

Education needs urgent reform and more funding



The education of our children and young people should be a key priority, and the causes of the crisis in SEND tackled now

The education of our most valuable asset – children – should be a key priority for any Government. f40 believes we must revolutionise our education system and invest heavily to improve attendance, resolve deficit budgets, and tackle the recruitment and retention crisis. Only by doing so can we ensure children reach their potential and we help to resolve the crisis in SEND.

Since 2010, education budgets have not matched school-specific expenditure and inflation, while the number of children requiring SEND intervention has grown

exponentially. To compound issues, support services, such as speech therapy and mental health care, have declined. Schools are doing far more without sufficient funding, and without the vital training and resources required. The cost-of-living crisis and Covid pandemic have created even greater challenges.

Budgets have become so stretched, teaching assistants are often now only available to support pupils with the greatest SEND requirements, while pastoral support and early intervention have reduced. The lack

of funding is impacting on every pupil and every school.

We agree with Government's aim to improve inclusion in mainstream schools, but there needs to be a funding strategy to make it happen. Schools must be provided with the right funding, training and resources to enable them to better support SEND. They must also be incentivised through greater accountability and inspection processes, which look more at their SEND support, as well as academic attainment.

f40 is campaigning for:

- Substantial investment in mainstream education
- A review of core SEND funding in mainstream, including notional £6k, ensuring it is ringfenced and able to better support inclusion
- Improved SEND resources, guidance, and teacher training in every mainstream school
- Greater accountability for inclusion in mainstream schools, along with a greater focus on inclusion during school inspections



Fairness of funding

School and SEND funding continues to be unfair, with many local authorities and schools receiving thousands of pounds less per pupil than others. The difference is as much as £5,000 per pupil between the lowest and highest funded schools. Similar neighbouring authorities with comparable pupils can receive wildly different funding.

There continues to be too many factors locking in significant gains

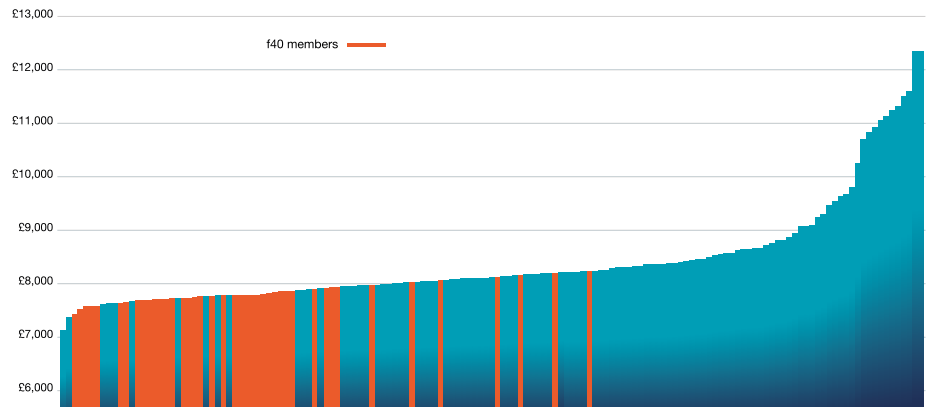
for some schools or capping others from receiving more. Irrelevant historic SEND data that bears no resemblance to today's needs should also not be used to determine funding. Currently the lowest funded authority for SEND receives £960 per pupil, while the highest receives £3,330. This must change. We do not wish to see funding taken away from the highest funded areas, and we appreciate there will always be some differences, however, the current differential is far too wide.

f40 is campaigning for:

- The funding formulae for schools and SEND to be improved so they are fairer, and the lowest funded areas lifted-up to ensure all pupils receive equal opportunities and funding

See funding graph overleaf

Variation in gross Dedicated Schools Grant allocation per mainstream pupil by local authority 2024-25



The SEND Crisis

The number of children with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) has doubled since changes to the SEND Code of Practice were introduced in 2014. This means more and more children are being provided with additional educational support, without sufficient funding to pay for it.

While Government funding for SEND has increased since 2019, it has not kept pace with demand or inflation, and local authorities in England are expected to have a cumulative £3.6bn SEND deficit by March 2025. Unless dealt with, many councils, as well as education providers, fear their deficits will lead them to bankruptcy.

The SEND crisis is due to a number of factors:

- 1 The number of children with SEND has gradually increased due to a growth in population, better detection of conditions, and longer life expectancy for those with very complex health needs. Mental health and speech and language issues have also increased, especially since COVID.
- 2 The Code of Practice 2014 was well intentioned and designed to improve SEND support. However, while it expanded the level of support and choice available to children and young people, including those up to age 25, it has been insufficiently funded. f40 has calculated £4.6bn extra annual SEND revenue is required to meet current need, based on the rise in inflation and EHCPs since 2015. It does not allow for further growth.
- 3 The current mainstream school system is insufficiently funded or equipped to deal with the increased demand for SEND support. Staffing issues, stretched budgets, and lack of training and resources, along with an inspection process focusing primarily on academic success, means some schools are not as inclusive as they could be. Too often SEND pupils leave to be home-schooled or are transferred into costly specialist provision when a mainstream place with additional support could have met their needs.
- 4 There is insufficient specialist State SEND provision to meet need. This means children are placed in expensive independent SEND schools, which often cost more than twice as much and are located out of the area. The over-reliance on costly independent provision puts huge financial pressure on local authority SEND and Transport budgets.

f40 is campaigning for:

- A SEND funding strategy, linked to the SEND and AP Improvement Plan, focusing on early intervention and inclusion
- Additional SEND revenue funding – f40 has calculated that £4.6bn more is required per year
- Substantial one-off capital funding to expand State SEND provision, fairly distributed to every local authority, which know best how to match provision with local needs
- Greater regulation and scrutiny of the independent SEND sector, including around value-for-money
- Improved clarity around expected ordinarily available SEND provision and support
- A Government commitment to resolve the SEND crisis and pay off accumulated SEND deficits

For more information

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