools note that Classroom Assistants require training in behaviour awareness and specific special needs such as, ASD and dyslexia and also needing general SEND training for implementation of the new framework. Hence, this may be a barrier to fulfilling the duties described by schools.

CAs play a large role in the school lives of children with special needs. Young people who participated in focus groups identify the huge impact the CA can have in the school life and in the life of children and young people with SEN. However, some of the young people and parents recounted how, due to lack of training initially, the Classroom Assistant was not able to fully assist the young person. Despite this, nearly all schools report that they do not involve either parents or children and young people in the recruitment of their CA. Only 2% involve parents only, 1% involve children/young people only and 2% involve both parents and children/young people.

However, once the CA is in place there is considerably more engagement between CAs and parents, with only 7% saying there is never any engagement. Almost two thirds of classroom assistants engage with parents at least once a week (64%), with a quarter engaging daily (26%). Moreover, three quarters (74%) engage at least once a month as a minimum.

Figure 7.17: Frequency of classroom assistants engaging with parents

Source: Ipsos School Survey

All the schools who participated in the one-to-one interviews highlight a range of issues associated with the employment and deployment of CA. At a very basic level, there is a lack of training for Classroom Assistants

“CAs need to be up to speed, they need to be trained and upskilled, and this needs to be kept up to date”.

School interview

Representatives from Irish Medium schools noted particular issues in the recruitment and training of Classroom Assistants, as there is not a particularly large volume of people who are suited to the role, given the use of the Irish Language in the school and a lack of speakers of the language.

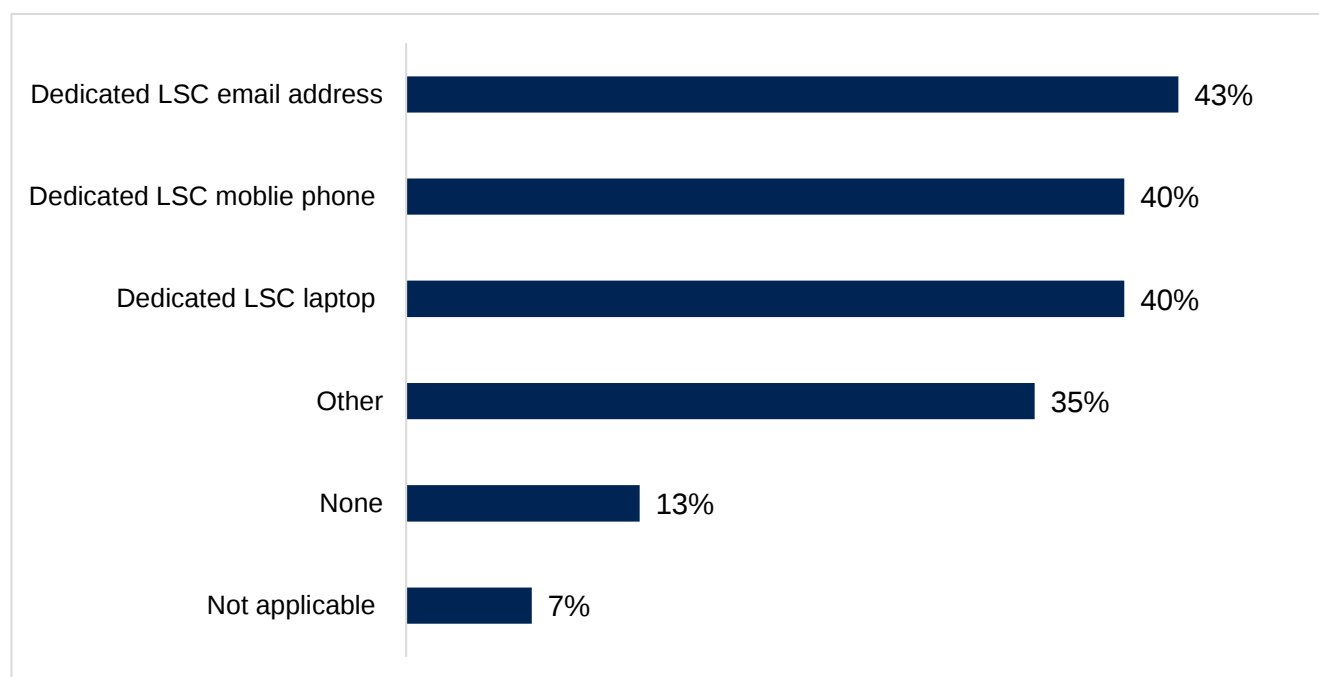
“Classroom Assistants are a huge issue, there is not a big pool of eligible people but, they are a very valuable asset but, there is not even basic CA, IME training.”

School interview

Use of technology and need for technology

Only a small proportion of schools report that they have a dedicated LSC laptop (33%), email address (21%) or mobile phone (4%).

Schools who do not have a dedicated laptop, email address or mobile phone were asked how useful these, and other technologies would be for the LSC. Some would find a laptop, email address and mobile phone useful.

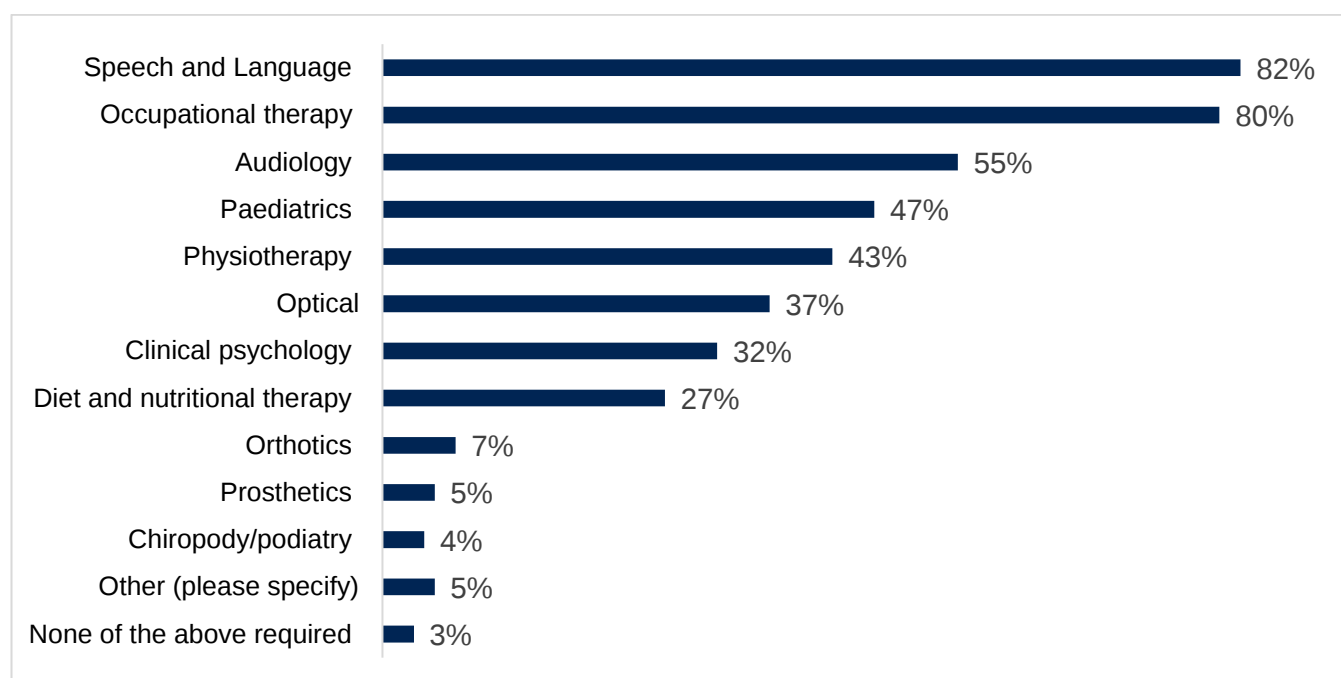
Figure 7.18: Useful technology for LSCs

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Just over a third (35%) also suggest other technology that would help support their role. Reading pens (32%) would be most useful followed by tablets (27%) and assistive software (24%), earphones (19%) and microphones (14%).

Engaging with other agencies

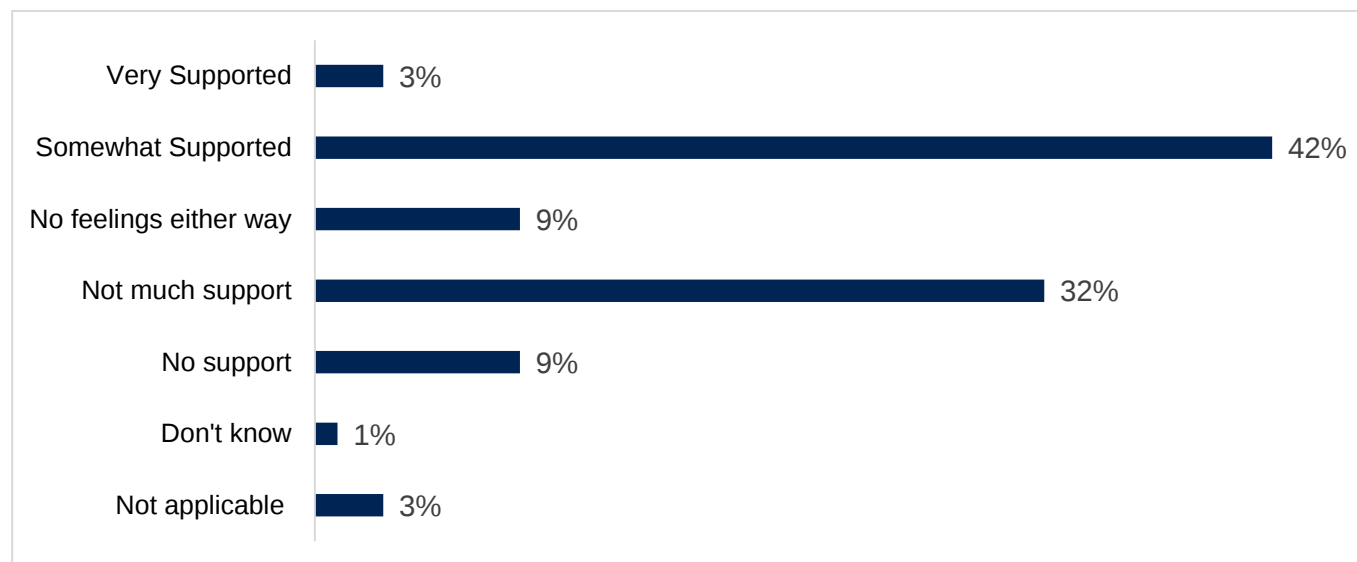
Speech and language and occupational therapy are the services which schools report their children and young people require access to through Allied Health Professionals. Approximately half of schools require audiology and paediatrics.

Figure 7.19: Services children and young people require access to from Allied Health Professionals

Source: Ipsos School Survey

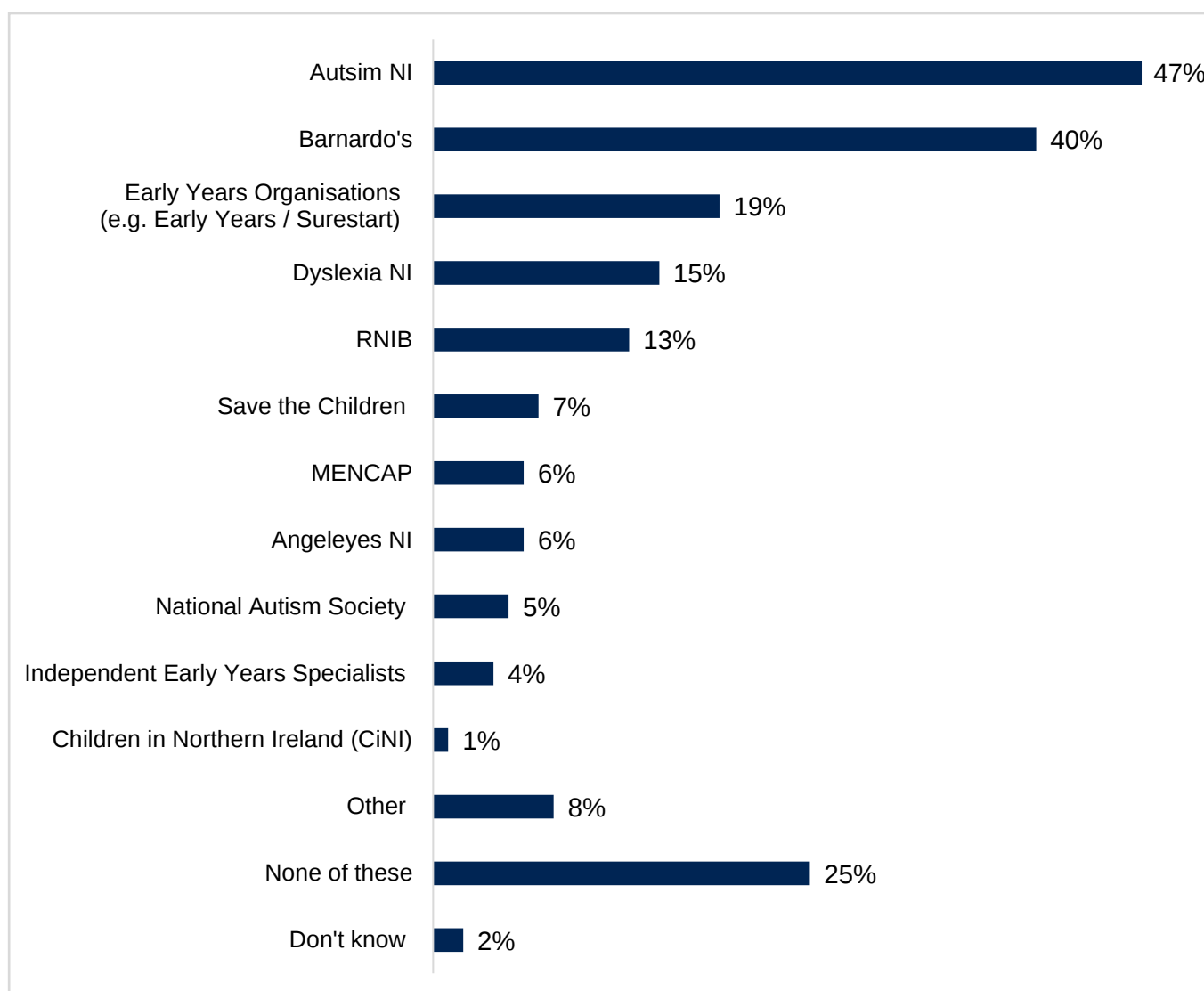
Most schools report that their children and young people require access to some services from Allied Health Professionals. Almost half (45%) of schools feel supported by their local health trust, if they are facing challenges with a delivery of a child's stated needs but a similar proportion (41%) do not feel supported by their local health trust if they are facing challenges. However, only a very small proportion (3%) feel very supported.

Figure 7.20: Extent to which schools feel supported by the local Health and Social Care Trust



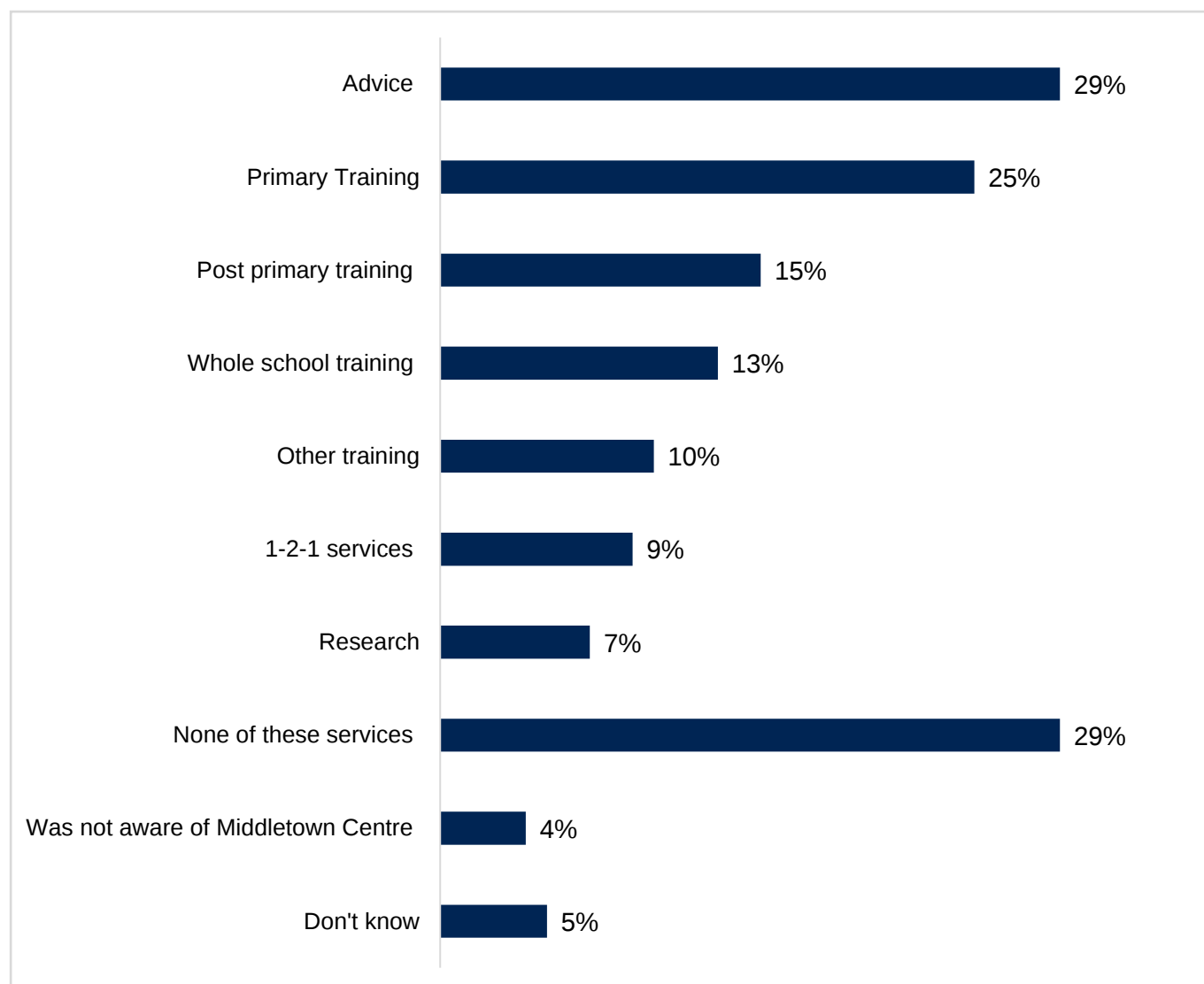
Source: Ipsos School Survey

In addition to HSCTs, a variety of other external agencies are used. Autism NI is the external agency used most frequently by schools (47%), followed by Barnardo's with a quarter of schools (25%) reporting that they use no external agencies for services or support. A fifth of schools are reporting that they use early years organisations and more than one in eight use Dyslexia NI. However, a quarter (25%) of schools surveyed are not using any external agencies for services or support.

Figure 7.21: Other external agencies used for services or support

Source: Ipsos School Survey

With regard to the Middletown Centre for Autism, as sizeable proportion of schools (38%) have not used any of Middletown's services, were not aware of Middletown or did not know if they had used their services. However, other schools have used the organisation's services to varying degrees. Middletown is predominantly used for a variety of training programmes, such as primary training (25%), post primary training (15%), whole school training (13%), and various other training courses offered (10%). In addition, it is used as an advisory touchpoint, with over a quarter (29%) of schools using it for this purpose. It is also used, to a lesser degree, for 1-2-1 services (9%) and research (7%).

Figure 7.22: Use of Middletown Centre for Autism

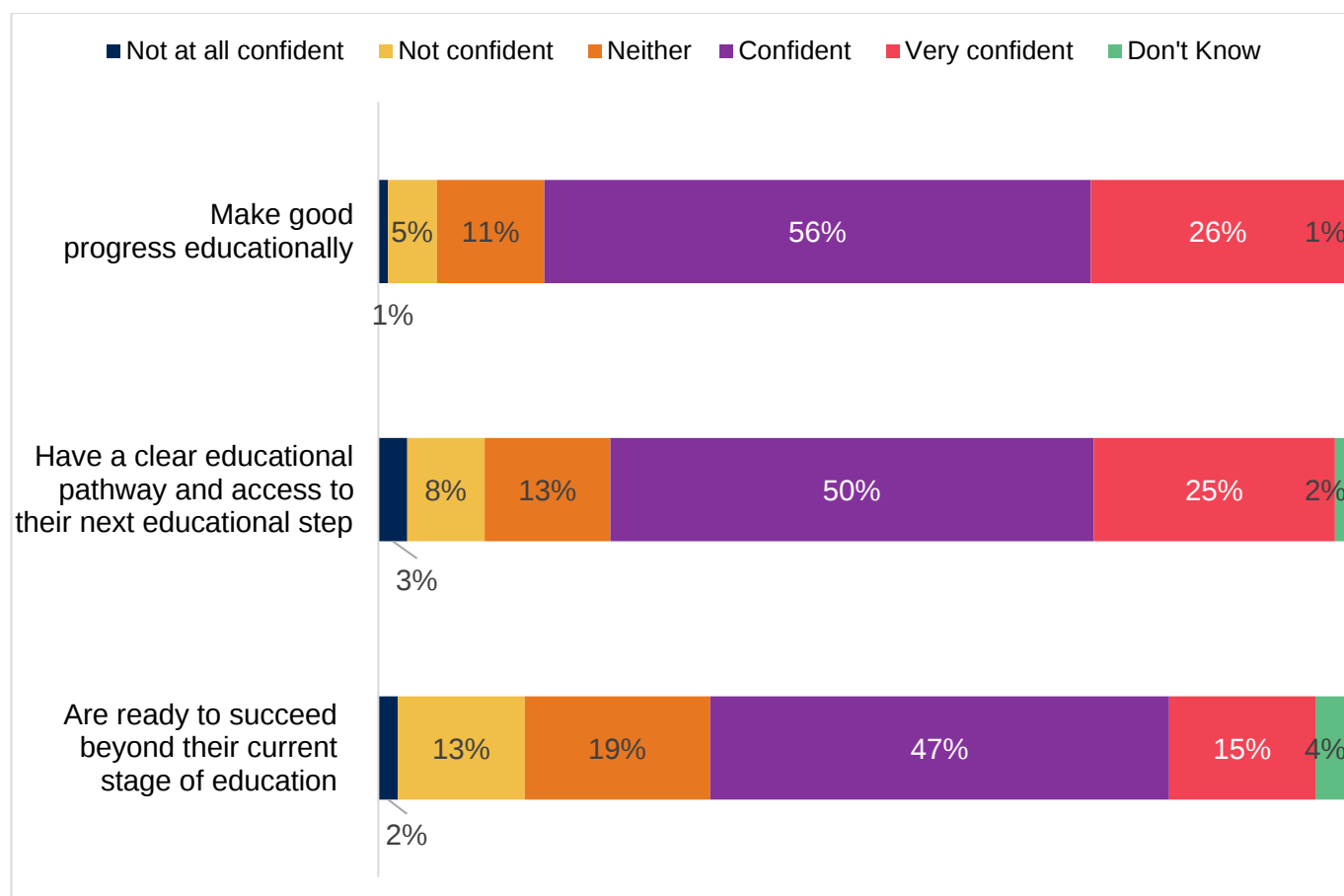
Source: Ipsos School Survey

Overall, there is considerable praise for the training provided by Middletown Centre. Most schools who have used its services rate the training, from Middletown Centre for Autism as either very good (58%) or fairly good (33%).

Areas for improvement

The majority (82%) of schools are confident that their pupils with SEN will make good progress educationally and that they have a clear educational pathway and access to their next educational step. They are also confident that they are ready to succeed beyond their current stage of education.

Meanwhile, 75% have confidence that SEN pupils have a clear educational pathway and access to their next educational step, with 11% not confident that this is so. In addition, three in five (62%) are confident that their SEN pupils are ready to succeed beyond their current stage of education. However, a larger proportion of schools are unsure about this (19%) and 15% lack confidence that their SEN pupils are ready to succeed beyond their current educational stage.

Figure 7.23: Confidence in pupils with SEN will make good progress

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Positive pathway for children with SEN

In order to ensure the most positive pathway for children, schools are of the opinion that increased budget, funding and resources are required, along with better training and an integrated, joined-up approach to SEN. Schools perceive a need for DE and EA to invest in SEN pupils to ensure more positive educational outcomes for them and investment means both financially but also by investing in appropriate and timely training for all who need it to aid in supporting SEN pupils.

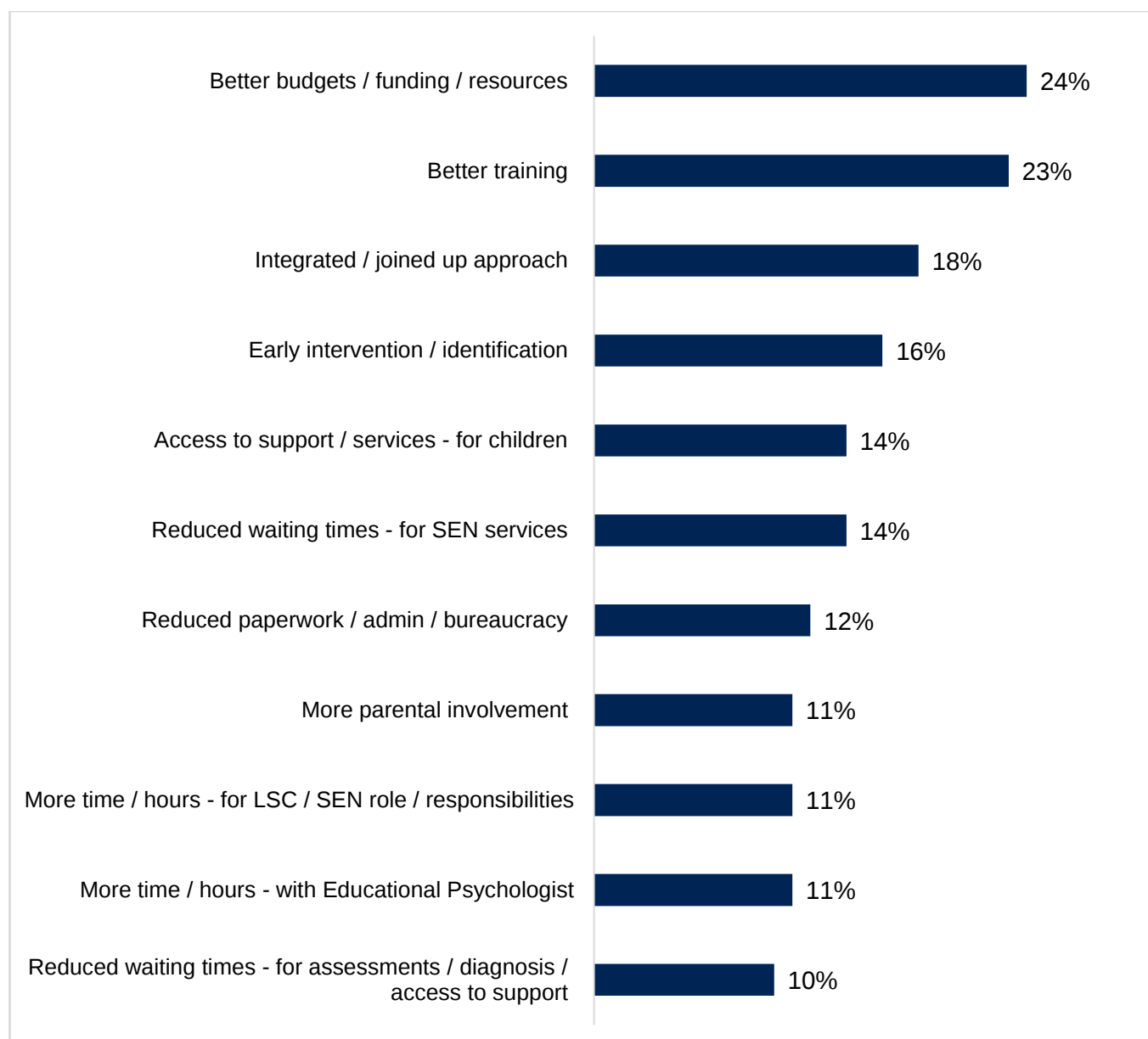
“Investment in SEN is fundamental to positive outcomes for these children. The nature of training needs to be addressed so it addresses the specific requirements of individuals or groups of children. There also needs to be a joined up approach among all agencies that work with schools. This has been a major issue and causes long and protracted delays, especially in the assessment process. There should also be a straightforward directory of contacts so that schools can access the advice or support that they require instead of having to make numerous attempts at trying to contact the right person or body.”

School interview

“Funding put into schools to freely support SEN needs within schools. Improve Classroom Assistance as a career path. Train CAs as experts in certain fields. Support schools in their need to address severe behavioural needs that are detrimentally impacting on other children’s learning, well being and staff health!!! Nurture Unit in every school!!!”

School interview

A variety of suggestions have been offered, by schools, that they believe would aid in a positive pathway for children with SEN and the following table outlines the top ten themes identified. The suggestions reflect and reinforce the training needs outlined throughout this report and also the ability or inability to access the services required due to waiting lists or lack of time with Educational Psychologists.

Figure 7.24: Top 10 suggestions for a positive pathway for children with SEN

Source: Ipsos School Survey

These suggestions are also reflective of the waiting times that schools have reported for assessments and access to support, during the one-to-one interviews. These improvements also echo the role of the LSC, which is largely a part-time role and hence LSCs feel that they do not have enough time for their role and responsibilities. While the table above outlines the top ten themes on a positive pathway for children with SEN, the following comments from schools reflects their thinking on the need for a joined up and integrated approach across services, paperwork, reducing duplication of paperwork and having a wraparound approach.

“More communication between post primary and primary regarding needs of children with SEN. If children move schools e.g. between primary schools all data should come with them i.e. standardised test results, IEP's Ed Psych report. More support with transition for vulnerable children.”

School interview

“Strong links with all those involved with a child who is on the SEN register. Less paperwork - all must be online/digital so that paperwork is not repeated. Support/training for all those involved with the child in school including parents. More funding in schools so teachers can get time to plan effectively for their SEN children and report and meet with the SENCo and parents.”

School interview

From the school one-to-one conversations, the importance of early intervention and children being identified early as having special needs was made very clear so that support is in place for them from nursery onwards as required.

“The challenges of supporting children with additional needs children are huge. Children are not being identified early therefore beginning nursery school with absolutely no support! Early years are the most important time of a Childs' development.”

School interview

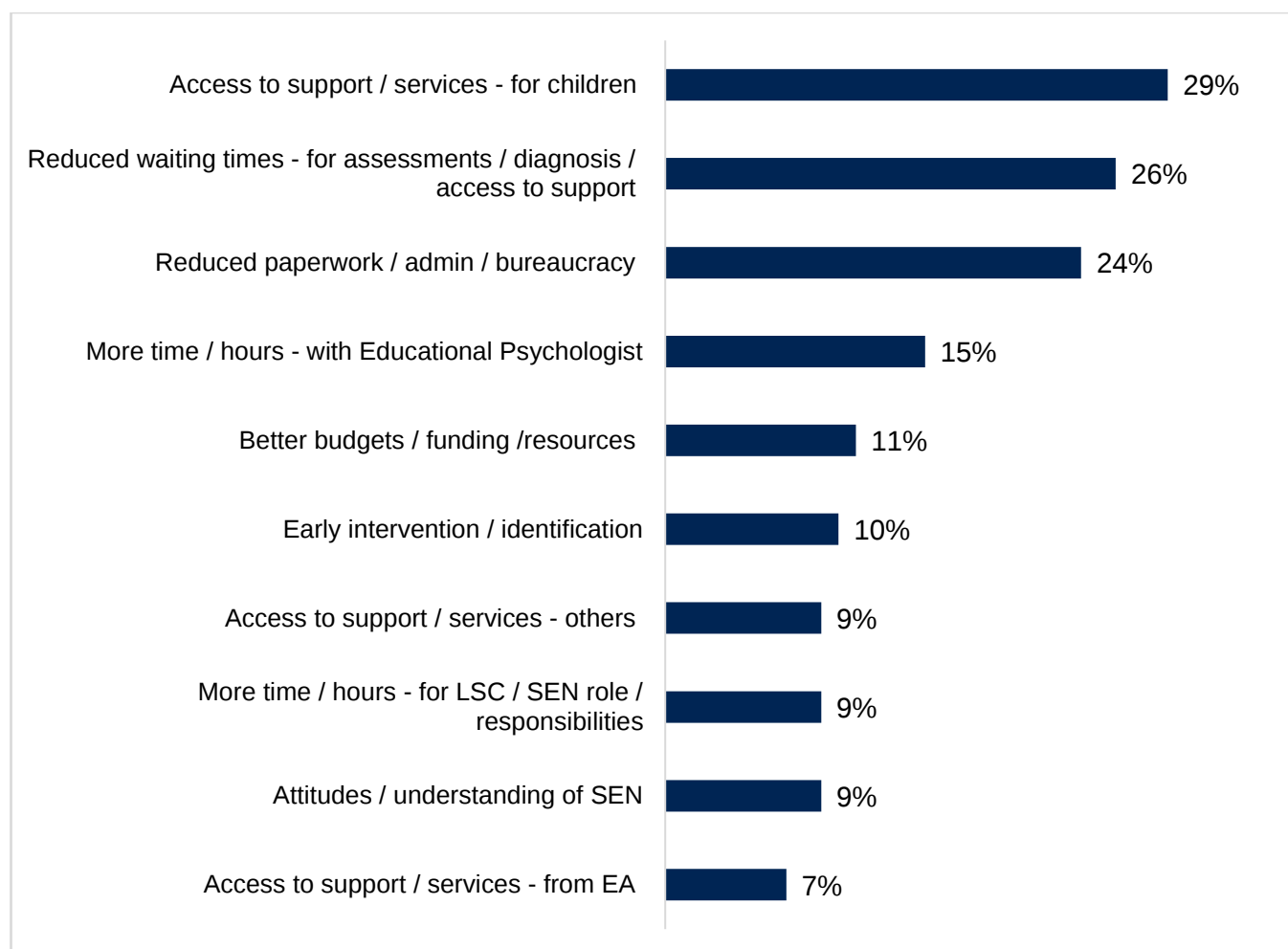
It is also reported that the process for children to be assessed by the Educational Psychology service in Nursery school is too slow and that often children are not assessed in time or are not far enough along the process to receive support while in their nursery year and, often the required support is not in place in time for starting primary one. Schools report challenges in getting places to suit the pupils' specific needs and that educational psychologists do not have enough time to develop interventions and to advise and support schools. Hence reflecting the need for early identification and intervention of special needs.

“The children need early intervention but with only a few hours Education Psychology it is impossible for all children to access the help and support they need ... giving a child an adult does not help unless that adult is able to access training for the needs of the child as once stated, very little support is given by EA. When a child is given a medical diagnosis, e.g., ASD they cannot access AAIS unless referred by Education Psychology even just to be added to the school referral list in case of support needed in the future.”

School interview

One thing schools would change about the current system for SEN children

There are a variety of changes that schools would like to see made to the current system for SEN children. The most mentioned change to the current system is increased access to the support and services for children (29%), closely followed by reduced waiting times for assessments (26%) and, reduction in the administration burden that schools face (24%). Furthermore, schools would like additional educational psychologist time (15%). These changes are not surprising, given that they are the most definite issues raised by schools throughout the review process. In addition, these suggested changes are not unlike schools' suggestions to ensure a positive pathway for children with SEN. Nor is it unlike the training which schools have requested and the support they have expressed they need.

Figure 7.25: One thing the schools would change

Source: Ipsos School Survey

Access to support/ services for children

Access to support/ services for children is a broad theme and within that schools would like to see changes that all children who require additional support to reach their potential, receive it, regardless of the size of the school. Schools reflect that they want access to all services that children need and that they would like to see resources in place that the pupil's need instead of trying to make the child's need fit into a system/service/provision that is not suitable. Whilst there is a move towards more inclusive education policy, for some schools there is a sense that SEN pupils should not be "shoe-horned" into mainstream schools and pupils should be placed in learning environments that best suited to their needs. In addition, there is a suggestion that each school could have a designated learning support hub to ensure that pupils have access to the one-to-one they need, regardless of whether they have a statement or not.

Many schools who were interviewed noted that the current SEN system is not child-centred, that it is too focused on processes and systems and not on what the needs of the children are.

“Schools are pupil focused, everything they do is about meeting the child’s needs. But the EA are all about getting bums on seats and the metrics”.

School interview

To synthesise what schools would change it would be access to all services that children deserve and need in a timely manner which meets the needs of children and not be a one size fits all.

“Resource the pupil's need instead of trying to make the child's need fit into a system/service/provision that is not suitable.”

School interview

A full list of suggested changes to systems and processes for SEN children from the schools' survey is available in Appendix C.

Summary of Key Themes highlighted by Schools

The key themes that were discussed with schools during the one-to-one interviews were highly consistent with the outcomes from the school survey. The most salient issues discussed include:

Challenges: The number of children in schools on the SEN register has been increasing steadily in recent years. In addition to this the number of children with complex needs in special and mainstream schools has also been increasing.

Administration: Almost every school described the administration associated with SEN as too much. The administration associated with SEN is significant and schools noted many areas of duplication across the SEN process. In many schools the SEN administration is only dealt with by the LSC (who often also have teaching duties).

Supernumerary: another issue related to the administrative burden associated with SEN that was highlighted by schools during the one-to-one interviews was the fact that children who are on the SEN register are supernumerary and as such are additional to the school's enrolment numbers. This creates difficulties for schools as they are often required to enrol SEN children at short notice, which does not provide them with sufficient time to prepare (for example, getting equipment or an appropriately trained Classroom Assistant).

Training: Training was a major issue that was highlighted in the survey and discussed during the interviews with schools. Schools highlighted that they would like more access to training for all staff (Principals, Teachers, LSCs, and non-teaching staff).

Educational Psychology Service: The majority of schools (58%) noted that the lack of Educational Psychology time had a negative impact on the ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children. Interviews with schools also highlighted that they would welcome more support from the Psychology Service to develop and implement strategies and interventions to support children and staff.

Classroom Assistants: Responses to the survey demonstrated that the majority (88%) of schools regarded the role of CAs as assisting the class teacher in the care and support of pupils with SEN. The interviews with schools also highlighted a number of issues associated with CAs. Whilst schools highlighted that many CAs are dedicated and capable they also noted the challenges associated with HR, administration and management. It was also noted that CAs need better access to training relating to the specific needs of SEN pupils.

Areas for improvement: Common themes emerged from the survey and the interviews with schools relating to how SEN systems and processes could be improved. Almost one-third (29%) of schools who responded to the survey believed that there should be easier/improved access to services for pupils with SEN. This theme was echoed in interviews with schools who highlighted challenges in accessing many pupil support services. Schools also noted that they would like local support hubs where they could access specialist advice and support and share good practice. Both survey respondents and schools who participated in interviews noted that they would like access to more resources / budgets. Training was also an area highlighted as a key area for improvement, with school requesting more and better training in relation to SEN.

8 Classroom Assistants

Introduction

This section presents a high-level overview of the literature relating to the impact of Classroom Assistants. Adult assistants in the classroom in Northern Ireland are typically referred to as Classroom Assistants (CAs) or, sometimes, Teaching Assistants (TAs). CAs are provided in both mainstream and special schools and, more and more frequently, on a one-to-one basis for children who have a statement of special educational needs. The number of Classroom Assistants in mainstream schools in Northern Ireland has increased from 3,570 FTEs in 2017 to 5,160 FTE in 2021. The cost of employing classroom assistants in mainstream schools has also increased from £75.7M in 2017 to £127.7M in 2021.

The following paragraphs summarise the findings of key pieces of research on the deployment of CAs (or their equivalents), particularly in England. We note the challenging finding that certain, widespread uses of CAs actually hold students back in their learning. We draw attention to the effective use of CAs and highlight what needs to be done to ensure maximum benefit is derived from this substantial resource.

Teaching Assistants in England

In England, adult assistants in the classroom are typically referred to as Teaching Assistants (TAs) and like Northern Ireland, the number of TAs has more than trebled since 2000: from 79,000 to 275,812⁸⁵. The number of pupils in England with an Education and Health Care Plan (statemented) has also increased by 35% since 2013/14 to 354,000 in 2019.

Unlike Northern Ireland, in England schools receive additional funding (of up to £6,000 per child with an EHCP) to provide support for children with SEN and the school is responsible for acquiring that support. Therefore, the costs of Classroom Assistants is paid out of this additional funding as well as other types of support, such as technology or specialist equipment. In England Classroom Assistants tend not to be 1-2-1 with individual children unless there are specific needs. There are also different levels of TAs depending on skills, experience and qualifications. Each school's additional funding for children with an EHCP is ring fenced and spending is reviewed as part of the overall school inspection process.

Literature

The employment of TAs in England was part of a workforce reform to reduce teacher workloads. The expansion of the CA or TA workforce has also generated a number of research studies and evaluations which have examined the impact of TAs in English and Welsh schools. The key themes arising from these studies are summarised in the following paragraphs.

A number of studies have shown that over the years schools in England have used TAs to support low attaining or pupils with SEN.⁸⁶ However, until 2011 the impact of TA support on academic progress of pupils was not clear. The largest and most detailed study of the deployment and impact of TAs in schools to date is the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project.⁸⁷ The DISS study found that the impact of TAs was largely negative, depending on how the TA was deployed in the classroom. This study found that those pupils receiving the most support from TAs made the least academic progress, even after controlling for factors such as previous attainment, Free School Meal eligibility and SEN status. A detailed examination of these findings found that a number of factors associated with the TAs themselves impacted upon the effectiveness of TA support, including deployment (the role that TAs have in the classroom), conditions of employment, preparedness (training and experience) and personal characteristics.

⁸⁵ School Workforce in England (2021).

⁸⁶ For example see Blatchford, P., A. Russell, and R. Webster. 2012. Reassessing the impact of teaching assistants: How research challenges practice and policy. Abingdon: Routledge.

⁸⁷ Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A. and Webster, R. (2011) The impact of support staff on pupils' 'positive approaches to learning' and their academic progress, *British Educational Research Journal*, 37 (3), 443-464

Deployment

The DISS study⁸⁸ found that TAs were predominately involved in teaching roles and tended to focus on students with additional needs (such as SEN pupils) who then in turn received less attention from teachers. It was observed that pupils who receive the most support from TAs consequently spend less time interacting with the teacher and become separated from the teacher and curriculum.

It was also noted ⁸⁹ that Teaching Assistants (TAs) tended to be more concerned with task completion, and less concerned with developing pupils' understanding. Additionally, those pupils who received the most support from TAs made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no support from TAs. The negative impact was most marked for pupils with the highest levels of special educational needs and /or disabilities (SEND). It was also found that deployment arrangements could result in a dependency effect.

Research by Glazzard (2011)⁹⁰ also highlighted how one-to-one support from TAs can result in a dependency effect. Furthermore, the process of withdrawing children from classes for interventions can reduce self-esteem and create an 'othering' effect (ibid). Short-term focused intervention should enable children to access the curriculum more effectively when they return to their usual classroom environment. However, if children are educated in the main classroom environment by TAs, outside of their usual learning environment, this can result in an abdication of responsibilities by the teacher for educating children with special educational needs, resulting in the perpetuation of a deficit view of the child (ibid).

Glazzard, (2013)⁹¹ also emphasised how practices in school which are taken for granted and implemented in the name of 'inclusion' can create exclusion. These include the use of individual education plans and behaviour plans which place the onus on the learner to improve. These mark individuals out as different and deflect attention away from the wider structures of schooling which result in marginalisation, discrimination and learner disengagement. Examples of discriminatory structures in England include the national curriculum and the assessment system. The national curriculum privileges academic forms of knowledge, resulting in the marginalisation of those learners whose strengths lie in other areas. The assessment system fails those learners who are unable to demonstrate academic forms of success. Inclusive education necessitates both a political and a pedagogical response. In the absence of a transformation of the curriculum and the assessment processes, practitioners can only go so far with inclusion. It is difficult to provide young people with an inclusive education if the wider structures that underpin education are exclusive.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice in England (DfE, 2015)⁹² emphasises that accountability for the progress of all pupils, rests with the teacher. The code states that the TA should be considered to be part of a package of support for pupils with SEND, but they should never replace the teacher. Teachers should also consider the detrimental impacts of withdrawing children from class. Learning is a social process, and knowledge is socially constructed, so withdrawal can result in pupils missing out on opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. If pupils are not exposed to higher-level content this can restrict learning. Teachers therefore need to consider how deployment arrangements can enable individual pupils to be supported within the context of the usual classroom environment, so that pupils can benefit from collaboration with their peers.

Improving the impacts of Classroom Assistants.

Despite the negative findings from the DISS project, further research found that when TAs deliver short, structured, time-limited individual or small-group interventions, this can have a positive impact on attainment. This deployment arrangement can add approximately three-to-four additional months' progress, provided that teaching assistants are trained to deliver the interventions. Additionally, the impact on attainment is positive when explicit connections are made between interventions out of class and the work/learning in class (Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015).

⁸⁸ Blatchford, P., Russell, A. & Webster, R. (2012) Reassessing the impact of teaching assistants: How research challenges practice and policy (Abingdon, Routledge).

⁸⁹ Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015, *Making the Best use of Teaching Assistants*. Education Endowment Fund, 2015.

⁹⁰ Glazzard J (2011) 'Perceptions of the barriers to effective inclusion in one primary school: voices of teachers and teaching assistants', *British Journal of Learning Support* 26(2): 56–63

⁹¹ Glazzard J (2013) 'A critical interrogation of the contemporary discourses associated with inclusive education in England', *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 13(3): 182–188

⁹² Department for Education [DfE] (2015) Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years: Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities, London. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

The Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project was designed to address the negative impacts of TAs which the DISS study found.⁹³ It found that in addition to the issues summarised above, TAs have untapped potential and have a positive impact on progress when they are specifically trained and prepared for curricular interventions. It noted that schools needed clear, well-informed guidance on effective ways of deploying and preparing TAs and teachers. The study also showed that TAs' time was more effective when they were involved in lesson planning and feedback, but time and budget were required to support this. This study also showed that TAs can increase opportunities for learning when they are provided with support and instruction on how to interact, question and engage with pupils during the lesson. This approach also provided opportunities to minimise any potential for adult dependency. A further notable finding from the EDTA study was that *"Leadership is vital to the change process, and in this sense, reassessing the use of TAs can be seen as part of the broader processes of school improvement"*.

The Education Endowment Fund have subsequently published guidance on how to make the best use of Teaching Assistants in primary and secondary schools⁹⁴. This report sets out evidence demonstrating that TAs can have a positive impact on pupil outcomes when they work in structured settings with high-quality support and training. Crucially, the report provides seven recommendations on the use of TAs in the classroom:

- TAs should not be used as an informal teaching resource for low attaining pupils;
- Use TAs to add value to what teachers do, not replace them;
- Use TAs to help pupils develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning;
- Ensure TAs are fully prepared for their role in the classroom;
- Use TAs to deliver high quality one-to-one and small group support using structured interventions;
- Adopt evidence-based interventions to support TAs in their small group and one-to-one instruction; and,
- Ensure explicit connections are made between learning from everyday classroom teaching and structured interventions.

New Models in Northern Ireland

A small number of mainstream, post-primary schools in Northern Ireland are piloting new ways to use their CA resources. The need to consider alternative approaches to providing additional assistance in the classroom was driven by the high proportion of children with a statement and, therefore, the need to consider the impact of additional adults in the classroom on all pupils and the additional pressures on the school estate. In co-operation with the EA and parents, one school used some of the resources that would be used to appoint CAs to employ Newly Qualified Teachers.

The Newly Qualified Teachers have been used to take small groups of pupils for additional support and tutoring based on their skills and qualifications. The pilot was interrupted during the national lockdowns associated with COVID but was fully re-instated once schools became fully operational again in 2021/22. The outcomes and impacts on pupil attainment are being closely monitored by the EA.

Other models of Adult Assistance

Some counties in California are trialling a totally new system of fully inclusive education – that is, a system that is for children of all abilities. This is based on State law that stipulates:

*"Children with disabilities, should be educated with children who are not disabled, and special day classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."*⁹⁵

In California CAs are known as Paraeducators, Teacher Aides, Education Aides or Instructional Aides. There are different grades/ levels of Classroom Assistants, most must pass a local assessment of knowledge and skills in assisting in instruction.

Classroom Assistants do not typically work one-to-one unless stated on an Individualised Education Plan (Statement). The number of Classroom Assistants in the class depends on class size and the needs and abilities of the pupils.

⁹³ Rob Webster, Peter Blatchford & Anthony Russell (2013) Challenging and changing how schools use teaching assistants: findings from the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants project, School Leadership & Management, 33:1, 78-96,

⁹⁴ Sharples, J., Webster, R. and Blatchford P. Making the Best Use of Teaching Assistants: Guidance Report. Education Endowment Fund. 2021.

⁹⁵ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004)

Summary

There is a significant body of evidence from across the UK highlighting that over the past number of years the way in which Classroom Assistants (CAs) have been employed and deployed can have a negative impact on the educational outcomes on children with SEN. The traditional approach of Classroom Assistants CAs or TAs focusing on those children who are most in need of additional support has meant a reduction in pupil: teacher interaction for these pupils and has distanced them from the curriculum.

Despite the wide range of evidence relating to negative outcomes associated with CA, there is evidence to show that CAs can positively contribute to pupil outcomes when they suitably trained and supported within school and deployed appropriately in the classroom. Sharples, et al (2021) noted that CAs can deliver high quality one-to-one and small group support using structured interventions however, schools need to adopt evidence-based interventions to support CAs in their small group and one-to-one instruction.

9 Comparative Analysis of SEN Rates in Northern Ireland and England

Introduction

The section describes SEN rates in NI and highlights the variation across the former Education and Library Board (ELB) areas. It also provides comparison rates between NI and England overall, along with rates in the Northwest of England. It is assumed that comparable SEN services are provided within other jurisdictions, but this may not be the case. Analysis of available datasets including census and school census data as well as other relevant health datasets have been accessed to complete the analysis.

Limitations to the data

It should be noted that there are various limitations to undertaking a detailed, comparative review of SEN rates and numbers in Northern Ireland and England. Whilst there are many similar administrative datasets, differences in the data collection methods and categorising across various regions and jurisdictions do not allow a direct comparative analysis on a significant portion of data. For example, definitions of SEN categories and medical conditions in Northern Ireland are not directly comparable with England and the stages of the SEN process are different in both regions making comparisons unreliable. Publicly available educational attainment figures were recorded and compiled inconsistently meaning no comparisons could be made. Therefore, the following data should be considered as indicative of trends across both regions.

Overall SEN Rates

Northern Ireland overall SEN rates from school years 2017/18 to 2021/22

The table below provides the numbers and proportions of the pupils with SEN as reported in the school census since 2017⁹⁶. This is further broken down by the three stages of the new SEN framework introduced in 20/21⁹⁷. The data from the previous years have been recoded into the three new SEN elements from the previous five stages.

It should be noted that over these five years the total school population has also risen from 329,733 in 17/18 to 340,696 in 21/22 (3% increase). The percentage of pupils with SEN is calculated on the school population in each year. The following table provides a summary of the total school population in NI (primary, post primary and special schools) and the proportion of children who are on the SEN register.

⁹⁷ Stage One: Pupils will be receiving school delivered, special educational provision.

Stage Two: Pupils will be receiving school delivered special educational provision plus external provision, e.g. from one of the Education Authority (EA) Pupil Support Services or from a service within the Health and Social Care Trust. Pupils who are going through the statutory assessment process will be recorded as Stage Two also.

Stage Three: Pupils will have a statement of Special Educational Needs and will be receiving school and EA delivered special educational provision as detailed in their statement. (Source: EA Guidance.

<https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/special-educational-needs-sen/stages-of-the-code-of-practice>).

Table 9.1: Number and percentages of pupils reported at the three stages of the SEN process in the NI School Census from 2017/18 to 2021/22 (Primary, Post Primary and Special Schools.9899100

SEN Stage	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Total Number of pupils	329,733	332,443	334,970	338,400	340,696
Not SEN: Number pupils	253,089	256,053	269,628	272,397	278,046
Percentage	76.8%	77.0%	80.5%	80.5%	81.6%
Stage 1: Number of Pupils	44,431	43,194	33,048	32,958	29,602
Percentage	13.5%	13.0%	9.9%	9.7%	8.7%
Stage 2: Number of pupils	14,504	14,883	13,189	12,714	11,092
Percentage	4.4%	4.5%	3.9%	3.8%	3.3%
Stage 3: Number of pupils	17,709	18,313	19,105	20,331	21,956
Percentage	5.4%	5.5%	5.7%	6.0%	6.4%
Total SEN (all on any stage of SEN register)	76,644	76,390	65,342	66,003	62,650
Total SEN % of total number of pupils	23.2%	23.0%	19.5%	19.5%	18.4%

Points to Note

- Total pupil numbers have been increasing steadily since 2017.
- The number and percentage of pupils at Stage 3 (statemented) also increased steadily from 2017/18 to 2021/22; (a rise of 24%).
- Whilst the overall proportion of children on the SEN register have declined since 2017/18, the number and proportion of children at stage 3 (statemented) has increased).
- The decline in the number of pupils recorded at Stage 2 (a decline of 24%). This suggests that in more recent years pupils have moved from Stage 2 to Stage 3.
- Between the academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20 there was a notable decline in the number of pupils at Stage 1 of the SEN register. This is most likely due to the creation of the medical register and pupils with only medical needs and not Special Education Needs were removed from the SEN register.

The overall, regional prevalence rates can mask intra-region variation. Indeed, there are marked differences across the five former Education and Library Board areas (ELBs) in the prevalence rates of pupils with SEN. The table below shows details of pupils in the five former Education Library Board areas (ELBs) with SEN and those at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice.

⁹⁸ Changes to the SEN categories were implemented in 2021 when they moved from five stages to three. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/de-circular-202106-three-stages-special-educational-provision> For the purposes of this analysis stages one and two are categorised as the new stage one; stages three and four are categorised as the new stage two; and, stage five is now stage three (statemented).

⁹⁹ Pupils on register in primary, post primary and special schools. School Census data.

¹⁰⁰ Pupils with a medical diagnosis/es who do not have an associated SEN were recorded on the schools medical register from January 2019. stages <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/sen-and-medical-categories-guidance-schools>

Table 9.2: The percentage of NI children with any primary SEN and at Stage 3 of the process in 21/22 census by Former ELBs of pupil residence

<i>Former ELB area</i>	All stages Revised Code of Practice	Stage 3 of Revised Code of Practice
Belfast	23.1%	7.7%
South-Eastern	18.4%	7.0%
Western	19.2%	6.7%
North-Eastern	16.6%	5.9%
Southern	16.9%	5.5%

When the intra-region differences are considered, it is clear that the headline figures shown in earlier tables can be misleading, in that for certain subgroups of pupils the proportions of pupils with SEN or at Stage 3 can be much higher. For example, the proportion of children at stage 3 on the register in the former Belfast ELB area is 2.2% greater than in the former Southern ELB area.

The increase in SEN was analysed further over five years from 17/18 to 21/22. To set the context the chart below details the proportion of pupils at Stage 3 (Statemented) by the five former ELB areas. Although all areas show an increase this was most marked in the Belfast area and less in the Southern area. The differences between the Board areas are largely consistent over the five years. Likewise, the proportion of pupils with SEN at all Stages (applying the revised categories retrospectively to previous years) is shown in Figure 8.3. The Belfast area has the highest prevalence rates with the North-Eastern and Southern areas the lowest rates. The prevalence rates rose from 17/18 to 20/21 in varying degrees in four Board areas but not in the South-Eastern area. However, in 2021/22 the rates decreased in all areas except the Southern area.

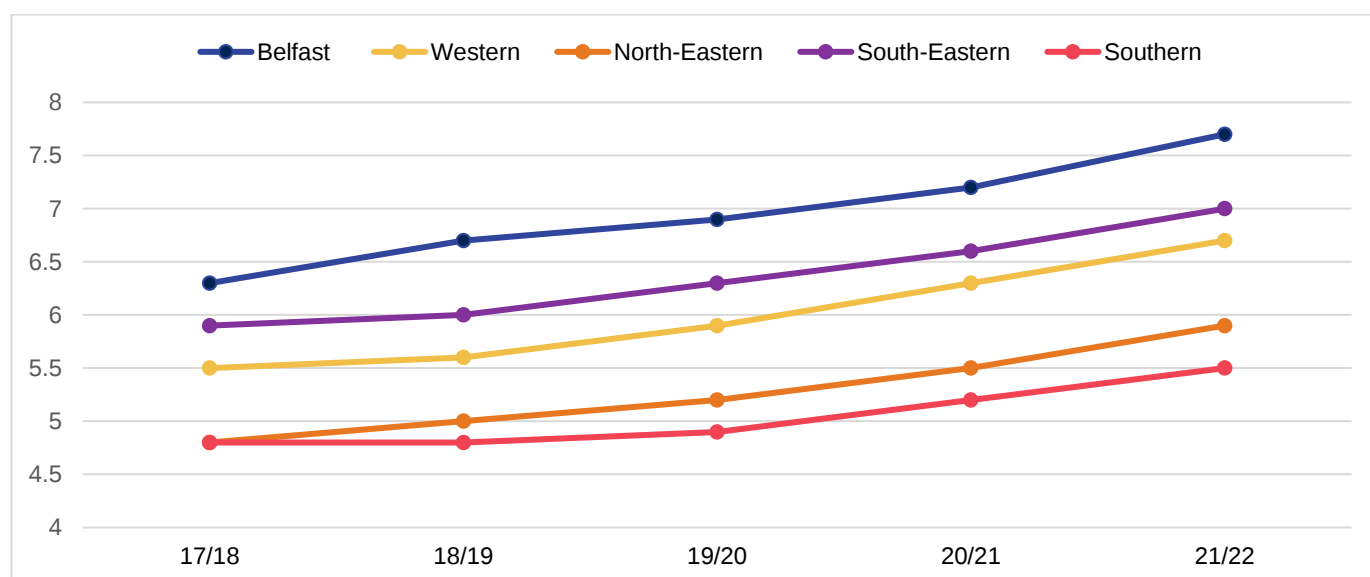
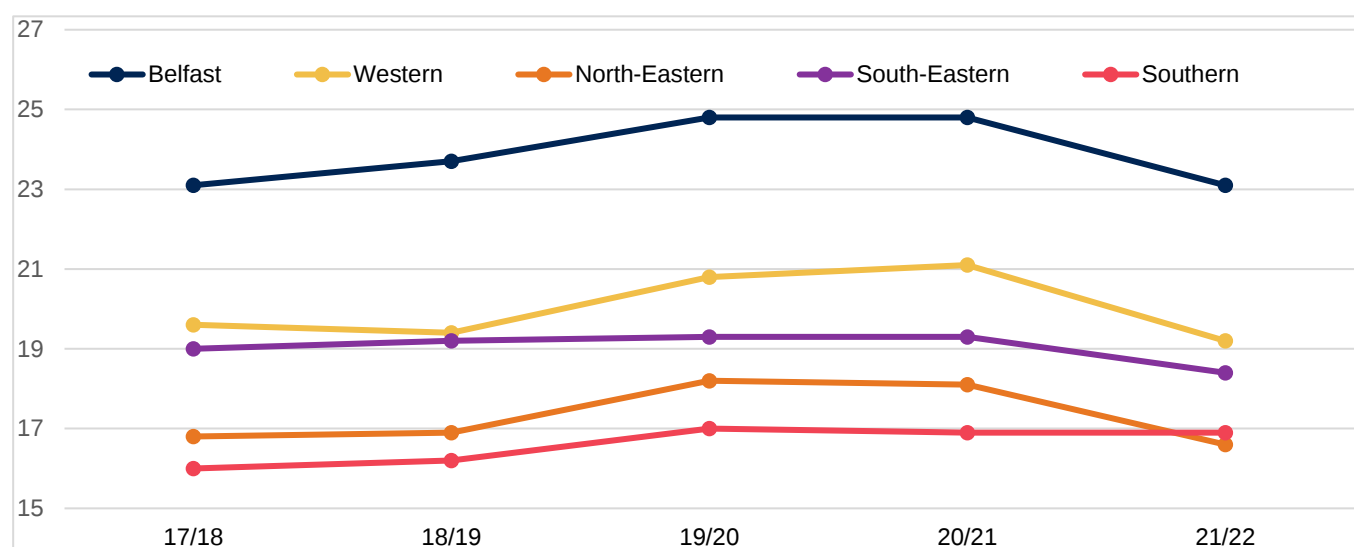
Figure 9.1: Proportion of pupils at Stage 3 (statemented) by legacy ELBs

Figure 9.2: Proportion of pupils with SEN by legacy ELBs

England SEN support and EHCP rates from school years 2017/18 to 2021/22

Special Educational Needs in England is provisioned and classified differently than it is in Northern Ireland. Whereas Northern Ireland has the staged approach, where stage 3 is when a child is given a statement of Special Educational Needs, in England, statements of Special Educational Needs were replaced with the introduction of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in 2014. EHCPs have a similar function as the statementing process in Northern Ireland, children and young people with special educational needs may still need additional support although may not satisfy the requirements needed for a personalised EHCP. In cases where children do not receive an EHCP but are still deemed to have some additional need for help, children and young people will still receive some level of SEN support.

Data in the table below provides the numbers and percentages of both EHCPs and SEN support in England from 2017/18 through to 2020/21. Data are publicly available national statistics from government databases and combine information from the school census (state-funded schools), the school level annual school census (independent schools) and general hospital school census on pupils with special educational needs¹⁰¹.

It should be noted that the English school population has increased by 3% from 87,250,098 pupils in 2017/18 to 90,000,031 pupils in 2021/22. The percentages of pupils with EHCPs and SEN support is calculated on the total school population in each year, therefore the prevalence of EHCPs and SEN support may appear relatively unchanged year on year, although the number of pupils with EHCPs and support will have increased.

¹⁰¹ [Special education needs in England, Academic Year 2021/22, GOV.UK National Statistics](https://www.gov.uk/national-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england). Accessed 15th July 2022.

Table 9.3: The number and percentages of pupils reported to have an Educational, Health and Care Plan and pupils reported to be in receipt of SEN support in all English schools from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

<i>SEN Support & EHCP</i>	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Total number of pupils	8,735,098	8,819,289	8,890,345	8,911,887	9,000,031
Not SEN: Number of pupils	7,458,882	7,500,961	7,516,587	7,503,186	7,514,622
Percentage	85.4	85.1	84.5	84.2	83.5
EHC plans/Statements of SEN	253,679	271,165	294,758	325,618	355,566
Percentage	2.9	3.1	3.3	3.7	4.0
SEN support	1,022,537	1,047,163	1,079,000	1,083,083	1,129,843
Percentage	11.7	11.9	12.1	12.2	12.6

Points to Note

- The steady rise in the number and percentage of children and/or young people issued EHCPs between 2017/18 and 2021/22 (a rise of 40%).
- The steady rise in the number and percentage children and/or young people receiving SEN support over the five years 2017/18 to 2021/22, from 11.7% of all pupils in English schools to 12.6%.
- This mirrors what has happened in NI, however the reasons for this are not clear. This could suggest that statements/EHCPs are required to access supports.

The overall school population has increased in both Northern Ireland and England across the five years 2017/2018, as has the percentage of pupils with SEN. In percentage terms, Northern Ireland has a notably higher proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs when compared to English EHCPs. In the 2021/22 school year 6.4% of pupils in Northern Irish schools were at stage three and in receipt of a statement, an increase of 1% since the 2017/18 school year at 5.4% (see table above). In the 2021/22 school year, precisely 4% of pupils in English schools were reported to have an EHCP. Although the rate of pupils in England with an EHCP is lower than those with a statement of SEN in Northern Ireland, there is a similar increase of 1% in percentage terms from the 2017/18 rate (see table above).

Types of SEN recorded in Northern Ireland for school years 2019/20 – 2021/22

Five overarching SEN categories are used to categorise SEN¹⁰². For the purposes of this analysis an extra category was added, this involved removing three categories of learning difficulties from the cognition & learning category and creating a standalone category for learning difficulties¹⁰³. In 2021/22 these six groupings accounted for 93% of all pupils recorded as the first (or primary) entry for SENs (n=58,006 from 62,650 with a SEN recorded). Fourteen other codes therefore account for 7% of pupils with SEN.

The table below shows the number and percentages of pupils recorded having each type of SEN as a primary need across three years.

¹⁰² Cognition & Learning; Social, Behavioural, Emotional & Wellbeing; Speech, Language and Communication Needs; Sensory; Physical Needs.

¹⁰³ The new category includes Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), and Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD).

Table 9.4: The number and percentages of pupils recorded having each type of SEN as a primary need across three years

<i>1st Recorded Type of SEN (primary)</i>	19/20	20/21	21/22
Cognition & Learning	33,203 (9.9%)	32,714 (9.7%)	29,288 (8.6%)
Social & Behavioural	12,367 (3.7%)	13,064 (3.9%)	13,025 (3.8%)
Speech, Language & Communication	7,436 (2.2%)	8,212 (2.4%)	8,741 (2.6%)
Learning Difficulty	8,890 (2.7%)	8,507 (2.5%)	8,284 (2.4%)
Sensory	1,477 (0.4%)	1,432 (0.4%)	1,278 (0.4%)
Physical Needs	1,718 (0.5%)	1,833 (0.5%)	1,849 (0.5%)

Cognition and Learning was the most common form of SEN which covers language, literacy, mathematics, numeracy as well as a smaller number of pupils with specific learning difficulties related to language and literacy. There may have been a small reduction in the percentage of pupils with this SEN in recent years. The proportion of pupils recorded as having a learning disability decreased slightly whereas the proportion increased for speech, language and communication but remained steady for social & behavioural. Fewer pupils with sensory and physical needs were reported although the numbers remained steady across the three years.

However, striking differences emerge among these types of SEN according to the stage of the SEN process as shown in the table below.

Table 9.5: The percentage of pupils for each stage of the SEN process by the types of primary needs identified in 21/22 Census.

<i>Types</i>	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Cognition & Learning	71.6%	16.8%	11.6%
Social & Behavioural	39.9%	23.6%	36.6%
Speech, Language & Communication	28.3%	22.9%	48.7%
Learning Difficulty	4.4%	5.4%	90.2%
Sensory	20.7%	27.9%	51.3%
Physical Needs	12.9%	12.1%	75.0%

Only a small proportion of pupils have cognition and learning needs at Stage 3 as a primary type of SEN; rather the majority are coded as Stage 1. The majority of pupils also with social and behavioural and with speech, language and communication SENs are also coded as Stages 1 and 2 with around one third up to nearly half having a statement. However nearly all pupils with learning disabilities are at stage 3 as well as three-quarters of those with physical needs and just over half of those with sensory needs.

Types of SEN recorded in England for school years 2019/20 – 2021/22

Due to the differences in categorisation of SEN across regions, for this review it was only possible to comparatively analyse two SEN categories as these were the only two categories that were broadly comparable with the categorisations across both regions. The table below shows the number and percentages of pupils in English and Northern Irish schools recorded as having a special educational need for learning difficulty or for speech, language

and communication across the three years 2019/20 to 2021/22. Compared to Northern Irish pupils, more pupils in England are recorded as having learning difficulties and speech, language and communication needs.

Table 9.6: The number and percentages of pupils recorded having a learning difficulty or speech, language and communication needs as a primary need across three years

<i>Types</i>	19/20	20/21	21/22
Learning Difficulty (Northern Ireland)	8,890 (2.7%)	8,507 (2.5%)	8,284 (2.4%)
Learning Difficulty (England)	285,668 (3.4%)	279,348 (3.3%)	274,281 (3.3%)
Speech, Language & Communication (Northern Ireland)	7,436 (2.2%)	8,212 (2.4%)	8,741 (2.6%)
Speech, Language & Communication (England)	279,549 (3.4%)	294,762 (3.5%)	319,757 (3.8%)

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Northern Ireland and England

Since 2019/20 ASD has been recorded as a medical condition in NI School Census. The Department of Health reports the prevalence of autism within the school aged population in Northern Ireland is 4.7% ¹⁰⁴. The table below shows the number and percentage of pupils with ASD as the first or primary record and as any record of ASD. In order to compare any data on ASD in Northern Ireland with available datasets in England, we have identified from the school census where ASD is noted as the first medical need (primary record of ASD). A primary record of ASD is when it was noted as the first type of medical condition. Any record of ASD was when the ASD code occurred as the second or third type of medical condition recorded for the child. (The number of pupils with ASD as a fourth or more type was very small). (Note: Pupils with ASD may also have SENs recorded and therefore are included.)

Table 9.7: The number and percentage of pupils in Northern Irish schools with a first/primary or an additional record of ASD by years.

<i>ASD recorded</i>	19/20	20/21	21/22
ASD – First/primary	12,149 (3.6%)	12,835 (3.8%)	13,248 (3.9%)
ASD – Additional/second or third need	13,485 (4.0%)	14,450 (4.3%)	15,195 (4.5%)
ASD – First/primary with SEN recorded	9,983 (3.0%)	10,577 (3.7%)	11,050 (3.2%)

As noted in the table above, for the majority of pupils with ASD this tends to be recorded as their primary need. In addition to this, in 2021/22 83% of pupils with an ASD diagnosis are also on the SEN register.

A previous analysis¹⁰⁵ of school census data from 2010/11 to 2018/19 had reported a steady rise in the percentage of pupils in Northern Ireland with ASD from 1.4% to 3.2%. In recent years, the proportions have continued to rise

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/publication-prevalence-autism-including-aspergers-syndrome-school-age-children-northern-ireland-0>

¹⁰⁵ McConkey, R. (2020) The rise in the numbers of school pupils with autism: A comparison of the four countries in the United Kingdom. *Support for Learning*, 35 (2) 132-143. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12296>

to around 1 in 25 pupils recorded with ASD. (Note: Not all pupils will have a formal diagnosis of ASD by health and social care services).

In England, ASD is recorded as a special educational need as opposed to a medical need as it has been in Northern Ireland from 2019/20. The table below shows the number and percentage of pupils in England with ASD recorded as a primary need for the years 2019/20 through to 2021/22 and those in NI who had a medical diagnosis of autism and a SEN recorded.

Table 9.8: The number and percentage of pupils in English and NI schools with a first or primary record of ASD SEN by years.

<i>ASD recorded</i>	19/20	20/21	21/22
NI - ASD+SEN	9,983 (3.0%)	10,577 (3.7%)	11,050 (3.2%)
England -ASD - Primary	150,714 (1.8%)	163,041 (2.0%)	182,493 (2.2%)

The rate of ASD as a primary SEN amongst pupils in English schools is lower than the rate of ASD recorded as a primary medical need amongst pupils in Northern Irish schools across the same time period. Although as noted above, the differences in categorisation of ASD (medical and SEN) mean that comparability of this data should be treated with a degree of caution. Data for ASD as an additional need amongst pupils in English schools is not comparable due to the way publicly available data has been collected, therefore it has not been included in the analysis.

The rate of ASD has continued to rise in Northern Ireland in recent years (up to 3.9% in 2021/22), the rate of ASD as a recorded primary SEN in England has also continued to rise in recent years from 1.8% up to 2.2%.

Not all children with a medical need of ASD will have a SEN recorded. The table below shows the percentages of pupils with ASD by the stages of the SEN process in 2021/22, the majority of whom have a statement of SEN but 16.6% have no SEN stage recorded for them. Although 17% have ASD identified as a medical condition, no SEN stage is recorded for them.

Table 9.9: The percentages of children in Northern Irish schools with first/primary and any record of ASD by the Stages of the SEN Process in 2021/22.

	No Stage	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Primary ASD	16.6%	13.6%	11.0%	58.9%

Table 9.10 below shows the percentages of children in English schools in the 2021/22 school year with ASD by whether they receive SEN Support and whether they have an EHCP. Over half (56.6%) of children with ASD as a primary need have an EHCP, while the remainder (43.3%) receive SEN support. When young people in English schools with a primary record of ASD and an EHCP are compared with Northern Irish young people with a primary record of ASD and a statement (stage 3 of SEN process), the proportion of Northern Irish children with a statement is similar (56.6% and 58.9% respectively).

Table 9.10: The percentages of children in English schools with a primary record of ASD by SEN Support and Statements or EHCPs.

	SEN Support	Statement or EHCP
ASD - Primary	43.3%	56.6%

Comparative Analysis of SEN rates in Northern Ireland and North West England

To provide a more meaningful comparative analysis of SEN rates in Northern Ireland it was agreed to examine a region of England that was demographically more similar to Northern Ireland, than England as a whole. As such, this element of the analysis focuses on Northern Ireland and the North West England.

Comparative analysis of School Census data and other education data

The following section of this report will focus on analysing school census data and other relevant administrative datasets for Northwest England and Northern Ireland. As noted above due to differences in definitions, data collection processes and data which is not available for both regions, the number of direct comparisons between the two regions is limited.

SEN support and EHCP rates in Northwest England and stages of SEN in Northern Ireland from school years 2017/18 to 2021/22

The table below gives the numbers and percentages of both EHCPs and SEN support in North-West England alongside the numbers and percentages of pupils on the SEN register in Northern Ireland from 2017/18 through to 2020/21.

The school population in Northwest England has increased from 1,148,161 in 2017/18 to 1,190,665 in 2021/22. Likewise, the school population in Northern Ireland has increased from 329,733 to 340,696 (primary, post primary and special school pupils only).

The percentages of pupils with EHCPs and SEN support is calculated on the total school population in each year, therefore the prevalence of EHCPs and SEN support may appear relatively unchanged year on year, although the number of pupils with EHCPs and support will have increased. In the school year 2021/22, Northern Ireland has a higher proportion of pupils on the SEN register through stages 1 to 3 (18%) than pupils in receipt of SEN support or pupils holding an EHCP in Northwest England (17%).

Across the five years, Northern Ireland consistently had a greater proportion of pupils on the SEN register through the three stages than pupils in receipt of SEN support or holding an EHCP in Northwest England.

Over the last few years, the proportion of pupils on the SEN register in England has remained relatively stable, with an increase of 1% in Northwest England in the 2021/22 school year. The proportion of pupils on the SEN register in Northern Ireland has decreased, mostly due to the re-classification of pupils with a medical diagnosis. Since January 2019 pupils with a medical needs only have been recorded on school's medical registers, as opposed to the SEN register. However, the proportion of pupils on stage three of the register increased by one percentage point (to 6.4%) in 2021/22.

Table 9.11: Pupils with Educational, Health and Care Plans and in receipt of SEN support in North West England and the number and percentages of pupils by SEN stage in Northern Ireland from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

SEN Support & EHCP SEN Stage		17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
North West England	Total number of pupils	1,148,161	1,160,491	1,173,002	1,177,119	1,190,665
	Not SEN: Number of pupils	978,355	983,588	987,709	987,506	989,839
	Percentage	85.2	84.8	84.2	83.9	83.1
	EHC plans/Statements of SEN	34,370	36,982	40,825	45,082	49,751
	Percentage	3.0	3.2	3.5	3.8	4.2
	SEN support	135,436	139,921	144,468	144,531	151,075
	Percentage	11.8	12.1	12.3	12.3	12.7
SEN Stage		17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Northern Ireland	Total Number of pupils	329,733	332,443	334,970	338,400	340,696
	Not SEN: Number pupils	253,089	256,053	269,628	272,397	278,046
	Percentage	76.8%	77.0%	80.5%	80.5%	81.6%
	Stage 1: Number of Pupils	44,431	43,194	33,048	32,958	29,602
	Percentage	13.5%	13.0%	9.9%	9.7%	8.7%
	Stage 2: Number of pupils	14,504	14,883	13,189	12,714	11,092
	Percentage	4.4%	4.5%	3.9%	3.8%	3.3%
	Stage 3: Number of pupils	17,709	18,313	19,105	20,331	21,956
	Percentage	5.4%	5.5%	5.7%	6.0%	6.4%

Types of SEN recorded in Northwest England and Northern Ireland 2019/20 – 2021/22

As noted earlier, for this review it was only possible to comparatively analyse two SEN categories. The table below shows the number and percentages of pupils in schools in Northwest England and Northern Ireland recorded as having a special educational need for learning difficulty or for speech, language and communication across the three years 2019/20 to 2021/22. In line with national figures from England there are more pupils in Northwest England recorded as having learning difficulties and speech, language and communication needs as a primary SEN.

Table 9.12: The number and percentages of pupils recorded having a learning disability or speech, language and communication needs as a primary need across three years

<i>Types</i>	19/20	20/21	21/22
Learning Difficulty (Northern Ireland)	8,890 (2.7%)	8,507 (2.5%)	8,284 (2.4%)
Learning Difficulty (North West England)	40,033 (3.6%)	38,523 (3.4%)	38,230 (3.3%)
Speech, Language & Communication (Northern Ireland)	7,436 (2.2%)	8,212 (2.4%)	8,741 (2.6%)
Speech, Language & Communication (Northwest England)	37,009 (3.3%)	39,542 (3.5%)	44,189 (3.9%)

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Northwest England and Northern Ireland

There have been a number of studies which have examined the rate of Autism or ASD diagnoses across the UK, all of whom found that ASD diagnosis is increasing. For example, Russell et al (2021)¹⁰⁶ examined GP records across England and Northern Ireland from 2008 to 2018 and found a 787% increase in recorded incidence of autism diagnosis over 20 years. As shown in the table below the proportion of pupils in Northwest England and Northern Ireland with ASD recorded as the first or, primary need has also been steadily increasing.

Table 9.13: The number and percentage of pupils in schools in Northwest England and Northern Ireland with a first/primary record of ASD by years.

<i>Country/Region</i>	19/20	20/21	21/22
Northwest England	19,872 (1.8%)	21,552 (1.9%)	24,259 (2.1%)
Northern Ireland	12,149 (3.6%)	12,835 (3.8%)	13,248 (3.9%)

The rate of ASD as a primary SEN amongst pupils in Northwest England is lower than the overall proportion of pupils in Northern Ireland with ASD recorded as a first/primary need (2.1% compared to 3.9% respectively)¹⁰⁷.

The table below compares the percentages of pupils in Northwest England and Northern Ireland with a first/primary record of ASD by their SEN status. The table has been split to account for differences in the SEN classification process across both regions. Statement or EHCPs in England is equivalent to stage 3 in Northern Ireland, while SEN support is equivalent to stages 1 and 2 in Northern Ireland.

¹⁰⁶ <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.13505>

¹⁰⁷ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england#dataBlock-b88fba0-6fbe-4100-1661-08da47b0392d-tables>

Table 9.14: The percentages of children in Northwest England and Northern Ireland with first or primary of ASD by the Stages of the SEN Process in 2021/22.

	North West England	Northern Ireland
SEN Support	41.0%	-
Statement or EHCP	59.0%	-
No stage	-	16.6%
Stage 1	-	13.6%
Stage 2	-	11.0%
Stage 3	-	58.9%

The majority of pupils with a first/primary record of ASD in both regions have a statement of SEN or an EHCP. Although more pupils with a primary record of ASD in Northwest England will be in receipt of SEN support when compared with stages 1 and 2 in Northern Ireland, around 4 in 10 pupils with ASD as a primary record are in receipt of SEN support while only one quarter (25%) of pupils with a first/primary record of ASD in Northern Ireland will be receiving support specifically for their ASD diagnosis.

Population and Demographics

The following paragraphs provide some demographic and socio-economic statistics to set the comparison in context.

Overall population

Northwest England includes the administrative counties of Cheshire, Cumbria, Great Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside. Census 2021 data show that the population for the Northwest is 7,417,300¹⁰⁸, while the overall population in Northern Ireland is 1,903,175¹⁰⁹.

School age population

The school age population for the years 2021/22 is shown in the table below. School age population is based off the total enrolments in all schools across both regions in the 2021/22 school year.

Table 9.15: Headcount of pupils in the school year 2021/22 in Northwest England and Northern Ireland and percentage of school age pupils as a percentage of the total population.

Region	Total headcount	% of total population
North West England ¹¹⁰	1,190,665	16%
Northern Ireland ¹¹¹	353,818	19%

The school age population in North West England (based on the 2021 Census) was 1,190,665 which is 16% of the total population of the region. Northern Ireland has a higher school age population as a proportion of the total population, at the time of the 2021 Census 353,818 pupils were enrolled in Northern Irish schools, which is 19% of the overall population (these figures include private pre-schools, nursery schools and voluntary schools).

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwalescensus2021>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census/2021-census>

¹¹⁰ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

¹¹¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/School%20Census%20Key%20Statistics%20202122.pdf>

Rates of population level disability

The latest estimates from the Family Resources Survey¹¹² indicate that 14.6 million people in the UK had a disability in the 2020/21, representing 22% of the total population. The prevalence of disability in Northern Ireland is also 22%, compared to 24% in North West England (as set out below).

Table 9.16: Disability prevalence by region/country, 2020/21

<i>Region/Country</i>	<i>Millions of people with a disability</i>	<i>Percentage of people</i>
North West England	1.8	24%
Northern Ireland	0.4	22%
England	12.2	22%
United Kingdom	14.6	22%

Average income

The Households Below Average Income report¹¹³ shows that median weekly income in the North West England is similar than the median weekly income in Northern Ireland before housing costs are deducted (£502 and £498 respectively). The median weekly income for the North West drops to £446 when housing costs are factored in, less than the median weekly income AHC for Northern Ireland at £453.

¹¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2020-to-2021>

¹¹³ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/who-has-the-highest-and-lowest-household-incomes/>

Table 9.17: 2017/18-2019/20 median weekly income at 2019/20 prices before and after housing costs (BHC & AHC).

<i>Country/Region</i>	<i>Before Housing Costs</i>	<i>After Housing Costs</i>
North West England	£502	£446
Northern Ireland	£498	£453

Poverty (low-income) rates

The following tables set out statistics from the Poverty in the UK briefing paper. This paper defines poverty as people living in households with income below 60% of the median that year¹¹⁴. Income can be measured both before or after housing costs are deducted (BHC or AHC), the tables below show both relative low income BHC and AHC for the whole population and children.

Table 9.18: Three-year averages of the percentage of the whole population of in relative poverty before and after housing costs (BHC & AHC).

<i>Country/Region</i>	<i>Three-year averages</i>	<i>BHC</i>	<i>AHC</i>
North West England	2015/16 - 2017/18	19%	23%
	2016/17-2018/19	19%	22%
	2017/18-2019/20	19%	22%
Northern Ireland	2015/16 - 2017/18	17%	18%
	2016/17-2018/19	18%	19%
	2017/18-2019/20	17%	18%

Relative poverty is marginally lower in Northern Ireland than it is in North West England before housing costs are deducted between 2015/16 and 2019/20. Although when housing costs are deducted, the gap between Northern Ireland and North West England widens; after housing costs are deducted Northern Ireland still has a lower rate of poverty than North West England. A recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation notes that Northern Ireland has the most affordable housing in the UK, which explains in part why the median weekly income AHC is higher in Northern Ireland than it is in North West England and that the generally lower housing costs, as well as the higher rate of homes owned by older households may contribute to the lower poverty rate here when compared with other areas in the UK¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn07096/>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.irf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

Table 9.19: Three-year averages of the percentage of children in relative poverty before and after housing costs (BHC & AHC).

Country/Region	Three-year averages	BHC	AHC
North West England	2015/16 - 2017/18	25%	25%
	2016/17-2018/19	25%	25%
	2017/18-2019/20	25%	25%
Northern Ireland	2015/16 - 2017/18	21%	21%
	2016/17-2018/19	22%	22%
	2017/18-2019/20	22%	22%

Relative poverty for children is higher than it is for the whole population in both regions. Consistent with overall poverty rates, rates of relative poverty for Northern Irish children (21%-22%) are lower than children from North West England (25%).

Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity

The latest data from the Labour Force Survey show that rates of employment in Northern Ireland were the lowest of all regions in the UK in the three months ending July 2022, the employment rate in Northern Ireland as of July 2022 was 69.6%, compared with 75.8% in England and 75.6% in Great Britain¹¹⁶. The table below shows estimates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity rates for the UK, GB, NI, England and North West England from May to July 2022 from the ONS Labour Force Survey.

Both the employment and unemployment rate for Northern Ireland is lower than the four other regions, the unemployment rate for Northern Ireland (2.9%) is lower than North West England where 3.5% of the population aged 16 years and over are unemployed. Although unemployment rates should be treated with caution and viewed alongside economic inactivity rates, due to the way that unemployment and economic inactivity are defined¹¹⁷. Although Northern Ireland and North West England have the lowest unemployment rates, both regions have the highest rates of economic inactivity (28.2% and 23.3% respectively).

¹¹⁶ [https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/regional labourmarket/september2022#:~:text=For%20the%20three%20months%20ending%20July%202022%2C%20the%20highest%20unemployment,%25\)%%20and%20Scotland%20\(3.1%25\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/regional labourmarket/september2022#:~:text=For%20the%20three%20months%20ending%20July%202022%2C%20the%20highest%20unemployment,%25)%%20and%20Scotland%20(3.1%25)) .

¹¹⁷ Unemployment measures people without a job who have been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and are available to start work within the next two weeks. The unemployment rate is not the proportion of the total population who are unemployed. It is the proportion of the economically active population (those in work plus those seeking and available to work) who are unemployed.

Economic inactivity are those who are not in employment and have not been seeking work within the last four weeks, or they are unable to start work in the next two weeks. The economic inactivity rate is the proportion of people aged between 16 and 64 years who are not in the labour force.

Table 9.20: Estimates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity rates in UK, GB, England, Northern Ireland and North West England between May and July 2022 (%).

<i>Country/Region</i>	Employment rate (%) aged 16 to 64 years	Unemployment rate (%) aged 16 years and over	Economic inactivity rate (%) aged 16 to 64 years
UK	75.4	3.6	21.7
GB	75.6	3.6	21.5
England	75.8	3.7	21.2
North West England	74	3.5	23.3
Northern Ireland	69.6	2.9	28.2

Pupil absence rates

Absence from schools in both England and Northern Ireland is not comparable for the school year 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic¹¹⁸, as such, data on pupil absences is based on the 2018/19 school year data to avoid any inconsistencies due to the pandemic. Absence rates for the 2018/19 school year for North West England¹¹⁹ and Northern Ireland¹²⁰ are reported in the table below. The absence rate is the total of both authorised and unauthorised absences.

Table 9.21: Absence rates for the school year 2018/19 in Northern Ireland and North West England.

School type¹²¹	Northern Ireland	North West England
Secondary (post-primary)	7%	6%
Primary	5%	4%
Special	10%	10%
Total	6%	5%

¹¹⁸ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Attendance%20at%20grant%20aided%20primary%2C%20post%20primary%20and%20special%20schools%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20202021.pdf>

¹¹⁹ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2018-19>

¹²⁰ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Attendance%20at%20grant%20aided%20primary%2C%20post%20primary%20and%20special%20schools%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20201819.pdf>

¹²¹ Secondary schools in Northern Ireland include all post-primary schools. For the North West England this includes all state-funded secondary schools including city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including all-through academies and free schools. Primary schools in Northern Ireland include all primary school settings. For North West England this includes all state-funded primary schools including all primary academies and free schools. Special schools in Northern Ireland include all special schools. For North West England this includes all special schools, non-maintained special schools and special academies. Excludes general hospital schools, independent special schools and independent schools approved for SEN pupils.

The absence rates for both regions are similar in the 2018/19 school year. Absences are higher in primary and secondary schools for Northern Irish pupils when compared to pupils in North West England, absence rates for special schools are the highest for all school settings across both regions, sitting at 10% in both Northern Ireland and North West England.

Free school meals

The table below shows the figures and percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSMs) for the school year 2020/21 in Northern Ireland¹²² and North West England¹²³.

Table 9.22: Free school meal eligibility for the school year 2020/21 in Northern Ireland and North West England.

	Northern Ireland	North West England
Pupils eligible for FSMs	29%	24%

Educational attainment

Publicly available data on educational attainment across both regions is irregular and inconsistent for comparison due to the way they are categorised. As such, a comparison of educational attainment rates between Northern Ireland and North West England was not possible.

Comparative Analysis Summary

Due to the differences in the collation and categorisation of various datasets it was not possible to complete a detailed comparative analysis of the SEN rates between Northern Ireland and England. However, some similarities and differences were noted across the two school populations.

The overall school population has increased across Northern Ireland, North West England and England across the five years 2017/2018, as has the percentage of pupils with SEN. Northern Ireland has a notably higher proportion of pupils with a statement of SEN compared to English EHCPs. In the 2021/22 school year 6.4% of pupils in Northern Ireland had a statement of SEN compared to 4.0% of pupils in England and 4.2% in North West England with an EHCP. However, as shown by the sub-regional analysis of the Northern Ireland School Census data there is likely to be variation in the SEN rates across local authorities within each region.

Due to the differences in the categorisation of SEN in Northern Ireland and England it was only possible to comparatively analyse two SEN categories across both regions. In the 2021/22 school year, more pupils in England are recorded as having a SEN for learning difficulties (3.3%) and speech, language and communication (3.8%) than pupils in Northern Ireland (2.4% learning difficulties and 2.6% speech, language and communication). There is also a higher prevalence of these SENs (learning difficulties 3.3% and speech, language and communication 3.9%) in North West England when compared to Northern Ireland.

The recorded rate of ASD amongst pupils in Northern Ireland, England and North West England has also increased over recent years. However, the rate of ASD as a primary SEN amongst pupils in England and North West England is lower than the rate of pupils in Northern Ireland with ASD as a first/primary medical condition (2.1% and 2.2% respectively, compared to 3.9% in Northern Ireland). The majority of children in all regions with ASD as a primary record have either a statement of SEN or an EHCP.

The prevalence of disability is similar across regions, although North West England has a higher percentage of people with a registered disability (24%) than Northern Ireland and England overall (both 22%).

¹²²<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/School%20Meals%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202020-21%20statistical%20bulletin.pdf>

¹²³<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

Overall, pupil absence rates are very slightly higher in Northern Ireland than they are in North West England (6% compared to 5%), absence rates in special school settings have the highest rates of pupil absence of all school settings (primary and secondary) in both regions (10% each).

More pupils are eligible for FSMs in Northern Ireland than North West England (29% and 24% respectively). The difference in the FSME rates in the two region is also consistent with the differences in the economic profile of the regions.

Due to differences in how education statistics for KS4 and KS5 are collated and published across jurisdictions, a comparative analysis of educational attainment was not possible.

In summary, whilst at a high level SEN rates in appear higher in Northern Ireland than in England the data does not allow for a direct, like for like comparison. As such it was not possible to identify individual factors than contribute to this. However, common themes were apparent in both jurisdictions. Total school populations across England, North West England and Northern Ireland have been increasing year on year as have the proportion of pupils with a statement or, an EHCP. The combination of both factors has lead to an increase in the number of pupils with a statement or an EHCP. Whilst the proportion of pupils recorded as having ASD is greater in Northern Ireland than in England and North West England, rates in Northern Ireland and North West England have both increased by 0.3 percentage points (from 2019/20 to 2021/22). The increased rates is also consistent with other studies that have also noted steadily increasing of ASD diagnosis rates across the population generally.¹²⁴ Therefore, both England and Northern Ireland are experiencing increasing numbers and prevalence of SEN in school populations. The proportions of SEN are more similar when compared to areas that are socio-economically more similar to Northern Ireland, such as North West England.

¹²⁴ For example see [Ginny Russell](#), [Sal Stapley](#), [Tamsin Newlove-Delgado](#), [Andrew Salmon](#), [Rhianna White](#), [Fiona Warren](#), [Anita Pearson](#), [Tamsin Ford](#). Time trends in autism diagnosis over 20 years: a UK population-based cohort study. The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. V. 63. Issue 6.

10 Review of SEN Processes in Other Jurisdictions

Introduction

SEN services, provision and processes are organised and administered differently across each jurisdiction within the United Kingdom. England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each have their own legislation and processes, which vary significantly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. With differing models in each jurisdiction comes differences in definitions, assessment, support etc. This section provides an overview of the procedures and processes associated with SEN across the UK and the Republic of Ireland (ROI).

England

Legislation

The primary piece of legislation relating to the education of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) in England is the **Children and Families Act (2014)**¹²⁵. The Act requires that Local Authorities (LAs):

- Identify children and young people (up to the age of 25) with SEN
- Assess the SENs of the child or young person (education, health and care needs)
- If necessary, LAs must prepare an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan for the needs they have identified, and the plan should specify the provisions and supports which should be made to meet those needs.

The Act defines a person as having SEN if they have:

“a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special education provision to be made for him or her.”

Under the Act, schools are required to have systems in place to identify children who are in need of support and to assess, monitor and provide support for any SEN they have. For schools to fulfil their statutory duties effectively, under paragraph 6.2 of the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*, schools must: make sure that each child with SEN gets the support they need; ensure that those with SEN engage in activities alongside pupils who do not have SEN; and designate a person to coordinate SEN provision within the school (SENCo)¹²⁶.

Under section 4 of the Act, Local Authorities (LAs) must publish a Local Offer, which sets out information about the provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area with SEN or with disabilities, including those without EHC plans. The Local Offer must also include provision from outside the authority's local area which they expect is likely to be used by children or young people with SEN and disabilities (e.g., provision of SEN, disability or health services in a neighbouring area).

The **Equality Act 2010**¹²⁷ is another relevant legislation for SEN provision in England, as it places a duty on schools and LAs not to discriminate against disabled pupils. Schools must treat disabled pupils as favourably as they would pupils without disabilities and must take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled students at disadvantage. Under the Equality Act, schools must prepare accessibility plans to demonstrate how they will improve access to education for these pupils¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

¹²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

¹²⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

¹²⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

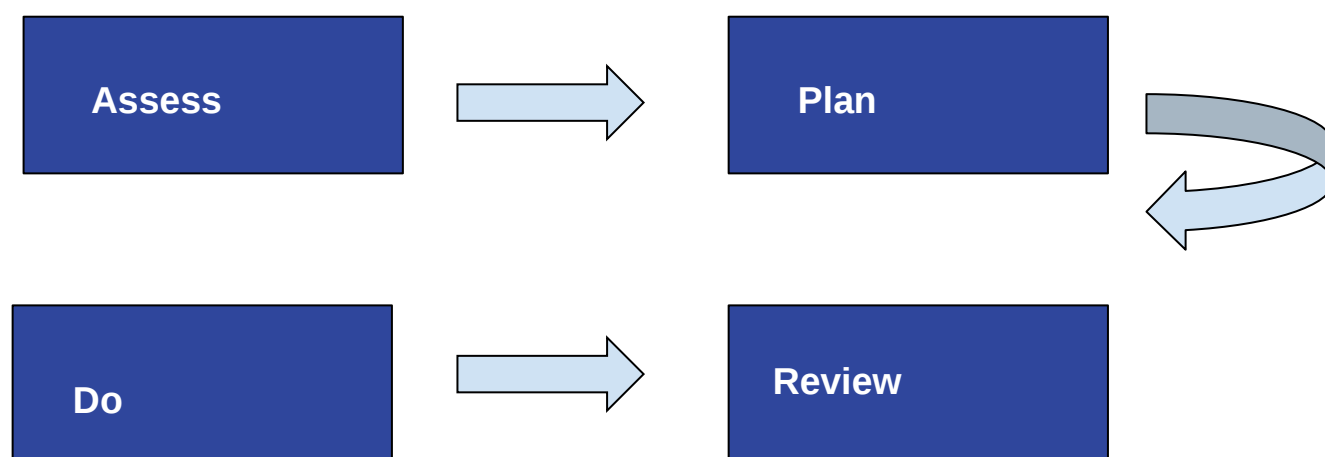
Stages of intervention and assessment

SEN Support

SEN support is additional provision given to a child or young person within their education setting (pre-school, school or college) who has been identified as facing barriers to accessing the curriculum with their schoolwork which may be caused by an underlying SEN.

Additional SEN support is provided in an approach known as the 'graduated approach'. The graduated approach is implemented in all education settings, from early years through to colleges, it consists of four stages of action: Assess, Plan, Do and Review. A model summarising the stages of the 'graduated approach' is included below, with further information on each stage subsequently outlined.

Figure 10.1: SEN Graduated Approach



Assess: A child's class or subject teacher along with the school SENCo will work together to carry out an analysis of the child's needs. The assessment should be reviewed regularly to ensure that support is matched to need. When there is little improvement, more specialist assessments may be required from a specialist teacher or from health, social services or other agencies beyond the school setting. The assessment process should not only involve the school, parents and children should have their views taken into consideration and if appropriate, the views of outside professions (children's services, health professionals, specialist teachers or educational psychologists).

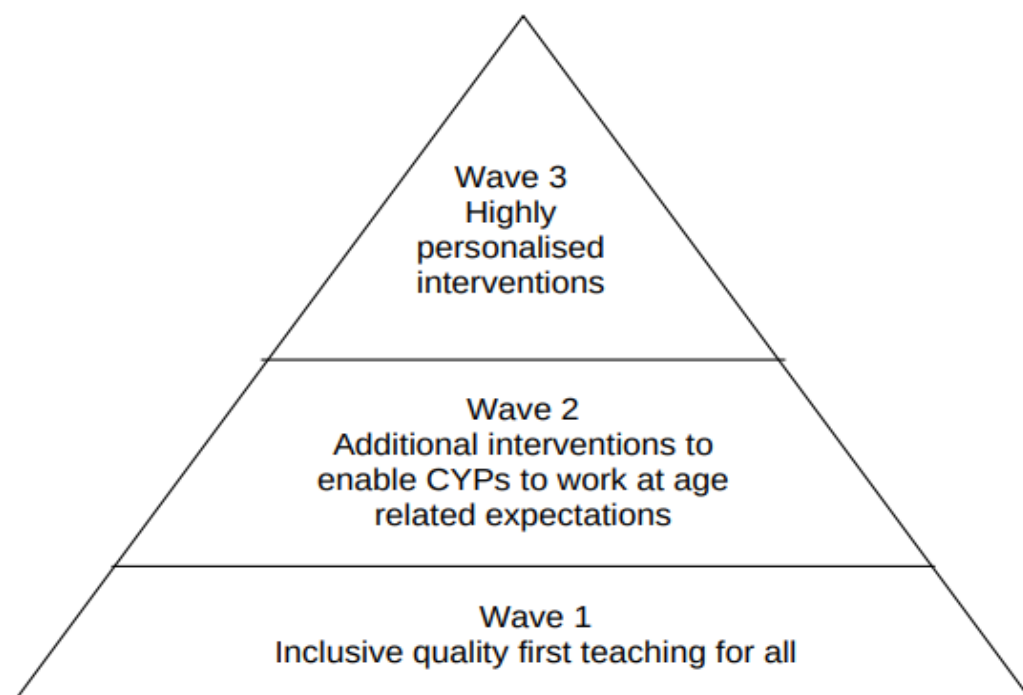
Plan: After assessment, if a school decides that additional SEN Support is required, parents should be notified of this decision. The school should, in consultation with the parents, pupils and, if applicable, other professionals, agree on the outcomes they are seeking through providing additional support, the interventions and support that will be put in place, the expected outcomes of this support and a date for future review of progress. All teachers and staff that work with the child should then be made aware of the child's needs and of the plan, so that the plan can be correctly implemented. The plan should be available and accessible for parents.

Do: The child's class teacher will remain responsible for the day-to-day progress of the child; this is still applicable even if the child attends group or one to one teaching away from the child's main class setting. Class teachers should continue to work closely with teaching assistants or specialist staff to plan and assess the impact of any additional support. The SENCo should support the class teacher in these processes, to help assess the child's progress and to ensure the plan is being implemented properly and effectively.

Review: The effectiveness of any support and interventions agreed in the initial planning stage should be reviewed in line with the date agreed. The impact of any supports and interventions should be evaluated, in conjunction with the pupil and their parents. The review process should feed back into the initial stage of the cycle, the needs should be assessed again, and the graduated process should circle back, and the cycle should continue, with any changes to support implemented. Reviews have been recommended to take place at least 3 times per year.

Some LA's use a system known as 'Waves of Intervention' where additional support for children with SEN is expected to be delivered in three successive levels, or 'waves.'¹²⁹ The below diagram summarises each 'wave.'

Figure 10.2: Waves of intervention



Wave 1: describes the expectation of 'Quality First' teaching, where inclusive teaching takes into account the learning needs of all the children in the classroom. This includes providing differentiated work and creating an inclusive learning environment.

Wave 2: describes specific, additional and time-limited interventions for some children who need help to accelerate their progress to enable them to work at age-related expectations. Wave 2 interventions are often targeted at a group of pupils with similar needs.

Wave 3: describes targeted provision for a minority of children where it is necessary to provide highly tailored intervention to accelerate progress or enable children to achieve their potential. This may include specialist interventions.

Possible supports

For children under 5, SEN support may include:

- A written progress check at 2 years old;
- a health visitor carrying out a health check if they are aged between 2 and 3;
- a written assessment in the summer term of child's first year of primary school; and,
- making reasonable adjustments for disabled children (e.g. providing aids etc).

For children of compulsory school age, children may receive:

- a special learning programme;
- extra help from a teacher or assistant;
- small group working;
- observation in class or at breaktimes;
- assistance in taking part in class activities;
- extra encouragement in their learning;
- communication help with other children; and,

¹²⁹ <https://www.sen-help.org.uk/the-system/sen-support/>

- support with physical or personal care difficulties (e.g. eating, using the toilet etc.)

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

The majority of children and young people with SEN or disabilities will have their needs met within local mainstream schooling settings, although some may require an EHC needs assessment for the authority to decide whether it is necessary to make provision available in accordance with an EHCP.

Parents can ask their LA to conduct a needs assessment, a request can also be made by:

- Anyone at the child's school;
- A doctor, health visitor or other health or social care professional; and
- Early years practitioners

After receiving a request for an EHC assessment, the local authority has 6 weeks to decide whether the assessment is necessary. Once a determination is made, that decision must be communicated to the child's parent or young person within 6 weeks of receiving the request.

If assessment indicates that the special help a child or young person needs cannot be reasonably provided within the resources normally available to the school or college, an EHC plan will be approved.

Content of EHCPs

The format of EHCPs will vary by LA, but as a statutory minimum that EHCP must include the following sections set out in paragraph 9.62 of the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years*, which must be labelled separately using the letters below.

- **Section A:** the **views, interests and aspirations** of the child and his parents or the young person;
- **Section B:** the child or young person's special educational needs ("SEN");
- **Section C:** health care needs which relate to their SEN;
- **Section D:** **social care needs** which relate to their SEN or to a disability;
- **Section E:** the **outcomes sought** for the child or young person;
- **Section F:** the special educational provision required to meet their SEN;
- **Section G:** any **health care provision** reasonably required by the learning difficulties or disabilities which result in the child or young person having SEN;
- **Section H:** any **social care provision** required from social services under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, and/or reasonably required by the learning difficulties or disabilities which result in the child or young person having SEN;
- **Section I:** the **name of the school or other institution** to be attended by the child or young person, and the type of that institution (or just the type if no specific institution is named);
- **Section J:** details of any **direct payment** which will be made; and,
- **Section K:** copies of all of the advice and information obtained as part of the EHC needs assessment.

Personal budgets

When an EHCP is developed, funding considerations are made by the LA in order to deliver the specified provision. For example, the school may require additional funding for therapy, additional support, counselling or specialist teaching. While the LA is responsible for ensuring that the support within the EHCP is adequately funded, parents can have additional responsibility in organising the support outlined within the EHCP through the option to request a Personal Budget.

Young people and parents of children who have EHCPs have the right to request a Personal Budget, which may contain elements of education, social care and health funding.¹³⁰ A Personal Budget can be requested when the child or young person receives their draft EHCP and the payment can be made to the young person, their parents, or another nominated person so that they can organise their own support provisions. Details of the personal budget, once approved by the LA will be included in section J of the EHCP. Funding can be sent directly to a young person if they are over 16 years old, or to their parents or nominated person if they are under 16 years old.

¹³⁰SEND Code of Practice, 2015

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf

The personal budget allows parents and young people to have a greater degree of autonomy over the service provision detailed in the EHCP. This allows greater flexibility and more specialised and tailored service provision.

Some examples of what a personal budget can be used for are outlined below¹³¹;

- Carers or personal assistants to help meet assessed needs in the child or young person's own home;
- Pursuing indoor and outdoor activities in the local community, such as sports, day trips, clubs, and learning centres;
- Short stays in care homes or respite centres;
- Equipment, tools, aids, and technology that is not provided by the NHS, and their ongoing maintenance;
- Transport costs for outdoors activities or day centres;
- Attending day services and centres;
- Specialist teaching; and,
- Complementary therapies.

If the personal budget is used to fund provision or services that take place within a school context, then the permission of the school must be obtained.

Number and rate of children and young people with SEN Support and EHCPs in England

There has been a steady rise in the number of children and/or young people issued EHCPs between 2017/18 and 2021/22 (a rise of 40%). There has also been a steady rise in the number and percentage of children and/or young people receiving SEN support over the five years 2017/18 to 2021/22, from 12% of all pupils in English schools to 13%.

Table 10.1: The number and percentages of pupils reported to have an Educational, Health and Care Plan and pupils reported to be in receipt of SEN support in all English schools from 2017/18 to 2021/22.

SEN Support & EHCP	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Total number of pupils	8,735,098	8,819,289	8,890,345	8,911,887	9,000,031
Not SEN: Number of pupils	7,458,882	7,500,961	7,516,587	7,503,186	7,514,622
Percentage	85.4	85.0	84.5	84.2	83.4
EHC plans/Statements of SEN	253,679	271,165	294,758	325,618	355,566
Percentage	32.9	3.0	3.3	3.7	4.0
SEN support	1,022,537	1,047,163	1,079,000	1,083,083	1,129,843
Percentage	11.7	11.9	12.0	12.2	12.6

The increasing demand for SEN support can be attributed to a number of factors:

- **More pupils:** school census data shows that between 2014 and 2022, the number of pupils in all schools in England grew by over 700, 000¹³² - an increase of 8 per cent.
- **Changing expectations:** the Children's and Families Act 2014¹³³ raised the expectations of parents and the aspirations of pupils through the new SEND code of practice, expecting all children to receive the best possible education and support.
- **More children with complex needs:** advances in life expectancy, increased awareness of SEN, and improved diagnosis means that there are now more children and young people with complex needs within mainstream schools.

¹³¹ <https://educationadvocacy.co.uk/what-is-a-ehcp/personal-budgets-ehcp/>

¹³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-and-pupil-numbers>

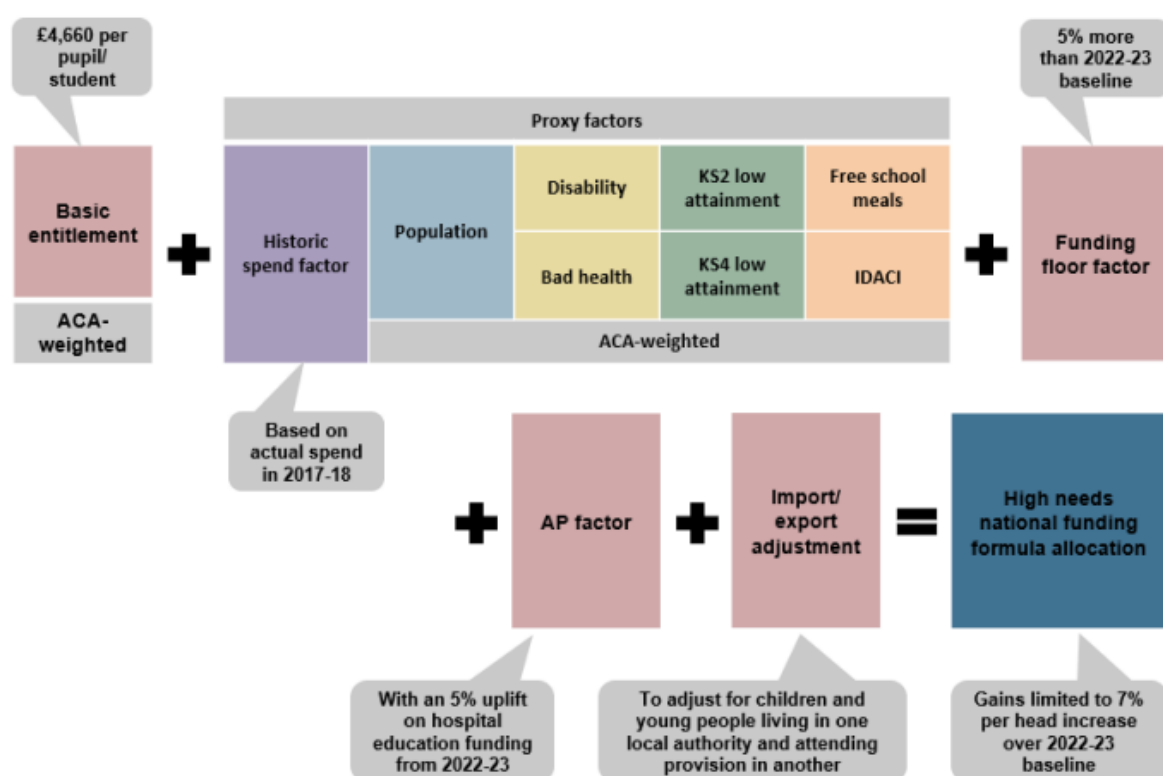
¹³³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>

Financing of SEN

High needs funding is provided to LAs through the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). For the financial year 2022-23 around £8.7 billion has been allocated for the high needs block, which covers special educational needs provision in state-funded schools in England. This is a 10% increase in cash terms and a 4% increase in real terms (adjusted for inflation) compared to 2021-22.¹³⁴ This increase in overall funding will translate to LA level: each LA will receive at least a 5% increase per head of their 2-18 population.

The DSG is divided into four notional blocks, the schools block, the high needs block, the central school services block and the early years block. Each of the four blocks of the DSG is determined by a separate National Funding Formula (NFF). The Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) makes an allocation to LA's for high needs as part of the DSG. High needs block allocations are calculated through the high needs national funding formula (NFF), which is distributed fairly across LAs based on the needs of schools and their pupils with SEN. The high needs Funding formula consists of 12 factors designed to indicate the level of needs within a local authority. The factors have been chosen to capture the nature of the local SEN system (for example, the number of special schools in the area) and the characteristics of the children and young people living in the area. The structure of the high needs NFF is outlined below:¹³⁵

Figure 10.3: DSG Notional Funding Blocks



LAs, in consultation with their schools' forums, decide how much money will be retained centrally within their schools' budget for expenditure on items such as independent special school fees, SEN support services and money for individual pupils with high-level needs. LAs also decide how much will be delegated to schools. This includes a budget that schools can use to provide additional support to pupils with SEN. While the majority of a

¹³⁴ [https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn07020/#:~:text=For%20the%20financial%20year%202022,%2Dfunded%20schools%20in%20England\).](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn07020/#:~:text=For%20the%20financial%20year%202022,%2Dfunded%20schools%20in%20England).)

¹³⁵ [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1091988/2023-24_NFF_Policy_Document .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1091988/2023-24_NFF_Policy_Document.pdf)

LA's high needs budget is spent on place and top-up funding for schools and colleges, local authorities can also use high needs funding to provide additional or targeted support for children and young people with SEN. This can take the form of additional funding to schools and colleges, which may be paid on the basis of a service level agreement, or access to specialist services or expertise commissioned by the local authority.

Such support can play an important role in enabling mainstream schools and colleges to meet a wider range of special educational needs and supports the presumption in law that children and young people should be educated in mainstream provision, unless their SEN requires more specialist provision. Local authorities can also provide additional funding to mainstream colleges for supporting a disproportionate number of students with lower level SEND, where their annual costs of additional support are less than £6,000 per student.

The notional SEN budget

Mainstream schools are notified each year of a clearly identified but notional budget within their overall budget allocation, towards the costs of fulfilling their duty to secure special educational provision for their pupils with SEN. Using funds from the DSG, LAs are responsible for calculating the amount of this notional budget using their local mainstream schools funding formula factors.

The notional SEN Budget is not separate from a school's overall budget, rather it is an identified amount within a maintained schools delegated budget share. It is intended to act as a guide for a schools spendings decisions, and is neither a target nor a constraint on a school's duty to use its 'best endeavours; to secure provision for its pupils with SEN. According to the SEND Code of Practice, mainstream schools are expected to;

- meet the costs of special educational provision for pupils identified as on SEN Support in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice; and,
- contribute towards the costs of special educational provision for pupils with high needs (most of whom have EHCPs) up to the high needs cost threshold set by the regulations, which is currently set at £6,000 per pupil per annum. This cost threshold is calculated by reference to the additional costs of provision, above the costs of the basic provision for all pupils in the school. High needs top-up funding is provided above this threshold on a per-pupil basis by the local authority that commissions or agrees the placement.

Scotland

Legislation

The following pieces of legislation set out the broad legal framework on how SEN should be delivered by education authorities in Scotland, namely:

- The **Standard in Scotland's Schools etc Act (2000)**¹³⁶: Under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act (2000), Education in Scotland should be focussed on "*the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential*". Education authorities (EAs) are presumed to deliver education in a mainstream setting, and it is the right of parents to have children educated in mainstream settings unless the education authorities can provide evidence that specific exceptions will apply.
- The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004¹³⁷, amended by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009¹³⁸ and further amended with the introduction of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016¹³⁹: Education authorities are required under the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 to provide statutory education to young people within their jurisdictions. The Act places duties on local authorities to identify, meet and review the needs of children and young people with ASN. The Act gives children and young people, parents and carers a number of rights, including rights to ask for additional support needs to be identified and planned for; to receive advice and information about their or their child's additional support needs; to be part of discussions about the support that they or their child receive; and access dispute resolution procedures to resolve concerns.

¹³⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/6/contents>

¹³⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/4/contents>

¹³⁸ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2009/7/pdfs/asp_20090007_en.pdf

¹³⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/8/contents/enacted>

- The **Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) Act 2002**¹⁴⁰: Education authorities are required to develop an accessibility strategy covering three-year periods, setting out how authorities will improve access to learning for all pupils with disabilities; how the physical environment will be improved to enhance physical access in education settings for pupils with disabilities; and, how they will provide reasonable support to meet the needs of pre-primary children with ASN in accessing pre-primary education.
- **The Equality Act 2010**¹⁴¹: The Act places duties on schools and EAs not to discriminate against pupils with protected characteristics contained within the legislation. Pupils with disabilities must not be treated less favourably than pupils without disabilities as disability is a protected characteristic.

Definitions: Additional Support Needs and Additional Support

In Scotland the term Additional Support Needs and Additional Support (ASN) is used instead of Special Educational Needs.

Children or young people are defined as having ASN if, *“the child or young person is, or is likely to be, unable without the provision of additional support to benefit from school education provided or to be provided for the child or young person”*¹⁴². Looked After Children and young people (in care of local authority) are automatically considered to have additional support needs, unless it can be shown that they do not require additional support to benefit from education within a school setting.

Additional support is defined within the Act as eligible children of school age or young persons *“receiving school education, which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children or, as the case may be, young persons of the same age in schools (other than special schools)”*. This is not limited to school age children and young people, but also includes pre-school children and also includes a ‘wrap-around’ type approach from other agencies such as health, social services and voluntary agencies, if needed.

Stages of intervention

Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice 2017¹⁴³, is statutory guidance which accompanies the 2016 Act. It sets out the different stages of intervention that may be required for pupils with ASN, how these measures should be implemented and how and when they should be reviewed. These various stages as detailed in the 2016 Code of Practice are explained below.

Stage 1: Parents, teachers, health or social services staff and other agencies identify whether a child or young person needs additional support and what planning for this additional support can be met within the existing school setting in a single agency plan. A named individual from within the school will coordinate the approach taken for the support and planning measures put in place for the young person. An individualised educational programme (IEP) may be required.

Stage 2: If the steps taken in stage 1 have not been effective and the situation has not been resolved effectively, then there is a need for further action through external support in the single agency plan. Advice will be sought from specialists outside the school, but from within educational services (educational psychologists employed by the authority etc.). Support and planning from a multi-agency team from outside the school setting is put in place (visiting teachers, educational psychologists etc.). An IEP is in place.

¹⁴⁰ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2002/12/pdfs/asp_20020012_en.pdf

¹⁴¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

¹⁴² Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004, Chapter 2, section <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/>

¹⁴³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/>

Stage 3: If further action is required a multi-agency plan can be developed. More advice and support are usually sought from outside other agencies (health, social work services, voluntary agencies etc.) in conjunction with school staff and other educational resources (educational psychologist etc.) involved in stage 2. Arrangements will be put in place for monitoring and review and a co-ordinated support plan will be considered as a next step if appropriate agencies agree that the young person would benefit from it.

Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) and Individualised Educational Programmes (IEPs)

All pupils, regardless of whether they have additional support needs, should have a Personal Learning Plan (PLP). They are intended to help children, parents and teachers be clear about the goals of learning and for personal development and to support dialogue between all parties involved in the child's education. Children should have opportunities to discuss their plans with an adult who knows them well and can help set appropriate goals and they should be at the centre of the planning as active participants.

Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs) will be put in place by LAs when a child needs some level of significant support for their ASNs. IEPs describe in detail the young person's ASNs, how these needs should be met, learning outcomes to achieve and what support is required, including support from other agencies if it is applicable. Education authorities should work with appropriate agencies to draw up IEPs when appropriate so that objectives and services working with the young person can be coordinated.

Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSPs)

Education authorities will develop co-ordinated support plans if they are responsible for the education of a pupil who needs support and has significant additional support needs arising from one or more complex factors that adversely impact on their school education; if those needs are likely to last for more than a year; and if the child requires support from at least one agency outside of the educational setting. Co-ordinated support plans can only be implemented once a child reaches pre-school age, although assessments to determine whether a co-ordinated support plan may be necessary for a child can begin before a child reaches the statutory pre-school age if they have grounds to believe a plan may be needed.

In short, all ASN pupils will have an IEP, those with more significant needs will have a CSP (Co-ordinated Support Plan).

Number and rate of pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN) in Scotland

The rate of pupils with ASN in Scotland has steadily risen over the past five years. The increasing prevalence of ASN in Scotland between 2017 and 2021 is demonstrated in the table below¹⁴⁴.

Table 10.2: Numbers and rates of ASN in Scotland for the years 2017-2021 as percentage of total school population.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
ASN	183,491 (26%)	199,065 (28%)	215,897 (30%)	226,838 (32%)	232,753 (33%)

Application and referral processes

Although the Education Authorities will ultimately make the decision as to whether a child or young person has additional needs, there are multiple routes available to apply and be referred for additional support. Education Authorities are responsible for identifying children and young people with additional support needs through teachers and their in-school learning assessments and ongoing monitoring of educational progress of children and

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/collections/school-education-statistics/>

young people. However, there are also provisions for parents, young people and eligible children¹⁴⁵ to make a request to the education authority independently to establish whether they or their child has additional support needs. Other professionals from appropriate agencies who may have some contact with a child or young person (such as a paediatrician, social worker or therapist etc.) may notify the authority through a referral that a child or young person may have additional support needs¹⁴⁶.

When a request is made to the education authority to establish whether a child or young person may need additional support, education authorities should notify the person or persons making the request of their decision to comply with the request within 8 weeks.

If the authority does not comply with the request or rejects it, the request can then be referred to a tribunal for consideration.¹⁴⁷

Who administers applications

Education authorities are required under the Act, for those children and young people who they are responsible for, to make appropriate arrangements for identifying those who may have additional support needs¹⁴⁸. Although, as the Act promotes inter-agency co-operation across all stages of the ASN process, appropriate agencies such as any other local authority, NHS boards and/or Skills Development Scotland, further education colleges and higher education institutions in Scotland have a duty to assist the education authority to fulfil their statutory duties. The only time an agency may refuse help, is if the help asked for is not possible within the agency's remit, is incompatible with their other duties or may prejudice the agency in fulfilling their own functions¹⁴⁹.

Assessing needs

In Scotland, each LA and other appropriate agencies use different approaches to support in assessments. The approaches used typically follow a staged approach, wherein each stage difficulties and problems are identified, and steps are put in place to try and help resolve the difficulties as early as possible and with the least intrusive course of action.¹⁵⁰

Assessment is seen as an ongoing and dynamic process with the child or young person at the centre. As such, the CoP makes clear that it should not be divorced from other aspects of the child's life at school, home or in the community. This approach is illustrated in the My World Triangle below.

¹⁴⁵ Eligible children are defined in paragraph 11 of *Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice* 2017 as a child in school education who has attained the age of 12 but not 16 and who has been assessed as having capacity (sufficient maturity and understanding) to exercise their rights under the Act, and that the education authority (or Tribunal) considers the wellbeing of the child would not be adversely affected by the child exercising their rights.

¹⁴⁶ Paragraph 31 of chapter 5 *Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice*, 2017.

www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/

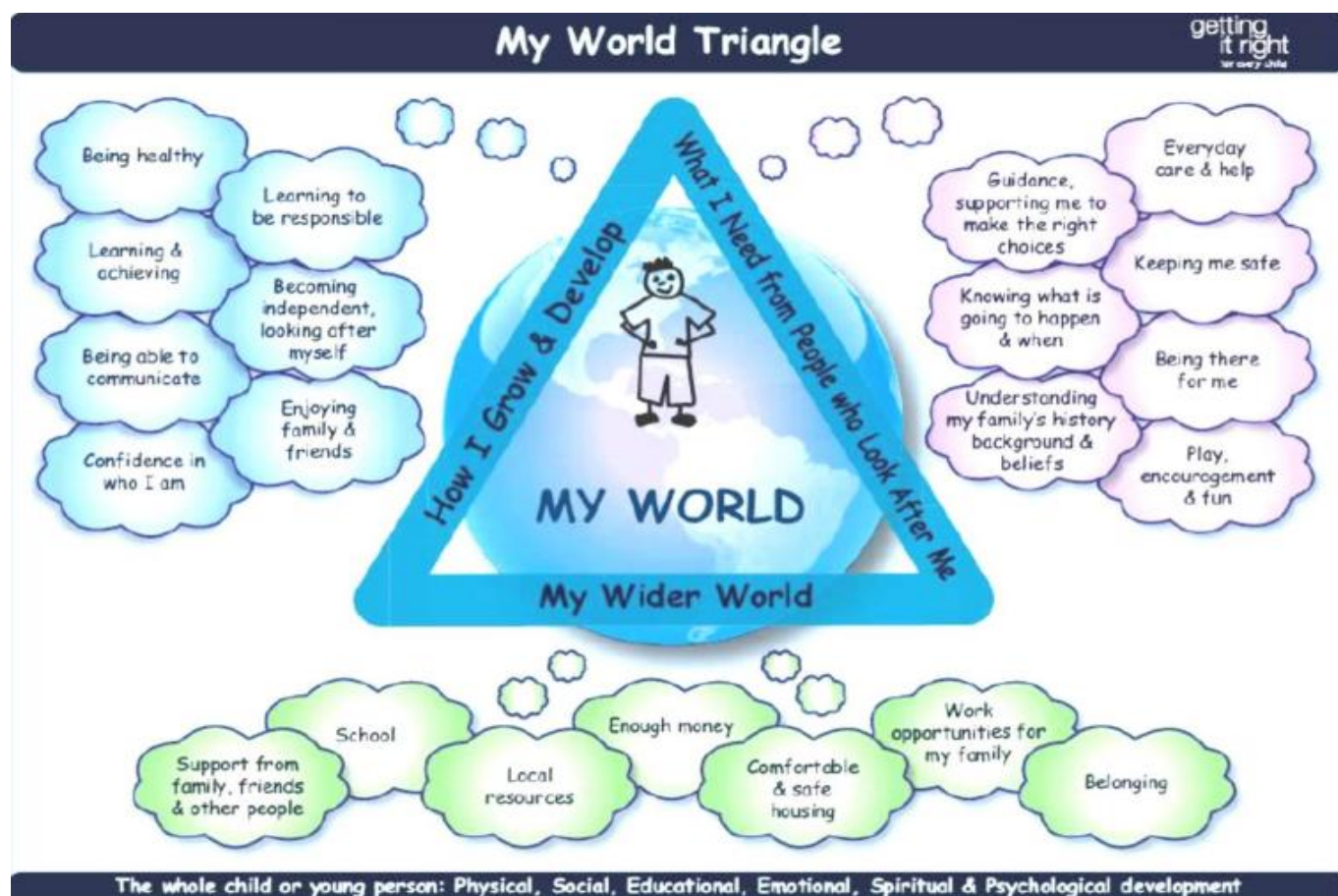
¹⁴⁷ Paragraphs 26 through 32 of chapter 5 in *Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice* 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Paragraph 32 of chapter 5 in *Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice* 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Paragraph 11 of chapter 3 in *Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice* 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Paragraph 30 of Chapter 3 in *Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice* 2017.

Figure 10.4: My World Triangle



Due to the dynamic approach to assessment, the CoP does not define any specific model of assessment or support. Assessment is seen as an ongoing process of gathering, structuring and making sense of information about a child or young person, and their circumstances. It will typically include discussion and cooperation with parents, class teachers, learning support staff, therapists, social workers etc. When an assessment beyond the boundaries of in-class education is requested, then it is up to the respective Local Education Authority (LEA) to decide who the appropriate individual to carry out the assessment should be.

LEAs may be required to work collaboratively and share information with other agencies where it may be needed due to the child or young person's additional support needs. Education authorities should take account of relevant advice and assessments from other appropriate individuals and/or agencies in establishing whether a child or young person has additional support needs or where they may require a co-ordinated support plan. Private assessments commissioned by parents can be presented to the LEA and it must take the report or advice into consideration if asked to do so¹⁵¹.

Financing of ASN

Local authorities receive funding from the Scottish Government and from council tax. The budgets for education within each LA are decided upon by the LA out of their overall allocated budget, in any case, education authorities must ensure that they meet their statutory duties outlined in the relevant legislation. Every LA must take account of the education needs of all children and make appropriate arrangements for individuals to receive additional support where necessary.

In 2018–19, LEAs spent £5.6 billion on education, of which £661 million was spent on additional support for learning¹⁵². Scottish Government data shows that while the budget for ASN has increased by £200

¹⁵¹ Paragraph 36 through 46 of chapter 3 in Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice 2017.

¹⁵² <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/uk-scotland/financing-of-inclusive-education-systems>

million between 2012 and 2021, the average spend per pupil with ASN has dropped from £4,276 in 2021 to £3,224 in 2020¹⁵³.

EAs prioritise their ASN spending in light of local priorities and circumstances, including across their range of provisions. Every year, LAs publish their abstracts of accounts and parents are entitled to a copy. Parents can also see the reports and minutes of meetings detailing the breakdown of the education budget.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended) requires LEAs to make adequate and efficient provision of additional support as is required by each pupil with additional support needs. To fulfil the duty under the Act, the LEA is not required to do anything beyond their powers or anything which would result in unreasonable public expenditure. Unreasonable public expenditure is not defined in the Act. However, cost is not expected to be the primary consideration when deciding about provision.

Wales

It is the role of LEAs to ensure that effective provision is in place for children with SEN and that high quality support is provided including access to educational psychology.

Legislation

The primary legislation relating to education in Wales is the **Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018**¹⁵⁴ came into force in 2021. The Act replaced the terms 'special educational needs' with 'additional learning needs' (ALN). It aims to be simpler and more equitable, by placing the learner at the heart of the process. Significantly, it will replace the system of statementing by creating a statutory individual development plan to replace the existing range of statutory and non-statutory plans for learners. This will ensure equity of rights regardless of the learner's level of need or the education setting they attend.

The implementation of the ALN system is well underway.¹⁵⁵ The ALN system started on 1 September 2021, and 1 January 2022, for children up to and including Year 10 who were newly identified as having ALN after those dates. Children with SEN are moving from the SEN system to the ALN system over 3 school years to make sure there is enough time for nurseries, schools and local authorities to discuss the support needed and to prepare plans.

Children are moving from the SEN system to the ALN system in groups. The first group moving from the SEN system to the ALN system are children who:

- go to a local authority nursery or local authority school or and have SEN with support through early years action, early years action plus, school action or school action plus;
- do not have a SEN statement and are not involved in an SEN statement process (such as waiting for a decision about an SEN assessment or waiting for a decision about an SEN statement).

From September 2022, children with SEN not included in the first group will move to the ALN system later in the implementation period.

Other legislation in Wales that is relevant to the education of children with SEN includes the **Learning and Skills Act 2000**¹⁵⁶ which sets out the need to identify learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability (LDD) in post-16 education. Welsh Ministers are responsible for the assessment of post-16 learners with LDD who have left or are about to leave school. They are also responsible for securing specialist post-16 provision where this is necessary. The Code of Practice which corresponds to the 2018 act is the **Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code for Wales 2021**. It was introduced in 2022 after being established under the 2018 Act. It provides the statutory system in Wales for meeting the additional learning needs of children and young people. It is aimed at ensuring that children and young people's additional learning needs are identified early and addressed quickly to enable them to achieve their full potential.

While the 2021 Code of Practice will ultimately supersede this, until the 2018 Act is fully implemented LAs must continue to have regard to the **Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales (Welsh Government, 2004)**. The aim of the Code of Practice is to remove barriers to participation and learning and providing effective support for children with special educational needs is an essential feature of effective schools. It also highlights that schools should take reasonable steps to ensure that they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage to those who are not disabled, in line with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 amends the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

¹⁵³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-57636716>

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2018/2/contents/enacted>

¹⁵⁵ <https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-transformation-programme-frequently-asked-questions>

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/21/contents>

Number of children with SEN in Wales

Data from the School Census shows that unlike the other jurisdictions the number of children recorded with SEN has been decreasing annually and now stands at 74,661, as shown below¹⁵⁷. However, the number of children in special schools has been increasing and is now 5,466. This reflects an increase in local authority funding for special schools, driven by a rise in the number of children with complex ALN. For example, Cardiff Council is increasing the number of places in special schools by 270 between 2022 and 2025.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council is increasing the number of special schools in the county borough from four to five in order to accommodate increasing numbers of children with complex ALN.¹⁵⁹

Table 10.3: Special Education Statistics Wales

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
All schools	105,303	104,957	105,143	105,577	105,625	103,976	97,551	92,688	74,661
Nursery schools	190	161	148	139	142	120	101	108	98
Primary schools	57,788	57,827	58,628	58,955	58,401	56,762	51,473	47,782	37,127
Middle schools	965	1,250	1,314	2,099	2,739	3,715	4,300	4,302	2,598
Secondary schools	42,022	41,275	40,513	39,659	39,515	38,399	36,530	35,276	29,372
Special schools	4,338	4,444	4,540	4,725	4,828	4,980	5,147	5,220	5,466

Source: Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC)

Definitions

The Welsh Code of Practice defines Special Educational Needs, as:

Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children have a learning difficulty if they:

- have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
- have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority; or,
- are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision was not made for them.

Special educational provision means:

- for children two or over, educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational of provision made generally for children of their age in schools maintained by the LEA, other than special schools, in the area
- for children under two, educational provision of any kind.

Assessment Process

In Wales, duties to decide whether a child or young person has ALN apply where it is brought to the attention or appears to a school or local authority. Once it appears to a school or local authority that a child may have ALN,

¹⁵⁷ Stats Wales. Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Welsh Government, <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census>

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.wales247.co.uk/cardiff-set-to-benefit-from-expansion-of-special-education-needs-provision>

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/new-special-school-ambition-rhondda-21801068>

they have a duty to determine the extent or nature of any ALN, and any Additional Learning Provision (ALP) it calls for.

Evidence is required to identify whether a child or young person has an ALN. Gathered evidence can come from staff within a school or other education setting, other services which have been involved, or from the parents or child or young person themselves. Evidence can include standardised screening, observational data, work quality, developmental checklists, assessment through intervention, assessment through other health bodies, or behaviour and social emotional questionnaires. On the basis of the evidence, a decision can be made about whether a learner is making less than expected progress. At this stage, schools should involve the ALNCo, if not already involved.

The evidence gathering and decision making process is flexible and individualised under the ALN system. What particular evidence or input is required to make a decision will depend on the individual circumstances of each individual case and it is for the school or local authority to determine what input to seek in order to make a decision. Local authorities are required to consider seeking input from an Educational Psychologist, but this may not be necessary in every case.

Putting the child or young person at the heart of this decision process is a fundamental objective of the ALN system. Children and their parents should be actively involved in this process, and schools have a requirement to hold meetings to discuss ALN and ALP decisions.

Schools and local authorities are required to adopt a graduated response in relation to children and young people with ALN, making use of a range of strategies. This means that the initial ALP determined should be at the lowest level to meet the child or young person's identified needs. Schools are obligated to make full use of their available resources before bringing in specialist expertise. In many cases, the initial ALP identified will meet the children or young person's needs. Only for those who continue to make less than expected progress will an increased level of ALP be needed.

Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) describe a learner's ALN and outline what support will be given to help them learn. IDPs are a requirement for all children aged 0-16 with ALN, as well as young people aged 16-25 who attend sixth form or college and have ALN, regardless of whether they have mild or more complex needs.

Because this is a single plan, IDPs should be available to learners with all levels of ALN, not just those with a high level of support need. Any support written into an IDP has to be provided by law. It is normally the maintained school's task to prepare and maintain the IDP for a child with Additional Learning Needs. This task falls to the local authority when:

- The child/young people are not a pupil at a maintained school or enrolled as a student at a further education institute;
- where they are a child looked after by a Welsh local authority;
- where the child is under compulsory school age but not attending a maintained school setting;
- where the young person is attending an independent specialist post-16 institution;
- the child is dual registered;
- where the child may require provision that would not be reasonable for the school to secure; and,
- where the extent or nature of needs a school cannot adequately determine.

An IDP maintained by a school and that maintained by a local authority will have exactly the same statutory standing. Whichever body prepares and maintains the IDP must ensure that the IDP describes the child or young person's ALN and the support that is called for by their ALN, and must then secure that support.

An IDP replaces the SEN statement used under previous legislation. While a statement was only required for learners with complex needs, IDPs are provided to children and people with ALN irrespective of the severity of their needs.

Support and Services

Under the new Code of Practice, Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCos) are responsible for the strategic coordination of ALN resources, such as in deploying and supporting staff and working with colleagues to plan and decide on the appropriate resources required to support staff within the setting. However, there is variability in the range of supports and services that are available across the different LAs in Wales. Examples of services and supports that are provided include, accessibility equipment, sensory services, dyslexia support, language support, behaviour support and inclusion services.

Funding

Funding for statutory age education in schools in Wales is mainly provided by the Welsh Government through the local government Revenue Support Grant (RSG). The Welsh Government provides around 80% of funding to LAs in Wales. Welsh government funding to support SEN is not ring-fenced and is contained within general funding for schools.¹⁶⁰

Once the RSG has been distributed to LAs, the individual authorities are responsible for setting budgets for their schools which are determined by a local funding formula. The School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010 require that 70% of school budgets are set based on pupil numbers. Authorities have discretion to distribute the remaining 30% based on a range of factors so that they can account for individual school circumstances.¹⁶¹

Once funding is distributed, the head teacher and governing body of each school decide how to spend the school's budget, taking into account their school's individual needs and circumstances.

LAs fund SEN provision through:

- the delegated budgets they provide to schools;
- funding retained centrally by the authority.

Delegated school budgets are the amounts of funding that each LA allocates directly to each individual school at the beginning of each financial year. These include a notional SEN budget, used to record the estimated amount within each nursery, primary, middle and secondary school's budget that will be needed for SEN provision. The figure is set to zero for special schools, as it is assumed that all provision for such schools is SEN.

Expenditure related to the notional budget allocated to mainstream schools to support learners with SEN increased by 65% between 2010 and 2020. This would reflect the increased delegation rates to schools for SEN budgets rather than an overall increase in spend.

For the year 2022-2023, total expenditure on SEN provision in schools by local authorities is budgeted to be £494 million. Of this overall budget, 27% of the total budgeted SEN expenditure is delegated to special schools.

Notional allocations within nursery, primary, middle and secondary schools account for a further 43% of the total. The remaining 30% is non-delegated money held centrally by LAs.¹⁶²

Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, The Department of Education's policy is to provide special needs education in mainstream settings as far as possible. The **Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004** maintains that children are to be educated in an inclusive setting unless this would not be in the best interests of the child or the effective provision of education for other children in mainstream education. It should also be noted that as yet, not all parts of this legislation have been implemented.

Legislation

The primary legislation relating to education in Ireland is the **Education Act (1998)**¹⁶³, which legally obliges schools to provide for a diversity of needs, values and traditions. The Education Act (1998) notes provision for the education of persons with disabilities or SEN. A stated objective of the Act is *'to give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability or other special educational needs'*.

Under the Act, schools must use their resources to ensure that the educational needs of learners with disabilities or other SEN are identified and provided for. Schools must make reasonable provision and accommodation for learners with disabilities or other SEN. They must also prepare and update a school plan outlining how the school proposes to achieve equality of access and participation in the school by learners with disabilities or other SEN.

The Act also lists a range of support services that schools can provide SEN pupils with; they are:

- assessment, psychological, guidance and counselling services;
- technical aid and equipment;
- adaptations to buildings to facilitate access;
- early childhood and continuing education;
- Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support; and,

¹⁶⁰ <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s96207/Research%20Brief.pdf>

¹⁶¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2010/824/contents/made>

¹⁶² Budgeted Expenditure on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Provision. 2022/23. Welsh Government. Statistical First Release.

¹⁶³ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/html>

- transport.

Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004)¹⁶⁴, is a statutory framework for the education of people with SEN. Its purpose is to make further provision for the education of people with special education needs in an inclusive environment and to promote inclusive education. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)¹⁶⁵ was established under the Act as an independent, statutory body. Although the Act sets out the statutory rights to assessment, education plans and appeals processes on children with special educational needs the implementation of these rights have not yet been enacted.

The EPSEN Act (2004) promotes inclusive education for learners with SEN and emphasises that wherever possible children with SEN should be educated with those who do not have special educational needs.¹⁶⁶

New legislation was announced in June 2022. **The Education (Provision in Respect of Children with Special Educational Needs) Bill 2022** seeks to ensure adequate provision of special educational needs placements for the coming school year. It gives the Department of Education (Ire) and the NCSE additional powers to establish special classes in existing schools to provide SEN placements, where required.

Other legislation in Ireland that is relevant to the education of children with SEN includes:

- **The Equal Status Act (2000)**¹⁶⁷ and the **Equality Act (2004)**¹⁶⁸: Promote quality and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability and notes the need for service providers to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability. Specifically, the Act states that educational establishments must not discriminate in relation to the admission or terms or conditions of admission of a person as a learner to the establishment;
- **The Education Welfare Act (2000)**¹⁶⁹: While this Act does not specifically refer to special education of children with SEN it notes the duties of the Education Welfare Service (within Tusla¹⁷⁰, the child and family agency) to ensure that each children attends a recognised school or otherwise received a certain minimum of education; and,
- **The Disability Act (2005)**¹⁷¹: One of the stated purposes of this Act is “to enable provision to be made for assessing the health and education needs of people with disabilities”. It also provides a statutory entitlement to an independent assessment of health and education needs, a statement of the proposed services.

Number of children with SEN in Ireland

Data from the Department of Education (Ire) shows that the number of children with SEN has been steadily increasing year on year and now stands at 18,393 as set out below¹⁷².

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/act/30/enacted/en/html>

¹⁶⁵ <https://ncse.ie/about-us>

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/act/30/section/2/enacted/en/html#sec2>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/html>

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/act/24/enacted/en/html>

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/22/enacted/en/html>

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.tusla.ie/>

¹⁷¹ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2005/act/14/enacted/en/html>

¹⁷² Education Indicators for Ireland. Department of Education 2021.

Table 10.4: Special Education Statistics Ireland

INDICATOR	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of NCSE special schools	114	114	114	114	114
Pupils in special schools	7,567	7662	7728	8035	8,018
Teachers in special schools	1,365	1,387	1400	1435	1,462
Pupils in special classes in mainstream primary schools	4,836	5,572	6,229	6822	7,510
Pupils in special classes in Post-primary schools	1,560	1814	2136	2406	2,856
Special education teachers in primary and post-primary schools (mainstream classes) (WTE)	12,501	13,395	13,412	13,530	13,620
Total Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)	12,634	13,862	14,877	15,799	17,713
of which in special schools	2,371	2,460	2,521	2,560	2,732
TOTAL SEN pupils	13, 963	15, 048	16, 093	17, 263	18, 393

Source: Department of Education (Ire): Education Indicators for Ireland

As set out above, almost half (43.6%) of SEN pupils are taught in special schools in Ireland, which is a decrease from 54% in 2016. It is also interesting to note that the Programme for Government¹⁷³ also notes an aim to reduce class sizes in all mainstream primary schools to 23:1.

Definitions

Under the EPSEN Act (2004) SEN is defined as:

... a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.

The Act also notes that SEN may arise in four different areas of disability: Physical, Sensory, Mental Health or Learning Disability. However, the NCSE emphasises that a child's special educational need should not define the whole child, each child has their own strengths, personality and experiences.¹⁷⁴

Model for Allocating of Teaching Resources

A new model for allocating Special Education Teaching Resources to mainstream primary and post primary schools was introduced in September 2017 with the aim of providing a fairer way to allocate resources to support children with Special Educational Needs.

Under the new model, the Department provides the resources directly to the schools, and enables the schools to allocate these resources flexibly to students according to their priority learning needs, without the requirement for a diagnosis, a professional report or disability labelling. Thus, it is expected that all schools will be more inclusive, and that they will have the capacity to provide appropriate education to all students, including those with special educational needs.¹⁷⁵ Under the model an additional 900 teaching posts were created throughout the school system.

¹⁷³ Programme for Government: Our Shared Future. Department of the Taoiseach, June 2020.

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

¹⁷⁵ <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ChildrenWithSpecialEdNeeds1.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ https://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/Review_Pilot_New_Model_SEN_18.01.17.pdf

Assessment Process

Assessments for SEN are made by an Educational Psychologist, based on a referral from schools. Assessments are conducted by an Educational Psychologist from the National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) or, one of their approved suppliers¹⁷⁶. Parents can also pay for a private assessment, but it will only be accepted by the school or the NEPS if the assessment is completed by one of their approved psychologists.

The NCSE employs a network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), who support and advise the parents of children with special educational needs and schools within designated geographical areas. A key role of the SENO is to identify the level of resources that a school may be allocated to support a particular child with special educational needs and what kinds of supports the child needs to benefit from school. SENOs must take into account professional reports and recommendations in relation to that child. They must also operate within the policies set down by the Department of Education (Ire). SENOs identify possible placements for children with special educational needs, liaise with the HSE and other services, engage in discussions with schools and assist in planning the transition of children between schools and onwards from schools to further/higher education and other services¹⁷⁷.

Supports and Services

Schools may allocate additional teaching support to pupils where they have identified learning needs using school based assessment. Schools can also draw on professional reports where available. The NEPS provides a continuum of support based on supporting schools to develop and implement classroom and school level strategies and additional support for pupils who require individualised support.

A pupil receiving mostly group support or occasional individual support in addition to classroom support would be considered to be at stage 2 in terms of the Staged Approach to Assessment Identification and Programme Planning. A pupil receiving more intensive teaching support including more focused small group work or individual teaching is considered to be at stage 3 in terms of the "Staged Approach to Assessment Identification and Programme Planning."¹⁷⁸ There are a range of support services available to children with SEN, including: Literacy support, numeracy support, speech and language therapy and behaviour.

Funding

Although many schools in Ireland are owned by various churches, the running costs for schools are paid for by the state (Department of Education). The level of funding is primarily based on the number of pupils (a capitation grant). A total of €7.1 billion was spent on disability and special education related supports in 2020. Over the period 2011 to 2020, total expenditure on disability and special education related supports has increased by €2.4 billion or 51 per cent.¹⁷⁹

Most Special Schools are owned by the Department of Education or, the Health Service Executive¹⁸⁰. Special schools and mainstream primary and post-primary schools are generally funded in the same manner. Their capital and current costs are predominantly funded by the state.

The Minister for Education is responsible for certain functions in respect of funding, including the funding of support services for students with disabilities. Schools must use their available resources to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with disabilities, are identified and provided for.

Boards of Management are required to use the State resources provided to the school to make reasonable provisions and accommodation for students with disabilities or other special education needs, including, where necessary, alteration of buildings and the provision of appropriate equipment¹⁸¹.

Comparison table

A review of legislation and processes across the four jurisdictions highlighted a range in definitions and processes, roles and responsibilities of the different agencies. Like Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and ROI have recently developed new legislation and are in the process of implementing all aspects of it. The table below provides a comparative overview of key points.

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5ef45c-neps/>

¹⁷⁷ <https://ncse.ie/special-educational-needs-organiser-seno>

¹⁷⁸ DES Special Education Circular 02/05

¹⁷⁹ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2021. Spending Review 2020, Disability and Special Education Expenditure: Lifecycle of Supports

¹⁸⁰ www.citizensinformation.ie

¹⁸¹ https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/the_irish_education_system/special_education.html

Table 10.5: Summary Comparison

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales	Republic of Ireland
Legislation relevant to special educational needs	Primary Legislation 1. The Education (NI) Order 1996 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (NI) 2016) 2. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDI) 3. Autism Act (NI) 2011 4. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 5. Autism (Amendment) Act 2022 Subordinate Legislation 1. The Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005 2. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal Regulations (NI) 2005	England is the Children and Families Act (2014) The Equality Act 2010	The Standard in Scotland's Schools etc Act (2000) The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 The Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) Act 2002 The Equality Act 2010	The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code for Wales 2021 The Learning and Skills Act 2000 The Education (Special Education Needs) (Wales) Regulations 2002	The Education Act (1998) The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) The Education (Provision in Respect of Children with Special Educational Needs) Bill 2022 The Equal Status Act (2000) and the Equality Act (2004) The Education Welfare Act (2000) The Disability Act (2005)
Definitions of need	Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Additional Support Needs (ASN)	Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Assessments	EANI Educational Psychologists	LA Educational Psychologists	LA Educational Psychologists	LA Educational Psychologists	LA and approved private Educational Psychologists
Finance	EA funded	Additional delegated budget	LA budget	LA budget	Partially delegated budget
Right to appeal/ tribunal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not yet

11 SEN Finance

Introduction

The following paragraphs set out an overview of the financial information associated with SEN processes and services in Northern Ireland.

Education Budget and SEN Expenditure

As set out below, in 2020/21 the overall budget to deliver education in Northern Ireland was £2,361m. This includes £37m to deliver Youth Services and an additional £149m of in year funding which was provided, to support the COVID-19 recovery programme and included a £33m block grant to address SEN pressures.¹⁸² As noted in the EA Annual Report, 82% of the EA budget is spent directly supporting schools.

SEND Transformation programme

In addition to the overall Education and SEN expenditure EA were also allocated £6.1m to deliver their SEN Transformation Programme in 2022/23. The total estimated costs for the Transformation Programme (as set out in the Outline Business Case) is £11.2m over three years.

Like all government departments, DE operates on a one year budget cycle, therefore, only funding for the first financial year (2022/23) funding has been allocated. Costings for the subsequent two financial years will be included in EA's budget requests to DE. The breakdown of the Transformation Programme's costs is set out below.

Table 11.1: Breakdown of costs associated with the EA SEN 3 year Transformation Programme

Project/Workstream	Notified Costs for 2022/23 (£k)	OBC Costings for 2023/24 (£k)	OBC Costings for 2024/25 (£k)	Total (£k)
SEND SDP Programme Management Office (PMO)	641	1,259	596	2,495
Statutory Assessment Improvement Project (SAIP)	3,827	0	0	3,827
Integrated Multi-Disciplinary Model of Pupil Support	377	762	324	1,463
Review of the Educational Psychology Service	295	438	186	1,077
Review of Early Years SEN Supports	209	438	187	835
Review of the Employment Model for SEND Classroom Assistants	181	328	76	585
SEND Placement Project	567	287	0	853
SE Strategic Area Plan Pilot	0	247	0	0
Total	6,097	3,760	1,370	11,226

Source: EA Transformation Team

Data provided by DE shows that the cost of delivering SEN services has increased by over £163m (63%) since 2017/18, as set out in the table below. Furthermore, projected final expenditure on SEN for 2022/23 is £490m, which would be a 93% increase since 2017/18. All cost categories have increased annually with the largest monetary cost being in support of children with a statement attending mainstream schools, which has increased by £88m over five years (43%) and now accounts for the largest proportion of SEN expenditure (43%). The largest proportional increase is school transport, which has increased by 135% (£23m) since 2017/18 and is project to increase by a further 22% (to £49m) in 2022/23. From 2017/18 to 2021/22 Special School expenditure increased by £37M (35%) and now accounts for 35% of all SEN expenditure. SEN funding to Voluntary Grammar Schools

¹⁸² EANI Annual Report and Accounts (2020 – 2021).

(VGS) and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools also increased by 44% and now accounts for around 6% of all SEN expenditure.

Table 11.2: EA Expenditure on all grant-aided schools and SEN 2017-2022

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
EA SEN expenditure (since 2017-18 the EA is the funding authority for all grant-aided schools)	254	285	311	354¹⁸³	417¹⁸⁴
Broken down as follows:					
Special school expenditure	107	112	122	134	144
SEN funding to Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools	18	20	21	23	26
Support for children with a statement attending mainstream schools	91	101	113	136	179
Pupil Support Services	21	24	24	26	28
Transport	17	28	31	35	40

Source: DE Finance

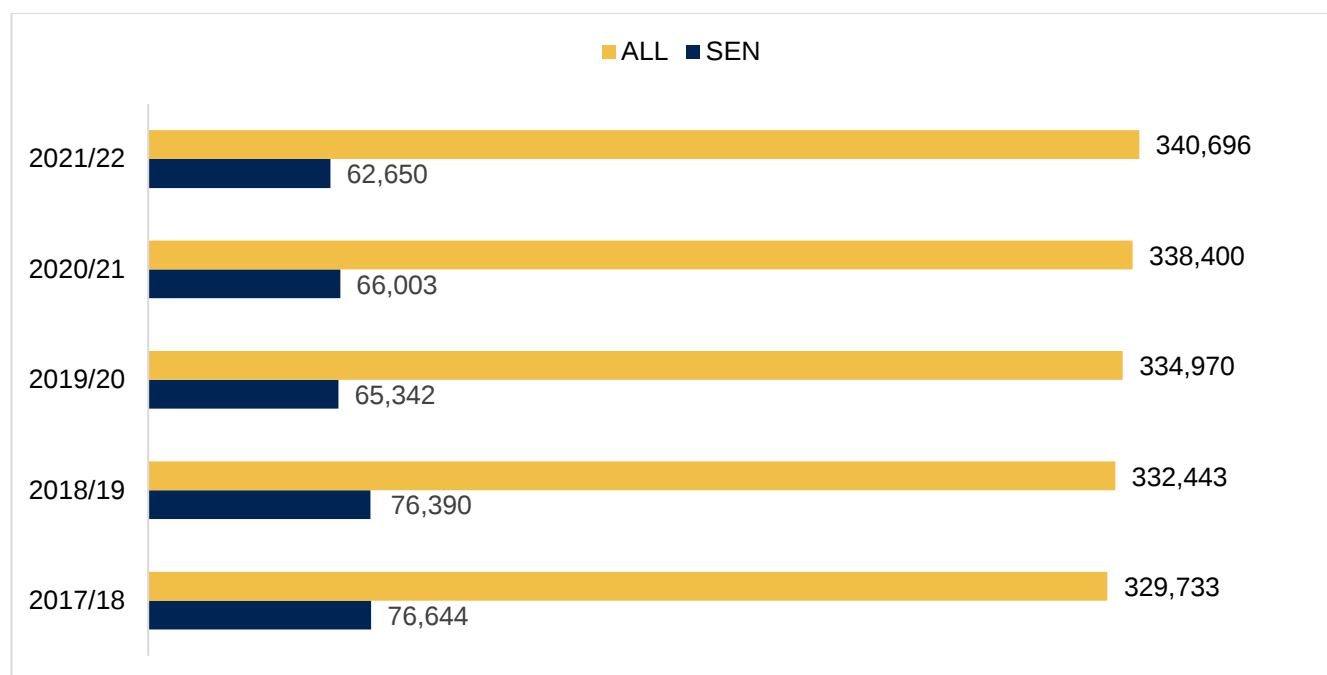
The DE data also shows that spending on SEN in both mainstream and special schools has increased by 64% since 2017/18 and by 2021/22 SEN expenditure was over £417m, as set out below

Spending per Pupil

As noted previously in this report, the total number of pupils in NI schools has increased by almost 11,000 (3%). By 2021 there were 340,696 (primary, post primary and special school pupils) pupils enrolled in NI schools, of which 62,650 pupils were on the SEN register (18% of all pupils). As set out in the following chart, whilst the proportion of pupils on the SEN register reduced when pupils with medical conditions only were moved to a medical register in 2019, the number of pupils at Stage 3 of the register (statemented) has increased by almost 24% between 2017/18 and 2021/22 (from 17,709 to 21,956).

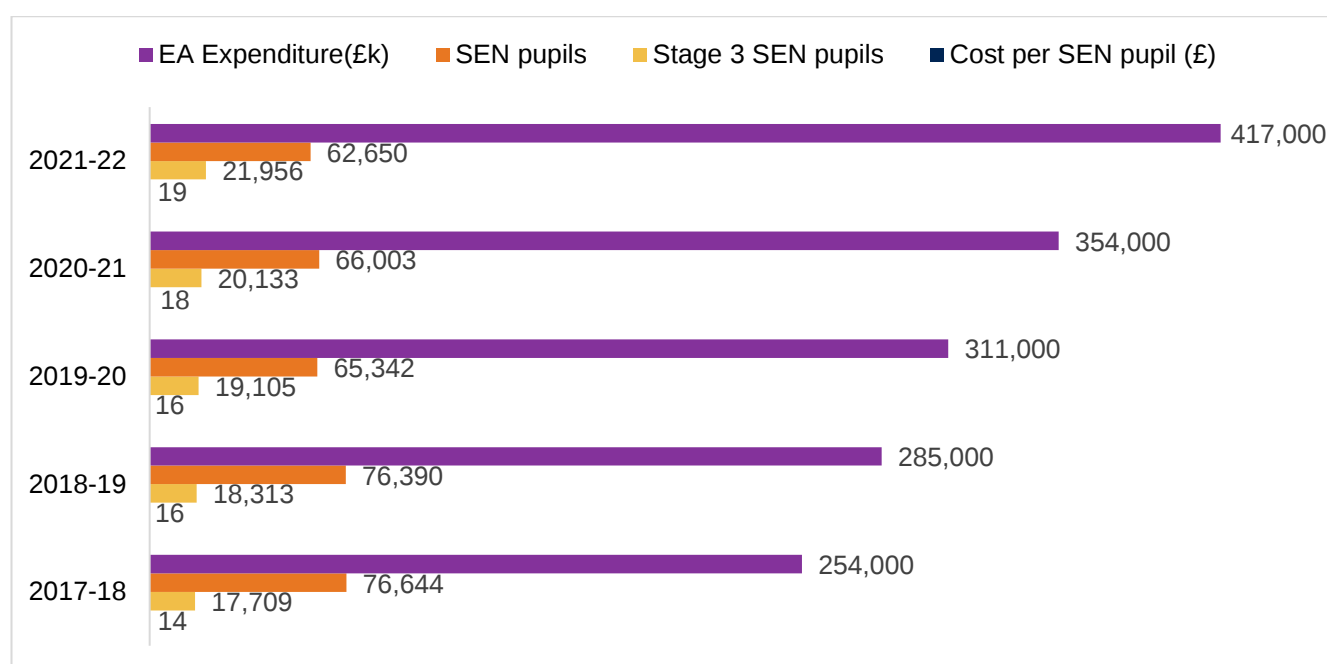
¹⁸³ 2020-21 includes £7.4m funding allocated to schools for the implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016 but excludes COVID-19 funding allocated for SEN in 2020-21.

¹⁸⁴ 2021-22 spend includes c£29.9m funding allocated to schools for the implementation of the SEND Act NI 2016 but excludes COVID-19 funding allocated for SEN in 2021-22.

Figure 11.2: SEN Pupils and All Pupils (primary, post primary & special schools)

Source: School Census

Given the significant increase in SEN expenditure over the last five years, it was necessary to examine the costs in more detail. Whilst the total number of statemented pupils has been increasing annually, the expenditure per SEN pupil, also more than doubled from 2017/19 to 2021/22.

Figure 11.3: Expenditure per SEN pupil

Source: DE Finance

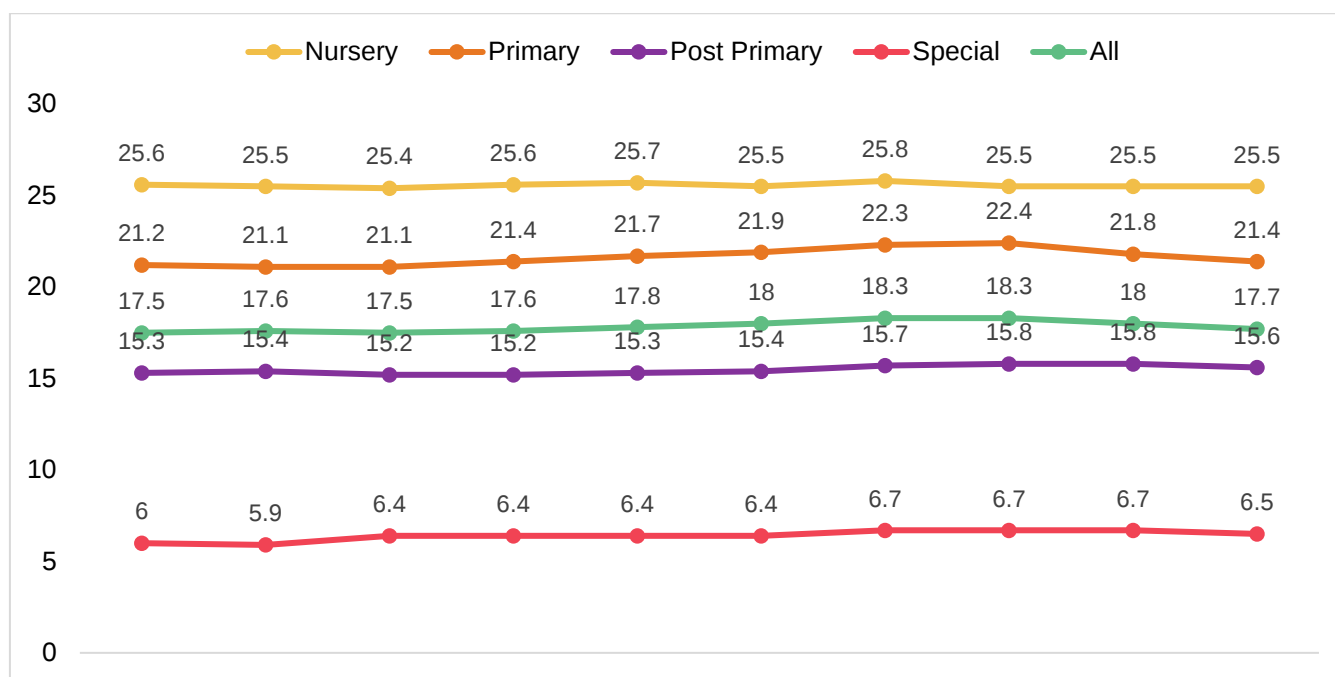
There are a number of potential reasons why cost per pupil has increased significantly, in addition to expected inflationary costs. For example, the number of SEN pupils at stage 3 (i.e. with a Statement) has increased by over 4,200 over the last five years. At stage 1 and 2 of the SEN register schools are expected to provide additional support for children, whereas at stage 3, pupils are entitled to access a range of external supports such as EA Pupil Support Services or, Classroom Assistants, as per their statement of educational need. Therefore, a key driver for the increase in SEN costs is likely to be the increase in the number of pupils at Stage 3. Whilst Stage 3 pupils are not the only factors that contribute to EA costs associated with SEN, an analysis of overall costs by Stage 3 pupils shows that the cost per pupil also increased from just over £14,400 in 2017/18 to almost £19,000 in

2021/22, an increase of almost one third. Therefore, an increase in all pupils on the SEN register, an increase in the number of pupils with a Statement and increased costs per pupil have all contributed to significant overall costs.

Staffing Costs

The EA Annual Report shows that staff costs make up around 58% of the overall EA expenditure, therefore, staffing costs relating to SEN have also been considered in more detail. The DE Teacher Workforce Statistics show that there were 19,363.4 FTE teachers in NI schools (an increase of 446.8 since 2020/21), with an overall pupil:teacher ratio of 17.7^[2]. As expected, the lowest pupil:teacher ratio is in special schools with 6.5 pupils per teacher, compared to an overall ratio of 17.7 pupils per teacher. The pupil: teacher ratio has stayed relatively consistent since 2012, as shown below.

Figure 11.4: Pupil Teacher Ratio from 2012/13 to 2021/22

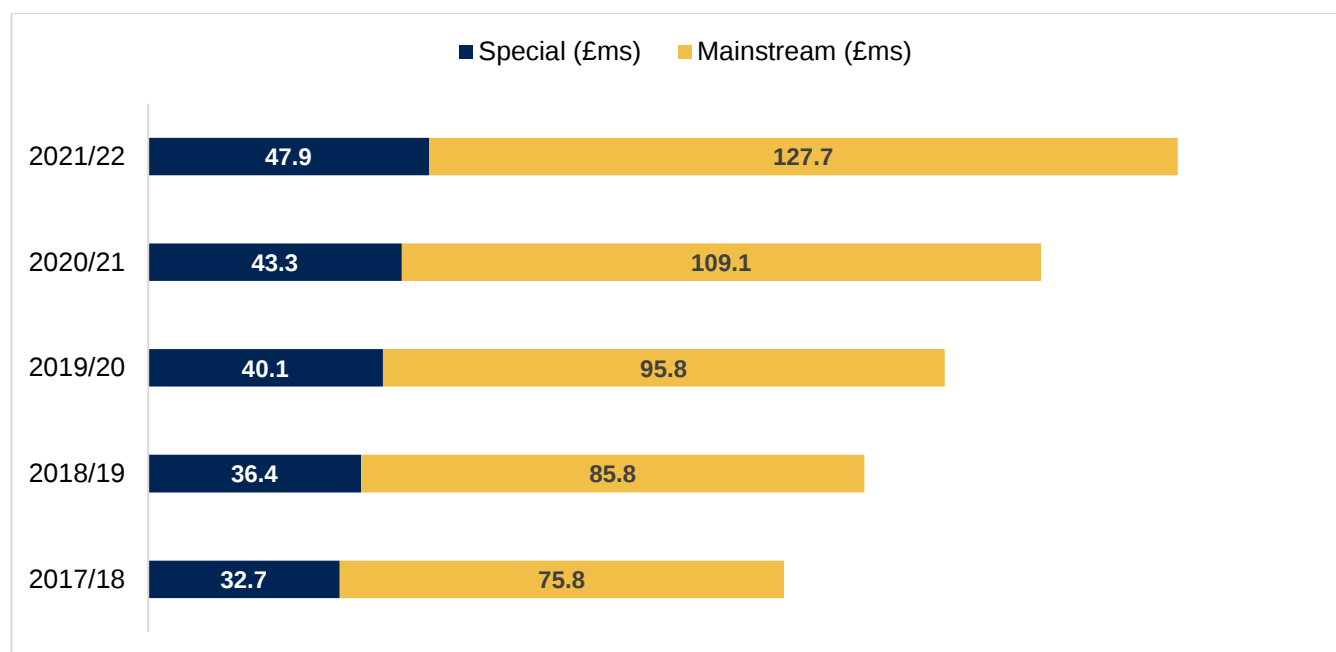


Source: DE Teacher Workforce Statistics.

Classroom Assistants (CAs)

Expenditure on CAs, in mainstream and special schools has been increasing over the last five years and now accounts for 51% of all SEN expenditure. The total expenditure on CAs is now over £175m, an increase of over 60% (£67.2m) since 2017/18. The biggest increase has been in mainstream schools where the expenditure on CAs has increased by 68% (£51.9m) in the same period.

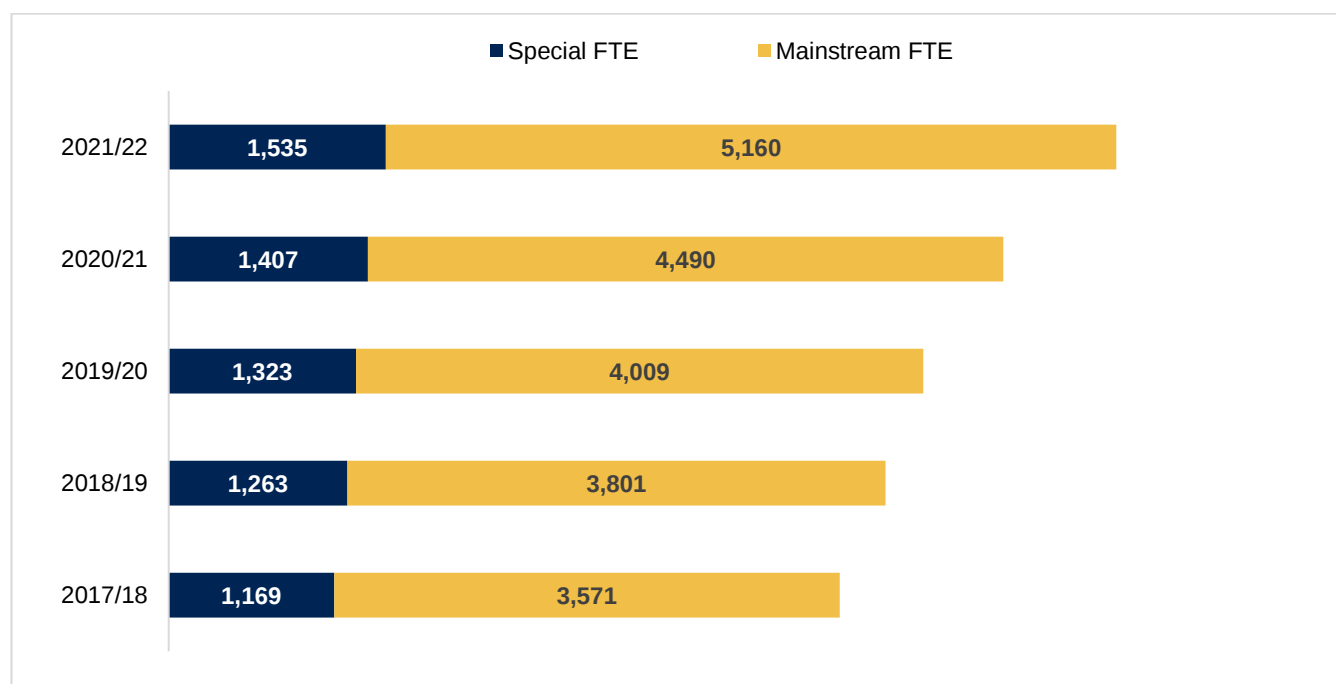
^[2] <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/teacher-workforce-statistics-202122>

Figure 11.5: Expenditure on Classroom Assistants Mainstream and Special Schools

Source: EA Finance

The total cost per CA has increased by an average of 4% per year since 2017/18, with the average cost to employ a Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) CA being £24,748 in 2021/22. Annual salary increases are to be expected and are broadly consistent with rises associated with national minimum and living wage rates¹⁸⁵.

As would be expected given the level of expenditure, the total number of CAs has also increased in both mainstream and special schools. Over the past five years, the total number of (FTE) CAs has increased by 1,955, 1,589 of which are in mainstream schools. This represents an increase of 45% in FTE CAs in mainstream schools, as set out below.

Figure 11.6: FTE Classroom Assistants

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>

Source: EA Finance

Whilst the number of CAs has been increasing annually since 2017 and there are now fewer SEN pupils per FTE CA, at 9.4 compared in 2021/22 compared to 16.2 in 2017/18. The number of Stage 3 pupils per CA has also decreased from 3.7 pupils per CA to 3.3 pupils per CA over the same period.

Table 11.3: Number of SEN pupils per FTE Classroom Assistant

	Total CAs FTE	Total SEN pupils	No. of SEN Pupils per CA	Stage 3 pupil per CA
2021/22	6,695	62,650	9.4	3.3
2020/21	5,894	66,003	11.2	3.5
2019/20	5,333	65,342	12.3	3.6
2018/19	5,064	76,390	15.1	3.6
2017/18	4,739	76,644	16.2	3.7

Source: EA Finance

Educational Psychology Service

As noted below the number of staff within the EA Educational Psychology Service is 10.75 FTE less than in 2017. In 2021/22 there were 27.26 FTE Educational Psychologists fewer than in 2017/18, although there are now four more Psychology Assistants and 12 additional Assistant Educational Psychologists. The total cost of the Educational Psychology Service was almost £20,000 less than in 2017/18, although the cost per FTE member of staff was just over 8.5% (£6,200) more than in 2017.

Table 11.4: FTE cost of the Educational Psychology Service.

	Total Expenditure £'s (m)	Total FTE	Cost per FTE
2021/22	9.76	123.25	79,189
2020/21	9.72	122.50	79,280
2019/20	9.85	129.50	76,053
2018/19	9.44	142.50	66,259
2017/18	9.78	134.00	72,992

Source: EA Finance

In addition to a reduction in staffing numbers, the Psychology Service is also experiencing increased levels of demand as the number of Stage 3 (statemented) SEN pupils per member of staff has increased annually since 2017/18. In 2017/18 there were on average 132.2 Stage 3 pupils per member of staff, in 2021/22 there are on average 178 pupils per member of staff, 46 more pupils, as set out below.

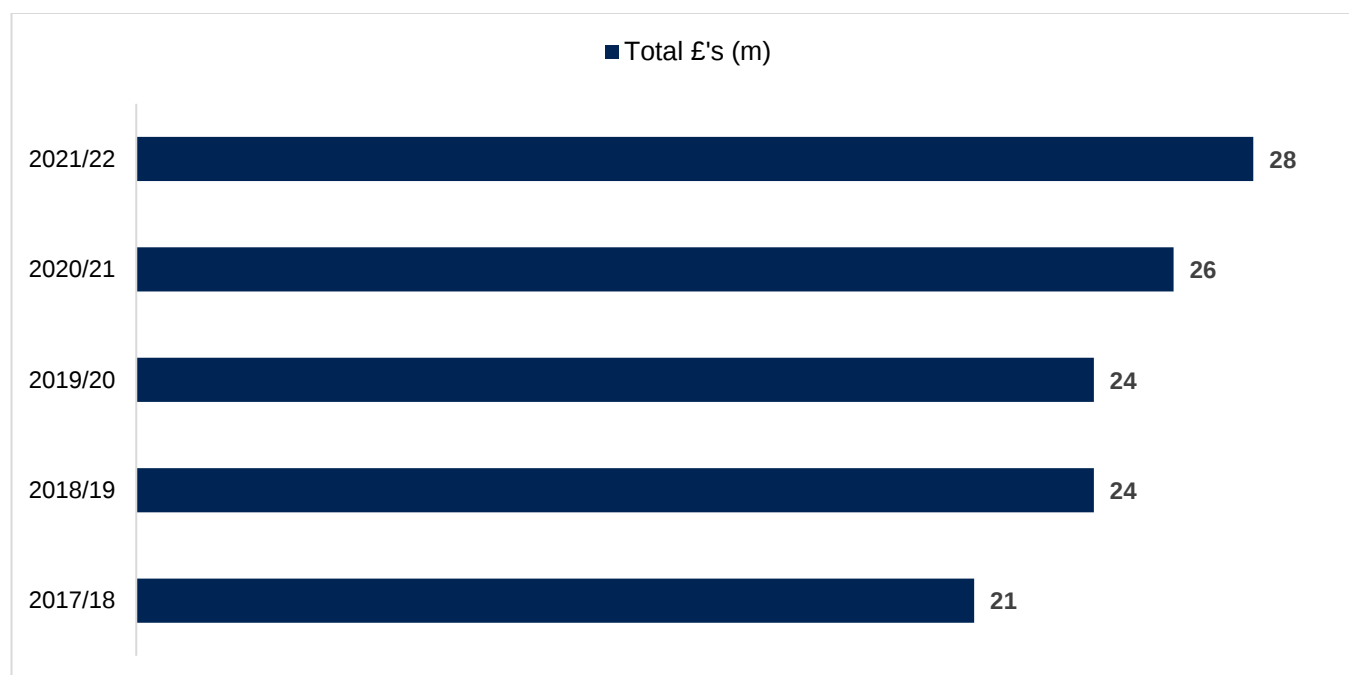
Table 11.5: FTE Psychology Service Staff per SEN Pupil

	No. of SEN Pupils	Psychology Service FTE staff	SEN Pupil per FTE staff
2021/22	21,956	123.25	178.1
2020/21	20,331	122.5	166.0
2019/20	19,105	129.5	147.5
2018/19	18,313	142.5	128.5
2017/18	17,709	134	132.2

Source: EA Finance

Pupil Support Services

Expenditure on pupil support services has also increased over the last five years. In 2021/22, expenditure on SEN pupil support services was just over £7M more than in 2017/18, an increase of 34%.

Figure 11.7: Expenditure on pupil support services

Source: EA Finance

Transport Costs

Another aspect of EA expenditure is home to school transport. In 2020/21 the total EA expenditure on transport was £91.4m, of this, £35.3m are costs associated with SEN pupils. As set out previous tables, overall SEN transports cost increased from £17m in 2017/18 to £40m in 2021/22 (135% increase).

Anecdotal evidence from EA staff has highlighted the increasing demand on the EA Transport service, in particular the use of taxis to transport SEN children to school on an individual basis. It was noted that this is often inefficient and that contracts with taxi companies are increasingly difficult to manage.

Summary

Costs associated with SEN have been increasing steadily since 2017/18 and the total expenditure on SEN services and processes in 2021/22 was almost £163m (64%) more than in 2017/18, whereas the number of SEN pupils has only increased by 3% during the same period.

A major element of the increased expenditure relates to the increase in the number of CAs (particularly in mainstream schools) which now accounts for more than half of SEN expenditure. CA expenditure is now 62% greater than in 2017/18. The increase in expenditure on CAs appears to be disproportionate to other aspects of the SEN services such as the Pupil Support Services and the Educational Psychology Service.

There are now more CAs per SEN pupil than there was 5 years ago, whereas the teacher: pupil ratio has barely changed. Furthermore, expenditure on Pupil Support Services has only increased by a third (33%) over the last five years, compared to almost two-thirds (62%) for CAs. Anecdotal feedback provided by school staff, parents and other stakeholders indicates that CAs are likely to be provided following an assessment by an Educational Psychology due to a lack of other options to provide additional support for SEN pupils.

Whilst expenditure on SEN in Northern Ireland has increased significantly over the last five years, other studies have shown that funding on a per pupil basis (all pupils) is still lower than in other jurisdictions. As noted in section three of this report, the Institute for Fiscal Studies¹⁸⁶ reported that core school spending per pupil, was the lowest of all four nations within the UK, at £6,400 per pupil. This paper also estimates that in real terms spending per pupil in Northern Ireland is round 3% lower than in 2011/12.

¹⁸⁶ ¹⁸⁶ <https://ifs.org.uk/news/school-spending-pupil-highest-scotland-lowest-northern-ireland>

The current processes in Northern Ireland which provide data on the number of pupils that attain academic qualifications is not structured in such a way that allows an analysis of the progress that pupils make. Key stakeholders consistently note that the current process of assessing schools and individual pupil performance on GCSE achievements is not relevant to many pupils with SEN and does not reflect the achievements or progress of many pupils. Given that there is no other consistent, regional approach to assess the outcomes of children with SEN it is not possible to determine in any robust manner if the increase in expenditure is effective or not and therefore if it provides value for money.

There are, however, a number of indicators that suggest that the system is not efficient and therefore cannot offer value for money. For example, feedback from those across the education sector, parents and the voluntary and community sector suggested that the current systems and process are very inefficient with multiple instances of unnecessary duplication in the administration processes. School staff have noted having to provide the same data to different parts of the EA or provide data that is held by EA to other stakeholders in multi-disciplinary teams. The burdensome administration process of SEN has been recognised for some time and are currently under-review by DE. Teachers also noted the system of providing 1-1 support to children via Classroom Assistants or some elements of the Pupil Support Services as inefficient and not good practice.

Given the significant increase in costs associated with the provision of SEN education and continued rise in the proportion of pupils on the SEN register, it is unlikely that the currently level of funding is sustainable. Improvements and efficiencies should be considered across all parts of the SEN system. It is noted that there are a number of ongoing programmes and projects across the education system that include the review of SEN administration and the independent review of education as well as the EA's SEN Transformation Programme, the outcomes of which should also be taken into consideration.

12 The SEND EA Transformation Programme

Introduction

In line with the terms of reference for this review, this section provides an overview of the EA Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategic Development Programme (SEND SDP), which is now called the SEND Transformation Programme. Version four of the Outline Business Case (date June 2022) was assessed by the SEN Review team in August 2022. The final business case was approved in August 2022. Particularly, it considers the need for each of the actions set out in the Transformation Programme, based on the evidence collected as part of this review and provides an assessment of the proposed activities and associated timescales.

Background to the SDP

The Transformation Programme was developed in reaction to a number of reports which highlight significant deficiencies in the delivery and effectiveness of SEND supports across the education system. It was intended that the Programme would address the 150 recommendations set out in these reports and improve SEND services and supports.

The Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Programme notes that its vision is:

“All children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities and their families are receiving the tailored and effective supports that they need to secure the best educational outcomes, delivered by a child-focused, responsive, co-ordinated, transparent, efficient and sustainable system.”

The OBC notes that the desired outcomes from the programme are:

- All schools & preschool settings can access the necessary services and resources and provide the right SEND supports at the earliest possible point for all children who need them;
- Statutory assessment is leading to the right additional SEND supports being delivered at the right time in the right setting;
- Parents/carers & children and young people understand, engage fully with and are getting the right support from the SEND system at the right time; and,
- SEND stakeholders have a shared sense of ownership and confidence in the system.

The Transformation Programme's OBC sets out the preferred option, with 21 individual programmes of work or projects. A preferred option within the OBC (5b) further narrows this down to 13 total projects, 6 being DE led and 7 being EA led. Each project has its own anticipated timescales for completion and resource implications and (at the time of writing) each project is at various stages of development and implementation. The OBC notes the intention for the Transformation Programme to be completely operationalised by December 2022. The following table provides an overview of the costs and timings associated with the implementation of the EA lead projects under the Programme.

Table 12.1: EA Transformation Programme Projects anticipated costs.

Project/Workstream	Notified Costs for 2022/23 (£k)	OBC Costings for 2023/24 (£k)	OBC Costings for 2024/25 (£k)	Total
SEND SDP Programme Management Office (PMO)	641	1,259	596	2,495
Statutory Assessment Improvement Project (SAIP)	3,827	0	0	3,827
Integrated Multi-Disciplinary Model of Pupil Support	377	762	324	1,463
Review of the Educational Psychology Service	295	438	186	1,077
Review of Early Years SEN Supports	209	438	187	835
Review of the Employment Model for SEND Classroom Assistants	181	328	76	585
SEND Placement Project	567	287	0	853
SE Strategic Area Plan Pilot	0	247	0	0
Total	6,097	3,760	1,370	11,226

Source: EA

The following paragraphs provide an overview the need for each of the projects and perceptions on their proposed approach.

The Transformation Programme Projects

Statutory Assessment Improvement Project (SAIP)

Under the SEN Code of Practice the EA is required to complete a Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs once a referral has been received and an initial assessment of need has been completed. The PAC (and other reports) have highlighted that frequently this statutory timescale was not being met, the PAC report ¹⁸⁷noted: *“There have been unacceptable delays in the SEN Statutory Assessment process”*.

This project was initiated in early 2020 to address the recommendations of an EA review of practice relating to the statutory assessment process. The OBC notes that significant progress was made by the end of the 2020/21 academic year by re-deploying existing EA resources. However, it is necessary to develop and implement a service model that would be capable of meeting all requirements of the SEND Act (NI) 2016, which in addition to new procedural and service quality duties, will reduce the timeframe for the statutory assessment and statement process from 26 to 22 weeks. The EA initiated the SARS project, with the aim of implementing an effective and sustainable service model to address the SEND Act requirements. The EA noted that a standalone business case would then have to be developed during 2022/23 to allow transition of this new service model into ‘business as usual’ in 2023/24. Maintaining the revised SARS staffing structure will result in an increased financial pressure from 1 April 2023 of approximately £6m p.a. and this will require recurring funding from DE in addition to the £11.2m requested in the Transformation Programme business case.

The EA have been experiencing a substantial increase in requests for statutory assessment for a number of years (for example, 52% higher in 2021/22 than 2020/21), in addition to this, the SAIP and SARS teams had cleared a backlog of over 1,000 cases. Feedback from the EA highlighted that this stretched staff beyond capacity.

¹⁸⁷ Public Accounts Committee: Report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs. NI Assembly. 2021.

Feedback from staff within the Educational Psychology Service also highlighted that in order to comply with the 26 weeks requirement their workload during this time was primarily focused on assessments, with little capacity for ongoing support and advice to schools and pupils. In order to urgently address this additional pressure, the EA Transformation Programme Board agreed that the EA should initiate an interim recruitment exercise 'at risk' until the programme budget was secured. The SARS performance for compliance against the 26 weeks timeframe improved during this time but evidence in September 2022 would suggest that this performance was not maintained.

Many of those who participated in the interviews as part of this review expressed concern about the EAs ability to continue to meet the statutory 26 week timeframe and doubt regarding their ability to meet a 22 week timeframe. The OBC notes that additional staff within the EA SARS are required to accommodate changes when the SEND Act commences in the 2022/23 academic year although full implementation is currently on hold pending the passing of supporting regulations through the NI Assembly. The total projected 2022/23 cost of bringing the SAIP to a conclusion is £3.8m. At that point SEND Act compliance would be assured in terms of increased case workload, reduced statutory timeframe and advice & information requirements. A business case to secure the necessary long-term increase in SARS recurrent budget to maintain the revised staffing structure is to be developed by EA and submitted to DE during 2022/23. On the assumption that this recurring mainstream funding will be provided, the EA note that no further project is required beyond 2023/24.

The EPS and SARS have experienced unprecedented levels of demand for an assessment. Given the statutory requirement to complete these with 26 weeks (from assessment to the completion of a statement), there is a need to ensure that this can be done until alternative services and supports can be put in place to reduce the level of demand. However, in addition to additional staff, the EA should also ensure that the current administration processes are as efficient as possible. As noted in the Landscape Review there is scope for the EA to deliver its services more effectively and efficiently. EA staff also noted that since the introduction of the Statutory Assessment Improvement Project (2020), there have been significant amendments to decision making procedure, process flows, management and staffing structures. This allowed the service to clear a backlog of over 1,000 cases which had been opened for longer than 26 weeks, and saw the NIAO reported 85% of statements taking longer than 26 weeks drop to 9%. While there have been strides made by EA to improve this service, such as through staffing structures, further improvements can be made. Therefore, in addition to increasing capacity within the service the EA should also consider issues such as automation and data sharing as well as further improvement to staffing structures to ensure that the service is delivered as efficiently as possible, and the current level of service is sustainable.

Review of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) Model,

The OBC notes a requirement to review the form and function of the EPS, accessibility of assessment, alternative referral mechanisms for wider support services and the balance of EPS role in terms of assessment versus therapeutic provision & support. Leading to a co-designed and piloted future model and supporting business case (for implementation beyond the Transformation Programme). Total projected costs are £1.1m across the 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. This would cover 6 additional FTE staff (the project team) who would need to be recruited (or seconded & backfilled) for a 24 month period. This equates to an average cost to employ of around £60,000 per member of staff per year.

Given the urgency of this study and its significance for the other projects which focus on EA's SEND pupil support services, this project was initiated in late 2021 through a combination of re-deploying existing EPS staff and funding secured by DE within 2021/22 monitoring rounds (to cover non-staffing costs).

An EA Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and a Senior Educational Psychologists (SEP) were released to work full-time on the study from December 2021, equating to a 2021/22 staff cost of £57.4k. Non-staff study costs in 2021/22 totalled £99.6k (£66.8k on sub-cover for participating SENCOs and £32.8k on research support), were approved by DE and ultimately covered by a successful monitoring round bid. Therefore, the total 2021/22 cost of the study was £157k and whilst this figure is included in the NPC's calculated in this business case, as the funding has already been secured from other sources, it is then excluded from the total being sought in the financial case. However, the analysis and reporting for the study have continued into 2022/23. Funding to cover expenditure relating to the EPS staff completing the unmet need study, which falls into 2022/23 is being sought retrospectively from the requested SEND SDP budget (£43.8k total to end June 22). Feedback from the EPS and other stakeholders highlights the significant changes in the EPS over recent years and the challenging working environment for psychologists. The recruitment and retention issues within the service, coupled with delays in accessing the service, emphasised the urgent need to complete this assessment.

There are high levels of agreement across stakeholders that the EPS has been under significant pressure, due to a significant increase in requests for assessments, a reduction in staff and an increase in workload associated with appeals. Therefore, there was a clear need to undertake a review. However, one concern voiced by stakeholders is the extent to which the EPS can maintain the current performance levels going forward. Another concern raised

was the fact that a senior member of the EPS team was released to complete this work when the team was already under pressure.

Review of the Employment Model for SEND Classroom Assistants,

The OBC notes that the overall aim of this project is to “co-design a model which will optimise the capacity, development and sustainability of the Classroom Assistant workforce to support pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, (but the resulting employment model may also be extended to cover other general assistant roles). The overall project deliverable will be an outline business case and implementation plan to consolidate the CA employment model in NI”.

Total projected cost of £585k across 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. This would cover five additional FTE staff (the project team) who would need to be recruited (or seconded & backfilled).

The need to re-consider the employment and deployment of CAs in Northern Ireland was noted in the NIAO and PAC reports and referred to frequently by schools and other stakeholders who participated in this review.

Feedback from schools and other stakeholders shows that the use of Classroom Assistants has grown on an ad hoc basis rather a planned or strategic manner. The huge growth in the number of CAs has occurred as a direct result of the growing number of pupils at Stage 3 who require additional assistance, which presents the statutory obligation to provide that support. A review of the literature and interviews with schools indicates that it is likely that CAs have not been deployed in the most effective way across all schools. Feedback from parents also highlighted an arbitrary approach to CA employment and deployment within schools.

Given the significant cost (to the EA) and admin burden of this resource (on schools and the EA), a review of their employment and deployment is required. However, there are many educational experts, beyond those employed by EA, who could potentially deliver this work within a shorter timeframe. Therefore, in order to access a wide range of expertise, the EA should consider fully, or partially outsourcing this work. This could reduce time and costs associated with recruitment, HR and backfill etc., whilst providing an independent perspective. In addition to this, there are a number of other pilot projects within NI schools, which are testing different approaches to the employment and deployment of CAs. The outcomes and impacts of these pilots should be considered in detail alongside any further projects.

Review of Early Years SEN Supports,

This project aims to develop an integrated and holistic early years SEND support model, by engaging all key stakeholders in designing a cross-sectoral model of service delivery that will enable more effective early identification and intervention to support children with SEND, their families and supporting staff in an integrated and holistic manner, with greater transparency and ease of accessibility between pre-birth and the end of the preschool year. This project will consider assessment and referral pathways, intervention effectiveness and impact, integrated working with health and capacity for early intervention. This project would also action recommendations from the prior public consultation around the SEN early years system. Leading to a co-designed and piloted future model and supporting business case (for implementation beyond Phase 1 of the SEND SDP). The EA have projected a total cost of £835k across three academic years (2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25). This would cover six additional FTE staff (the project team) who would need to be recruited (or seconded & backfilled). Project costs involve a range of staff and costs and sub-cover and includes allowance for specialist and expert staff such as Educational Psychologists and Early Years educational staff.

The importance of early intervention and difficulty in accessing early years support is a common theme amongst stakeholders, which would indicate that there is a need to consider how referral pathways and intervention could be more effective and efficient. The OBC notes the need to liaise with health, they should also liaise with DE Early Years team.

The proposed cost to employ for the proposed staff is quite substantial. The EA should be clear regarding their rationale for the proposed staffing structures and costs and should consider if there are other, more cost effective ways to design, test and implement a new model. There are a significant number of early years and early intervention experts in Northern Ireland (many of whom are based in local universities) who could lead or support this work. Again, outsourcing all or, some of this project has the potential to reduce costs and timescales.

Integrated Multi-Disciplinary Model of Pupil Support,

This is a fundamental review cutting across all of EA's SEN-related pupil support services (and linking into projects 2 & 3 above), focusing on intervention effectiveness, child transitions across the services and options to integrate and deliver earlier intervention. Leading to a co-designed and piloted future model and supporting business case (for implementation beyond Phase 1 of the SEND SDP). This project is focused on Stage 3 services:

- Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS);
- Language and Communication Service (LCS);
- Sensory Service (SS);
- Literacy Service (LS);

- SEN Inclusion Service (SENIS); and,
- Behavioural Support and Provisions Service (BSPS).

The projected costs are £1.463m across the 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years. This would cover 11 additional FTE staff (the project team) who would need to be recruited (or seconded & backfilled). The projected cost to employ staff (including sub-cover) equates to an average staff cost of over £43,700 per annum.

Key stakeholders, schools and parents highlighted that although children often required support from multiple agencies liaising with Health and Social Care Trusts was often challenging and resource intensive for schools. Furthermore, stakeholders also noted effective multi-disciplinary programmes that are already effective in NI (such as RISE). Therefore, this project is appropriate and required in order to ensure that SEN children have access to all the services they need. Given the range of workforce issues across the Health and Social Care system¹⁸⁸ and the workforce issues experienced by other edu-care programmes EA may have difficulties recruiting staff for this project, they may, again consider an outsourcing option.

SEND Placement Project

This project was initiated in late 2020 to address urgent pressures, in terms of the capacity of special schools and specialist provision units, within mainstream schools to accommodate the requirements and increasing numbers of children and young people with statements of SEN who required specialist placement. The project was initiated by re-deploying existing EA staff and was successful in ensuring that all pupils had an appropriate placement in time for September 2021.

However, projections indicate that another 260 special school places will be required by 2023/24 and the Special Education Strategic Area Plan (see below) will not have delivered full long-term capacity by that point. The SEND Placement Project would therefore have to continue out to September 2023 and, although funded by the OBC until this period, additional resource would be required to maintain the necessary project team post September 2023. Total projected cost of £853k across 2021/22 and 2022/23 academic years. This would cover the cost of 9.5 FTE staff (the project team). The project team is already in post, but these staff are temporarily re-deployed from their business as usual (BAU) posts within EA. Either the existing staff will have to be regularised (and appropriate backfill provided for their BAU posts), or an additional recruitment exercise will have to be undertaken to sustainably populate the project team.

Transitions and placements have been a significant issue for many of those who were consulted during this review. The lack of data and the notice that children, parents and schools have had regarding placements is a significant concern. Therefore, the action to reduce late and delayed placements is essential. Ongoing, early engagement is required with schools and relevant DE teams to minimise any further late or inappropriate placements. Many stakeholders and schools have noted that if SEN children were counted within the general enrolment of the school and SEN school applications were processed before other applications this would help to reduce this issue. It should be noted that the process to place children with statements in schools differs to placing children without statements. Statements and annual review are completed throughout the year and may recommend a change in placement.

Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 (SESAP)

In 2020, the EA developed draft area planning frameworks for both special schools and specialist provisions within mainstream schools. After public consultation, the frameworks received Ministerial approval and a Special Education Strategic Area Plan (SESAP) was drafted based on those frameworks and its public consultation closed in April 2022. The SESAP was finalised in July 2022 and is now operational.

As part of the prior DE Transformation Programme, an EA team had been supported in piloting an accelerated and streamlined process for adjusting some provisions without the need for the full development proposal process. Although the DE Transformation Programme has since been wound down, DE requested that the area planning pilot be extended. Given that the SEND Placement Project above has resulted in 80 temporary provisions being established across 2021, the pilot extension is intended to allow the regularisation of this backlog and that of the additional temporary provisions which will have to be established across the next two academic years. The pilot also includes bringing through two special school development processes under the new planning frameworks. This project will allow the completion of the pilot and operationalisation of the SESAP at pace to ensure that sufficient sustainable capacity is available within special schools and specialist provision within mainstream schools, allowing the SEND Placement Project (see above) to be wound down at the end of the 2022/23 academic year.

¹⁸⁸ For example, see: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-occupational-therapy-workforce-review2019-2029_0.pdf

The SEND Transformation Programme Board agreed that this project should be funded under the programme, but delays in securing the associated budget resulted in DE requesting that that project's 2021/22 and 2022/23 costs should be brought forward as a standalone business case (i.e. outside the SEND SDP). This business case seeks £250k in 2023/24 only. This would cover the cost of 4 FTE staff (the project team). The project team is already in post, but these staff are temporarily re-deployed from their business as usual posts within EA. A key theme from those who were consulted with was the lack of data and long term planning within the EA, therefore this is essential to support further decision making and to understand demand.

Summary

The SEND Transformation project costs as they are set out in the OBC (version 4), are substantial (£11.2m) and require significant investment from DE. Given the extensive current, budgetary pressures within the education system many stakeholders would like the EA to consider, in collaboration with DE a more efficient programme of change, delivered within a quicker timeframe, with clear evidence of improved outcomes for children and young people with SEN to enable DE to demonstrate Value for Money (VFM). This will allow better focussing of SEN resources in line with one of the 10 recommendations set out in NIAO Report (2017).

The list of projects set out under the SEND Transformation Programme are directly relevant to the issues that have been identified as part of this review and those identified by previous studies (NICCY 2020, NIAO 2017 and 2020). Given the scale and range of the proposed projects within the Programme and the inter-related aims and objectives, it is important that the programme is carefully managed and co-ordinated. Furthermore, the Transformation Programme is being implemented at the same time as a range of other reviews and pilots being undertaken with the wider education sector, each of which are also likely to have an impact on SEN systems and processes. Therefore, there is a need for the EA Transformation Programme team to ensure that they remain engaged with key teams across the wider education sector to ensure that the Transformation Programme is not implemented in isolation.

Each of the projects set out under the SEND TP is planned to be implemented over two to three academic years with a staggered approach to their implementation. The pilot phase for all projects are due to be completed by September 2024. The EA and SEN processes and services have been subject to a number of negative reviews over the past number of years and feedback from parents, schools and other stakeholders who participated in this review emphasised the perception that there is a lethargy with the EA to implement meaningful change in relation to SEN. Therefore, in order to re-gain confidence and trust with the system it is important that EA can implement the projects in a timely manner and share any outcomes that emerge from them.

The full implementation of the Transformation Programme would require a significant amount of recruitment or, back-fill. Data provided in the OBC suggests that many of these posts will be reasonably senior, it is not clear from the evidence provided to date, if the level of experience and expertise for these posts requires salary levels that are proposed. Furthermore, the OBC does not state if these posts are being recruited on a permanent or temporary basis, given that the Transformation Programme is a not a permanent initiative the posts should not be permanent. Given that many of these posts may be difficult to recruit due to the required expertise and the temporary nature of the programme, the EA should consider outsourcing much of this work. Outsourcing may have a number of advantages for the EA, including:

- Projects may be able to start sooner as procurement of services is likely to be quicker than staff recruitment;
- It could potentially give EA access to a wider pool of expertise than a temporary employment contract would provide;
- Some of the proposed work could be delivered at less cost than is currently proposed;
- While some project management would be required for any projects that are outsourced, there would no HR or payroll requirements. Any contractors appointed to deliver all or, some of the projects could be required to report into the proposed Programme Management Office;
- EA already have a Centre of Excellence for Procurement (COPE) who should be able to put the projects out to tender; and,
- The projects and the findings from any research/trials may be better received by the wider education community as it would be more likely to be perceived as independent and impartial.

Whilst evidence suggests that the actions and projects that are set out in the Transformation Programme 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. 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. Furthermore, given the current budgetary pressures that all government departments and agencies in Northern Ireland are facing it is likely that the EA will be required to consider

delivering transformation not only quicker but more efficiently. In the implementation of each project, the EA should also develop benefit realisation plans and performance indicators to allow them to report progress and impacts to DE on a regular basis.

13 Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The section sets out the findings, conclusions and recommendations. It is based on the triangulation of the data analysis from each stage of the primary and secondary research and is cognisant of the other reviews and evaluations that are also in process that relate to SEN, such as the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland and the DE Review of the Administrative Burdens associated with SEN.

Context

This review was commissioned by DE in response to a PAC report which highlighted concerns regarding Special Education in Northern Ireland. The PAC report referred to a number of studies which highlighted serious shortcomings in the services provided and the need for improvement in the operation of SEN processes and value for money.

An analysis of school census data and EA internal datasets emphasised a significant increase in the demand for SEN services over the past five years. The school population has increased by almost 11,000, and there are around 4,000 more pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs than in 2017. The rate of pupils with a statement has risen by one percentage point since 2017 (5.4% to 6.4%). Feedback from schools, parents and advocacy groups indicates that parents believe that the level of support that is available for children on stages 1 and 2 of the register is insufficient and the only way to access effective support is through the statementing process. Therefore, an increase in the school population plus increased parental demand for an assessment by an Educational Psychologist, has created a marked increase in the number of children at stage 3 on the register. In addition to the increasing parental demand for an assessment for a statement, a range of stakeholders highlighted that the proportion of children in Northern Ireland schools with complex needs is also increasing. It was the perception of many stakeholders that there are now many more children in mainstream schools with complex needs than ever before.

This increased demand has placed pressures on the EA in two main service areas, the Educational Psychology Services (EPS) and the Pupil Support Services. If a school or parent requests an assessment for a statement of Special Educational Needs, this must be completed using advice from an EA Educational Psychologist, whilst evidence from other professionals such as an Educational Psychologist in private practice is considered, it is not relied upon. Once a request for an assessment has been received the EA must complete their assessment within 26 weeks. Given the increase in requests since 2017, this has placed significant pressures on the EPS. Furthermore, the EPS has also experienced recruitment and retention difficulties during this period and now have 23 fewer psychology staff. As a result, both EA Psychologists and schools have reported that Educational Psychologists are now primarily focused on completing assessments and less so on supporting children and schools. Pupil Support Services has also experienced an increase in demand.

Whilst many teachers and parents noted that the services were valuable when they are available, teachers also highlighted increasing difficulties, in accessing pupil support services, particularly on a face-to-face basis (as opposed to remote support).

Both the EA and schools highlighted that the increased number of pupils (and those on the SEN register) has created additional pressure on the school estate in both mainstream and special schools. Both mainstream and special schools reported having many more pupils enrolled than their accommodation was designed for and that space that had previously been intended for storage or offices had been repurposed for therapy space or sensory rooms, which is not ideal. In addition to this, some mainstream schools with additional accommodation to facilitate Specialist Provision noted that whilst the modular buildings that are often erected to accommodate additional or specialist classes are of a very high standard, they can negatively impact the whole school by reducing the amount of outdoor space that is available as they are frequently built on school playgrounds. Special schools have also seen an increase in pupil numbers which has created an increase in the use of modular accommodation. Many are now at or close to maximum capacity.

The costs associated with the delivery of SEN in Northern Ireland have also increased significantly. From 2017/18 to 2021/22 SEN costs increased by £163m (64%) to £417m. Of this 52% (£216m) relates to support for children with a statement attending mainstream schools and 35% (£163m) relates to special school expenditure. Areas of expenditure that have seen the largest increase are transport and support for children with a statement attending

mainstream schools. EA expenditure relating to transport for SEN increased by 135% from 2018/18 (£17m) to 2021/22 (£40m). Expenditure to support children with a statement attending mainstream schools almost doubled (97% increase), from £91m in 2017/18 to £179m in 2021/22.

It is also important to consider the wider context in which the SEN services were delivered. In March 2020 the UK implemented a series of national lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result most schools closed or were open on a very limited basis. The population was required to stay at home and employees were required to work from wherever possible. There is evidence to show that the lockdowns had a disproportionate impact on children with SEN¹⁸⁹ as it compounded issues associated with their condition or meant that they were unable to access therapeutic interventions. It was also highlighted that remote learning is extremely challenging or impossible for many children with SEN. Therefore, the difficulties and challenges experienced by SEN children in schools may have been exacerbated by the pandemic¹⁹⁰.

Findings

Challenges within the system

The challenges with accessing and navigating the current SEN system have been documented elsewhere and also highlighted as a context to this review. Schools reported extensive administrative burdens and duplication within the system. The increase in pupil numbers, the number of requests for assessment by an Educational Psychologist and the insufficient protected time for SENCOs were all highlighted as the most significant challenge for schools.

Schools (both mainstream and special) also highlighted the increasing number of children on their enrolment with complex needs. This was particularly an issue for mainstream schools, many of whom had little or no prior experience of children with complex needs.

Planning and Placements

A review of EA documents and feedback from a wide range of stakeholders highlighted that over the past number of years there have been issues associated with finding suitable school placements for children with SEN, particularly in P1 and Year 8. This has resulted in late notification of school places for the academic year. Both parents and schools noted that the late notification of school places creates uncertainty which causes distress for pupils and their parents.

Schools highlighted a number of issues associated with the process of placing SEN children, firstly they noted that because SEN children are supernumerary, they are expected to take additional children no matter what their current enrolment is. This can create additional undue pressure on staff and the school estate. Also, schools often do not receive notification of SEN pupils until much later than other pupils, which creates difficulties getting additional supports and services in place where required, within time. Many stakeholders highlighted frustration with the current placement process and believed that the EA should have better data in order to manage this more effectively and that all SEN pupils should be notified of their school placement at the same time as their peers. Whilst it is recognised that the EA Area based plan has now been published and that this should support planning for SEN placements in the coming academic years, it was widely regarded that this is an issue that needs addressed urgently.

EA SEND Transformation Programme (SEND TP)

A review of the Outline Business Case (V.4) for the SEND TP was undertaken in August 2022. The issues identified within the programme are very consistent with those identified in this review and there is a high degree of complementarity with recommendations in this review (see below) and the Transformation projects. However, given the long running difficulties with the SEN systems and processes many of those in the education sector and parents would like to see evidence of change or, progress in a shorter timeframe than those set out in the SEND TP. Furthermore, as it is currently planned, the SEND TP is heavily dependent on the recruitment of staff, this can

¹⁸⁹ For example see: <https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2022/02/03/children-and-young-people-with-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-adversely-affected-by-covid-19-lockdowns/#:~:text=Lockdown%20compounded%20existing%20special%20education,sudden%20change%20in%20routine%20and>

¹⁹⁰ Whilst it is noted that children with statements were deemed vulnerable and therefore like key worker children were allowed access to schools during lockdown this was not the case for those on stage 1 or 2 of the register.

create significant HR and administrative challenges for the EA and can extend timescales if the right staff cannot be recruited. Moreover, the projected costs for the SEND TP are substantial (£11.2m) and given that the extensive current financial constraints within the education system many stakeholders would like this programme of change to be delivered more efficiently and for it to demonstrate value for money in the medium to long term.

Comparative Analysis of SEN Processes in NI and other regions

A review of the SEN processes and procedures across the UK and ROI, highlighted the very different approaches taken by each nation. Each nation has their own specific definition, legislation and terminology associated with SEN and its services, this makes any direct and meaningful comparison very difficult. In England, Scotland and Wales, Local Authorities are required to identify and support children with SEN. However, the definition of SEN in each jurisdiction differs, for example, in Scotland Looked After Children and young people (in the care of Local Authorities) are considered automatically to have “additional support needs”, which is not the case in Northern Ireland. In all jurisdictions Educational Psychologists are required to undertake an assessment of need. In England additional funding for SEN children is provided directly to schools, which is then ring-fenced to ensure that it is spent on addressing the needs of SEN pupils within the school. In both Scotland and Wales, the Local Authority takes responsibility for the SEN budget. The interviews with schools, unions and school leaders in Northern Ireland highlighted that whilst many schools could see the advantages of having a flexible, delegated SEN budget, some schools also highlighted the additional administrative burden of a delegated SEN budget, which, given the current SEN administrative burdens, made a delegated budget unattractive.

Comparative Analysis of SEN Rates in NI and England

The current rate of SEN in Northern Ireland is 18.4%, this has reduced from 23.2% in 2017 as in 2019 pupils with only medical conditions were removed from the SEN register and recorded on the medical register. However, the overall school population has increased, and the number of children with a statement of Special Educational Needs has increased by over 4,000 to 21,956. The school population in England has also increased but, the rate of SEN (16.6%) is lower than the 18.4% in Northern Ireland. The proportion of children at the upper end of the SEN register is also lower in England at 4% (with an Education and Health Care Plan) compared to, 6.4% of pupils in Northern Ireland with a statement of SEN. Given the different ways in which data is collected and characterised it is difficult to make a meaningful comparison of the SEN rates across both jurisdictions. However, in an attempt to compare with a region that is more demographically and socio-economically similar to NI, the NI school census data was compared with the school census data from the North West of England. Whilst it is noted that the population of the NW region of England is significantly higher, the population structure and socio-economic circumstances are more comparable to the NI context than England as a whole. This analysis found that whilst the rates of SEN are increasing in both regions, the NI rates were slightly higher than in the NW region of England. In the North West of England 17% of pupils were receiving some form of SEN support and in NI 18% of pupils were on the SEN register. Due to inconsistencies in the way in which achievements at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 are calculated, it was not possible to compare the outcomes of educational achievement.

Therefore, whilst the analysis showed that SEN rates in NI are higher than the whole of England, the rates started to converge when comparing with a region that is more socio-economically similar. Also, the rates of SEN, in Northern Ireland, the North West of England and the whole of England are increasing at similar rates. Whilst the analysis of the statistics does not provide an obvious reason for the increased rates of SEN in Northern Ireland there are a couple of potential explanations. Firstly, Northern Ireland is relatively more deprived than England, and SEN is correlated with deprivation. Secondly, the definitions and thresholds used in England are slightly different and this could also explain some variation in the data. Furthermore, it is not known to what extent levels of awareness and diagnosis impact on SEN rates. Feedback from stakeholders has also suggested that there may be other process issues that are driving the increase in pupils who are at Stage 3 (i.e. statemented) that is not occurring in England. For example, in NI, an assessment by an Educational Psychologist is required to access many of the pupil support services. However, in England schools receive a delegated budget for SEN children, this means that the school has more freedom in accessing additional support, services and equipment for children with SEN, which in-turn may reduce the need for a statement and allow the school to introduce support quicker for children with SEN. Also NI has higher number of special school places for which Stage 3 assessments are needed.

It should also be noted that there is also great variance in the rates of SEN within Northern Ireland. As noted in section 10 of this review, the rate of SEN is much higher in the legacy Belfast Education and Library Board areas than in other areas. Feedback from stakeholders and schools suggested that there are also many reasons for local variations in rates of SEN not all of which are associated with deprivation or, childhood poverty but, could include other issues such as rates of premature births, survival rates of pre-term babies and public health issues such as smoking and alcohol consumptions during pregnancy. However, extensive analysis and data linkage of education and health and social care databases would be required to prove any potential theories.

Classroom Assistants

The number of Classrooms Assistants in Northern Ireland has been steadily increasing over the past five years, though not as much as in neighbouring jurisdictions. The traditional view of CAs was that they were ‘an extra pair of hands’ for teachers and, specifically, by attending to children with SEN, they enabled teachers to concentrate on the class as a whole. This meant that children with SEN were supported in their learning primarily by staff who had not received appropriate professional development.

A major study in England (the DISS project¹⁹¹) highlighted the weaknesses of the traditional approach, of deploying CAs, could have a negative impact on the educational outcomes of children with SEN. Numerous studies have documented instances where the assignment of a CA to one specific child can lead to: greater isolation of children with SEN, running counter to the goal of greater inclusion; reduced self-esteem on the part of many children; and most damning of all, lower academic outcomes than if they did not have a CA. This does not mean that CAs are redundant. What is required is a rethink of their role and deployment and an acknowledgement that those children who are most in need of additional support should have greater interaction with teachers, not less. There are pilot schemes to divert funding for CAs to funding more teachers but evidence on outcomes is limited to date. Whilst this approach calls for a major shift in thinking and practice, it is possible and is even beginning to happen. There are good examples of effective use of CAs, and there is a growing body of evidence that CAs can be deployed in ways that enhance student learning and facilitate teachers in carrying out their professional roles. However, certain conditions must be met for this to happen, in particular, well-structured settings where teachers and CAs work closely together, have time for planning and review, and where CAs receive appropriate professional development as a matter of course.

International Approaches

A review of the literature highlighted that there are a range of in-classroom techniques and pedagogical approaches that teachers may use when teaching children with SEN at an overall system level there is a general movement towards inclusive education, not least because of the high costs of special schools. Many studies have highlighted the systems and processes used in Finland as best practice. Under the Finnish model all children are taught at their local school, within their local community and teachers are expected to teach children of all abilities. Teachers are also expected to be highly qualified and well trained. Special Education in South Africa is still relatively young compared to many developed countries. However, the processes that have been established are also interesting. South Africa has also developing an inclusive model of education however, there are area based multi-disciplinary teams who provide support and advice to local schools.

Early intervention

Whilst there are a wide range of studies and reports, highlighting the benefits of early intervention in SEN, under the current system and processes early intervention is almost impossible. The majority of pre-schools cannot request an assessment by an Educational Psychologist and have limited access to the EA supports. In addition to this, the availability of Educational Psychologists to provide support to schools and children who are at stage 1 and 2 is extremely limited due as their time is increasingly restricted due to the volume of assessments that are required. Furthermore, currently the Educational Psychologists are the ‘gate keepers’ to many of the Pupil Support Services as children only have access to them following an assessment. This means that some children will have to wait up to 26 weeks before they can access support for their additional learning needs. Feedback from parents and schools suggests that because of the Time Allocation Model and other challenges in the system children have waited years to access the additional support they require.

Built environment

Although not necessarily a key element of the aims and objectives of this study, a number of parents, teachers and other relevant stakeholders highlighted the importance of the built environment for all children, especially those with SEN. Many teachers noted that the physical space in which the children are educated is now too small to accommodate all the children on their enrolment and that all available space has been re-purposed as classrooms. For many this has included principal's offices, staff rooms and even storerooms. Parents noted how their children need specific space within the school to cope with sensory overload or relieve stress. Other stakeholders noted

¹⁹¹ Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A. and Webster, R. (2011) The impact of support staff on pupils’ ‘positive approaches to learning’ and their academic progress, *British Educational Research Journal*, 37 (3), 443-464

that much of the mainstream school estate is now quite old and was not designed to accommodate the number of children that are now attending school or to accommodate the specific requirements of children with SEN.

There are a number of studies that have identified how all aspects of the school's environment can affect students' ability to learn and that factors such as the design and arrangement of furniture, acoustics, lighting, temperature, air quality all need to be considered. If not properly considered such factors have serious deleterious effect on the physical health and neurologic development of children¹⁹².

Recommendations

The following paragraphs set out the recommendations that have emerged from the findings of this review.

A: Implementing and Driving Change

It is clear that the SEN system needs to be re-aligned and reformed to move from a process system driven to a child-centred approach which meets the needs of children with SEN, improving their educational outcomes while ensuring that funding is being used effectively and demonstrates Value for Money. The issues that have been identified within this review and other related reports need to be addressed within a reasonable timeframe. Accountability within DE and EA is needed to drive the change needed. The strengthening of DE's governance and oversight in relation to SEN is key to leading, implementing and driving change within the EA and the wider SEN system. A focus point for this shift could be children who are born in 2025 (the mid-way point of NI Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy) who will be starting school in 2029/2030. These children and their parents should experience a very different SEN service than the children before them. Governance and oversight arrangements from both the Department and the EA Board need to be strengthened in relation to SEN.

A1: RECOMMENDATION: 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 and who will give annual reports to NI Assembly through the Education Committee of the Assembly. 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. A Programme Board should be established to oversee the implementation of the recommendation that would include representatives from school leaders, SENCOs and parents and/or advocacy groups. The action plan should also be cognisant of the recommendations that have emerged from the Landscape Review of the EA and any recommendations that emerge from the Independent Review of Education.

B: Early Intervention

Early intervention is widely recognised as the most effective way to support children with SEN, yet the current EA referral and assessment processes make early intervention very challenging. These challenges are exacerbated by the limited time¹⁹³ that Educational Psychologists have to work with individual schools make it difficult for them to support schools and devise preventative plans and interventions.

B1: RECOMMENDATION: The reviews of EA SEN Early Years and Inclusion Service (SENEYIS) and the overarching review of Pupil Support Services included within the EA SEND Transformation programme should consider the most effective way to provide early intervention to pupils with additional needs and how best staff in schools and early years settings can be equipped to support children with additional needs.

B2: RECOMMENDATION: Access to Pupil Support Services should be expanded, with a new model of referral considered.

C: Educational Psychology Service

Whilst it is recognised that the Educational Psychologists are a valuable and finite resource, how schools access their support should be reviewed and re-modelled.

¹⁹² Mitchell, D. (2013) What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education. 2nd Edition. Routledge.

¹⁹³ The amount of time that each school has with an Educational Psychologist is defined by the EA's Time Allocation Model. The time allocation model takes into account different factors such as the number of children on the school enrolment and the level of deprivation in the area in which the school is based.

In the meantime, as part of the overall referral system, schools should identify all children who would benefit from Educational Psychology input, not just those who fit within the time allocated to the school. In this way the EA can start to develop an understanding of the level of unmet need and where additional sources of support could be provided (e.g. literacy support, behaviour support, etc.). It was noted by some stakeholders and highlighted in the SEND Transformation Programme that not all nurseries/ pre-school provisions have access to the EA Educational Psychology Service, which has the potential to limit early intervention.

C1: RECOMMENDATION: The plan to record all children who would benefit from an assessment by an Educational Psychologist as part of the role of the digitalisation of the PLP should be delivered as soon as possible to ensure that the full scale of unmet need can be assessed. The need to identify all children within schools who have additional needs was a key issue that was also identified in the recent NICCY and PAC reports as a key issue¹⁹⁴. The PLP should be considered as the best vehicle for recording children in need of EP support.

C2: RECOMMENDATION: All DE funded pre-schools should have access to the Educational Psychology Service and through this access to the EA Pupil Support Services

C3: RECOMMENDATION: DE should continue to support the EA in building back up the wider EA Educational Psychology Team to ensure that there is sufficient resource to deal with demand.

C4: RECOMMENDATION: The EA should provide support and training to prepare SENCO's to undertake some of the SEN assessments which would allow the school to start early interventions prior to a child being seen by an Educational Psychologist. It is likely that this would require SENCOs to receive additional remuneration.

C5: RECOMMENDATION: Once the EA Educational Psychology Services have been consolidated, DE and EA should consider secondment opportunities for Educational Psychologist to support policy development and to provide career development opportunities for Educational Psychologists.

D: Access to information and advice

Parents reported that it was often challenging navigating the SEN service and accessing information regarding their child's rights in relation to SEN and to navigate their way round the SEN supports and services. This often creates further delays to accessing support and further reduced opportunities for early intervention.

D1: RECOMMENDATION: DE, EA and DoH should collaborate and work with relevant agencies and voluntary and community groups to ensure that accessible, clear information on SEN is readily available from a number of information channels.

D2: RECOMMENDATION: DE and EA should ensure that children, young people and their parent/carers have access to supportive mechanisms which can assist with the navigation of the identification and statutory assessment of SEN process.

E: Communication

A common theme emerging from interviews with parents, schools and key stakeholders was the difficulty in communicating with the EA and navigating their systems to identify the EA officer who can address their queries and concerns. Lack of communication and engagement was also noted a concern in the Landscape Review of the EA.

E1: RECOMMENDATION: EA need to improve their communication processes with schools and parents. This includes improved engagement from and accessibility to key staff such as SEN Liaison Officers and Transition Officers. EA staff should be required to respond to school and family queries within reasonable timeframes.

E2: RECOMMENDATION: EA should clearly publish contact details for staff who are responsible for SEN at a sub-regional level.

E3: RECOMMENDATION: Both schools and families should have a named contacted person within the EA. This key contact would be responsible for co-ordinating SEN advice and information from the EA and provide a single point of contact.

F: Staff Training and Workforce Development

The number of children in mainstream schools on the SEN register is increasing year on year. Yet a large proportion of teachers were trained more than 20 years ago when the SEN- specific training in the teacher training courses was very different to the presentation of needs within the classroom of today. Over time teachers have been required to acquire skills and expertise by experience. The onus has been forced on teachers without specific support or training in this area.

¹⁹⁴ NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (2019). Too Little, Too Late. The views of parents/carers on their child's experiences of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) process in mainstream schools.

Furthermore, ongoing industrial action over the past number of years has created additional challenges for many teachers to participate in additional, non-mandatory training. Hence the approach to gaining knowledge and expertise relating to SEN has been piecemeal and individual efforts to gain understanding and knowledge. Based on this there is clearly a need to provide teachers with greater access to training and support in relation to SEN presentations in the classroom.

F1: RECOMMENDATION: DE and DfE should collaborate and jointly engage with the Higher Education Institutions to ensure that there is sufficient coverage of SEN in teacher training to allow Newly Qualified Teachers to respond to SEN in the classroom.

Evidence based pedagogical approaches such as the Universal Design for Learning Approach¹⁹⁵ should be considered, particularly for those who are completing the one year post graduate PGCE.

F2: RECOMMENDATION: DE should engage with EA to ensure that all current teachers have access to good quality, evidence-based resources and CPD opportunities in relation to SEN. Teachers and CAs should actively participate in SEN training and schools should be provided with resources to allow them to participate. Consideration should be given within schools for teacher and CAs training within their directed time budget.

F3: RECOMMENDATION: There should be a tiered approach to training that will take into account the learning and expertise that experienced teachers and CAs have gained in the classroom and the needs of less experienced teachers.

Newly qualified teachers are frequently not being offered long term or permanent roles, which reduces their opportunities to develop skills and expertise. Teachers and the wider educational workforce should have access and opportunity to meaningfully participate in CPD opportunities that develop and update their skills for the current classroom presentations.

F4: RECOMMENDATION: DE, DfE and EA should consider a joint programme that would provide an 'apprenticeship' type programme for NQTs focussed on developing their skills in relation to special educational needs.

This approach would enable NQTs the opportunity to hone their teaching skills and to gain experience and understanding of SEN and to access training relating to SEN whilst based within a school.

F5: RECOMMENDATION: EA should consider the level and range of SEN training they can provide in-house and where gaps exist, they should contract other specialist organisations who can provide training services to schools (this may be VCSE sector groups), in relation to SEND.

F6: RECOMMENDATION: DE and EA should create local multi-disciplinary, SEN support hubs based around area learning communities and utilising expertise within special schools.

The hub would consist of SEN experienced teachers, as well as other relevant staff such as AHPs, and specialist staff. The purpose of the hubs would be to provide expert advice and support to schools and allow schools to share knowledge and resources at a local level. The hubs should cover all schools in local areas, special and mainstream and also support DE funded pre-schools.

G: School Leadership

Interviews with schools and parents highlighted that school leadership and the ethos within individual schools are critical in informing the way in which SEN children are supported in school.

Furthermore, schools and Board of Governors have a duty under Article 6 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI) 2005, and the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in relation to their provisions for children with SEN and disabilities. A common theme emerging from the interviews was that many schools are either unsure of their roles and responsibilities or, feel unsupported and unable to make adjustments. Inclusion is a core part of the school inspection process and an area in which ETI can sign-post schools to sources of support following an inspection. However, their capacity to do this has been impeded over the last five years as teaching unions have been engaged in action short of strike, which has limited the extent to which schools have engaged with the ETI.

G1: RECOMMENDATION: DE and EA should work with schools to help them better understand their responsibilities regarding reasonable adjustments.

G2: RECOMMENDATION: EA should also provide a programme of support, training and advice in relation to reasonable adjustments for schools' leaders and boards of governors, both in terms of the physical environment and in-class support.

¹⁹⁵ [https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/designing-your-course/universal-design-learning#:~:text=Universal%20design%20for%20learning%20\(UDL,hurdles%20in%20the%20learning%20process.](https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/designing-your-course/universal-design-learning#:~:text=Universal%20design%20for%20learning%20(UDL,hurdles%20in%20the%20learning%20process.)

School leaders should be able to cascade this learning and support throughout the school to create a whole school, inclusive ethos.

G3: RECOMMENDATION: DE should convene a task and finish working party of principals to develop recommendations for SEN leadership training that would be available to principals, SENCOs and school leadership teams.

G4: RECOMMENDATION: All SENCOs should be on the school leadership team to ensure that SEN is considered a key priority for the school and SENCOs receive support and recognition from other senior colleagues.

G5: RECOMMENDATION: DE need to decisively address the issues that have led to industrial action, whilst simultaneously reviewing the legislation to allow the ETI to meaningfully fulfil all aspects of their remit and to engage and collaborate with schools to address pertinent issues.

This would only bring Northern Ireland into sync with the rest of the UK.

H: Classroom Assistants

While there is evidence to show that Classroom Assistants (CAs) can positively contribute to pupil outcomes when they are suitably trained and supported within schools and deployed appropriately in the classroom assigning CAs on a one-to-one basis is not perceived to be an efficient way to provide support to children to access the curriculum. There is no consistency in the way in which Classroom Assistants (CAs) are employed in schools or, used in the classroom. The short-term and low pay nature of their contracts make it very difficult for schools to recruit and retain good CAs. This not only creates an additional administrative burden in schools but also means that children are not always provided with the support that they need. The proposed review of SEND CAs (to be conducted as part of the EA SEND Transformation programme) should consider the following.

H1: RECOMMENDATION: EA should review CAs contracts to make them more attractive for those who are interested in pursuing a career in education. This could include the potential of CAs being employed on a permanent basis by EA who can then be seconded out to schools or schools should be provided with flexible, delegated budgets for schools to employ SEN support staff on a permanent basis. The latter approach would allow school leaders to develop a model that is best suited to the circumstances of their school.

H2: RECOMMENDATION: The SEND CA role should be professionalised. This would include a requirement for more accredited training which would include SEN specific training (mainly provided in schools) and would also require consideration of CA pay grades, along with options for career development and promotion. A new job title may also be required.

H3: RECOMMENDATION: CAs should not be deployed to work with children on a one-to-one basis, unless specifically required (for example for medical or physical reasons). This is important in order to foster a child's independence and to reduce any potential stigma. Research clearly shows that providing assistance to groups of children would also give schools the opportunity to support pupils who are struggling and at risk of SEN as well as providing one-to-one pupil support as needed.

I: Supernumerary Pupils

Conversations with schools highlighted that children with a statement of SEN are supernumerary to their enrolment. Often this means that the EA informs schools that a child with SEN will be placed in the school at the last minute, which can make it difficult for them to arrange any required supports and services. It also means that some schools are operating significantly above capacity putting additional challenges on the school estate and staff.

I1: RECOMMENDATION: DE should ensure that children with a statement of SEN should not be supernumerary within the school, they should be included within the school's overall enrolment numbers and enrolled at the same time as other pupils.

I2: RECOMMENDATION: DE should closely monitor the EA SEN Strategic Area Plan Programme to ensure that all actions are completed to ensure that there is sufficient provision for all the required pupils in each area.

I3: RECOMMENDATION: DE should also work closely with EA to ensure that SEN pupil transfers are not processed after their peers and are enrolled in schools at the same time.

This will also help to promote SEN inclusivity and will ensure that children feel that they belong to the school and not just "fitted in".

J: Measuring Achievement

The current process of basing schools' and pupils' achievements on academic outcomes is not always appropriate for children with SEN.

J1: RECOMMENDATION: DE should consider other consistent indicators that can easily, routinely and consistently be collected by schools. For example, schools already use the NIC levels of progression which identify across the curriculum, at a level appropriate to their ability, the knowledge/skills pupils should be enabled to develop, existing data like this should be taken into consideration to minimise any potential for additional burden on

schools. Any measurement of SEN pupils progress should be more holistic and include factors such as attendance and vocational achievements.

J2: RECOMMENDATION: DE and DfE should consider utilising the Unique Learner Number, to measure pupils progress and outcomes post compulsory school age to allow a longitudinal view of outcomes.

It is recognised that measuring the more long-term outcomes of children who are SEN would require improved data sharing and linkage across departments.

J3: RECOMMENDATION: DE, EA and DfE should engage in cross departmental working to share all the information that is required to understand how SEN pupils can best be supported in the long term and where support should be directed. This will require linking data from schools through to FE and training providers and where possible into the workforce.

K: Administration

The current level of administrative burden associated with SEN is challenging for schools and yet the survey results indicate that not all SENCOs have protected time from teaching to conduct their SEN duties or, have help with the administration. Principals and SENCOs require more support in relation to SEN administration.

K1: RECOMMENDATION: DE, in conjunction with managing authorities should consider the implementation of recommendations that will emerge from the SEN Workload Review that is currently underway. This should include the adoption of a new administrative process to simplify the process for schools and to prevent duplication of effort. Any administrative process should eliminate requests for information from EA for information that they already hold and multiple requests for the same information.

K2: RECOMMENDATION: School Leaders should ensure that SENCOs have sufficient protected time to allow them to properly undertake their SENCO duties.

K3: RECOMMENDATION: All schools should have a budget delegated to them for SEN resources. This would allow school leaders the discretion to address specific SEN issues within their own school including administration. The monitoring or, auditing of this delegated budget should not add to the SEN workload.

L: Pupil Support Services

The costs and level of demand on Pupil Support Services has been increasing annually. They are a core part of the SEN support systems and yet schools along with parents perceive them as being inaccessible as most require an assessment by an Educational Psychologist (or a medical diagnosis or, both). The inaccessibility of Pupil Support Services also provides additional barriers to early intervention due to the long waiting timing for an assessment.

Models of the delivery of pupil support services in countries such as Israel or South Africa suggest that area based support hubs consisting of multi-disciplinary teams to support schools and provide services to pupils in small groups maybe more efficient and effective.

L1: RECOMMENDATION: A timely review of pupil support services and suggested working models should be a priority focus for the project within the EA SEND Transformation Programme.

M: The SEND Transformation Programme

The actions set out in the SEND Transformation Programme are consistent with the change that is required to make SEN services more effective and efficient. However, it is heavily dependent on the recruitment of staff which can create additional risks and administrative burden with many additional costs.

M1: RECOMMENDATION: DE and EA should re-consider how best to achieve transformational change within reasonable timescales with available resources. DE should consider if the policy and legislative framework remains appropriate to deliver improved outcomes. The EA should consider outsourcing as an option to deliver many aspects of the Transformation Programme. Full or partial elements of individual projects could be tendered through the EA's Centre for Procurement Excellence. This has the potential to reduce project timescales (due to time required to recruit staff) and could give the EA access to wider pool of expertise.

N: Cross-Departmental Working

Effective co-operation and collaboration between Health and Education is critical for the provision of services to schools and pupils and the timely completion of assessments. The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 provides the legislative vehicle to allow meaningful co-operation across all relevant agencies.

N1: RECOMMENDATION: DE and DoH should continue to build upon the effective working relationships that were developed through the COVID-19 response programmes to co-design and jointly commission multi-disciplinary services for children with SEN, disability and complex needs.

N2: RECOMMENDATION: DoH should work with Trusts to identify and address the challenges associated with providing Allied Health Professional support and services to pupils with SEN in school and in doing so develop effective communication channels between schools and Trusts.

N3: RECOMMENDATION: There should be better co-ordination and sharing of data across all education and health agencies to facilitate better planning and development of services for children and young people with SEN and complex needs. There should be a detailed review to remove any barriers to data sharing and ensure that relevant, up to date information is available to those who are responsible for planning services for young people and that the correct data sharing agreements are in place.

O: The School Estate

Feedback from Special and Mainstream schools highlighted that the current school estate is under pressure. Many schools are struggling to accommodate the increased number of pupils and the growing proportion of pupils with SEN and children with increasingly complex needs. Consequently, many schools have been required to repurpose space within schools to accommodate additional SEN pupils or to provide SEN supports and services. As a result of this pressure on accommodation many pupils are being educated in a sub-optimal environment.

O1: RECOMMENDATION: DE and EA should ensure that the school environment is suitable and accessible for all pupils. Where issues are identified within schools, the EA should ensure that they are addressed as quickly as possible. DE provides funding for small scale, pressing and immediate works through the Minor Works Scheme and School Enhancement Programme

O2: RECOMMENDATION: Going forward DE and EA should ensure that any new school buildings or major works programmes are designed to be inclusive for all children using universal design principles. This should include a review of the school building handbook to ensure that all new buildings are designed to be accessible and inclusive.

Appendices

Appendix A – List of Key Stakeholders

The following tables provides and over of key stakeholders who participated in one-to-one interviews. All stakeholders participated anonymously, therefore the identify of individuals has not been shared

Key Stakeholder Organisation
DE Directors and Permanent Secretary
ETI Inspectors
EA Chief Executive, Directors and Senior Staff
EA Educational Psychologists
EA Board Members
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
Comhairle na Gaelscholaíochta (CnaG)
Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA)
Department of Health
Independent Review of Education Panel
Teaching Unions
Special Schools Strategic Leadership Group
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)
Children's Law Centre
Special Educational Needs Advice Centre (SENAC)
Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)
Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance
Disability Action
Action for Children
Angeleyes NI
Guide Dogs NI
Solas
Alliance Party
Democratic Unionist Party
Ulster Unionist Party

Appendix B – The School Survey

DE Review of Special Education Needs SCHOOLS Questionnaire

Review of Special Education Needs in Northern Ireland.

We all want the best outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in all our schools and education settings, across Northern Ireland. However, the current system simply does not do that for all children, and we know it has to change.

Departmental expenditure on special educational needs provision is increasing year on year and this is unsustainable. However, more importantly a better system is needed in order to support and improve the learning outcomes for more children with SEN. We are asking you to consider the current system and to outline how we could spend our resources more efficiently and effectively to improve outcomes for children and young people.

In order to change the system, we need to hear **the views and opinions of every school in Northern Ireland**. We want you to tell us what works, what doesn't and how we can change the current system to ensure children with SEN are better off.

Ipsos UK along with academic advisors have been commissioned by the Department of Education to conduct the Independent Review of SEN in Northern Ireland. We are inviting you to participate in a survey which should take between **20-25 minutes** to complete depending on your answers, and will close on **30th June 2022**.

It is crucial to the review that as many schools as possible participate in the survey so that we can achieve a robust and complete picture of SEN in all schools.

You may leave the survey and come back to complete it later. Your responses will be saved. You have the right to withdraw consent at any time.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact the Ipsos helpline by email: UK-PA-SEN-Schools@ipsos.com. If you wish to speak to a member of the DE team about the survey, please contact: desenreviewteam@education-ni.gov.uk.

The research is being carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. All your answers will remain confidential and will be used for the purposes of this research only.

Survey findings will only be reported in an aggregated format; **you and your school will not be identifiable in any of the findings shared with the Department of Education or publicly**. Further information can be found in our Privacy Notice.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your input is very much appreciated by Ipsos and the Department of Education as the research findings will help to shape the future of Special Educational Need in Northern Ireland.

ASK ALL SINGLE CODE ONLY

QA. Are you happy to participate?

Yes	1	Continue
No	2	Thank and close

INTRO 1

SHOW TO ALL

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the survey. You do not need to complete this all in one session. If you stop and come back to the survey later, you will be able to pick up where you left off. If you need to send the survey to a colleague to complete – you can do that **but please be advised, they can only pick up from the point you left off and will not be able to go back and review your answers.**

INTRO 2

SHOW TO ALL

Thank you again for participating in this survey.

Please note that this survey focuses on Children with Special Educational Needs in your school. We ask that you complete the survey with a view to changing or improving education for children with SEN, rather than any other pupils or staff. In addition, please complete the questionnaire on behalf of your school and not from your own personal perspective.

1. Demographics

DemogsIntro

Firstly, some questions about you, your role and your school.

Ask all

Q1a. What is your role within your school? Single code	
Principal	1
Learning Support Coordinator (LSC) (previously SENCO)	2
Teaching principal	3
Teacher	4
Other (please specify _____)	5
Prefer not to say	99

Ask all

Q1b. Did you complete the survey alone or in conjunction with a colleague(s)?	
Alone	1
[Note to scripter allow multi-code within this option.] In conjunction with a colleague(s), please tick who they are Principal Learning Support Coordinator (previously SENCO) Teaching principal Teacher Other (please specify _____)	2
Prefer not to say	99

Ask all

Q2. Which of the following best describes your school? Single code only	
Pre-School/Playgroup	1
Nursery	2
Primary	3
Post-primary	4
Special	5
EOTAS	6
Other please specify _____	7
Prefer not to say	99

2. SEN Experiences

SENIntro

The next few questions are about SEN experiences in your school.

Ask all

Thinking ONLY about current SEN provision in your school:

Q3A. To what extent do you think the areas below impact positively, negatively or not at all on your ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children in your school? Single code for each row							
	Negative impact – unable to cope	Negative impact – we are just about managing	Positive impact – we have everything we need	No impact on our ability to provide good outcomes	Not applicable	Don't know	Prefer not to say
The number of children requiring support at Stage 1	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The number of children requiring support at Stage 2	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The number of children requiring support at Stage 3/ Statemented	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The amount of time allocated for Educational Psychologists	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The number of teachers trained in supporting pupils with Special Educational Need	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
Not having a Learning Support Co-Ordinator	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
Our Learning Support Co-Ordinator having teaching commitments and limited time for SEN	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
Level of training for Learning Support Co-Ordinator	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The school building structure we currently have to facilitate the needs of our children with SEN	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The level of support received from allied health professionals	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The level of administration required for Individual Education Plans (soon to be Personal Learning Plans)	1	2	3	4	97	98	99

Overall administration of SEN	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The number of classroom assistants	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The number of teachers	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The amount of effective resources to support children at stage 1-3	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
The demands from parents	1	2	3	4	97	98	99
Other issues, please specify _____	1	2	3	4	97	98	99

Ask all**Only ask those elements coded 1 or 2 in Q3a**

Q3B. Thinking about the SEN areas you identified as having a negative impact on your ability to provide good outcomes for SEN children in your school, what level of support do you think your school needs? Single code for each row						
	Significant support required	Some support required	A little support required	No support required	Don't know	Prefer not to say
The number of children requiring support at Stage 1	1	2	3	4	98	99
The number of children requiring support at Stage 2	1	2	3	4	98	99
The number of children requiring support at Stage 3/ Statemented	1	2	3	4	98	99
The amount of time allocated for Educational Psychologists	1	2	3	4	98	99
The number of teachers trained in supporting pupils with Special Educational Need	1	2	3	4	98	99
Not having a Learning Support Co-Ordinator	1	2	3	4	98	99
Our Learning Support Co-Ordinator having teaching commitments and limited time for SEN	1	2	3	4	98	99
Level of training for Learning Support Co-Ordinator	1	2	3	4	98	99
The School building structure we currently have to facilitate the needs of our children with SEN	1	2	3	4	98	99
The level of support received from allied health professionals	1	2	3	4	98	99
The level of administration required for Individual Education Plans (soon to be Personal Learning Plans)	1	2	3	4	98	99
Overall administration of SEN	1	2	3	4	98	99
The number of classroom assistants	1	2	3	4	98	99
The number of teachers	1	2	3	4	98	99
The amount of effective resources to support children at stage 1-3	1	2	3	4	98	99
The demands from parents	1	2	3	4	98	99
Other issues, please specify	1	2	3	4	98	99

3. In School Support (New Code of Practice Stage 1)

InschoolIntro

The next few questions are about in-school support (New Code of Practice Stage 1)

Ask all

Q4 Which of the following SEN training are you aware of ...?	
Allow multi code	
Training offered from EA Children and Young People Services (CYPS)	1
Training on offer from Middletown Centre for Autism	2
Other voluntary and community SEN training (please specify _____)	3
Other professional SEN training (please specify _____)	4
None of these [exclusive]	98
Prefer not to say [exclusive]	99

Ask all

Q5a. Thinking back over this school year (since September 2021) did any of your staff avail of the following SEN training?		
Please select all that apply.		
Training offered from EA Children and Young People Services (CYPS)		
Training on offer from Middletown Centre for Autism		
Other VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained) Specify course 1 _____ Specify course 2 _____ Specify course 3 _____ Specify course 4 _____ Specify course 5 _____ [scripter allow up to 5]		
Other PROFESSIONAL SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained) Specify course 1 _____ Specify course 2 _____ Specify course 3 _____ Specify course 4 _____ Specify course 5 _____ [scripter allow up to 5]		
None of the teachers/staff have availed of any training [exclusive]	97	GO TO Q6d
Prefer not to say	99	GO TO Q7

Ask all**ONLY SHOW CODES SELECTED AT Q5a**

Q5b. Of these groups (since September 2021) how many of your staff have availed of training from each of these...? <u>WRITE IN NUMBER</u>		
Training offered from EA Children and Young People Services (CYPS)		
Training on offer from Middletown Centre for Autism		
Other VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained) Specify course 1 _____ Specify course 2 _____ Specify course 3 _____ Specify course 4 _____ Specify course 5 _____		
Other PROFESSIONAL SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained) Specify course 1 _____ Specify course 2 _____ Specify course 3 _____ Specify course 4 _____ Specify course 5 _____		
None of the teachers/staff have availed of any training [exclusive]	97	GO TO Q6d
Prefer not to say	99	GO TO Q7

Ask only for training courses mentioned at Q5a

Q6a. For each course attended please rate the extent to which you or your staff increased their knowledge because of this training? Single code in each row				
	Increased Knowledge significantly	Increased Knowledge somewhat	Did not increase knowledge at all	Don't know
Training offered from EA Children and Young People Services (CYPS)	1	2	3	98
Training on offer from Middletown Centre for Autism	1	2	3	98
Other VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained)				
Specify course 1				
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Other PROFESSIONAL SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained)				
Specify course 1				
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98

Ask only for training courses mentioned at Q5a

Q6b. For each course attended please rate the extent to which you or your staff improved their practice as a result of this training? Single code in each row				
	Improved practice significantly	Improved practice somewhat	Did not improve practice at all	Don't know
Training offered from EA Children and Young People Services (CYPS)	1	2	3	98
Training on offer from Middletown Centre for Autism	1	2	3	98
Other VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained)				
Specify course 1				
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Other PROFESSIONAL SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained)				
Specify course 1				
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98
Specify course 1	1	2	3	98

Ask only for training courses mentioned at Q5

Q6c. For each course attended, please rate the extent to which you or your staff think that knowledge learned in the training has had a positive impact or no impact on children with SEN in your school? Single code in each row				
	Had a very positive impact	Had some positive impact	Had no positive impact at all	Don't know
Training offered from EA Children and Young People Services (CYPS)	1	2	3	98
Training on offer from Middletown Centre for Autism	1	2	3	98
Other VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained) Specify course 1 Specify course 1 Specify course 1 Specify course 1 Specify course 1	 1	 2	 3	 98
Other PROFESSIONAL SEN training (please write in the name or type of SEN training availed of and how many staff were trained) Specify course 1 Specify course 1 Specify course 1 Specify course 1 Specify course 1	 1	 2	 3	 98

Ask only those who have not attended any training – coded 97 at Q5a

Q6d. You mentioned that neither you nor other staff have attended **SEN** training since September 2021, why is this the case?

Allow Multi code

Cost – not able within the budget	1
Not enough time	2
Not able to backfill while staff go on training	3
Have had training and don't need any more	4
Can't find the right training course	5
Don't know how to access training	6
Don't know who does the training	7
Other (please specify _____)	8
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q7. To what extent do you think you have the appropriate skillset within your school to deliver support for pupils with SEN?

Single code only

To a large extent	1
To some extent	2
None at all	3
Don't know	98
Prefer not to say	99

Ask all

Q8. To what extent do you think you are able to allocate enough time from your directed time budget for staff training to support pupils with SEN?

Single code only

To a large extent	1
To some extent	2
None at all	3
Don't know	98
Prefer not to say	99

Ask all

Q9. Do you have teachers or other staff trained, within your school, to provide support in the following areas?

Please select all that apply.

Allow Multi Code

Literacy support	1
Numeracy support	2
Language and communication	3
Sensory support	4
Autism Advisory & Intervention	5
ADHD	6
Medical / medication needs/ physical disabilities	7
Behavioural support	8
Don't know	98
Prefer not to say	99

Ask only for EACH type of support provided at Q9 (codes 1-8).

Q10. For each type of support offered please indicate who mainly delivers this in school. For each support select who MAINLY delivers the support. Single code only per row							
SUPPORT	Teacher	LSC	Classroom Assistant	Other educational support (Specify)	Other health support (Specify)	Not applicable	Don't know
Literacy support	1	2	3	4	5	97	98
Numeracy support	1	2	3	4	5	97	98
Language and communication	1	2	3	4	5	97	98
Sensory support	1	2	3	4	5	97	98
Autism Advisory & Intervention	1	2	3	4	5	97	98
ADHD	1	2	3	4	5	97	98
Medical / medication needs/ physical disabilities	1	2	3	4	5	97	98
Behavioural support	1	2	3	4	5	97	98

4. Engagement with Parents

ParentsIntro

The next set of questions focuses on engagement with parents.

Ask all

Q11. How often do you typically check in with parents around their child's progression throughout the year? By this we mean scheduled check ins, not those that may occur due to a specific incident.	
Single code only	
Ongoing discussions which could be daily/weekly depending on the situation	1
Once a term	2
Once in the school year for normal parent / teacher meetings	3
Once a year at the annual SEN review	4
Only when the parent requests an update	5
Other please specify _____	10
Prefer not to say	99

Ask all

Q12. What feedback do you seek from parents? Please select all that apply.	
Allow multi code	
Regular general feedback, for example, how much the child reads at home	1
Regular general feedback on how easy/difficult it is to get their child to complete homework tasks	2
How well the school is doing at keeping them informed on their child progress	3
Whether they need general assistance from the school to support their child at home	4
Whether they need specific assistance to reinforce the in-school interventions at home	5
Parental satisfaction with formal written communication received from the school	6
Parental satisfaction with quality of teaching	7
Parental satisfaction with quality of additional services the school provides to support their child	8
Formal feedback through parent/ teacher meeting	9
Formal feedback through parent/ LSC meeting	10
Formal annual review of child with formal written or verbal feedback provided by parents	11
Other please specify _____	12
None	98
Prefer not to say	99

Ask all

Q13. What support, if any, is provided to parents to support in-school intervention at home? Please select all that apply Allow multi code	
A copy of the Personal Learning Plan (PLP) / Individual learning plan (IEP)	1
School material, e.g., copies of schoolwork/exercises to support in-school interventions at home	2
Training for parents on how to support in-school interventions at home	3
Ongoing discussions with parents on their child's progress	4
Online training resources for parents	5
Online resources to help parents support in-school intervention	6
Referrals to voluntary and community groups	7
Access to training through voluntary and community groups	8
Information on parent groups, such as Parenting NI	9
Information to parents on training through voluntary and community groups	10
Other please specify _____	11
None	98
Prefer not to say	99

5. Learning Support Co-Ordinator

LSCIntro

The next set of questions are about your school's Learning Support Co-Ordinator (LSC) (previously SENCO).

Ask all

Q14. Thinking about your Learning Support Co-Ordinator (previously SENCO), how is this delivered in your school? Please select all that apply Allow multi code	
By the Principal	1
By a teacher who teaches part-time and has part-time LSC responsibilities	2
By a teacher who teaches full-time and has LSC responsibilities	3
By a teacher who has full-time LSC responsibilities and no class teaching responsibilities	
Specially recruited full-time LSC	4
Specially recruited part-time LSC	5
The LSC post is vacant at the moment	6
A teacher without specific LSC training is doing the role at the moment	7
Other please specify _____	8
Prefer not to say	99

Ask all

Q15a. Have you faced, or are you currently facing challenges recruiting for the role of LSC? Single code only	
Yes	1
No	2
Not applicable	97
Don't know	98

Ask only those who code 1 [Yes at Q15a]

Q15b. What challenges have you faced or are you currently facing when recruiting for the role of LSC?	
Write in	
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q16. Do you allocate teaching points for the role of LSC?	
Single code only	
Yes	1
No	2
Not applicable	97
Don't know	98

Ask only if code 1 (Yes) at Q16

Q17. How many points do you allocate?	
Single code only	
One	1
Two	2
Three	3
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q18. Do you think there should be a career pathway for an LSC?	
Single code only	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q19a. Is the LSC a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) within your school?	
Single code only	
Yes	1
No	2
Not applicable	97
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q19b. How often does the LSC report to the Board of Governors?	
Single code only	
Following a request to do so by the Board of Governors	1
To inform the annual Board of Governor's report	2
At all Board of Governors meetings	3
Each term	4
Annually	5
Other please specify _____	6
Not applicable	97
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q20. Which of the following do you have in your school? Single code only in each row				
	Yes	No	Not applicable	Don't know
Dedicated LSC laptop	1	2	97	98
Dedicated LSC email address	1	2	97	98
Dedicated LSC mobile phone	1	2	97	98

Ask only for those which code 2 (No) at Q20

Q21a. Which of the following would be useful for your LSC?	
Please select all that apply	
Dedicated LSC laptop	1
Dedicated LSC email address	2
Dedicated LSC mobile phone	3
Other - please specify any other devices which would be useful for digital based interventions or assistive technologies or software, for example, tablets, other computer hardware such as microphones, earphones, reading pens, or specify any other software _____ _____ _____	4
Not applicable [Exclusive]	97
None [Exclusive]	98

Ask only for those which code 1 (yes) to all options OR codes 3 (Not applicable) AND 4 (Don't know) at Q20 ONLY

Q21b. Are there any other software or computer hardware which would be useful for your LSC?	
Please select all that apply	
Other - - please specify any other devices which would be useful for digital based interventions or assistive technologies or software, for example, tablets, other computer hardware such as microphones, earphones, reading pens, or specify any other software _____ _____ _____	4
Not applicable [Exclusive]	97
None [Exclusive]	98

Ask all

Q22. Thinking about the role of the LSC in your school, we would like to know how the Education Authority (EA) could support your school to develop this role. Please provide up to 5 suggestions.	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
We don't need any additional support to develop this role	6
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q23. What are the top THREE issues currently facing your LSC?	
Allow three only	
Lack of time	1
Lack of admin support	2
Too many children to support in the time allocated	3
Not enough specific LSC training	4
Lack of training	5
Lack of knowledge	6
Lack of experience	7
Lack of opportunity to develop skills and knowledge	8
Lack of networks with experts in SEN field	9
Barriers in bringing multi-disciplinary teams together (even for annual review)	10
School does not have a specialist provision (learning support centre)	11
School does not have a special room/space for 1-2-1 support to be delivered	12
School does not have a special room/space for group support to be delivered	13
Not enough Classroom Assistants	14
Too many Classroom Assistants and not enough teaching hours	15
Other (please specify _____)	16
Not applicable	97
Don't know	98

6. Administrative Workload Relating to SEN

AdminIntro

Now some questions about the administrative workload relating to SEN.

Ask all

Q24. Thinking about the amount of administration in relation to SEN, how would you describe it? Single code only	
Far too much	1
Somewhat too much	2
About right	3
Somewhat too little	4
Far too little	5
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q25. Which of the following best describes how you manage the SEN administrative workload currently? Single code only	
There is a SEN administrator in the school	1
The school office staff manage it	2
The school secretary manages it	3
The LSC does all the administration	4
The principal does all the administration	5
There is a combination of staff who work on the administration (e.g., the LSC + office administration staff + others)	6
The Classroom Assistants	7
The class teacher completes this	8
Other (please specify _____)	9
Don't know	98

7. Engagement with EA Pupil Support at New Code Stage 2

Code2Intro

The next set of questions are in relation to engagement with Education Authority Pupil Support (New Code Stage 2).

Stage Two: Pupils who are recorded as new Stage Two will be receiving school delivered special educational provision plus external provision, e.g., from one of the Education Authority (EA) Pupil Support Services or from a service within the Health and Social Care Trust.

Ask all

Q26. If you have needed to, which of the following services have you been able to access? Please select all that apply	
Allow multi-code	
Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS)	1
Language and communication service (LCS)	2
Literacy Service	3
Sensory Service	4
Behavioural Support and Provisions	5
SEN Inclusion Services	6
SEN Early Years Intervention Service	7
Have not needed to access any services [EXCLUSIVE]	8
Have needed to but have not been able to access any services [EXCLUSIVE]	9
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q27. If you have needed to, but have been UNABLE to access some or all services, which, if any, of the following have been a barrier to accessing the services? Please select all that apply	
Allow multi code	
Waiting on a medical diagnosis	1
Long waiting list for the service	2
Need Educational Psychologist input in order to be able to access the service	3
Another barrier (please specify _____)	4
Not applicable	97
Don't know	98

8. Children with Statements (New Code Stage 3)

Code3Intro

The next set of questions are in relation to Children with Statements (New Code Stage 3).

Stage Three: Pupils who are recorded as new Stage Three will have a statement of Special Educational Needs and will be receiving school and EA delivered special educational provision as detailed in their statement.

Ask all

Q28. To what extent do you think that the statements, as presented, accurately reflect the child's needs? Single code only	
To a great extent	1
To some extent	2
Hardly at all	3
Not at all	4
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q29. To what extent do you feel equipped as a school to deliver the content of a child's statement? Single code only	
To a great extent	1
To some extent	2
Hardly at all	3
Not at all	4
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q30. To what extent do you feel supported BY THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY (EA) as a school if you are facing challenges with the delivery of a child's statemented needs? Single code only	
To a great extent	1
To some extent	2
Hardly at all	3
Not at all	4
Don't know	98

9. Use of Classroom Assistants

CAIntro

The next set of questions are in relation to the use of Classroom Assistants.

Ask all

Q31. Which of the following are the top FIVE duties that your classroom assistants undertake for children and young people with SEN?	
Please select up to five statements only.	
Allow FIVE only	
Assist the teacher with the support and care of pupil(s) with special educational needs e.g., enable access to the curriculum,	1
Attend to personal needs of the children with SEN including dietary, feeding, toileting, etc.	2
Develop an understanding of the specific needs of the pupil(s) to be supported	3
Assist with authorised programmes (e.g., Education Plan, Care Plan)	4
Encourage pupil(s) participation in such programmes	5
Participate in the evaluation of the support for SEN children	6
Contribute to the inclusion of the pupil in mainstream classes under the directions of the Learning Support Coordinator /teacher.	7
Assist with operational difficulties and noninvasive medical/clinical difficulties pertaining to pupil(s) disabilities	8
Support in implementing behavioural management programmes	9
Assist pupil(s) in moving around school and on and off transport	10
Clarify and explain instructions	11
Ensure the pupils can use equipment and materials provided	12
Assisting in motivating and encouraging the pupil(s)	13
Assisting in areas requiring reinforcement or development	14
Promoting the independence of pupils to enhance learning	15
Helping pupil(s) stay on work set	16
Meeting physical/medical needs as required whilst encouraging independence	17
Administrative duties e.g., prep of documents, photocopying, which are whole class rather than specifically for the child with SEN	18
Ensuring understanding of SEN and inclusion throughout the mainstream setting	19
Building a trusted relationship and rapport with the child and family	20
Other please _____	21
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q32. Do you involve the parents and children/ young people in the recruitment of their classroom assistants?	
Single code only	
Yes – parents only	1
Yes – children/ young people only	2
Yes – both parents and children/young people	
No – we do not involve either parents or children/young people in the recruitment of their classroom assistant	2
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q33. How frequently, if at all, do the classroom assistants engage with parents? Single code only	
Every day	1
Every 2-3 days	2
Every 4-5 days	3
About once a week	4
Every 2-3 weeks	5
About once a month	6
Less often than once a month	7
Once a term	8
Annually	9
Never	10
Don't know	98

10. Access to Allied Health Professionals (AHP)

AHPIntro

The next set of questions are in relation to access to Allied Health Professionals (AHP).

Ask all

Q34. Which of the following services do your children and young people require access to from Allied Health Professionals? Please select all that apply. Allow multi code	
Diet and nutritional therapy	1
Occupational therapy	2
Speech and language therapy	3
Chiropody/podiatry	4
Prosthetics	5
Orthotics	6
Physiotherapy	7
Clinical psychology	8
Paediatrics	9
Optical	10
Audiology	11
Other please specify _____	12
None of the above required	13
Don't know	98

Ask all

Q35. To what extent do you feel supported BY YOUR LOCAL HEALTH TRUSTS as a school if you are facing challenges with the delivery of a child's statemented needs? Single code only	
Very supported	1
Somewhat supported	2
No feelings either way	3
Not much support	4
No support	5
Don't know	98
Not applicable - do not require support from Local Health Trusts	99

11. Other External Agency Support

OthIntro

The next few questions are about other External Agency Support.

Ask all

Q36. Which external agency do you seek services or support from? Please select all that apply.	
Allow multi code	
Autism NI	1
National Autism Society	2
MENCAP	3
Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)	4
Save the Children	5
Barnardo's	6
Early Years Organisations (e.g. Early Years/ Surestart)	7
Independent Early Years Specialists	8
Dyslexia NI	9
RNIB	10
Angeleyes NI	11
Other please specify _____	12

None of these [exclusive]	13
Don't know [exclusive]	98

12. Middletown Centre for Autism

Ask all

Q37. Have you accessed any of the following services from Middletown Centre for Autism <u>in the last 5 years?</u>	
Please select all that apply	
Allow multi code	
1-2-1 services	1
Advice	2
Whole school	3
Research	4
Primary Training	5
Post primary training	6
Other training	7
None of these services [exclusive]	8
Was not aware of Middletown Centre for Autism before today [exclusive]	9
Don't know [exclusive]	98

Ask only those who have accessed training code 5-7 in Q37

Q38. On balance, how would you rate the current training provided by Middletown Centre? Single code only	
Very good	1
Fairly good	2
Neither good nor poor	3
Fairly poor	4
Very poor	5
Don't know	98

13. Staff/ Training and Continuous Professional development in SEN**CPDIntro**

The next question is about staff training and Continuous Professional Development in SEN.

Ask all

Q39. Thinking about SEN Training, what is the priority SEN training that is needed for each of the following staff/group of staff in your school?		
Principals	Not applicable	Don't know
Teachers	Not applicable	Don't know
LSCs	Not applicable	Don't know
Classroom Assistants	Not applicable	Don't know
Non-Teaching Staff	Not applicable	Don't know

14. Role of the Board of Governors**GovIntro**

The next question is about the role of the Board of Governors.

Ask all

Q40. Does your Board of Governors have a designated SEN governor? Single code only	
Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	98

15. EOTAS Provision

EOTASIntro

The next questions are about EOTAS (Education other than at school) Provision.

Ask all

Q41. How many children from your SEN register only are registered with EOTAS (Education other than at school) settings and are they full time or part time?	
Write in number of children registered with EOTAS settings FULL TIME	Write in number of children registered with EOTAS settings PART TIME
We currently have no children registered with EOTAS settings	
Don't know	
	00
	98

Ask only those who have children in EOTAS settings [have put a number either full time or part time in Q41]

Q42. To what extent do you feel supported by the Education Authority (EA) when it comes time to reintegrate the pupils with SEN back into your school following EOTAS intervention?	
Single code only	
Very supported	1
Quite supported	2
No feelings either way	3
Not very supported	4
Not at all supported	5
Don't know	98

Ask only those who have children in EOTAS settings [have put a number either full time or part time in Q41]

Allow up to **FIVE** only

Q43. What are the top FIVE reasons why pupils with SEN are referred to EOTAS ?	
Please provide up to five answers only	
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
Don't know	98

16. Final Thoughts

FinIntro

This final set of questions will gather any additional information regarding children with SEN in your school.

Ask all

Q44. On a scale of one to five, where one is not at all confident and five is very confident how confident are you that the children with SEN in your school...?

Single code in each row

	Not at all confident	Not confident	Neither	Confident	Very confident	Don't know
Make good progress educationally	1	2	3	4	5	98
Have a clear educational pathway and access to their next educational step	1	2	3	4	5	98
Are ready to succeed beyond their current stage of education (e.g., to primary / post primary / FE/HE / employment)	1	2	3	4	5	98

Ask all

Q45. What needs to be done to ensure the most positive pathway for children with SEN?

Don't know

Ask all

Q46. If you could change **one thing** about our current system for SEN children, what would that be?

Don't know

Appendix C – Things that schools would like to see changed

The following sets out the verbatim responses provided by schools when asked in the survey “If you could change **one thing** about our current system for SEN children, what would that be?”

Reduce the paperwork to allow more time to be directed where it has the most positive impact - working on interventions with the children as early as possible.

Have a single system for accessing support

Quicker access to educational psychology. More access to direct teaching from EA-eg LSS/Behaviour Specialists/Nurture Specialists.

Training for class teachers on meeting the varied needs of children in their class. Teaching hours being allocated to some children with a statement rather than all CA hours. (So more than one thing!!)

Put dedicated learning support teachers into schools based on the levels of need and numbers of children.

Parents are better supported by EA

The speed by which we can get our preschool children assessed and access support - we cope without support in the nursery sector - we are simply vessels to do all the groundwork, see children at their most need yet do not get the input or classroom assistance unless in the case of the most extreme of needs that have been picked up prior to entry.

The role of nursery teachers is becoming almost impossible in that the levels of need coming through our doors are increasing year on year and a ratio of 1:13 is simply speaking becoming unsafe at worst and detrimental to the needs of these children and the rest of the class at its least

That support could be accessed when required

Timescales

More funded interventions for 1-to-1 work by trained professionals

Far too much paperwork. School Admissions have moved to a portal which is excellent. No paperwork at all.

Amount of time wasted getting support to children due to administration and having to pass through gatekeepers. It can be evident that a child needs additional support but this can take 3-5 years to get due to all the barriers in place.

Better early identification

Making PLP more paper based and on the SIMS system - currently we have IEP 1 x A4 page per term - 2 per year

PLP suggested - 4 pages for each pupil. This is a big ask to have it on the SIMS system and 4 pages is a lot as we have 50 pupils currently on the SEN register.

Access to all services that children deserve and need.

More time allowed for Educational Psychology support and assessment

I had more time to dedicate to each one

Re introduction of streaming and vocational education.

Subjects from boards like OCN, or GCSE equivalents, do not help pupils in mainstream school progress. Having vocational subject taught in school or at regional college's offer better life skills and experience.

Unnecessary labelling and diagnosis.

As a principal I would like a whole school budget for JE2 staff based on children at Stage 2&3 and not an allocation per child at stage 3 that leaves with the child.

Stop pretending that we have a functioning service for the most needy children. More cooperation from the EA and less disconnect between ptofessional.

REPLACE OFFICERS WHO MAY NOT BE QUALIFIED FOR THE POST AND HAVE NO EXPERIENCE AND WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE DICTATORS RATHER THAN OFFICERS PREPARE TO LISTEN TO PARENTS.

THE EA SHOULD INSTRUCT TRAINED OFFICERS TO CO-OPERATE WITH EXPERTS IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR WHO HAVE A PROVEN RECORD OF SUCCESS AND PLACE CHILDREN IN INDEPENDENTS SCHOOLS WITHOUT DELAY.

SEN AT PRESENT IS NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE. TEACHERS ARE BEING REPLACED BY AN ARMY OF CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS.

More access to our wonderful Ed Psy Mr. Tony Murphy

faster identification and allocation of CAS

More joined up approach with other services.

Greater allocation of time and input from Educ Psychologist.

Take away the Education Psychologist as the gate keeper to services or give the education psychologist more hours to carry all the assessments needed to get the children the help / support they need.

All branches of CYPS are clear in their service role and have adequate staffing to carry out the support in a timely fashion.

Earlier interventions for children with specific literacy difficulties.

More recognition and time given to LSC's.

Annual Reviews only for transition or change of placement

Better training

Increased educational psychology input

The amount of paperwork

Less paper work

Access to external services. Schools are increasingly being expected to take on more and more responsibilities which should be delivered by external experts.

Less paperwork

Have more funding for resources e.g Laptops, Headphones etc.

Have a clear pathway to identify SEN - Medical Needs from Statement and IEP

The administrative burden, which REQUIRES, constant repetition of the same information on each form at each stage of the process. This contributes to the feeling that we are being brushed off as a school, with as many barriers as possible being put in place to prevent our children getting the help and support that they need.

speed and efficiency of service delivery without the need for duplicate and unnecessary paper work and red tape procedures

Nurture provision / funding as a priority in all schools, at all levels to build and maintain pupil self-esteem

Protected funding for in-school provision, resources and facilities which means we don't have to rely on external support. A local 'hub' which provides purposeful and meaningful support for all stages of the CoP.

Specialist provision in mainstream schools for Behaviour Support

Resource the pupil's need instead of trying to make the child's need fit into a system/service/provision that is not suitable.

SEN pupils should not be shoe-horned into mainstream schools. Pupils should be placed in learning environments best suited to their needs.

That the provisions and services offered still have to be fought for at every level. These are services that these children need to help them manage. Too many still view these accommodations as doing something extra or above and beyond as opposed to something that is vital for our children. Parents and teachers of children with additional needs are viewed as demanding for simply asking for something that should just be the norm.

Increase access to ed psych assessments. process for support is very slow.

Realistic pathways suited to the needs of each young person post-19

Have more assistants available to support children.

The length of time taken to process assessments: Children are left struggling in inappropriate placements for far too long.

The length of time required to have a statement in place.

Access to a solid level of support when required, without the long and anxious waits.

Remove legislation / legal framework - to develop a more responsive flexible system.

the amount of paperwork

Open unfettered access to Educational Psychology assessment and review for all pupils who require it, and to the support services they need.

EA taking more responsibility for statemented children and providing the resources needed to meet identified needs on statements

Im aware that the streamlining of the Stages is to make it simpler, however, the role seems to be so complex and laden with paperwork.

I've been to training and heard such knowledgeable people speak but SEN is or has often been their entire role in a school, I have a class to teach and a LSC role also. Also, schools vary so much in how the role is done, some teachers seem to have the role as a type of secondment, some get a day a

week for it, some get hardly any time at all despite funding being provided. It is so very varied, I know that school size plays a role, of course this is so, but it is very variable from place to place but we're all expected to provide the same level of service and knowledge.

The volume of bureaucracy needed to access anything

More expert help within mainstream schools - not outreach! Outreach is a waste of resources!!!!

Waitlists and access to more support, further development of ASD Units.

More provision for children with numeracy difficulties

Constant paperwork and jumping through 'hoops' to get to the next stage.

Educational Psychologists being the 'gatekeepers' to services such as AAIS.

Children are identified sooner so support can be put in place. More educational psychologists. I would bring back Reading Recovery.

Our nursery, situated in a deprived area should have an extra classroom assistant to support the needs of SEN children coming into the nursery with no support due to the fact that the statementing process hasn't started yet. Every year we lose good trained CA's when their 1 to 1 leaves nursery at the end of June and every year we are looking for a new 1 to 1 before the end of September. This has happened each year, in all of my 21 years as principal at this school.

Quicker timescale to get help for children

Much more involvement and support from EA to reduce the burden of schools. This would include money and time to support LSC.

Resources made available to increase the amount of space in special schools to allow more children to access their services and reduce the burden on mainstream staff.

That it would be better understood by the people who are writing the policies and creating the services

That services and psychologists were more accessible to ensure children are not missing out.

Less administration

Faster turnaround time for accessing CAs/ support.

Early intervention

Each school to have a designated Learning support hub to ensure that pupils have access to one to one they need regardless of whether they have a statement or not.

ADDITIONAL sen assistant[s] in every setting to ensure that there is one person designated to ensure that the children's needs are being properly met .

Funding and more realistic expectation what can be managed within a mainstream classroom

Reduce class numbers to improve ratio of adults to children

Lessen the paperwork

Increase Educational Psychology hours

Reduce waiting lists/times of outside agencies

Red Tape - Pupils need support as soon as they need it. We see a deterioration in engagement, behaviour, mental health etc. whilst awaiting access to services

Less restrictions around Ed Psyc time because a lot of our children are presenting with complex learning and emotional needs and the resources aren't there for them.

greater support for busy class teachers (and not 15 pages of a literacy support waiting list form!)

More awareness of SEN needs by staff

Wait times for receiving intervention and support.

Length of time to get support for children. In primary, it can take many referrals before a child secures a statement of SEN.

I suppose as a new SENCo. with lots of children on the SEN I feel overwhelmed at times. Training 1:1 for all staff would be beneficial on PLPs among other things.

reduced waiting times for referrals

More special schools

That Autism would be less understood through caricatures and more through knowledge of the individuals.

Reduce the paperwork and protocols from the Education Authority which at times actually prevent pupils from accessing the support that they so desperately need.

When an educational professional asks for help for a child we shouldn't have to jump through hoops to get it. Triage visits could be carried out and an interim plan and support put in place whilst the more formal avenues are completed. This would improve outcomes for the child, reduce stress on the setting and positively impact the community around the child eg. parents and peers

Better communication with EA - they seem to be unobtainable and shorter time frames for those children who are going through stat, especially if all communication/requests for info are submitted. In this day and age of email this should no longer be dragged out, for the sake of the children

More children could be given individual support in school

We need to have a more joined up approach involving all groups and bodies that have a role to play in the diagnosis and/or support of children with SEN.

early intervention so we are not playing catch up in post primary.

That schools were responsible for their own allocation of resources from a learning support funding pot, rather than a mismatch of hours for CAs, learning mentors specialist teaching. Give schools autonomy in managing their own learning support provision.

Less administration - too much time spent on paperwork rather than actually working with the young people

There are so many children with SEN now that many of them will not have opportunity to have a formal diagnosis. The number of children with dyslexia vastly outstrips the number that we can put forward to Educational Psychology each year.

To make it easier to access Stage 2 support.

LSC to be a non-teaching role.

Quicker identification through easier access to ed psych in early years

direct AND IMMEDIATE CONTACT WITH EXTERNAL EXPERTS

Remove the administration, have a proper technological link with SIMS and lead services, reduced form filling. Today i feel like a data input clerk and i am trained to be much more.

More Educational Psychologists and more time for them to assess children for a statement. Too many children are 'slipping through the net' and not being seen by Ed Psych early enough and often intervention is too late. School with over 100 pupils should have access to at least 5 statutory assessments annually.

Less complicated and time consuming IEPs or PLPs that teachers or LSCs are not spending lots of time completing administrative tasks.

The process from referral to statutory assessment.

An EP visited a child in my school recently and recommended statutory assessment. I had to fill this form out after the stage 3 referral form and then add further school information. Surely if the recommendation has been from EP to SA, then their recommendation after a lengthy observation and testing day, as it was recent, should negate the need for more paperwork from schools which says exactly the same thing.

Too much paper work that is repetitive.

Parents currently can refer their child for Ed Psy assessment at any stage of the school year. This places unnecessary stress on teachers who are duty and timebound to fill in all the relevant forms, even though they don't agree with the requested assessment, or the child has just entered their class in September! Some parents are using this system to jump the queue and bypass teachers' professional opinion. Filling in PIP forms seems to be prioritised. If there was simply a tick box at the top of the form, asking teachers if they agree with the parental request BEFORE any part of the form had to be completed, then this would:

(a) reduce wasted time and unnecessary paperwork.

(b) free up Ed Psy time to assess the pupils who were agreed upon by both the school and Ed Psy.

This year, all of our time allocations weren't fulfilled due to a few demanding parents who had referred their children themselves and the Ed Psy ran out of time to assess the children who have been agreed upon.

Better professional satisfaction for classroom assistants.

In England there are different grades of assistant, with opportunities for career progression.

We are losing assistants to other jobs due to a lack of job satisfaction, a lack of career progression, and low pay.

This has a direct impact on the continuity of provision for young people with SEN. Sometimes recruitment has not been possible and young people are without the assistance they require.

Administering absences, shortfalls and recruitment then takes up a significant proportion of LSCo time which would more efficiently be spent on working with young people with SEN.

More access to specialist teachers at Stage 2, not 'advice & guidance' being provided by Stage 2 services.

Fast track process for assessment in the nursery year.

SENCo time allocation and an understanding of the amount of 1:1 work required to complete the role.

Increase Educational Psychology hours

Make it easier to access support and advice for children who need it.

Children would be seen by professionals from an early age, their needs would be assessed and statutory assessment completed prior to availing of a nursery place thus ensuring that these children get a placement that can meet their needs rather than the laissez faire arrangement of lets see how they get on in nursery.

I would also recommend that a preschool professional be a member of the Early Years panel within the Child Assessment clinics in Health so that they can be the voice of reason and ensure that children with SEN get the diagnosis and then placement they deserve rather than have a year of struggling within mainstream nursery classes.

To treat the children as individuals! Not just a percentage or a statistic!!!!!!

More maths support from outside school

Reduce waiting times for diagnosis and services.

the paperwork requirements

Ratios should be lowered to allow staff to support children who are beginning nursery school with the complex needs and with little or no support.

More time for small intervention groups with specific resources and time for well-being activities.

More support and a quicker process for being assessed by psychology. Better SEN assistant hours - the hours often only cover part of the school day which is not adequate or appropriate.

all foundation/key stage one classes should have a general classroom assistant to lunch time

Ability to access referrals for educational psychology quicker.

Access to Education Psychologists and greater allocation of their time.

Listening to teachers who are dealing with the children on a daily basis in regards to which children need a classroom assistant. too much stress put on staff!

Schools having consistent control of how to spend their funding so they can decide whether to buy teaching hours or resources. This funding needs to be distributed based on need!!!

Putting children into mainstream schools without access to the correct provision.

Root and branch change required of whole SEN EA system.

That the EA listen to the school and not just procedure spread sheets and graphs - it feels like corporate business and that they have forgotten the children and parents.

EA

Change from a process-driven culture to a learning-driven culture. Democratise the expertise: Every teacher can be a Learning Support Teacher

It needs to be more joined up and more simple. Easier access to the services required.

Waiting time between school referral and contact from an Educational Psychologist and final statement CA allocated hours.

SEN children attend their closest special school setting.

Give staff more time to do their job and less paperwork.

Make sure outside agencies have a set timeframe to respond and support schools.

Support for SBEW children-full time placements and more children able to access it .

simplify the language and explain it clearly to SEN children in a way they can understand that their challenge might be an opportunity

It is important that Educational Psychologist sees children within a shorter timeframe and they are giving the hours to meet the needs of the children.

extend provision

Special schools need to be built to meet needs of changing population, staff INSET to manage changing profile, significant investment in resources

Less administration, more direct teaching intervention in the early years to intervene early before the gap widens together with the time taken for outside intervention to happen being reduced.

More adult assistance available.

Early intervention and joined up thinking with external agencies, health and education. A multidisciplinary support, training and delivery programme from ages 2-5 with school liaison officers integrating children into formal education. Access to early intervention programmes to prevent delay as children come to school. Awareness raised among teachers that children are not all the same and need to be taught in different ways.

The amount of Education Psychology hours need to be reviewed according to number of pupils in the school, the number of FSM in the school and the social/economic status of the area/town they live in.

That all children who require additional support to reach their potential, receive it, regardless of the size of the school. We have children waiting to see the Ed.Psych for up to 4 years - no early intervention

Decrease the amount of time pupils waiting for support for eg. from Literacy service and allowing pupils who have a statement for Dyslexia access to Peri service also.

That if teachers believe that there is a child in definite need for support within thier class that they have the confidence to turn to a sevice which will address the needs quickly and effectively. That we have an approachable and transparent SEN service which is accessible by all. That the time scales when dealing with the needs of these children are met more quickly. Sorry more than one thing and I could add a few others to this list!!!

Access to small group settings within the mainstream pre school setting. Despite my proposal to establish a SEN unit at Dungannon Nursery school it has been allocated to a primary school instead. Greater and faster access to diagnostic services.

shorten the referral time for nrserly aged children so we as staff in nursery schools can have some support as it is a stressful enough environment without adding to it unnecessarily

Located and Resourced to have Closer links with all age related schools so that all children in Omagh have the opportunity to learn together on a regular basis.

Recognition that pupils in independent schools are entitled to support by ALL EA staff.

how it is funded

Access to specialist support at an earlier stage

Give each school a dedicated teacher for early intervention work. Not a project that is funded from Sept to April and then April to June. (ie Engage) No teacher can be motivated to set up and acquire the skill set necessary to develop appropriate interventions if they dont know that this is going to be their full time valued role in school.

The waiting times - even when a child is in crisis, NO support is offered while statement is drawn up or change of placement is sourced

Easier access to specialist support in mainstream primary schools.

More staffing in school which would include SLT's, OT's etc coming in to work with the children rather than seeing them in clinic.

More Educational Psychology assessment hours per school

Less paperwork and more direct support being delivered to the schools

Statementing process- too long and tied up with red tape and unecesarily long time frames with very limited access to educational psychology which seems perpetually over stretched.

Extremely difficult to choose 1 thing!

Improve training and increase support provision for ALL staff, and parents for working with pupils with SEN. Get the supports in place early, build confidence and skills in all staff and parents, develop strategies and give easy access to resources (which are currently kept as some kind of hidden treasure until you need the services!!) to meet needs of SEN pupils in a mainstream school (with reduced class sizes). This may in turn reduce the need for requests for Educational Psychologist assessments and statementing, and the need for alternative placements.

Lack of contact from EA SEN services. Phoning and no one to answer your queries and constant change of contacts. Every one working more closely together to speed up the process of accessing support.

I would like to feel that we were working with EA and all agencies rather than feeling we have to fight for the support that our children need and deserve. Each school needs an EA SEN officer who is there to offer support when needed - everything takes too long and there is very little support on offer to help day to day.

Schools are often left to explain the system to parents and to explain why we are no further forward, which is very frustrating as it is often out of our control.

More Special Schools so that pupils who need a special school setting have sufficient places available

That special schools had an appropriate and fully delegated budget to enable them to purchase the appropriate resouces and support to allow them to be sufficiently responsive to the individual requirements of children with complex needs

Provision of adequate resources to ensure that the needs of all SEN pupils are being effectively supported.

More time and training from educational psychologist

Permanent funding to allow release time for training, smaller classes and less paperwork

Quicker access to additional support (either within school or from outside acgencies)

Provide nurture and learning support classes to EVERY school

Less children with SEN in each class, or a separate room/ ISC for them. This would benefit the child, the staff and the other children in the class who lose out as the teaching staff and Nursery assistants

have to devote so much time to the SEN children. The activities have to be changed to suit the SEN to ensure their safety, the others are losing out!

Pointless question, there is not one thing.

Targeted support by staff member responsible for SEN only

More access to external support services and services e.g. increased access to psychology services/behavioural

Number of children seen by Ed Psych each year. Not enough children are being given the support they most desperately need.

The amount of time it takes for assessment and diagnosis to take place. The amount of paperwork that needs to be completed in order to get the children the help that they need and the time that this takes. Statements and allocation of hours do not take into account the complexity of the children's needs and the impact that this has upon them both socially and academically. By the time the children have gone through the process to get help they are already struggling in the school system for too long and they have already disengaged.

Reduce administration

Educational Psychology service need to be expanded to allow for a greater number of referrals per year and help being given to schools to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.

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Ipsos' standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.



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This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



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ISO 9001

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