

SEND Provision - LSE and EPI Roundtable

24 March 2025, London

Summary Note

As part of a series of roundtables centred around the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, the Education Policy Institute and London School of Economics and Political Science held a roundtable discussing the Government's proposals to address SEND provision.

EPI and LSE were joined by expert representatives from the House of Commons, children's charities, parents and teachers' networks, professional associations, and leaders from the education sector.

The roundtable was based around a discussion of how the Bill will impact SEND provision, including changes to the accountability framework, school admissions and the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding. Participants also considered what additional measures may be necessary to ensure the Bill tackles the immediate challenges facing children with special educational needs and disabilities, their families, and professionals.

Guiding Questions

Participants were invited to consider the following questions:

- What do the provisions in the Bill mean for students with SEND and their parents or carers?
- To what extent will the policy changes in the Bill address the immediate needs of the SEND system? To what extent do they support longer-term planning?
- To what extent does the curriculum and assessment review consider the impact of curriculum on SEND students?
- Which provisions of the Bill do you think are likely to be the most beneficial to the SEND system, and which are likely to be the most deleterious? How would you change the Bill's provisions to improve it?
- What is needed from the anticipated Spring White Paper to tackle special educational needs spending deficits and improve the SEND system?

Children Not in School

The introduction of a register of children outside of education was welcomed, and there was agreement in the room that the government needs to be aware of children who are not in school.

- It was noted that improved discussions need to be had on how best to meet the needs of those in home education or with SEND who are returning to schools. Under good pastoral leadership – that is compassionate and kind - these children will be able to catch up with their peers.
- The progress of children returning to education and catching up should be tracked and transitions managed with the needs of the individual child in mind.
- Thought should be given to how best to communicate with parents and carers of children not in school to ease their fears about their children returning to education and concerns about the level of support their children will receive at school. This is especially important in the short-term whilst plans are put in place for a child to return safely and smoothly to a welcoming school.
- Some participants called for communication efforts to move away from a narrative that parents or carers who have taken their children out of school have done the wrong thing.
- It was noted that improving the Early Help Framework could help to prevent some of the issues that lead to children leaving education; the system currently is reactive and not sufficiently proactive.
- Concern was raised about the Bill's plans to increase powers around attendance orders. It was noted that families with children with SEND and additional needs who are struggling to attend school are most adversely impacted in terms of access to education entitlement, attendance and educational outcomes. An overly-punitive approach towards attendance will not address underlying attendance barriers such as unmet SEND needs.
- An attendee challenged Ofsted inspections' emphasis on attendance, with Outstanding judgements requiring sufficient attendance and punctuality. It was noted that attendance is easier to measure than other qualitative improvements. This can impact the intake of children at each school for those that require SEND support.

Mental health and SEND in young children

Participants discussed the persistent issues that have led to some children disengaging from education, as well as reflecting on the wider context of SEND provision and needs.

- It was suggested that more thought should be given to the impact of SEND diagnoses themselves; there is a lack of evidence base on what effect SEND diagnoses have on pupil outcomes.
- There are also other potential factors at play in the system when data is examined; one attendee recalled that, when looking at their school data on the *Lighthouse*

platform, they found that 74% of children who applied for an ECHP did so on behavioural grounds, not SEND.

- Relatedly, social media is having an impact on pupil's behaviour.
- It was noted that school should not be having adverse effect on mental health; a school's purpose is to allow children to have a positive learning experience with their peers, in an environment where they feel safety and belonging.
- It was noted that we must also consider the link between schools' income and their culture, and evaluate what schools are doing with the money they have to foster a culture of inclusivity.
- Participants discussed and questioned whether Ofsted inspections should be improved to better reflect and measure the qualitative impact on children of their time spent at school.

Breakfast Clubs

Several suggestions were made to ensure breakfast club provision was inclusive:

- Breakfast club provision must be adapted to support children with SEND, with some children having specific dietary needs and preferences which must be factored in when considering resources for this.
- It was noted that council-provided school transport typically only operates at the start and end of a school day, which could prevent children with SEND from attending breakfast clubs.
- Breakfast clubs will require extra staff, at a time of pressure for staff workloads and retention issues in the profession.

Recommendations to improve the Bill:

Asked what the Bill should contain, attendees replied that the Bill should make provisions to:

- Consider the role of Independent Schools in SEND provision and **standardise Independent Special Schools** to ensure that those falling short on standard are better identified.
- **Enhance the power to direct schools to accept pupils through admissions and open school places.**
- **Encourage and support new local authority special schools.**
- **Ensure Academy curriculums are inclusive.**
- **Foster more supportive relationships between families and local authorities**, for instance through a code of practise.

Follow up questions for researchers

- What analyses could be done on the current evidence base on SEND diagnoses? Does a SEND diagnosis improve outcomes for pupils?
- How can EHCPs be better utilised at a time when children are in key stages of development?
- What might a non-verbal curriculum look like?