



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

Four asks. One ambition:

A SEND system where every child can thrive

ASK TWO Assess Need. Fund Need.

Support should be funded according to children's special educational needs, not local budget pressures.

Funding decisions should be driven by children's needs rather than the financial pressures faced by local systems.

Every child and young person with SEND deserves access to the support they need to thrive. Yet too often decisions about provision are influenced not by assessed need, but by the financial pressures facing local systems. When funding fails to keep pace with demand, children, families and schools are left carrying the consequences.

NASS supports efforts to improve the sustainability of the SEND system. However, lasting reform will only succeed if government funds the level of need that exists, rather than expecting children and schools to manage within an underfunded system.

The challenge

Current reforms do not show how funding will follow assessed need. Instead, the focus on national standards, local inclusion, layered support and affordability risks, resulting in a 'cost-control framework' in which children's needs are fitted into standardised packages or local budgets. This is especially concerning when demand and complexity are rising: EHCP numbers have increased sharply, and the National Audit Office has warned that the SEND system is financially unsustainable, with high-needs deficits forecast to grow significantly.

Yet government has not set out the evidence, assumptions, costings or impact assessments behind proposed support packages, nor how specialist provision will be protected where it is the right placement. Without that detail, reform could reduce access to individualised support, shift pressure onto schools and families, and leave children with the most complex needs competing with local financial pressures rather than having their needs properly assessed and funded.

We want the Government to:



Fund individual need, not standardised packages. Funding should reflect the needs of each child and young person rather than predetermined bands, categories or cost-control mechanisms.



Be transparent about the numbers. Government should publish the evidence, assumptions and costings underpinning support packages, together with impact assessments on children, families and specialist provision.

Why Investment in Specialist Provision Matters

Special schools provide highly specialised education, therapies, expertise and environments for children with the most complex needs. When adequately funded, specialist provision delivers life-changing outcomes for children and long-term value for society.

Research, such as the NASS-commissioned work by Sonnet Impact **Reaching My Potential**, consistently demonstrates that early intervention and appropriate specialist support improve educational attainment, independence, wellbeing and participation in adult life. Delayed or insufficient support frequently leads to escalating needs, increased reliance on public services, poorer attendance, mental health challenges and higher long-term costs.

Our concern about SEND Reform

NASS is concerned that the proposed reform focuses primarily on containing expenditure rather than meeting need. Under proposals for banded funding for specialist placements and provision, children with different levels of need would be grouped into set funding bands, with each band linked to a standard level of funding rather than a package built fully around the individual child. This could reduce flexibility and make it harder for funding to reflect the full complexity of children's assessed needs.

We are particularly concerned by approaches that could:

- require children to fit within available budgets rather than funding assessed, individual needs;
- place increasing pressure on local authorities to limit access to specialist provision;
- create uncertainty about funding for special schools and specialist placements;
- fail to recognise the additional costs associated with residential and highly specialist provision; and
- introduce changes without fully assessing their impact on children, families and providers.

Attempts to reduce financial pressures without addressing underlying levels of need risk storing up greater costs elsewhere in the system, including health services, social care, family support and alternative provision.

Our message to the new Prime Minister

Children's needs do not reduce because budgets are under pressure.

ASSESS NEED. FUND NEED.

Support should be funded according to children's special educational needs, not local budget pressures.

Government should fund the level of need that exists, not the level that current budgets can accommodate.



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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