



NASS

National Association
of Special Schools

Navigating SEND policy

NASS spring term digest

March 2025



Welcome to NASS's summary of major SEND policy news and announcements over the past term. It's certainly been a lively time for speculation about SEND, even if we don't have anything confirmed yet about major policy changes.

Want to know more news as it happens? Join us!

NASS is the leading membership association for special schools, offering expert guidance, support and a strong advocacy voice for the sector. Stay ahead of SEND policy changes and be part of a national network of special schools. Find out more: [NASS membership](#)



Education Committee Inquiry

Solving the SEND crisis

At the end of December 2024, the Education Committee launched a major new inquiry focused on finding solutions to the crisis in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision.

This term, the Committee has had several oral evidence sessions hearing from a range of stakeholders. NASS's CEO, Claire Dorer OBE gave evidence at the session focused on funding on 25th February: [Watch session](#)

Questioning of witnesses has focused on a number of core questions, particularly on whether SEND support should be made statutory with ringfenced funding. There have also been questions about whether the Children and Families Act should be amended or replaced to reduce rights and entitlements to provision.

What next: The committee is due to report back later this year and will make recommendations that the government must respond to.

The Committee has recently published all submissions to their call for evidence. You can view these here: [Written evidence](#)



Government plans

A new SEND white paper?

On 3rd March, the Guardian announced that an 'insider' had hinted at an imminent and wide-ranging SEND White Paper. This led to the chair of the Select Committee, Helen Hayes MP, writing to Bridget Philipson, asking for further details and reassurance that the Government would wait until after the Committee had finished its enquiry to launch.

The Government has not commented on what they are branding as a 'leak' but it appears likely that we have at least a few more months to wait. In addition to the Select Committee, the Government has also recently announced the [Inclusion in Practice advisory group](#), which will be working over the summer term. To date, almost all work on inclusion identified so far focuses on mainstream schools.

Championing special schools: NASS is actively working to promote the role of special schools in inclusive education and calling for the first strategic review of the role of special schools in over 20 years



Sir Martyn Oliver, speaking at our 2024 NASS Conference in October

Ofsted consultation

Proposed education inspection framework

January's education news was dominated by the launch of Ofsted's consultation on its new education inspection framework. With the demise of the single word judgment, Ofsted is proposing a 5-scale judgment approach across 11 evaluation areas. Inclusion is a specific evaluation area for the first time. The consultation offers a chance to see and comment on the proposed inspection handbooks. You can access and respond to the consultation here:

[Ofsted consultation](#)

Representing special schools: The new framework has received a mixed response in the media. NASS has concerns over whether the framework will work well for special schools, specifically for evaluation areas such as achievement and inclusion. We have held focus groups with our members this term and are feeding into an Ofsted roundtable at the end of March.

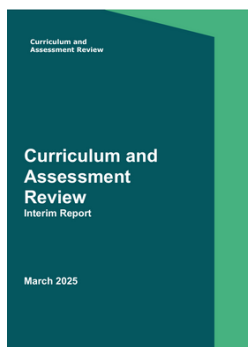


A new Government Bill

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

This term the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill has made its way through committee and report stages in the House of Commons. Whilst the Bill does not focus specifically on SEND, it does contain clauses which will impact on special schools. In particular, the Bill sets out a reduction in the freedoms afforded to academies, including a proposed requirement to teach the National Curriculum and for all teachers to hold QTS. You can read more about the Bill here: [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#)

Representing special schools: NASS has been involved in discussions with DfE this term about ensuring flexibility is available for special schools to continue to teach the most appropriate subjects for their students, using the best qualified staff, which may not always be staff with QTS.



Government review

Curriculum and Assessment Review

An interim report was published on 18th March: [Interim Report](#)

We welcomed the early assertion that the current system does not work well for all learners, and specifically those with SEND. We know that too many of our schools deliver great educational opportunities and outcomes in spite of the system, rather than as a result of it.

We were pleased to see recognition of the need for education to keep pace with social and technological changes, including the use of AI. NASS is currently supporting 11 of our member special schools to make good use of AI across the work of the school and we'll be sharing findings at our conferences in June and October.

For young people aged 16 or over, we have been worried that the recent narrowing of funded courses is having a negative impact on those with SEND. We welcomed the report's call for a recognition of a broader range of qualifications and learning and assessment methods to support more learners and enable them to continue to make meaningful progress in their education. We are looking forward to seeing further work on these in the next phase of the review.

Grant funding to schools to support increases to employers' National Insurance Contributions



On 18th March, the Government made its long-awaited announcement on how it will fund Employers' NIC increases from 1st April 2025. The good news is that funding has been allocated to all types of special schools. The less good news is that, for many of our members, this is directed through local authorities. The even less good news is that education media reports suggest that the funding does not cover the real cost to schools in full with TES suggesting a 10-35% shortfall.

Funding for special schools is being managed differently to funding for mainstream settings and the grant stream will be directed through the Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG) for all settings. Those with the easiest route to recovery will be NMSS, who will receive the funding direct from DfE. Funding for academies and independent special schools will be directed via local authorities, who should pass this on to schools. Unhelpfully, the conditions of grant for this funding are not due to be published until May! This may result in schools struggling to get the funding that is due to them. The position for post-16 organisations is even less clear with a line in the guidance saying that LAs 'may' use funding to support fee increases in these settings.

The CSBG is the route by which funding will also be allocated for the Teachers Pay Grant and the Teachers' Pension Employers' Contribution grant.

The grant will be paid to local authorities in 3 payments, due to be made in May 2025, September 2025 and March 2026. The NIC payment will be made in LAs' September 2025 payments, so schools may not receive funding ahead of this. However, provisional conditions of grant suggest that LAs should use the funding to pay for fee increases as a result of cost increases. If as a school, you have already reflected these in your fee increases, you may not receive further funding on top of this. NMSS should note that if you have put in fee increase requests that include NIC increases, you should be funded for these via DfE, not the placing LA.

Allocations will be based on student numbers from the January 2025 pupil or school census (depending on your setting) and will not be adjusted once the 2026 census figures become available.

The CSBG funding rates for the 2025 to 2026 financial year are as follows:

- £2,054 per place for SEND and AP places in maintained and NMSS, pupil referral units, and special and AP academies and free schools. This has been calculated using the 2024 to 2025 rates for TPAG (£446) and TPECG (£595) and the full-year equivalent of the 2024 to 2025 rate for CSBG (£1,013).
- £1,608 per place for pupils placed in independent schools. This has been calculated using the 2024 to 2025 rate for TPECG (£595) and the full-year equivalent of the 2024 to 2025 rate for CSBG (£1,013) only, as independent schools were not eligible to receive TPAG in 2024 to 2025.
- A further £496 per place for SEND and AP places in maintained and non-maintained special schools, pupil referral units, and special and AP academies and free schools; and £496 per pupil/student placed in independent special schools, SPIs and ITPs/ILPs. This rate will be used for the separate September 2025 payment of the NICs element of the CSBG allocations as well as for the final payment of the additional NICs funding in March 2026.