



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

Four asks. One ambition:

A SEND system where every child can thrive

ASK THREE Recruit. Retain. Reward.

Build a sustainable specialist workforce

Every child and young person with SEND deserves access to skilled professionals who understand their needs and can provide the specialist support required to help them thrive. Yet across education, health and care services, workforce shortages are creating increasing challenges for children, families and providers.

NASS welcomes government recognition that workforce development is essential to SEND reform. However, improving outcomes for children will only be possible if there are enough specialist professionals to meet need. Recruitment alone will not solve the problem if experienced staff continue to leave the sector at unsustainable rates.

A long-term workforce strategy for specialist education is urgently needed. Government must ensure that specialist expertise is valued, developed and retained across the SEND system.

The challenge

The SEND system depends on a highly skilled workforce that includes teachers, therapists, support staff, nurses, psychologists, care professionals and many other specialists. These professionals support children and young people with some of the most complex educational, communication, health and behavioural needs.

However, providers across the sector report increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Competition for specialist professionals is intense, while workforce shortages across education, health and social care continue to affect services.

Special schools face particular challenges because the work requires specialist knowledge, additional training and significant emotional resilience. Many schools report difficulties recruiting qualified teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, educational psychologists and specialist support staff.

At the same time, growing demand for SEND provision is placing additional pressure on existing staff. Increasing workloads, rising complexity of need and challenges in accessing specialist support can contribute to stress, burnout and workforce attrition.

The result is a system where vacancies remain unfilled, experienced professionals leave, and children can face delays in accessing the support they need.

Our message to the new Prime Minister

The quality of the SEND system depends on the people who deliver it.

Government must not only recruit more professionals into specialist education but also retain and reward the expertise that already exists within the system.

RECRUIT. RETAIN. REWARD.

Build a sustainable specialist workforce by attracting new professionals into specialist education, improving retention through workload and wellbeing measures, and recognising specialist expertise through clear career pathways, professional development opportunities and enhanced professional status.

Why investment in the specialist workforce matters

Children's outcomes depend upon the expertise, stability and capacity of the workforce supporting them.

Specialist professionals develop knowledge and skills that take years to acquire. Their expertise enables children and young people to access learning, develop communication skills, improve wellbeing, build independence and prepare for adult life.

When specialist services are adequately staffed, children benefit from:

- ✓ timely access to specialist support;
- ✓ consistent relationships with trusted professionals;
- ✓ improved communication and engagement in learning;
- ✓ better attendance and wellbeing;
- ✓ stronger preparation for adulthood; and
- ✓ improved long-term outcomes across education, employment and community participation

Workforce stability also benefits families. Experienced staff build trusted relationships with parents and carers, provide continuity of support and help families navigate increasingly complex systems.

Retaining skilled professionals is generally more cost-effective than continually recruiting new staff. High turnover creates additional costs through recruitment, induction, training and temporary staffing arrangements, while also disrupting provision for children.

A sustainable workforce is therefore essential to achieving both improved outcomes and a more effective SEND system.

Our concern about SEND reform

NASS is concerned that workforce challenges are not always given sufficient prominence within discussions about SEND reform.

We are particularly concerned by approaches that could:

- focus on expanding provision without addressing workforce capacity;
- prioritise recruitment initiatives without improving retention;
- overlook the expertise of specialist support staff and allied professionals;
- fail to provide clear specialist career pathways;
- underestimate the impact of workload, accountability pressures and staff wellbeing

No reform programme can succeed without the professionals needed to deliver it. Policies that increase expectations on schools and services without addressing workforce pressures risk worsening recruitment and retention challenges.



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:

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