

CDC Digest

Winter 2025

Dear all,

We know that at the moment everyone's heads are full of the White Paper and what the future of SEND will look like. A thousand round tables have bloomed, including our own. Each seeking to unlock the solution to providing effective, early support to children and young people and their families.

However, we want you to take a moment away from the future to celebrate those working tirelessly within the current system. For that reason we are hosting the SEND Awards. There are ten categories:

- 1. Excellence in Co-production - local area with strongest approach (must be across children and young people and parent carers)**
- 2. Accessible and Inclusive Communications Strategy for SEND**
- 3. Unity in Leadership**
- 4. Shared System Vision**
- 5. The Service That Made the Difference to Me (Children and young people/parent carer nomination)**
- 6. Partnership with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector**
- 7. Best Integrated Service or Team**
- 8. Preparing for Adulthood**
- 9. Partnership for Inclusion (Local authorities and Schools)**
- 10. Partnership for Early Years Inclusion**

Please do share the QR code you'll find in the newsletter which links to the nomination forms for each category.

In terms of the future, our summer round tables were delivered in partnership with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, National Association of Special Schools, Royal College of Paediatric and Child Health, Alliance for Youth Justice and the Michael Sieff Foundation. They looked at some of the key elements of any system reform:

- The role of special schools
- The role of the health system
- Implications for the youth justice system

Some clear themes emerged across these three subject areas:

- Making mainstream schools more inclusive requires new models of support: A team "wrapped around schools".
- Systems for identifying needs and behaviours should be truly needs-led, not diagnosis-led.
- Investment in early years needs assessment and a whole system to support early identification and intervention is essential.
- Policies that promote inter-disciplinary thinking at locality levels and processes that improve implementation are needed.

We held a final roundtable in September which looked at potential policy mechanisms to underpin a move to a "team around the school model" of support. Do catch up with the outputs from the roundtables [here](#).

Finally, December has been a whirl, we have been supporting the Department for Education (DfE) and Minister Georgia Gould OBE MP with a series of regional face-to-face engagement events which hopefully many of you have been able to attend. They have provided an opportunity to discuss areas of reform in greater depth. The final three in Darlington, Leeds and Birmingham are now fully booked. The job for January will be compiling all of the rich input for the DfE so that it can feed into the White Paper. It is clear that the Minister is very much in listening mode. Once the White Paper is published there will be the opportunity to share your views and experiences in our public consultation events.

I do hope you have a restful break over Christmas, next year is going to be busy.



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Policy Update: Developments in SEND, Disability and Children's Policy

CDC Policy Update: Developments in SEND, Disability and Children's Policy

While the details of the Government's SEND Reform programme and the publication of the Schools White Paper have been delayed, there are lots of other policy developments across education, health, and broader public services with implications for disabled children, young people, and their families. This bulletin summarises the key developments and their potential impact across the sector.

Education Select Committee – Solving the SEND Crisis

The Education Select Committee published its report [Solving the SEND Crisis](#). The Government's interim response has also been published as a Special Report. CDC was pleased to see Amanda's evidence reflected in the report's recommendations for stronger joint working across education, health, and care, greater transparency in accountability, and earlier intervention.

In its [response](#), the Government confirmed that the publication of the Schools White Paper will be delayed until the new year. It also set out five principles that will underpin the next phase of policy development: early, local, fair, practical, and shared. These principles have been central to the Department for Education's engagement events.

Curriculum and Assessment Review

In November, the Curriculum and Assessment Review, led by Professor Becky Francis, published its final report, and the Government issued its [formal response](#). CDC welcomes the Review as an essential step towards a richer, more inclusive curriculum that better reflects pupils' diverse needs and avoids underestimating children against rigid age-related expectations.

Taking forward the Review's recommendations will be critical to breaking down barriers facing students with SEND, including: developing evidence-led guidance on adaptations to curriculum and teaching; building inclusive approaches into school accountability measures alongside Progress 8 and Attainment 8; and ensuring all parts of the exam system work together to build accessibility into new GCSE, A level, T level and vocational specifications.

The Budget and Child Poverty

In the Autumn Budget, Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced changes to tax and spending, including additional investment in children's social care and the removal of the two-child limit in benefits. Removing the cap is expected to lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty and increase household income for around two million children overall.

The Government subsequently published its [Child Poverty Strategy](#), which includes measures to reduce learning loss for children in temporary accommodation, lower the cost of infant formula and introduce "deep poverty" (deep material poverty) as a new headline measure. These steps have been broadly welcomed by organisations working to end child poverty. At the same time, concerns remain about the absence of legally binding targets and the need for sustained action given the impact of poverty on all aspects of children's lives.

SEND Funding Changes

In the Budget, the Government restated its commitment to significant reform of the SEND system, including changes to funding. From 2028, the costs of SEND will be met from central Government budgets, and local authorities will no longer be required to use their general funds to cover Dedicated Schools Grant overspends.

This represents a significant structural change in how SEND provision is funded. The detailed arrangements, including how existing "statutory override" deficits will be addressed, have not yet been set out in the SEND Reform proposals. More information is available [here](#).

Best Start for Life – Early Years Reform

As part of the Best Start for Life Family Hubs programme, the [Government has announced](#) that every local authority is being asked to strengthen Family Hubs by recruiting new SEND practitioners to provide family-facing support. [National guidance](#) explains that these roles will identify children with SEND who may need extra help early on, build links with early years settings and health services, and assist parents to navigate what can be a complex landscape of provision.

The Fonagy Review – Mental Health, Autism and ADHD

The [Government has launched an independent review](#) into mental health conditions, autism and ADHD across children, young people and adults, led by Professor Peter Fonagy. The review will examine trends in prevalence, challenges facing services, and how to strengthen prevention and early intervention. This is a critical opportunity to address rising levels of unmet need among many children and young people, and the gaps between education, health, and social care that allow problems to escalate into severe crises without effective intervention.

The review's findings and recommendations must then be taken forward by both the NHS Transformation Programme and in reforms to the SEND system.

Reviews into Health, Work and Youth Employment

The Government is increasingly focused on the relationship among health, disability, and unemployment, having commissioned three reviews in this area.

The [Mayfield Review](#) has reported first, setting out how rising levels of ill health and disability are contributing to increasing economic inactivity, driven by persistent barriers disabled people face in both getting and keeping a job. The report highlights that the number of 16–34-year-olds with a mental health condition who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness grew by 190,000 (76%) between 2019 and 2024. It calls for coordinated action across government, employers and health partners to reverse these trends, including a vanguard programme to test new ways of working together.

The [Timms Review of Personal Independence Payments](#) will examine how the PIP system operates and how it can be changed "to enable disabled people and those with long-term conditions to live independently and fully participate in society." The Government has committed to co-producing this review with disabled people, disabled people's

organisations, carers, clinicians, and other experts, and has appointed Dr Clenton Farquharson CBE and Sharon Brennan as co-chairs, both with long track records of advocacy alongside Disabled People's Organisations.

Finally, the Government has commissioned a [review led by Alan Milburn](#) to focus directly on youth unemployment and economic participation. The Review's terms of reference do not explicitly include a focus on SEND. Still, it will be vital that it considers how education, health and employment support work together to help disabled children and young people move into rewarding and sustained employment, provide decent support for those not in work, and address widening inequalities.

NHS England – Ten-Year Health Plan and Restructure

Ongoing NHS England restructuring and new planning frameworks are shaping delivery of the Ten-Year Health Plan, which aims to create "the healthiest generation of children ever." Integrated Care Boards are expected to prioritise children's health, access and prevention, with national priorities including reducing long waits in community health services and improving autism and ADHD pathways.

The Medium-Term Planning Framework emphasises neighbourhood health models and integrated multidisciplinary teams, creating opportunities to align health transformation more closely with forthcoming SEND reforms and to strengthen local, community-based support for children and families.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Regional Engagement Events with the Department for Education

Ahead of the publication of the Schools White Paper early next year, the Department for Education is committed to testing the proposals to reform the SEND system with the people who matter most – young people and families – alongside teachers and other experts.

The Department for Education, alongside expert advisors Dame Christine Lenehan and Tom Rees, and in partnership with the Council for Disabled Children, has been hosting [a series of SEND Engagement events across the country](#), to listen to and understand the full range of views and experiences from a wide range of perspectives. Creating an opportunity to discuss and understand views on the core principles for SEND reform and ensure that reforms are grounded in lived experience.

Each event is for parents, carers, school staff and SEND professionals, and other key interested stakeholders to come together. Participation from across the SEND community and all those with an interest in these issues has been strongly welcomed and encouraged. Following this period of engagement, there will also be the opportunity to share your views and experiences in the public consultation following the publication of the Schools White Paper.

Feedback from attendees has described the events as:

- "An opportunity to bounce ideas off other interested people from different backgrounds/roles who see the system from different positions."
- "A good mix of contributors on the table bringing different perspectives."
- "It was exhilarating and I feel hopeful in a system I have loved for 17 years that things may actually change."

Minister for School Standards Georgia Gould said:

"For too long families have felt unheard and left to battle a system that simply doesn't deliver for their children. We're committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity for children with SEND, which is why we're putting lived experience at the heart of our reforms and creating a direct line to parents across the nation. We want this to be the biggest national conversation on SEND in a generation, and I urge parents, teachers and all those with views to participate and help us deliver lasting reform."

You can [read the Department for Education's press release](#) on the launch of the national conversation on SEND.

Although the in-person events are now sold out, you can still get involved online by joining the Department for Education's [SEND Reform National Conversation Online Series](#).

You can also share your views and experiences by completing the Department for Education's [online SEND reform national conversation](#).

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: A postcard from Bratislava

Written by Dr Daniel Stavrou - Assistant Director - Education and Equalities

This year's autumn Biannual took place in Bratislava, Slovakia, and my first reflection came about before I even arrived in the designated country. As it happened, timings of flights meant that it would be easier for me to fly into Vienna airport and take a bus from there to Bratislava. Indeed, that section of the journey, crossing the border and arriving in midtown Bratislava, was quicker than my commute from my home in North London to our offices in Hackney. As the Director of EASNIE mentioned in his remarks to the conference, the geopolitical reality is that there are discernible differences in relation to approaches to inclusion internationally (think for example of the US – Europe divide re Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies). The geographical closeness I personally experienced highlighted the importance of European unity around the concept of inclusion, with all its moral weight.

On day one, we had our exchange session which this time was titled 'Inclusive pedagogy, curriculum and assessment'. It was exquisitely timed, just hours after the publication of the [Curriculum and assessment review final report](#). I took the opportunity to ask my European colleagues a question which grounds much of the debate around the intersect of SEND, policy and practice: *what curricular framework might support inclusion for all while acknowledging and attending to significant differences within a classroom? Or, more simply: how can a curriculum support a variety of needs while still being meaningful and ambitious for all?*

What follows is by no means a robust, academically valid survey, but anecdotally, in the room we had three approaches:

1. **The [English](#) and Dutch systems**, rely on prescriptive curricular frameworks, which include specified age-related expectations (statutory expectations relating to taught content at every year group and key stage). While having the advantage of setting clear standards and supporting sequential learning, the age-related expectations mean that some pupils will fall below them and potentially disengage. There is a worry, that such a curriculum becomes a mechanism for stratification. And, of course, this curriculum does not cater for those who are not able to reach even the first step on it, for example learners who require a non-linear, functional programme of learning. In these systems, then, the curriculum in effect sets the boundaries of inclusion. The Curriculum and Assessment Review report calls for guidance on adaptive teaching to ensure those with SEND are able to engage with the curriculum – a lot will ride on this if the curriculum is to better serve learners of all abilities.
2. **The Austrian model**: following the [evolution of special education in Austria](#), a number of curricula are available, corresponding to types of impairment and diagnoses: an impairment-specific curricular framework. 'Transporting' the separate curricula of special schools into the mainstream system is intended to answer the question we posed – to facilitate inclusion. In practice, often pupils in mainstream schools will be instructed

separately from their peers, for example, those with 'intellectual disabilities' or 'mild cognitive impairments'. While offering a degree of individualised content and approach, this also risks creating a de-facto within-school segregation.

3. **The Welsh – Icelandic model**, where the curriculum sets out a set of competencies without the strict age-related expectations. These curricular frameworks place an emphasis on progression which is understood as being individual in its pace, as set out in clear terms in the [Welsh framework](#) – “While there may be particular threshold concepts that represent a significant shift in a learner’s understanding, these are not linked to specific ages, nor will they happen at the same time in different Areas for individual learners”. This means that all learners, and particularly those with additional needs (ALN in the Welsh terminology), can learn at a pace suited to them without facing the prospect of being labelled as ‘failing’. [The Icelandic curriculum](#) similarly works around the concept of competencies with only broad expectations set for wide age brackets (grades 4, 7 and 10). Schools and teachers have the autonomy to set the assessment methodology, without state-set, standardised assessments. The Icelandic framework encourages varied forms of assessment, including pupil self-assessment. Both these systems see assessment as predominantly an ongoing *formative* assessment *for* learning. These two systems, then, use the curriculum as a broad guide to learning, tasking teachers to adapt it (potentially in a very significant way) to the individual abilities in their class. This system draws some criticism on the grounds of concerns regarding consistency, rigour, and [outcomes \(in the context of PISA scores\)](#). Other concerns centre on the huge task of curriculum design for a diverse pupil body and the question if [teachers have been well enough enabled to carry this out](#).

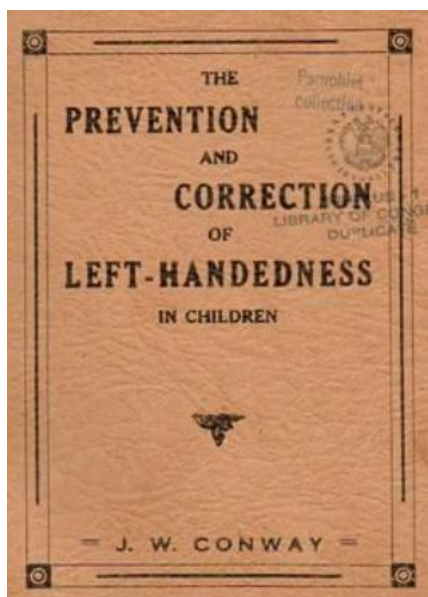
It must be put on record, no representative in the room felt their system was perfect.

The upcoming and delayed White Paper is now expected early in the new year. We don't have any detail on what it will include, but we do know from the [principles](#) which have been set out for the reforms, that the intention is to increase inclusive practice in mainstream schools. One implication might be, that in time, fewer pupils will attend specialist provision as their needs will be adequately identified and met in mainstream. On the last day of the Biannual, during a conference dedicated to inclusive education in the host country of Slovakia, I came across an [interesting initiative by the Ministry of Education](#), which aims at transitioning pupils from special schools to mainstream. The key to this enterprise is the precise target group. In this case, it relates to learners from the Roma community, who have been diagnosed with moderate learning disability. While the language used here – ‘desegregation’ – might feel loaded to some, the project does possibly shine a light on the potential to assertively question if particular groups *genuinely require* to be educated separately.

The Slovakian context is different from ours, but the concept of targeting a specific group for inclusion, using an intersectional lens to do so, seems a helpful one. It will require, of course,

some nuanced and intentional use of data. EASNIE has been attending to the question of data as well, as part of the [Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in Inclusive Education Policy project](#). While the debate in England continues around how might we best use data and accountability to ensure better outcomes for all learners (think [Ofsted reforms](#); the role of [LAGESCO](#)), EASNIE articulated a number of key points for what is meaningful evidence which chime, I think, with what we require here as we reform the SEND system. Amongst the key points: connecting lost learning and school exclusions with long-term outcomes; evidence that is co-produced with excluded learners; seeking new sources of evidence and data which reflect what inclusion means, such as participation and belonging. For those interested in data collection and accountability, [Dr Verity Donnelley sets out in a video](#) key principles in understanding the importance of data collection for accountability and use of data in inclusive education.

As we ended the conference, EASNIE's Director, Joao Costa shared an intriguing thought as a call to action: it wasn't that long ago that left-handedness was considered an impairment requiring 'correction'. Joao made the point that as those attitudes have changed, so we should we be steadfast in changing approaches to SEND, and more broadly difference and diversity. He shared an image of a book, which appears ridiculous today – I hope this gives some hope to all of you carrying the weight of the fight for inclusion.



Training, Events & Resources

Embedding the disability duties in schools

CDC has published a webinar for schools on the disability duties in the Equality Act. The webinar sits alongside, and complements, the school materials that CDC published in July. These include a guide for day-to-day decision-makers, a guide for governors and trustees and a handbook for schools on the accessibility planning duties. Earlier this year CDC also published materials for early years providers and FE colleges.

Read our latest blog about embedding disability duties in schools and access all of the guides and training videos [here](#).

Disability History Month: turning back the clock to the 1970s

To mark Disability History Month we celebrated five individuals whose work helped transform life for disabled people in the UK. We could've mentioned many more, so we would like to dedicate this article to the campaigners, too numerous to mention, who inspired these people to take action.

Read our blog about how we marked Disability History Month [here](#).

Council for Disabled Children's eLearning

The Council for Disabled Children's eLearning covers a range of SEND-related topics. These are primarily intended for professionals and practitioners but are open to all, including parent carers. These programmes have been developed with input from practitioners, parent carers and leaders. CDC continues to seek and respond to opportunities to support further workforce development.

Browse our courses and start your eLearning [here](#).

SEND Awards

Join us at the Great Hall, Birmingham University, Edgbaston Campus The Great Hall – University of Birmingham on 23 April 2026 for an Awards Ceremony celebrating What Works in SEND. We will be celebrating collaborative systems, innovation and service improvement in SEND across ten categories. The Awards will be followed by an early evening drinks reception.

Find out more, make a submission for the awards and register your place by scanning the QR code below or click [here](#).



IMPOWER

SEND Awards



Share your experience

Share Your Feedback – Effective Practice Case Studies Engagement Survey

We're inviting you to take part in a short survey about the What Works in SEND effective practice case studies. These case studies share examples of system-level practice in local SEND systems in England that have improved outcomes for disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs.

The purpose of this survey is to help us understand:

- How aware stakeholders are of the case studies.
- How they are currently accessed and used.
- How relevant and useful they are for different roles and contexts.

The survey will take no longer than 5 - 10 minutes to complete, and your responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

Please complete the survey [here](#).

Thank you for helping us make these resources more accessible, relevant, and impactful!

SEND Workforce Survey

The What Works in SEND team are conducting research to understand how state-funded mainstream schools in England organise and deploy staff supporting SEND. This is to improve the experiences of this group of children and young people.

The survey asks about staff who support SEND in your school and about features of your school population. Please complete the survey [here](#).

Get involved

Council for Disabled Children: Apply for CDC Membership

At CDC we know that we are stronger and have a bigger voice if we are together. The CDC membership is a collection of over 400 voluntary or community organisations that represent the various facets of the SEND and Alternative Provision sector.

By becoming a member, organisations will have the opportunity to actively participate in shaping policies, sharing best practices, and advocating for positive changes that directly impact the lives of disabled children and young people and those with SEN. CDC membership is free and provides access to a network of over 400 organisations across the sector, as well as resources and opportunities for collaboration and learning.

Benefits of becoming a CDC member include:

- Access to the CDC members online forum which provides the opportunity for peer-to-peer support on challenges and solutions, best practice, and information and resource sharing.
- Networking opportunities to connect with professionals, policymakers, and other organisations in the field.
- Policy Influencing by actively participating in discussions and initiatives aimed at influencing policies.
- Access to a wealth of resources including a monthly newsletter, quarterly digest and news alerts.
- Direct updates from the Department for Education.
- Invitations to join CDC working groups.

To become a CDC member your organisation must be:

- A registered charity or Community Interest Company with a special interest in disabled children and young people and those with SEN, and/or a provider of Alternative Provision;
- Based in England; and
- Committed to the CDC values and our [policy on inclusion](#).

To apply to become a CDC member please click [here](#).

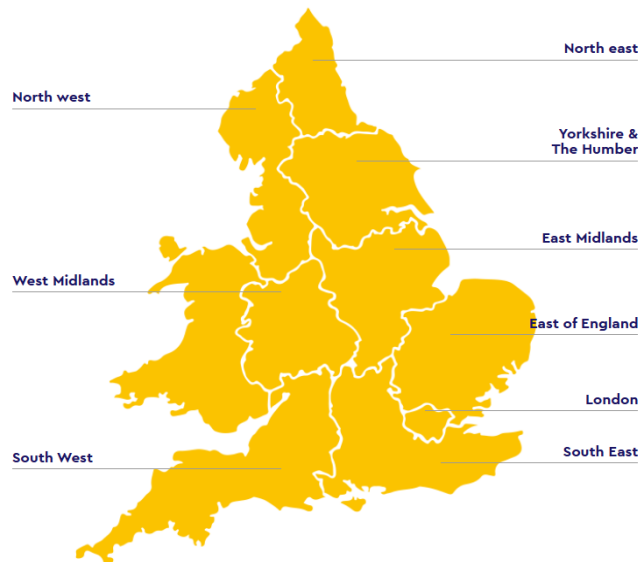
Are you on our map?

We're continuing to develop our **interactive map of strategic participation groups** for disabled children and young people, and those with special educational needs, across England. We want this map to list the contact details of all strategic participation groups running in England.

If your group, or one you know of, isn't listed yet, we'd love to hear from you. **Share your details and join the map:**

- participation@ncb.org.uk
- [Interactive Map](#)

We would also like to build connections with those leading on participation in their local area, if this sounds like your role, please get in touch.



Help us build a clearer picture of participation across England!

This map is part of the Making Participation Work programme, which focuses on enabling the effective participation of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs. **You can find out more here:** [Making Participation Work](#).

Transition to adulthood

For too many young people with a severe learning disability, the move from children's to adults' services feels less like a new beginning and more like a 'cliff edge'. We need urgent change.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation in partnership with KIDS charity has launched an open letter to government with three key asks:

1. Implement a national, cross-departmental plan that is co-produced with young people and their families.
2. Introduce a named transition coordinator for every young person.
3. Amend the Care Act 2014 so transition planning begins from age 14.

How can you help?

- [Sign an open letter to Government](#) to #EndTheCliffEdge that is experienced by many young people and their families and encourage others to sign it too. Click here to read and sign the letter.
- Watch and share the transition reels on social media. You can follow the CBF on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

The letter to Ministers from the Department for Education, Department of Health, and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in the new year. If you have any queries, please do get in touch with Holly: holly.cobb@thecbf.org.uk.

What else we're doing at CDC

Health

The team have worked with a local area to deliver bespoke 'Introduction to SEND' training to a group of social workers, with the training focusing on key legislation, an overview of disability and special educational needs, and assessments and planning.

The team recently worked with a local area to deliver a 2-day training course on strengthening their SEN case team. This course focused on effective communication in challenging situations, trauma-aware approaches and reflected on how team members can mitigate challenges during times of wider system uncertainty. We also carried out an organisational resilience survey and presented the results during a workshop, where the team made actions on how they can strengthen their internal ways of working.

As part of the RISE Partnership, CDC has been working nationally to support local area partnerships on a range of area. This DfE funded programme, supports areas to tackle and improve key areas, such as quality of EHCPs, joint commissioning arrangements and developing and embedding Ordinarily Available provision. We've worked with 16 areas this year, delivering workshops, reviews and training to hundreds of colleagues working in and around SEND.

Alongside this, our programme of workforce development continues to deliver a range of trainings from EOTAS to the role of Social Care in an Inclusive system. Our National Event saw key updates from Claire Burton, Director, SEND and Alternative Provision DfE, and Lorraine Mulroney, Head of SEND for NHS England.

As we continue to navigate a changing landscape, these events and trainings are helping provide information and guidance to a range of professionals across the SEND system.

Reaching Excellence and Ambition for all Children (REACH)

CDC has continued to support Change Programme Partnerships (CPPs) through the Reaching Excellence and Ambition for all Children (REACH) consortium. REACH are the DfE's delivery partner for the SEND & Alternative Provision Change Programme, supporting 32 local areas to implement and learn from nationally and locally developed initiatives, whilst also capturing learning and insights from these initiatives to share with the CPPs, the DfE and other key organisations and individuals outside of the Change Programme.

In its current phase, local areas are testing a range of programmes collectively to strengthen the inclusion support offered to mainstream settings. REACH has supported local areas to problem solve for the testing of the Local Inclusion Support Offer through a series of online

"Hackathons", shared learning about the early language support programme ELSEC through a webinar with presentations from three pathfinder areas, and ran an online session exploring how trajectory modelling can be used to assess the impact of Alternative Provision (AP) interventions, support financial planning and inform cost-benefit analysis.

Alongside this, REACh published some of the key learning and insights from the Change Programme so far, which you can read more about [here](#).

Social Care

The Social Care team has been busy delivering a variety of projects through our Strategic Reform Partner contract with the Department for Education (DfE). This included delivering an online event designed for parent carers to hear from Education Ministers and to feed their views directly into the development of SEND reforms. The event was attended by 64 parent carers and provided an opportunity to hear from the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for School Standards and for parent carers to share their views on what great support for pupils with SEND looks like.

Our last CDC Members meeting took place in December 2025 and provided an opportunity for Members to feed into the discussions with DfE to test the proposals for SEND Reform and focused on views on the core principles for SEND reform.

The team delivered a series of new training courses on Family Help and making it work for disabled children. The training was designed to ensure that the transformation in family support, to rebalance the system away from crisis intervention and toward earlier help, considers the specific needs of disabled children and their families.

We have also published a series of guides on the disability duties in the Equality Act. There are three guides for schools, two guides for FE colleges and one guide for early years settings. The guides are designed to raise awareness of the disability duties in the Equality Act and their importance in addressing the disadvantage that many disabled young people face.

If you'd like to learn more, feel free to email us at cdc@ncb.org.uk.

Special Educational Consortium

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) has been busy planning for the much-anticipated White Paper as well as ongoing engagement and parliamentary influencing work with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Regarding the Bill, we had our amendments tabled and presented by Lord Holmes and others before the summer recess. We were disappointed that the amendments were not moved forward, but our Parliamentary Vice-Chairs are working tirelessly to continue pushing our messages forward with parliamentarians.

Recent meetings have been attended by a range of speakers including, The Difference and Tom Rees, who was keen to hear the consortium's views on his work with the inclusion taskforce. Our next Steering group meeting will be held in the London Office and will be attended by Prof. Karen Guldborg.

To find out more about the consortium and our work, please visit the [website](#).

Early Years SEND (EYSEND)

The past quarter we have spent delivering training, national seminars, and strategic support as part of the Early Years SEND Partnership, a coalition of organisations committed to improving access and inclusion in the early years.

The highlight over the past quarter has been our National Seminar on Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP), which was held on 7 October and attended by over 125 professionals, including, local authority staff, family hubs practitioners and early years practitioners. This led to great interest in our support and in attending our upcoming Network Action Learning Set, which brings together professionals to discuss their successes and learning relating to developing their own OAP documents.

As part of the EYSEND Partnership, we also provide strategic support to local areas with their local inclusion planning. CDC supported Norfolk, Hull, York and Birmingham since the beginning of this iteration with the development, implementation and evaluation of their OAP.

Finally, we are busy planning our upcoming National Event, which will be held in person in Birmingham on Thursday 12 March 2026. This event will focus on the Best Start in Life Strategy with speakers from parent carer forums, the DfE and experts in reaching multilingual families.

You can find out more about training and other events from all six Partners on our [training calendar](#) or by signing up to our [EYSEND newsletter](#).

IASSN

This quarter the IASSN have been busy writing our reporting, running training for SENDIAS services, developing resources and planning future training and events.

This is the time of year we write our main data report. Interestingly this year the data report shows that SENDIAS services have seen their funding increased by an average of 12%. While this is great news for services, we can see that their helpline referrals have gone up by 8% and casework by 13%. Considering this and once you factor in rising costs of running a service, services are under just as much pressure. Still, it's great to see that they are seeing a rise in funding that reflects the value local areas place on them.

This quarter we've also run training on tribunal, managing a helpline, legal training and on education other than at school. We're in the process of planning emotionally based school avoidance training, and face to face sessions that will include training and white paper

briefings. We're also planning online training on the equality act which will be filmed on Monday.

It's been a particularly busy quarter but as always, we're impressed by the way SENDIAS services continue to meet challenges, and we look forward to the next!

Participation

As part of the [Making Participation Work](#) programme, we have continued to deliver community of practice events for practitioners in engagement and participation roles and monthly coffee mornings. These have explored how we engage disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEND) digitally, ways visually impaired children and young people can be supported to participate, and deep dives into participation work happening in local areas. You can stay up-to-date with our events, for professionals, children and young people, by signing up to the Making Ourselves Heard [Forum](#) or [newsletter](#) (tick 'participation'). In July, five members of the young SEND advisory group to the Department for Education, [FLARE](#), met with the Secretary of State for Education to discuss the education system. The discussion focussed on funding, individualised support and what this might look like during exams and for those with mental health needs, Education Health and Care Plans, and access to inclusive extra-curricular activities. Members of the group also presented at CDC's national webinar in September, speaking about what makes a fulfilling transition to adulthood.

What Works in SEND

The What Works in SEND (WWiS) programme has continued to build a wealth of evidence of both primary and secondary research.

Recent examples of effective practice from the work of local SEND systems that meet our evidence standards include:

- [The Nursery Inclusion Project for All in Wandsworth](#)
- [Hertfordshire's continuous Improvement Journey](#)
- [Supporting children under 5 through the Early Years Partnership in North Tyneside](#)

In September 2025, we [published 'Learning Synthesis: Lessons Learned from What Works in SEND Research Studies'](#). This learning synthesis brings together findings from the What Works in SEND programme research reports completed in the first 3 years of the programme. These findings have been synthesised against the framework of 5 broad enablers of improvement in SEND systems, which is used as part the What Works in SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework.

In December 2025, the What Works in SEND team held the second of four workshops with our WWiS local area learning community, a group of eight local authorities all working to further embed youth voice in their local SEND systems. The learning community is a space for local authorities to come together to work on similar priorities, share practice, and develop and test ideas – within a structured process, planned and overseen by external facilitators.

Alongside a series of workshops featuring external speakers doing innovative and effective work on youth voice and participation, local areas have access to an online space to support collaboration between workshops. After a third workshop in February, we are convening a final in-person learning event in March and will publish a summary of the learning from the community on the WWiS website, potentially including tools and resources developed by local areas during the course of their work together.

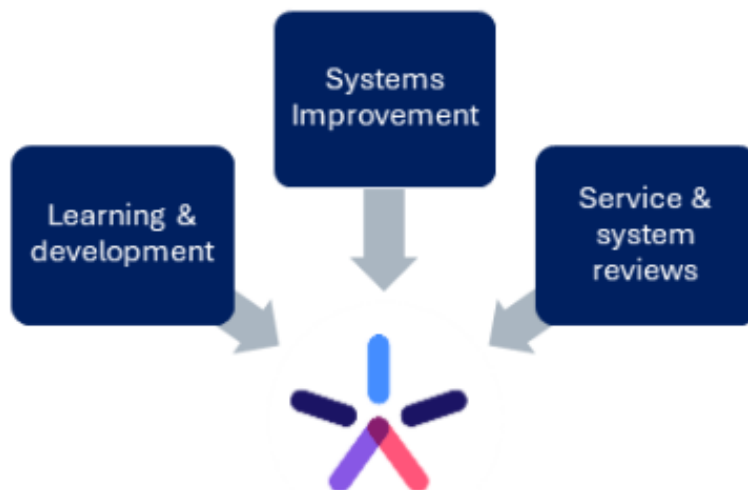
Find out more about the What Works in SEND Programme by visiting our website [here](#).

CDC's Local Area Support Offer

Were you aware that CDC teams can help local area leaders and their partners address challenges in local SEND systems?

Our teams bring a wealth of knowledge of SEND and insight into the policy and systems surrounding it. Using our experience of training and facilitation, we can help you to build partnerships, skills and knowledge, and effectively address your local challenges. We take a supportive, non-judgemental approach which combines a welcoming atmosphere, friendly facilitators and a focus on solutions.

Our wide-ranging expertise and flexible approach mean that we will always work with you to identify the most appropriate support for the challenges that you and your partners face. We bring expertise across the SEND system, including multi-agency working, health, social care, participation and much more.



Recent pieces of work have included:

- Training on The Equality Act, Challenging Conversations, Data & Voice in Commissioning and Safeguarding Disabled Children.
- Support to develop strategic outcomes frameworks, co-production charters, SEND strategies and Short Breaks strategies.
- Reviews of a SENDIAS Service and a Keyworking Service .

To find out more about our offer, please visit [our website](#) or talk a member of our team by contacting rethink@ncb.org.uk.

About the digest

The CDC Digest is a quarterly round-up of all the essential policy, practice and other news involving disabled children and young people, and their families. If you would like to be added to the list to receive this digest, please visit our [website](#) and tick 'CDC Digest'

About CDC

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) is the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England, with links to other UK nations. We are the only national body that brings together the diverse range of organisations that work with and for disabled children to support the development and implementation of policy and practice. Our work impacts on over 800,000 disabled children and their families. CDC hosts Making Ourselves Heard, the IASS Network, the Special Educational Consortium and the Transition Information Network.

Find out more



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FOR DISABLED
CHILDREN
Part of the family



United for disabled children

The Council for Disabled Children brings people and organisations together to drive change in society and deliver a better childhood for disabled children the UK. We interrogate policy, uncover evidence and develop more effective ways of supporting disabled children and their families. Together with National Children's Bureau we are united for a better childhood.

Let's work together: 020 7843 6000 | cdc@ncb.org.uk

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NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU

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