

SEND Reform

23 March 2026

Reform Principles

- 1. Early.** Children and families should **receive the support they need as soon as possible**, with a quick response to changing needs. This will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse. Instead, we will intervene swiftly and proactively, focusing on **providing support earlier** in children's lives when this can have the greatest impact.
- 2. Local.** Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at an **education setting close to their home**, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Specialist settings should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.
- 3. Fair.** Every education setting should be **resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs**, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people, we will ensure it is there, whether that be a mainstream, specialist or Alternative Provision setting, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.
- 4. Effective.** Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring **all education settings know where to go to find effective practice** that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.
- 5. Shared.** Education, health and care services should **work in partnership** with one another, Best Start Family Hubs, local government, families, teachers, educators, experts, the voluntary sector and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people. The voices of children should be at the heart of decision making.

Reform Direction

- **Consistency:** There have been difference across local authorities in terms of access to support and delivery of this, with Specialist Provision Packages one way of evening this out.
- **Speeding up access:** More speech and language therapists, education psychologists and occupational therapists available to support mainstream settings as Experts at Hand, but number or target isn't given.
- **Partnerships:** Push of Best Start in Life Hubs and expert practitioners to work alongside Early Years settings; partnerships between EY settings and schools to help children with SEND transition.
- **Inclusive:** High importance on children having access to mainstream education as much as possible; not as much emphasis on the need for more higher need settings.
- **More changes to come:** Early Years will receive SENIF and DAF for the time being, as well as Inclusive Mainstream Fund, but there is a coming consultation on early years funding.
- **Early identification (to a point):** Emphasis on targeted and early identification of children's support needs, but majority of funding aimed at schools and colleges.

Early years-related reforms

We will ensure **every Best Start Family Hub** has a **dedicated SEND practitioner**, backed by over £200 million investment over three years.

Access to expert advice and services through the new **Experts at Hand** offer, which brings more speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and education psychologists into mainstream settings .

We will fund **partnerships between early years settings and schools**, using this model to test and implement different approaches to transitions, including for children with SEND.

From September 2026, all staff nationwide will be able to benefit from **new training**, supported by government-backed training materials. For early years, we will **consult with the early years sector on teacher training routes and course content**; this will inform training in inclusive practice for early years teachers. We plan to expand access to this training route, more than **doubling the number of EYITT places by 2028**.

Levels of support

Targeted

Children and young people get **Targeted support** from their setting, outlined in an Individual Support Plan that is developed with parents.

Targeted Plus

Children and young people get **Targeted Plus support** from their setting, with input from education and health professionals. School-aged children are also supported through their school group. Support may include access to a 'Support Base'.

Specialist

Children and young people receive **Specialist support** through an EHCP in mainstream or special setting, if they require provision set out in one of the new nationally defined **Specialist Provision Packages**. Support may be delivered through a 'Specialist Base'.

We will introduce a fast track for a Specialist Provision Package and EHCP for children under the age of 5 whose needs are complex and identified at an early stage.

To achieve this, DfE and DHSC will work with NHS England to enable better information sharing between health professionals and local authorities. This will speed up the process of matching children to the right Specialist Provision Package and create a more direct route to specialist provision for those with the most complex needs at the earliest stage.

Funding

We will provide additional funding from our new **Inclusive Early Years Fund** to providers to identify and respond where children have emerging additional needs - £47m in 2026-27.

This marks the first step towards upfront, **cohort-based funding**, enabling settings to plan and deliver proactive support for commonly occurring needs. Local authorities will have a crucial role in cohort planning, **ensuring settings have what they need to support the most commonly occurring needs** across their populations.

Local authorities will play a key role in distributing inclusion funding, supporting cohort planning, and monitoring inclusive practice. We will develop clear guidance on how providers can use funding effectively, including recommended interventions and proportionate approaches to tracking impact.

As outlined in Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life, existing funding streams such as **SENIF and DAF will continue for now**, but we will consult this year on simplifying and consolidating funding streams and reducing bureaucracy.

Funding

From 2029 to 2030, we will begin rebalancing high needs funding so that a greater share is available to early years settings upfront. We will work with local authorities and providers to design the approach, ensuring it supports earlier intervention while maintaining strong provision for children with the most complex needs. This will reduce reliance on individual assessments, encourage earlier action, and give providers greater certainty, while maintaining strong support for children with the most complex needs.

These funding reforms will sit alongside our over £200 million investment in Best Start Family Hubs, which will play a particularly important role in the early years sector, providing integrated support for families alongside education and health services.

Places

In the early years, while many local authorities work proactively to identify and plan provision, we have heard that there are still challenges in securing sufficient and appropriate places for children with SEND.

We will work with local authorities to strengthen their sufficiency planning for children with SEND, including reviewing whether statutory requirements are clear enough and exploring how to improve data on the availability of suitable places, including for those needing specialist support.

This will help strengthen local accountability and give parents greater confidence that their children can access the early education and childcare they are entitled to.

Updates to Standards

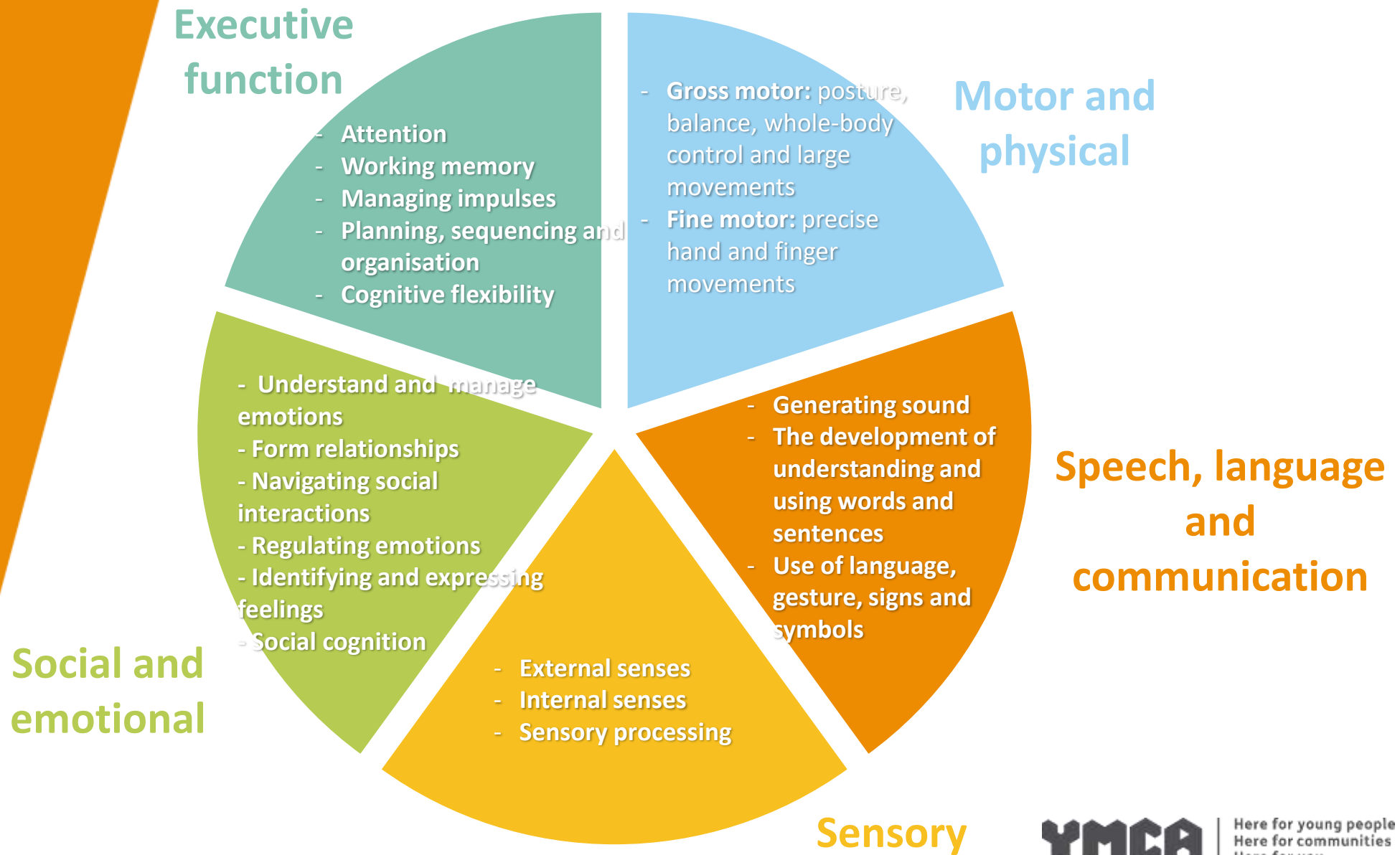
An independent expert panel will oversee the development of **National Inclusion Standards**. These will set out what all children and families should be able to expect from their school. These will provide guidance on **how to make schools more inclusive** and to design **targeted support for specific areas of development**.

We will update the SEND Code of Practice to clarify the responsibilities of education settings and local partners, as well as make the guidance easier to use and navigate. This will have stronger emphasis on an evidence-based “support approach”, with additional professional development understand barriers to learning and enabling to recognise and respond to wider range of needs with greater confidence.

We will also update the Code of Practice to refresh the current four broad areas of need, which are often unclear and inconsistently applied, replacing them with new **areas of development** that reflect key aspects of child development.

The National Inclusion Standards will provide a clear framework for how the updated Code should be delivered in practice.

Areas of development



Timeline

Phase one: 2026 to 2028

Investment and building new system

- Workforce training programmes for all staff.
- Schools, colleges and early years settings receive Inclusive Mainstream Fund.
- Experts at Hand comes on stream for all settings.
- Specialist Provision Packages published.
- National Inclusion Standards published.

Phase two: 2028 to 2029

Improved support

- We will continue to invest in and build-up the new system
- New legislation expected to come into effect from September 2029

Phase three: School year 2029/30 onwards

Future system

- School year 2029/30:
- First assessments of children take place under reformed system.
- EHCP, National Inclusion Standards and Individual Support Plan legislation enacted.
- First children using Specialist Provision Packages.
- 60,000 new school places for children with SEND will have been created in special schools and inclusion bases.

Summary

- Best Start Family Hubs to have a dedicated SEND practitioner
- Access to Experts at Hand offer for specialist support through local authority
- Additional funding through Inclusive Early Years Fund, with move to a greater share of high needs funding upfront by 2030.
- Partnerships between early years settings and schools for transition to reception
- New training from 2026 with consultation on course content to come
- Three levels of support rather than EHCP, delivered through Individual Support Plans developed between settings and parents
- Fast-track for Specialist Provision Package and EHCP for children under 5 with complex needs
- New National Inclusion Standards and updated SEND Code of Practice

Reflections

- How do you think these proposals will affect children with SEND at your settings?
- Do you think changes to EHCP eligibility and duty of care will benefit the children and families you support?
- What are existing relationships like with schools, Best Start Family Hubs and local authorities on needs at your settings?
- What do you think was missing from the reforms?
- What are the most welcomed improvements?
- Is there anything that you think will be detrimental?

Consultation questions

What arrangements would best support effective joint working between early years providers, Best Start Family Hubs, health and local authorities and parents for children with SEND in the early years?

How can the early years foundation stage (EYFS) two-year old progress check and the Healthy Child Programme development review be improved so that children's needs are identified and supported more quickly? Please share examples.

Consultation questions

From this year, we will provide delivery guidance and examples of good practice of Experts at Hand. Scaling up will take time, so each local area should start establishing clear partnership governance to support delivery and fair allocation of expertise and resources. Initially, we expect the focus to be on upskilling of education staff to raise baseline knowledge across mainstream settings.

Over time, as system capacity grows and reliance on statutory assessment reduces, we expect more expert time will shift to bespoke advice and group-level support for children and young people, with education staff increasingly able to deliver interventions themselves.

Through the Experts at Hand offer, we want to ensure that mainstream settings can get quick specialist support for children and young people.

What arrangements are needed between local area partners (education, health, social care) to deliver this Experts at Hand offer effectively?