



**Every Need Met.
Every Opportunity Given.**

Four asks. One ambition:

A SEND system where every child can thrive

ASK FOUR Build Capacity. Prevent Crisis.

Invest in capacity before needs escalate.

Every child and young person with SEND deserves timely support that meets their needs before difficulties escalate. Yet too much of the current system intervenes only when children reach crisis point, by which time needs may have become more complex, outcomes poorer, and costs significantly higher.

NASS supports efforts to create a more sustainable and effective SEND system. However, meaningful reform will only be achieved if government invests in sufficient capacity across education, health and care services to provide the right support at the right time.

Children should not have to wait for needs to worsen before receiving appropriate help. A system designed around early intervention, flexibility and sufficient specialist capacity delivers better outcomes for children and better value for public services.

The challenge

NASS is concerned that current SEND reforms focus on managing demand for specialist provision rather than building the capacity needed to meet children's needs. There are growing concerns that policy is seeking to reduce reliance on specialist placements, including Non-Maintained and Independent Special Schools, rather than addressing the reasons families seek specialist support.

Reports that local authorities may be encouraged or incentivised to reduce specialist placements, alongside the cancellation of plans to build new special schools, raise significant concerns. Reform must not become an exercise in limiting access to support. Children's needs do not disappear when provision is restricted. Too often, children and families are forced to navigate multiple thresholds before accessing help that meets need, allowing difficulties to escalate and creating greater pressure across education, health and care services.

A sustainable SEND system must be driven by need, not ideology about where children should be educated. The system must be supported by sufficient specialist capacity to ensure support is available when it is needed, not only when situations reach crisis point.

Our message to the new Prime Minister

Children should not have to wait for needs to escalate while progressing through successive SEND thresholds before accessing appropriate support that fully meets their needs.

Government must invest in new special school places and increase capacity within existing special schools, recognising their vital role in delivering specialist support, outreach and early intervention across the SEND system. This will help ensure children receive the right support at the right time, before needs become acute.

BUILD CAPACITY. REDUCE CRISIS.

Invest in more specialist school places, more outreach and support services, more therapeutic provision, more specialist staff, and more flexible early intervention across education, health and care services.

Why investment in capacity matters

Early intervention and appropriate specialist support can significantly improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

When sufficient capacity exists across the system, children are more likely to receive support when it is needed, rather than after difficulties have become entrenched. This helps to prevent escalation of need and reduces the likelihood of placement breakdown, prolonged absence from education, family stress and mental health difficulties.

Investment in specialist capacity enables:

- ✓ earlier identification of emerging needs;
- ✓ timely access to specialist advice and intervention;
- ✓ improved attendance and engagement in education;
- ✓ greater stability for children and families;
- ✓ reduced reliance on crisis interventions;
- ✓ increased independence and preparation for adulthood; and
- ✓ better long-term outcomes across education, health and community participation.

Special schools play a vital role within this system. Sufficient specialist school places ensure children can access appropriate provision and specialist expertise when required.

If the system would allow and provide adequate funding for special schools to offer outreach services and enable specialist knowledge to be shared more widely, we could see more mainstream and special schools working together to support children effectively before needs escalate. Similarly, therapeutic provision and specialist staffing could provide the expertise necessary to address challenges early and reduce the risk of future crises. However to date, reforms have created insufficient opportunities for schools to develop and deliver sustainable outreach services.

Investment in capacity is therefore not simply an additional cost. It is a practical means of reducing pressure across education, health and social care systems while improving outcomes for children and families.

Our concern about SEND Reform

NASS is concerned that future reforms focus primarily on managing demand rather than building the capacity required to meet it.

We are particularly concerned by approaches that could:

- delay capital investment in special school provision while demand continues to grow; Government sees inclusion bases as providing specialist provision. We seek confirmation that DfE will continue to invest in special school provision.
- fail to increase the number of special school places available;
- Government has underinvested in the capacity of special schools to deliver the outreach, early intervention and preventative support that can reduce pressure across the wider SEND system;
- exacerbate shortages in therapeutic provision and specialist staffing;
- prioritise crisis management over early intervention;
- create barriers to flexible, child-centred support.



NASS is the membership association for all types of special schools in England and Wales. We provide support, advice, information, events, training and a strong national voice.

We're a growing community with over 500 schools and organisations in membership.

If you have any questions or would like further information please contact:

Mari Davis - NASS Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer mdavis@nassschools.org.uk

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Attempts to reduce costs without investing in appropriate and needs led early support risk generating greater expenditure later through more intensive interventions and crisis responses. Generic support at mainstream level will not be enough for many children and young people with SEND.