

## **The response of the Special Educational Consortium to the consultation response on:**

### **Initial teacher training (ITT) market review: recommendations**

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC) is a membership organisation that comes together to protect and promote the rights of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN). Our membership includes the voluntary and community sector, education providers and professional associations. SEC believes that every child and young person is entitled to an education that allows them to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.

SEC identifies areas of consensus across our membership and works with the Department for Education, Parliament, and other decision-makers when there are proposals for changes in policy, legislation, regulations and guidance that may affect disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Our membership includes nationally recognised experts on issues including assessment and curriculum, schools and high needs funding, the SEN legal framework, exclusions and alternative provision. This response therefore focuses on the SEN and disability aspects in particular.

#### **Context:**

SEC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the recommendations made in the report of the ITT market review, which was undertaken by an expert group led by Ian Bauckham CBE. The ITT review was undertaken with the aim to enable the provision of consistently high-quality training in line with the ITT core content framework. SEC's main concern is about how well teachers are prepared for teaching children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and how the ITT review can provide quality assurance around the provision of training on SEN and disability aspects of teacher training. Current evidence suggests we have a long way to go.

#### **Supported by:**

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In this response, we analyse some of the current issues in the provision of high quality preparation for teaching all children, including children with SEN and disabilities. We then consider how well the ITT market review recommendations address these issues.

SEC concludes with eight key 'asks'. These are primarily focused on quality requirements for ITT providers in respect of SEN and disability responsibilities. The eight 'asks':

1. SEC wants the proposed Quality Requirements to provide explicit quality assurance around all SEN and disability aspects of ITT.
2. SEC wants the proposed Quality Requirements to set out clearly the expectations of all ITT providers to prepare teachers with the professional skills to include all children, including those with SEND, in high quality teaching.
3. SEC wants Quality Requirements to ensure that ITT providers equip teachers with the skills and understanding to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all children, including those with SEN and disabilities.
4. SEC wants Quality Requirements to specify that practice placements include a focus on SEND and equip trainee teachers with knowledge and experience of delivering high-quality teaching to children with SEN and disabilities.
5. SEC wants Quality Requirements to ensure that ITT providers equip teachers with a thorough understanding of the legislative requirements and of their professional responsibilities to pupils with SEN and disabilities.
6. SEC wants to see a thorough training programme for all mentors to ensure understanding of SEND-related practice and issues.
7. SEC wants robust quality requirements of all mentors that include SEND-related practice and issues.
8. SEC wants the quality requirements to include the establishment of professional networks of well-trained expert mentors who have a deep understanding of the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEN, the relevant research base which informs it and their role in supporting its delivery and practice.

## **Evidence of pressure on the system**

### **Teachers feel ill-prepared on SEND**

Surveys of trainee teachers and NQTs indicate that many do not feel that their training has equipped them to teach pupils with SEN and disability. A [survey report by NASUWT](#) in 2018 highlights the challenges mainstream schools face in supporting children with SEN and disability, where nearly a third of teachers surveyed felt they are 'rarely' or 'never' supported to teach children with SEN.

Limited preparation of teachers to meet the needs of children with SEN and disabilities through core high quality teaching means that teachers need to adapt their teaching for more children individually and, in turn, pressure on the capacity of teachers to adapt their teaching means that teachers need to seek the support of the SENCO to meet the needs of more children.

The impact of this is that school SENCOs may be approached to provide SEND-related input/mentoring at an early a stage and for more children than would be necessary if teachers were better prepared to include more children in high quality teaching, augmented by adaptive teaching. SENCOs already have huge workloads and many carry substantial teaching responsibilities, therefore increasing the number of children who require support from the SENCO has an impact on their capacity to manage support for children with SEND and their parents. The reliance on SEN support and on SENCO responsibilities causes high levels of pressure and burnout on SENCOs and takes attention away from the responsibilities of all teachers to support pupils with SEN and disability.

A national survey of SENCOs from nasen and Bath Spa University (2020) found the pressures on SENCOs had been further exacerbated by the pandemic, as additional responsibilities took priority over SEN and disability considerations.

### **The data tells of the same pressures**

There has been a significant increase in requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments and a steady increase in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans issued since 2014 - as of January 2021, [3.7% of all pupils had an Education \(EHCP\)](#).

Pupils with SEN also account for [just under half of all permanent and fixed term exclusions](#). The steady increase in the number and percentage of exclusions as a result of 'persistent disruptive behaviour' speaks of the need to tailor learning better to meet their needs, and in a way that enables more children to engage in learning.

There are also [disproportionate attendance figures](#) based on SEN, where pupils with SEN have higher rates of absence and persistent absenteeism.

The data, combined with information from teachers themselves, speak of the need to identify and meet the special educational needs of children at earlier stages. To achieve this, we need to prepare teachers better to include children with a wide range of needs in core curriculum teaching; to improve the range of ways in which teachers can comfortably adapt their teaching; and to ensure the specialist support that they may need to seek, both within and beyond the school, is not overwhelmed by the number of referrals.

### **ITT needs to equip teachers with the skills to identify and meet needs early**

In the introduction to the ITT Common Core Framework, the stated reason for the removal of references to the SEN and disability Code of Practice is that there is no need for a reference to the four areas of need set out in the Code, because high quality teaching is high quality teaching for all children. However, there is a tension between this message in the introduction and how SEN and disability are then treated in other parts of the ITT framework, for example, in the section on adapting teaching there is relatively quick recourse to the SENCO and other specialists.

SEC makes the point, above, that high quality teaching, supplemented and complemented by the skills of the SENCO and wider specialist expertise, is crucial to enabling children and young people to learn and progress. However, the evidence suggests that teachers in training are inadequately prepared, through their initial training, either for:

- ensuring that high quality teaching includes enough children; or
- a sufficiently detailed understanding of the range of needs they can expect to encounter in their early career and for whom they may need to adapt their teaching.

Inclusive high quality teaching relies on teachers being equipped with an understanding of the breadth, depth and detail of the curriculum; of sequences of learning within the curriculum; and of stages of learning and development that both precede and follow the current phase or stage, so that children learning outside age-related expectations are included in curriculum design.

Inclusive high quality teaching also relies on highly developed skills in analysing where children are in their learning, so that teachers can plan the next steps, and understanding enough about a range of needs, including special educational needs, to be able to adapt their teaching. Skills in analysis need to extend to being able to analyse possible underlying causes of any difficulty that children encounter and being able to tailor their approach in the light of that analysis, for example: persistent disruptive behaviour may have a range of differing underlying causes, and

different approaches are needed in the light of this analysis. For a pupil with a learning difficulty, it may be ensuring that the child's starting points are recognised and learning is sequenced appropriately; for a pupil with a communication difficulty, it may be simplifying or otherwise adjusting instructions; for a pupil with a hearing impairment, it may be adjusting teacher behaviour so that a pupil who lip reads can 'see' what the teacher is saying; or for a pupil who has recently been bereaved, it may be providing pastoral support.

Without this level of analysis, children and young people with SEN and disabilities are often seen as having behaviour problems, when high-quality core and adaptive teaching is needed to identify and address the underlying needs that manifest as behaviour. The importance of tailoring the approach for different underlying needs or impairments is highlighted by these points from Square Peg, the voluntary organisation focused on improving things for children with school-based anxiety and their families<sup>1</sup>:

*There is an inextricable link between persistent absence, mental health and behaviour policies. Most persistent absence is triggered by disabling anxiety, although the underlying causes are varied and multi-faceted. Many of the 916,000 persistent absentees have undiagnosed or unsupported SEND/SEMH. Students who are struggling to cope will either mask and become invisible until they can no longer attend, or their stress will manifest in disruptive behaviour (particularly if there is underlying SEND). They respond to relational, individual frameworks, where they can build trust and feel understood. Strict, standardised behaviour management policies nearly always have a negative impact, exacerbating attendance difficulties, ignoring the neuroscience and often causing trauma. Parents of these children and informed professionals overwhelmingly feel that behaviour is a form of communication and not enough is being done by schools to identify their child's underlying needs; one-size-fits-all is not inclusive or equitable. Behaviour management policies are too standardised, not taking into account individual children's difficulties or circumstances. Trauma-informed approaches and better training for teachers (so that there is less reliance on strict policies) would be more effective.*

Effective inclusive education is skilled work for teachers and requires a reflective attitude to professional practice. Enrichment input on SEND in ITT courses can have a significant effect on increasing the understanding of beginning teachers about how to achieve effective inclusion with children with SEND (Mintz et al, 2015). *The International Guidelines for The Education of Learners with Down Syndrome* highlights that students completing ITT should have a well-formed, research-based personal philosophy for inclusive education; the skills to manage the

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<sup>1</sup> Square Peg was set up in order to improve things for children with school-based anxiety and their families. This has developed to include all low or non-attenders, whether excluded on behaviour grounds, too anxious to attend, or disengaged with an education system which lacks relevance.

learning of diverse learners in a classroom; and, an understanding of the legal and policy framework that underpins their practice.

## **Understanding specific responsibilities to learners with SEND**

ITT needs to provide all trainee teachers with a sound understanding of responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Equality Act 2010.

ITT should include training on the statutory framework for identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND, specifically Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Regulations 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice. Similarly, training should include the law on disability discrimination (both direct and indirect discrimination) and the legal duties to make reasonable adjustments as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

A thorough understanding of the legislative and policy requirements for inclusive education is critical. Whilst many of the statutory responsibilities lie with schools and local authorities, teachers have individual professional responsibilities under the Teachers' Standards<sup>2</sup>. They:

*...must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.*

These explicitly include duties under the Children and Families Act and the Equality Act. From the very first steps in their career, teachers are expected to be aware of the impact of high quality teaching on pupils' life chances, to adapt their teaching in a responsive way without lowering their expectations and to ensure all pupils have the opportunity to experience meaningful success<sup>3</sup>.

## **Higher aspirations for children with SEND**

There is now significant evidence from longitudinal research that, in the teen years, disabled young people and young people with SEN have diminished expectations of their future career, when compared with their non-disabled peers with the same GCSE outcomes<sup>4</sup>.

Trainee teachers need to be aware of the risks of compromised expectations and the impact on young people's life chances. Their training needs to prepare teachers well to understand what

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Education (2013) *Teachers' Standards*

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education (2019) *Early Career Framework*

<sup>4</sup> SEN, school life and future aspirations:

<https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/SEN-school-life-and-future-aspirations-briefing.pdf>

good practice looks like in relation to the whole school approach and the encouragement of high aspirations for every child.

## **What Ofsted is looking for**

In the inspection of ITT, Ofsted makes key references to SEN and disability and inclusion. The next steps for the ITT review need to be informed by an understanding of the basis of Ofsted's judgments. In a number of the judgment criteria, there are references to:

- a 'good' ITE curriculum will have SEND meaningfully integrated into all aspects of the training programme;
- a 'good' curriculum will ensure trainees understand up-to-date research on promoting inclusion, whilst an 'inadequate' curriculum won't;
- a 'good' curriculum will teach trainees to recognise signs that may indicate SEND, whilst an 'inadequate' one won't.

The inspection framework also makes it clear that:

- inspectors will ask for evidence of promoting equality and diversity;
- that the leadership and management judgement looks at the application of the Equality Act 2010;
- SEND must be appropriately woven in and meaningfully integrated throughout any ITE curriculum;
- Inspectors will consider how relentlessly leaders and managers pursue a vision for excellence, including applying effective approaches for pupils with SEND.

## **The SEND Review**

Based on the same indicators that we have outlined, above, the SEND review is likely to identify the need to improve the quality of provision for children and young people with SEN and disabilities within mainstream schools. The need to act on SEN and disability aspects of teacher training is indicated and we cannot wait for the publication of the SEND review to address these concerns.

## **The recommendations in the ITT market review**

SEC's concerns about the recommendations in the ITT market review are based on our analysis, above, of the challenges for ITT:

- the evidence of SEN pressures within schools

- the need to equip teachers with the skills to identify and meet needs early
- the need for teachers to have a sound understanding of specific responsibilities to children and young people with SEND
- the need to be more aspirational for children with SEND in particular
- an awareness of what Ofsted is looking for
- the need for action on the basis of all the available evidence and without waiting for the SEND Review.

Our test for the ITT market review is the extent to which it recognises and addresses these issues.

The ITT market review is part of a number of developments in teachers' professional development, such as the creation of Teaching School Hubs, the Early Career Framework with the move to a 2-year induction for early career teachers (ECTs) and the development of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). The ITT market review is likely to lead to major reforms of teacher training, so it is critical we address how well trainees will receive SEND-related training and support, based on the current evidence.

The ITT market review references SEND in paragraph 29 and 30 in the context of Adaptive teaching. The review states that all trainees should possess universal SEND knowledge and expertise. SEC agrees but the focus is on specialising in SEND through an in-depth specialist training curriculum and there are no further explicit references to SEN, disability, equality and inclusion within the report. It cannot be ascertained within the review what steps will be taken to ensure the training provided includes high-quality, quality-first teaching that meets the needs of pupils with SEN and disabilities. There appears to be a greater focus on separate specialist SEN provision and insufficient focus on the core provision available through quality-first teaching.

### **Trainee Teachers high quality preparation for inclusive quality-first teaching**

Ever since the [Carter Review of initial teacher training](#) (ITT) in 2015 reminded us that *"good teaching for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) is good teaching for all children"*, practitioners and policymakers have highlighted the variability in coverage of SEND in ITT. The ITT review has a significant focus on a more consistent approach to high quality preparation of teachers. SEC welcomes the focus on quality but is concerned that in seeking to establish a more consistent approach there is a risk that standardization leads to a more mechanistic approach that does not focus adequately on the professional skills that teachers need to include all children, including those with SEND, in high quality teaching.

Current ITT providers have raised similar concerns around how the profession is being represented within the review, with a push towards a highly prescribed curriculum and an untested mentoring programme on the basis of little evidence<sup>5</sup>. Teachers need to be recognised as professionals who make independent professional judgments that are fundamental to inclusive practice. They need to be supported in the unique and ambitious endeavor to teach children of all abilities to a level of high-quality and professionalism.

Training needs to equip teachers with those higher order professional skills that are critical to a deep understanding of curriculum design and the analysis of children's learning. The review lacks recommendations on aspects of quality assurance for the aspects of ITT that are crucial to including children with SEND in quality first teaching.

1. SEC wants the proposed Quality Requirements to provide explicit quality assurance around all SEN and disability aspects of ITT.
2. SEC wants the proposed Quality Requirements to set out clearly the expectations of all ITT providers to prepare teachers with the professional skills to include all children, including those with SEND, in high quality teaching.

### **Adaptive teaching**

The review recommends that ITT providers should offer an evidence-based training curriculum as a condition of accreditation, under the first quality requirement. This should include training in how different types of SEN and disabilities can affect children's learning, and how to adapt teaching strategies and the classroom environment to children's individual needs.

This approach needs to ensure that providers equip trainee teachers with the professional skills, discussed in more detail, above, that are essential to adapting teaching to meet a range of individual needs, including:

- A sound understanding of the breadth, depth and detail of the curriculum, of sequences of learning, of stages of learning and development so that children learning outside age-related expectations are included in curriculum design;
- skills in analysing where children are in their learning, underlying causes of difficulties that children encounter, and being able to tailor their approach in the light of that analysis.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/aug/18/cambridge-to-cease-teacher-training-if-government-continues-with-damaging-reforms>

Central to the review of the provision of ITT must be the rights of every child to have their needs identified and met. SEC has concerns about areas where only one approach is to be used in ITT, such as in the teaching of reading.

There is a strong evidence base for the use of Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) in the teaching of reading when it is used in conjunction with the other elements of the beginning reading programme, but its primary or sole use can lead to reading failure and/or dysfluent reading for around 20-25% of children who have working memory and/or orthographic processing difficulties. (McMurray 2020, 2021; McMurray and Thompson 2016).

In tailoring learning to meet individual needs, there is no 'one size fits all approach'. ITT requires a much broader focus on understanding difficulties in literacy development so that student teachers understand clearly why some children have difficulties in learning to read and can adapt their teaching methods to help them acquire these skills.

ITT education courses must include the development of understanding and critical evaluation of a range of methods that can be used to teach any subject, and an understanding of how children with a wide range of different needs respond to different methods. This will support teachers in understanding the range of ways in which children learn and how to identify learning needs so that these needs can be met. This is essential for achieving the goal of inclusive quality first teaching.

ITT course instruction needs to educate and inform trainee teachers so that they can assess, identify, and adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all children in their class.

3. SEC wants Quality Requirements to ensure that ITT providers equip teachers with the skills and understanding to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all children, including those with SEN and disabilities.

Trainees will also be required to undertake at least two intensive practice placements and focus on four foundational areas. It is unclear whether the intensive practice placements include a specific focus on SEND as a foundational area, including through quality first teaching.

The main focus of placements needs to be on providing experience of high quality inclusive practice with learners with a range of needs. However, this may need to be supplemented with placements in a special school, and studies have found that experiences of being in a special school setting, even for a short period, have a significant influence on the practice of student teachers in mainstream settings, and can continue to have an effect into the NQT year (Mintz et al, 2015).

4. SEC wants Quality Requirements to specify that practice placements include a focus on SEND and equip trainee teachers with knowledge and experience of delivering high-quality teaching to children with SEN and disabilities.

### **Understanding of statutory responsibilities to CYP with SEND**

ITT providers need to be able to demonstrate how they are preparing trainee teachers with a sound understanding of *their professional duties and responsibilities* under the Children and Families Act and the Equality Act.

Claims of disability discrimination that have been made to the Tribunal provide an insight into the lack of understanding of the breadth of the definition of disability, with a teacher, in on case thinking of the pupil a 'mainstream pupil' and failing to recognize the impact of his particular learning needs. Such insights remind us all of the importance of the duties in the Equality Act which, arguably, have been given less profile than the SEN duties in the Children and Families Act. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is crucial to adaptive teaching.

5. SEC wants Quality Requirements to ensure that ITT providers equip teachers with a thorough understanding of the legislative requirements and of their professional responsibilities to pupils with SEN and disabilities.

### **Mentors: preparation, training and quality assurance**

The review addresses the role of mentors, including their training, and emphasises the importance of subject and phase expertise. It does not however specify how mentor training will address SEN and disability, nor how mentors themselves will have the knowledge, skills and competencies to do this appropriately and effectively. It is vital that mentors develop and support trainees to identify and meet the needs of learners with SEN through high-quality teaching but also identifying when to draw on specialist support. The quality assurance on mentors is therefore imperative to ensure SEN and inclusive practice is integrated within mentor training.

6. SEC wants to see a thorough training programme for all mentors to ensure understanding of SEND-related practice and issues.
7. SEC wants robust quality requirements of all mentors that include SEND-related practice and issues.

The review also stresses the importance of working in partnership and the critical role that ITT lead partners have in the design and content of the training. There is no mention of the steps

that ITT providers will take to ensure trainees review the expert input on early and timely identification of need, how to adapt teaching to meet need(s), and when and how to seek specialist input and support. This runs the risk of hubs deciding on a particular way of teaching and sharing this as best practice. Quality assurance is therefore also required at partnership level to ensure SEN dimensions are reflected within the partnerships.

8. SEC wants the quality requirements to include the establishment of professional networks of well-trained expert mentors who have a deep understanding of the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEN, the relevant research base which informs it and their role in supporting its delivery and practice.

**For further information:**

SEC would be happy to provide further information or to clarify anything in our response.

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**Special Educational Consortium**

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