

# Solving The SEND Crisis

## Corby and East Northamptonshire SEND Roundtable Written Evidence Submission

### Introduction

This paper presents findings from the Corby and East Northamptonshire SEND Roundtable convened by Lee Barron MP to submit evidence for the Education Select Committee's Inquiry 'Solving the SEND crisis'. The main aim was to gather key SEND stakeholders including families, education professionals, health professionals, employment professionals, support services, and others to enable meaningful cross-sector discussions, leading to proposed solutions to the crisis in SEND.

The Roundtable resulted in positive collaborative discussions which are recorded as observations and subsequent solutions, recorded under each of the five main headings as set out through the Education Select Committee Inquiry Call for Evidence document. Supplementary questions were extracted from the evidence document based around the expertise of invited participants and practical factors such as time. Interestingly, despite a wide variety of questions, several key themes overlap throughout the following sections.

### Section 1: SEND Support

#### 1.1 How should SEND workforce issues be addressed?

##### **OBSERVATIONS**

The SEND workforce is under immense pressure and staff well-being must be urgently prioritised to retain current staff and recruit new (beyond cakes on Fridays!). SEND staff need to feel valued both in their place of work and wider society. Teaching Assistants are poorly paid, and recruitment is difficult.

Part of a wider discussion around workload where teaching staff are (historically) only given 10% of contact time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) so work many hours beyond contractual hours. This is crucial to the debate 'Every Teacher a Teacher of SEND'. SENDCos and SEND staff must be supported through a whole school inclusive approach.

##### **SOLUTIONS**

- Top-down consistent messaging from Government strongly in support of profession
- Make being a SENDCo a more attractive career path by providing adequate time to do the role. SENDCo's should not be expected to teach or cover absent colleagues.
- SENDCOs need more staff and succession planning. Minimum expectation should be a Deputy or Assistant SENDCo with administrative support

- The current three-year window to gain a SENCO qualification should be reviewed so that qualification begins ahead of appointment
- Well-being through supervision for staff – clinical and therapeutic – safe space for containment and to process emotions
- Protected time needed to complete NASENCO professional qualification
- Mandatory for SENDCos to be on the Senior Leadership Team to keep inclusion at the heart of schools
- Exams Officers to manage Access Arrangements administration
- Redefine importance of Teaching Assistants and shift title to ‘Assistant Teachers’
- Review of ‘Assistant Teacher’ pay to make wage fairly reflect role’s responsibilities and pay through the holidays as headline salaries are pro-rated
- Flexible working practices
- Protected time for Assistant Teachers to engage with CPD, plan provision or prepare resources

## **1.2 What expertise should exist and how can we build capacity in the workforce?**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

North Northamptonshire Council is currently considering an improved asset-based approach which will enable multi-disciplinary squads to work with a cluster of schools. There will be a central point of contact which can quickly mobilise SEND support. Expertise built through upskilling SEND staff working alongside therapists.

### **SOLUTIONS**

- Multi-disciplinary teams in schools provided either through ‘Roving’ specialist staff employed by Trusts or through Local Authorities with opportunities for training across health, social care, and education
- Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) upskilling whole school staff
- Educational Psychologist (EP) early intervention focussed
- Occupational Therapist (OT) with sensory and environment support
- School Nurse
- Physiotherapist
- Team of Assistant Teachers co-planning and delivering interventions (remunerated) through initially ‘shadowing’ other professionals (e.g. SALT)
- Specialist practitioners (e.g. ADHD, ASD, SEMH)
- Mental health specialist in each school

## **1.3 What training is needed to increase inclusion?**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Staff SEND knowledge and pedagogy variable within and across schools. Students need to be explicitly taught core skills to remove barriers accessing the curriculum and to create independent and resilient learners. Consistency in Teacher Education with universal standards across all providers needed.

## **SOLUTIONS**

- Consistent programme of ongoing CPD for all staff to support knowledge of Graduated Response (Assess/Plan/Do/Review)
- Staff training in how to support learners with core skills which unlock access to the curriculum, such as executive functioning, scaffolding and metacognition
- All staff trauma informed (like current safeguarding training)
- Relational approaches at whole school / Trust level to support emotional regulation and maximise learning
- Integrating SEND and Inclusion into professional development for trainee teachers – to cover all routes into teaching.
- Consistency across Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers with a minimum threshold time for SEND
- Early Career Teacher (ECT) programme each year must have focus on development of progress supporting learners with SEND – adaptive teaching examples
- Training in de-escalation techniques for teachers and support staff

## **Section 2 SEND NEED: Identification and Assessment**

### **2.1 What approaches would support earlier and more accurate identification of SEND need and how should assessment of need be improved?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

Under the current system, the assessment of a child's individual needs comes far too late and there needs to be a fresh strategy with intervention in the very early years. More value should be put on the first 1000 days of a child's life. Especially important in preschool to listen to parents carefully (they know their child best). Early help for parents with child development is key to tap into each child's individual potential.

There is currently no nationally recognised standard to identify SEND. Through discussions, it emerged that differences exist even within the same Trust as to which children are on the SEND register. An agreed standard would target time, resources, funding and expertise. Important to recognise the national backlog in diagnostic assessments – schools must respond to presentation of need as cannot wait for diagnosis for child to be added to SEND register

#### **SOLUTIONS:**

- National standard identifying clear descriptors for SEND
- Assessment must be EARLY and TARGETTED to avoid many issues later in school life
- EP/OT/SALT in all pre-schools
- Early Years Portage and Health Visitor support for parents reinstated
- Health Visitor check at 2.5 years in person (not online) for all
- Assessors shared across schools for improved identification of need
- Tools for assessment could include PATOSS – could be part of SENDCO Level award

## **2.2 How can the EHCP process be made non-adversarial and what are the alternatives?**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Across North Northamptonshire Council there are 4,200 children with EHCPs. This is set to rise to over 9,000 by 2028 so urgent action must be taken. Units are full and there are no places in specialist provision.

Many children do not need an EHCP, but families are forced to go down this route because there is no alternative in the current system. The system needs to change, not the children. Academically able students are unable to access mainstream schools due to the environment, but also unable to access Specialist Provision as GCSEs not offered in many cases. Schools must be fully inclusive with curriculum, assessment and environment adapted for all (see section 3 and 4) so that EHC Plans are for children with the most complex needs.

### **SOLUTIONS**

- Multi-agency approach to write EHC Plan, rather than each professional providing separate evidence and final plan written by a person who has never met child.
- Explore use of AI around EHCP outcomes
- Change the environment (see section 4) to reduce anxiety related applications for EHCP
- Families need navigation to access services and wrap around support not only in schools but through the NHS and social care
- Support in early years (see section 1)
- One person (caseworker) to support family through process
- Phased consultation timelines need to be reviewed – children going to secondary school without up-to-date plan impacts whether child receives placement and support
- More information sharing when moving schools and key stages or relocating
- Assessment for EHCP needs to be in person to fully understand need
- Regular assessments to avoid children going for years without a diagnosis

## **Section 3: SEND Provision (Curriculum and Assessment)**

### **3.1 What changes are needed to the curriculum?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL – we need to accept that each student will have and want different outcomes. There is a need to raise awareness and educate others in the school community to shift the narrative away from SEND as a deficit model.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Curriculum content should promote understanding of SEND and celebrate differences
- Flexibility in curriculum offer to allow for innovation and a move away from all students doing 8-10 GCSE's
- Create a system where innovative and creative curriculum pathways are incentivised
- Widen offer to include more vocational options - BTECS / CNATS/ T-levels (see section 3.3)
- Careers curriculum to give more time to explore apprenticeship options and preparation pathways to adulthood through life skills

- Contextual real-life maths taught in all schools
- Performance tables to fully recognise value of vocational qualifications

### **3.2 How can the assessment process be made more inclusive?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

The current assessment process has a significant emphasis on phonics and times tables in primary, but the way these are taught can put undue pressure on children. At secondary level, there is too much emphasis on GCSEs. Schools are disadvantaged for being inclusive and innovative through lower progress 8 scores. End point assessments rely too much on memory, which significantly disadvantages students with SEND.

Digital assessment tools are not compatible with exam boards so cannot be used in assessments and exams.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Early years remove formal testing and use play-based assessments, professional observations, and dialogue with parents to record small steps of progress
- Alternatives to 'end point' written assessment such as oral, video/VLOG and practical assessments
- Increase variety of qualifications which can be digital/online
- Portfolio assessment to counteract memory issues and play to children's strengths
- Digital assessment and accessibility software embedded in curriculum offer and exam boards to review software
- Shift away from standardised cognitive assessments and towards child centred dynamic assessments as a more accurate representation of need

### **3.3 What steps should be taken to improve the P16 landscape for students with SEND?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

There exists a gap between paediatrics and geriatrics – what happens to young adults 18-25? A cliff edge exists for learners with SEND when looking to secure a job or move to higher education.

The DfE works with the DWP to create an Alternative Health Adjustment Passport. This is used to identify reasonable adjustments needed for work and access to additional funding

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- EHCP should become EEHCP (Employment Education Health Care Plan)
- Adopt DWP passport model universally to support learners with SEND into employment
- More flexibility when assessments can be taken (day / time / length)
- Adopt graduated approach to P16 SEND provision nationally to standardise processes around funding, EHCP and Annual Review

## **Section 4: SEND PROVISION (School Environment)**

### **4.1 How can we reduce the risk of children being unable to attend mainstream schools?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

There has been a growth in home education often driven by parents who feel they have no choice. There are a wide range of reasons: no available space at a chosen school, waiting for an EHCP, or the school offered is not inclusive. This has far-reaching impact on families, including a reduction in income where a parent must stop working.

Absences are classed as unauthorised, but parents might not have a choice. Attendance guidance is clear that these absences should be authorised. Many children are unable to cope in the traditional school environment and greater consideration needs to be given to both the physical and emotional space (sense of belonging).

Children need to move frequently to support regulation— they are not meant to sit for six or seven hours, and a lack of movement affects brain development. If we elevate movement, we will eradicate many low level sensory linked behaviour issues (Active Schools Model).

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Reframe behaviour management as behaviour regulation
- Staff training in de-escalation techniques
- Ensure curriculum accessible for all through high quality inclusive practice (see section 3.1)
- Improve transition process and consider Year 7 a ‘transition year’ with students in one classroom for mornings
- Universal classroom environments which promote self-regulation and maximise learning (e.g. removal of strip lighting, window blinds and ‘soothing walls’)
- Incentivise garden projects to promote green spaces
- Movement breaks during lessons for all, with staff trained in understanding importance
- Relational approaches at whole school / Trust level
- Attendance support frameworks for more persistent non-attendance with a fair approach to absence coding
- Flexibility around uniform rules as impractical, costly, and uncomfortable for many
- Children to come to school ‘PE ready’ to avoid unsafe changing rooms and increase physical activity time

### **4.2 How can we address higher exclusion rates for students with SEND?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

North Northamptonshire Council reported a Year 1 child had 61 fixed home exclusions. How do we prevent this? Many exclusions are behaviour related, and every behaviour is expressing a need. Staff need to be supported through relational approaches. Early intervention is key (see section 2.1)

## **SOLUTIONS**

- Protected spaces for calming, as opposed to ‘isolation booths’ (exacerbating the exclusion of the most isolated)
- Regulation room, with staff trained in de-escalation and restorative approaches
- Part-time timetables to support students to regulate
- Increase sense of belonging – peer mentoring schemes, support with communication skills and activities to support social communication
- Appoint a designated ‘leader of belonging’ in every school (and give time for the role)

### **4.3 How can specialist provision best be provided and how can it broaden the mainstream offer?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

Schools are under immense pressure to meet the needs of students, with spaces often not available even for those with EHCPs. This means, rather than learning in their community, money is spent bussing children out of Northamptonshire. This money would be better spent investing in hubs/units.

Hubs of expertise in schools is a suggested way forward to meet immediate challenges.

There was a broader discussion around whether SEND hubs / units are compatible with inclusive principles.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Funding for more specialist units in schools
- Transition programmes to support children from unit to mainstream
- Mentoring programmes and overlapping curriculum to encourage integration
- Ensure specialist provision is inclusive e.g. Full-Service Schools model
- Links between local businesses and community e.g. coffee shop model (Singapore).

## **Section 5: Funding and Accountability**

### **5.1 What support do Local Authorities need to ensure LT financial sustainability?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

There needs to be a radical approach to find solutions, rather than simply tinkering around the edges of a fragmented system. We need to create much more predictive models, so it is possible to assess demand and build systems.

This will need partnerships with other services including health and social care and integrated commissioning. Budgets will need to be pooled to give financial stability to those commissioning models which will drive through the change.

A central data system would enable earlier interventions from professionals which could help avoid the need for EHCPs.

## **SOLUTIONS**

- Stronger investment in Early help and prevention (cost-benefit analysis)
- Joint integrated commissioning arrangements with delivery models across Health, Social Care and Education
- Collaborative approach across different agencies so everybody holds the same dataset
- Consistent central recording system of accurate SEND data for future proofing
- Place funding review – Local Authority (LA) placement tracking for mainstream units and special provision
- No more temporary staff – stability needed for longer term
- Caseworkers as school links for CPD and support

### **5.2 Is school notional funding reform needed?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

Consensus was YES! EHCP provision does not match funding currently as there is a significant shortfall between allocated funding and staffing costs.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Local Authorities cessation of requesting notional funding used as already allocated on staffing
- There needs to be a Local Authority pot for additional needs funding beyond the notional budget and allow for a move to an alternative provision to better suit need. Currently, the notional budget does not allow for this as it has been spent.
- Caseworkers allocated to a cluster of schools would have a better understanding of needs and make sure available funding is better spent
- Reform to P16 funding for SEND learners (without an EHCP)

### **5.2 What can be done to ensure all schools contribute to local SEND provision and school SEND places are planned effectively?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

There is a shortage of school places. A headteacher shared how their primary school unit is already over-subscribed for September 2025. This means children with EHCPs must be turned away. Another headteacher shared how staff are often in tears because they are unable to meet the needs of a child through lack of funding and spaces.

Local authorities need to challenge consultation to ensure all schools admit their fair proportion of students with SEND – but must provide the tools and funding to enable this to happen. The integration of education, health and social care can drive this forward.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Placement Panel should include a representative from each school
- Pledges / agreements (district based) on a fair distribution of students
- More joint governance and identified school leads to ensure placements are fair and sustainable
- DfE Directive on percentage of EHCPs each school should have. Ofsted outcomes review – accountability

- Financial incentives offered to be inclusive
- Funding for Hub provisions – shared expertise and support for families across key services including education, health, and social care
- Strong community links – incentives to attend local school – sense of belonging important

### **5.3 What should Ofsted's new 'inclusion' criterion for the inspection of mainstream schools look like?**

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

There is a recognition that the threat of an Ofsted inspection can put immense pressure on a school's team. Their professionalism will be judged on factors which may not be relevant for a child with different needs but puts pressures on the SEND team to deliver results.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Reform Ofsted top-down external model and replace with Local Authority collaborative audits, which result in regular reviews of not only performance, but opportunities and challenges
- The school environment should be included in the new 'inclusion' criterion
- Schools should be required to account for the number/percentage of students with SEND and explain why this may be above or below expected local levels
- Joint development of strategic plans across schools and shared good practice
- Expectations need to be more realistic and recognise neurotypical development