

Monday, 18 May 2026



The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Successfully reforming SEND provision with careful planning, supported inclusion, sufficient funding, and capital funding

I am contacting you on behalf of the f40 group to share some of our thoughts on the Schools White Paper and SEND reforms, and to invite you to meet with us so we can discuss it together in more detail. We have responded to the SEND reform consultation.

We welcome the new policy documents and are supportive of Government's direction of travel towards greater inclusion at mainstream, with reduced reliance on EHCPs and specialist provision for those children with less complex needs.

We believe many of the proposed changes can lead to improved outcomes for children, parents, schools and local authorities in the years ahead, and could help to turn the tide on the crisis in SEND. Indeed, many of the things we have been advocating for were included in the documents.

The huge shift in statutory responsibility for SEND support away from local authorities and towards schools is significant and must not be underestimated. If we're able to get the changes right, with sufficient time for planning, support, funding and guidance, we could see the majority of children attending schools in their local community - and thriving, both academically and socially.

However, f40 believes we must ensure all of the mechanisms to support the reforms are in place to enable their success. Otherwise, we are concerned the reforms themselves – and schools – will be set up to fail. We fear a repeat of the unintended consequences that followed the 2014 SEND Code of Practice if we do not properly prepare and put the necessary resources and processes in place. This includes providing the necessary time for local authorities to formulate their Local SEND Reform Plans.

We believe the reforms can work, provided:

- A review of the whole funding system for Schools and High Needs is carried out to ensure budgets are more fairly distributed so all schools have sufficient funding, before extra is added on for specific school and pupil need and area living costs.
- Schools are given significant additional funding to enable them to provide the right space, resources, staff and training to improve their inclusive practice. The funding suggested so far is not enough.
- A long-term funding policy is implemented that aligns with the reforms. It is crucial that we move away from annual grants and short-term funding, and enable education settings, local authorities and integrated care boards to set more accurate, long-term financial plans.
- Information and policy guidance is shared with local authorities and schools in a more timely fashion, so that plans are well-informed. The current LA SEND Reform Plans are being developed without crucial policy guidance.

- Greater clarity is provided around ordinarily available SEND support in mainstream and SEND packages.
- There is continued investment in capital funding to enable local authorities to increase their specialist SEND support. Reliance on high-cost independent provision will only reduce when LA specialist capacity is at the right levels. This, in turn, will create competition in the independent sector and drive down costs. Many local authorities will need additional specialist places, despite planned investment into inclusion bases.
- Greater accountability is placed on all partners, particularly Health, around the SEND support and funding they must provide.
- Ofsted inspections focus on quality of SEND provision, alongside academic outcomes.
- There is greater regulation of the independent SEND sector to ensure value for money and better targeted support.

As you know, f40 represents 43 of the lowest educationally-funded local authorities across England. Whilst all schools and local authorities are struggling financially to provide the SEND support needed, the issues are exacerbated for those in the lowest funded areas.

We believe now is the perfect time to review and improve the National Funding Formula for both Schools and High Needs to ensure budgets are fairly distributed, along with enabling flexibility in how funding is utilised. Currently, some schools receive £5,000 less per pupil than others, while SEND funding in the East Riding of Yorkshire is less than a third of what the highest funded authority receives. No child should be worth less than another. Historic proxy factors that lock in funding for some areas, whilst capping others from receiving more, should be removed.

We appreciate there will always be some differences in funding due to area living costs and specific school and pupil needs, but the current disparity is far too wide. We know you believe all children should have access to the same resources and opportunities, but this can never happen while the distribution of funding is so unfair.

We urge you to review the whole education and SEND funding system now, so schools and local authorities have an equal chance of making the proposed changes work. Without it, we believe any proposed reforms – however well-intended – will lack the foundation to succeed.

f40 would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss our thoughts in more detail. We would be very happy to work with your Ministry to act as a trusted partner and sounding board, and to share our knowledge and experience, where required. If you would like to discuss in more detail, please do get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Phil Haslett
Interim Chair of f40
Email: philip.haslett@gloucestershire.gov.uk

cc Minister for School Standards Georgia Gould OBE MP

cc Karen Westcott
Secretary, f40
Tel: 07545 210067
Email: karen@dtw.co.uk