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Removing Barriers to Achievement

The Government's Strategy for SEN

Executive Summary



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About this publication

This is a summary of Removing Barriers to Achievement – The Government’s Strategy for Special Educational Needs, which sets out the Government’s vision for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities and a programme of sustained action and review, nationally and locally, over the coming years.

Copies of the Strategy and this Summary are available from:

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It can also be downloaded online at
www.teachernet.gov.uk/senstrategy



Foreword

Education is the key to a better future for all our children, and I am committed to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. But for children with special educational needs and disabilities, too many barriers can stand in the way of the right education and support. And too often, the help they receive depends on where they live rather than on their own needs.

Removing Barriers to Achievement sets out the Government's vision for giving children with special educational needs and disabilities the opportunity to succeed. Building on the proposals for the reform of children's services in *Every Child Matters*, it sets a new agenda for improvement and action at national and local level.

All children, wherever they are educated, need to be able to learn, play and develop alongside each other within their local community of schools. Parents must be able to have confidence that their children's needs will be met quickly and effectively throughout their education and as they move into adult life. And those working in schools, early years settings and other frontline services need the skills, confidence and support to do a vital job well.

This strategy contains a programme of sustained action. It reaffirms our commitment to partnership working between local authorities, early years settings, schools, the health service and the voluntary sector and incorporates our strategy for improving childcare for children with special educational needs and disabilities. It is by working together that we can unlock the potential of the many children who may have difficulty learning, but whose life chances depend on a good education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles Clarke', written in a cursive style.

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills

I believe that young people with learning difficulties and disabilities have a right to lead rewarding and independent lives. The SEN Strategy reflects a shared commitment across Government to improving the opportunities for further education, training and work that will help make this principle a reality.



Maria Eagle, Minister for Disabled People

Support for children, young people and families from health and social services often plays a crucial role in enabling children with SEN and disabilities to access education. The work we are doing to link the implementation of the SEN Strategy and the Children's National Service Framework will help to ensure that they can make the most of their education and achieve their potential.



Dr Stephen Ladyman, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health



Introduction

All children have the right to a good education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. All teachers should expect to teach children with special educational needs (SEN) and all schools should play their part in educating children from their local community, whatever their background or ability. We must reflect this in the way we train our teachers, in the way we fund our schools, and in the way we judge their achievements. This strategy, promised in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters*, sets out the Government's proposals for achieving our vision.

Where we are

The 1997 Green Paper *Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs* and the subsequent *Programme of Action* published in October 1998 made a commitment to improving the statutory framework and procedures for SEN, building on experience and best practice. This commitment was taken forward in 2001

through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and the publication of a new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

However, the Audit Commission's report *Special Educational Needs – a mainstream issue* (2002) highlighted a number of continuing challenges:

- too many children wait for too long to have their needs met
- children who should be able to be taught in mainstream settings are sometimes turned away and too many staff feel ill equipped to meet the wide range of pupil needs in today's classrooms
- many special schools feel uncertain of their future role
- families face unacceptable variations in the level of support available from their school, local authority or local health service.

Where we want to be

Over the past three decades, successive Governments have built up and refined the statutory framework for children with SEN. This strategy aims to personalise learning for all children, to make education more responsive to the diverse needs of individual children, so reducing our reliance on separate SEN structures and processes and raising the achievement of the many children – nearly one in six – who are considered to have SEN.

We have never been so well placed to deliver such a wide ranging strategy to transform the lives and life chances of children. The reform of children's services set out by *Every Child Matters*, with its focus on early intervention, preventative work, and integrated services for children through Children's Trusts, will deliver real and lasting benefits to children with SEN and their families. And our commitment to reducing child poverty, investing in early years education and childcare and targeting support at areas of social and economic deprivation will enable us to address the underlying causes of many children's difficulties in school.

This strategy follows discussion with a wide range of practitioners and policy makers in local authorities, the health service and the voluntary sector, as well as children and young people. It sets out the Government's vision for the education of children with SEN and disabilities.

It provides clear national leadership, supported by an ambitious programme of sustained action and review, nationally and locally, over a number of years, in four key areas:

- **Early intervention** – to ensure that children who have difficulties learning receive the help they need as soon as possible and that parents of children with SEN and disabilities have access to suitable childcare (Chapter 1)
- **Removing barriers to learning** – by embedding inclusive practice to every school and early years setting (Chapter 2)

- **Raising expectations and achievement** – by developing teachers’ skills and strategies for meeting the needs of children with SEN and sharpening our focus on the progress made by children with SEN (Chapter 3)
- **Delivering improvements in partnership** – taking a hands-on approach to improvement so that parents can be confident that their child will get the education they need (Chapter 4).

We want all children, wherever they are educated, to have a good education that enables them to achieve to the full and provides a firm foundation for adult life. We want all pupils to have regular opportunities to learn, play and develop alongside each other, within their local community of schools, with shared responsibility and a partnership approach to their support.

We want parents to have confidence that their children’s needs will be met effectively in school without feeling that the only way to achieve this is through a statement. In time, through action at local and national level to build the skills and capacity of schools to meet diverse pupil needs, we would expect only those children with the most severe and complex needs, requiring support from more than one specialist agency, to need the protection a statement provides.

We are committed to working in partnership to help all in the education service to deliver this vision, to unlock the potential of the many children who may have difficulty learning, but whose life-chances depend no less on a good education.



Chapter 1: Early intervention

Where we are

- 1.1 *Every Child Matters* recognised that early intervention is vital to achieving better outcomes for children with SEN and disabilities. But a number of factors stand in the way:
- poor coordination between health, education and social care for young children with SEN and disabilities, leading to gaps in support for parents and weaknesses in sharing information between professionals
 - shortfalls in the availability of childcare for disabled children and in specialist advice and support for children in early years settings
 - difficulties in refocusing funding so that resources are available to support earlier intervention – help is often not forthcoming until children’s difficulties are significant
 - too much bureaucracy and paperwork associated with the SEN system.

Where we want to be

1.2 We want to see:

- health, education and social care organised around the needs of children and families, with better information-sharing and assessment leading to early intervention
- parents having access to good quality childcare and early years provision in their local community
- schools with the skills and resources to enable them to take prompt action to help children who are falling behind their classmates
- teachers and early years staff spending more time supporting early intervention and inclusive practice and less on SEN-related paper work.

Action we will take

1.3 We will build on the proposals for early intervention and integration of children's services set out in *Every Child Matters*, and in particular we will:

- ensure that the principles for working with babies and very young disabled children and their families established by the Early Support Pilot Programme become integral to practice nationally

- implement a new strategy for childcare for children with SEN and disabilities, promoting an integrated approach to early education and childcare and improving information for parents
- encourage local authorities to extend access to SEN advice and support to early years settings to develop the skills and awareness of staff in the Foundation Stage
- work with voluntary organisations, including Mencap, on a feasibility study for establishing a National Early Intervention Centre of Excellence to raise awareness of effective approaches and promote improvements in practice
- promote further delegation of SEN funding to schools to support early intervention and more effective management of resources through practical guidance, expert advice and support
- cut bureaucracy on SEN by helping schools and early years settings to focus on the essentials and make better use of Information Communication Technology, enabling staff to spend more time working with pupils.



Chapter 2: Removing barriers to learning

Where we are

2.1 We are firmly committed to the principle of inclusion and an increasing proportion of children with SEN attend mainstream schools. But inclusion is about much more than the types of school children attend: it is about the quality of their experience and how far they are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school. But we know that the reality does not always match this. *Every Child Matters* recognises the need to bring specialist services together, working in multi-disciplinary teams, focused on the needs of the child. There remain concerns about:

- the skills and capacity of some schools to work with the full range of pupils and the availability of specialist expertise and resources to support them

- a lack of clarity about the future role of special schools within an inclusive education system
- the challenges for schools posed by children with severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
- difficulties in planning specialist services for children with less common SEN and rising expenditure on residential special schools.

Where we want to be

2.2 We want to see:

- schools with the confidence to innovate and the skills and specialist support they need to meet the needs of all pupils successfully
- special schools providing education for children with the most severe and complex needs, and sharing their specialist skills and knowledge to support inclusion in mainstream schools
- schools working together to support the inclusion of all children from their local community, backed up by good quality specialist advice from local authority and health services, working in multi-disciplinary teams, as proposed in *Every Child Matters*
- parents with confidence that, in choosing a local mainstream school, their child will receive a good education and be a valued member of the school community.

Action we will take

2.3 To support this, we will:

- support schools in developing effective inclusive practice through a new Inclusion Development Programme bringing together education, health, social care and the voluntary sector. The programme will focus on children with types of need which we know are placing growing demands on schools – autistic spectrum disorder, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties, and moderate learning difficulties
- provide practical tools and materials for schools and local authorities to improve access for disabled pupils, working with the Disability Rights Commission and voluntary sector partners
- work with the National College for School Leadership to ensure that leadership programmes promote inclusive practice
- clarify the future role for special schools, giving a strong focus to high standards, partnership working with mainstream schools and encouragement to participate in the full range of diversity programmes – specialist schools, leading edge partnerships, federations and clusters
- take steps within the national behaviour strategy to improve the quality of education for children with more severe behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

- work with the SEN Regional Partnerships to improve regional planning of low incidence provision following an audit of specialist services. We will pump-prime regional centres of expertise, building on the work of leading special schools and local authority support services
- develop practical guidance on reducing reliance on high cost placements in residential special schools
- set minimum standards for SEN advisory and support services, for self-evaluation, and for use by OFSTED, to achieve greater consistency in quality, availability and cost effectiveness.



Chapter 3: Raising expectations and achievement

Where we are

- 3.1 We need to provide a personalised education that brings out the best in every child, that builds on their strengths, enables them to develop a love of learning, and helps them to grow into confident and independent citizens, valued for the contribution they make. We have seen great progress in the achievement of pupils in primary and secondary schools in recent years. But we need to do much more to help children with SEN achieve as well as they can, not least if we are to meet the challenging targets expected of all schools. The proposals in *Every Child Matters* for integrating services in order to improve outcomes for all children support this aim. However, there remain concerns about:

- how effectively some schools are able to respond to the wide range of pupil needs in today's classrooms and how far children with SEN are helped to achieve to the full
- whether some children are making reasonable progress, due to a lack of relevant comparative data
- a lack of relevant curricular pathways and recognised qualifications for young people with learning difficulties
- lack of confidence in involving young people in decisions about their education, the variable quality of advice on options beyond school and limited opportunities for progression for some young people.

Where we want to be

3.2 We want to see:

- all teachers having the skills and confidence – and access to specialist advice where necessary – to help children with SEN to reach their potential
- improved data giving parents and teachers a clearer picture of how well children working below age-related expectations are progressing
- young people able to follow courses which build on their interests and aptitudes and lead to recognised qualifications

- young people with SEN actively involved in decisions about their education and options post-16 and having real opportunities for progression, training and work.

Action we will take

3.3 We will:

- put children with SEN at the heart of personalised learning, helping schools to vary the pace and approach to learning to meet individual children's needs
- deliver practical teaching and learning resources to raise the achievement of children with SEN through the primary strategy and strengthen the focus in Key Stage 3 on young people with SEN who are falling behind their peers
- develop a framework of evidence-based strategies and teaching approaches for pupils with particular types of need for dissemination through the National Strategies
- work with the Teacher Training Agency and higher education institutions to ensure that initial teacher training and programmes for continuous professional development provide a good grounding in core skills and knowledge of SEN; and work with higher education institutions to assess the scope for developing specialist qualifications
- promote and extend the use of P Scales to measure the progress made by those pupils working below level 1 and collect this data nationally from 2005

- consult on changes to the performance tables so that schools get credit for the achievements of all pupils, including those with SEN
- publish practical tools for involving young people with SEN and disabilities in decisions about their learning
- work across Government to improve the quality of transition planning, setting national standards for health and social care through the Children's National Service Framework. We will work with Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council to expand educational and training opportunities and develop new opportunities for transition to work.



Chapter 4: Delivering improvements in partnership

Where we are

4.1 SEN is one of the most difficult and challenging of local authorities' responsibilities. Many local authorities have made great progress in providing for children with SEN in recent years. But despite the robust legal framework and detailed statutory guidance, there remain unacceptable variations in the availability and quality of provision. Too often parents continue to face a postcode lottery in the support available from their school, local authority and health services.

Every Child Matters recognised the importance of addressing these issues, but there remain concerns about:

- a culture of mistrust that has grown up in some areas, such that parents feel they need to 'fight' for the support to which their child is entitled

- confusion about which provision should be made by the school and which should be made by the local authority, giving rise to disputes, delays and gaps in support
- shortfalls in the availability of some local authority, education and social services, and health
- a lack of rigorous monitoring arrangements.

Where we want to be

4.2 We want to see:

- more consistency between local authorities in their strategic management of SEN, particularly in their use of statements, the level of delegated funding to schools and in special school provision
- schools regularly reviewing the effectiveness of their SEN provision, with local authorities providing support and challenge where concerns are raised
- parents with greater confidence that their child's SEN will be met in school – whether or not they have a statement
- greater integration of education, health and social care to meet the needs of children and families in line with the proposals in *Every Child Matters*.

Action we will take

- 4.3 We will work closely with our partners – local authority education and social services, schools and the health service, the voluntary sector and parents – to support the delivery of this strategy. We will:
- promote more consistent practice through a team of expert national advisers, working closely with the Department for Education and Skills’ Schools Directorate Advisers, who will provide support and challenge on key SEN issues, including the use of statements, management of SEN resources, identifying and sharing good practice and tackling underperformance. The networking and collaboration facilitated by the SEN Regional Partnerships and Beacon Councils will support this work
 - make SEN Regional Partnerships directly accountable to the Department for Education and Skills for their work on the implementation of this strategy
 - ensure that schools make inclusion an integral part of self-evaluation. We will publish OFSTED’s judgement about schools’ inclusiveness in performance tables
 - share best practice and improve comparative data on SEN performance through further development of the SEN National Performance Framework

- enable local authorities to monitor schools' performance in meeting the needs of children with SEN. OFSTED's inspection framework will reflect the key role for local authorities set out in this strategy
- spread best practice in improving accountability to parents for SEN and in providing advice and support to parents locally
- build on the proposals for integrating children's services in *Every Child Matters*, in particular the common assessment framework, multi-disciplinary teams and Children's Trusts, to deliver joined up services for children and families
- deliver a joint Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health implementation strategy for the SEN strategy and the Children's National Service Framework.



Conclusion

We have come a long way in recent years in improving education for children with SEN. We owe those improvements to the skill, hard work, commitment and dedication of all those who work in the education service and their partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

But despite the progress we have made, for children with SEN, too much still depends on where you live, which school you attend, or on other factors such as their family circumstances. Some children still face real barriers to learning and some parents still lack confidence in the commitment and capacity of our schools to meet their child's needs. We are determined to transform their experience, working together with all those in the education service and their partners.

Every Child Matters gave a commitment to improving provision for children with SEN. This strategy fulfils that commitment and sets out a long-term programme of change. Its implementation will be part of the wider developments stemming from *Every Child Matters* and the Children's National Service Framework. We will publish the Government's response to *Every Child Matters* in early 2004, followed by the Children's National Service Framework later in the year.

Looking ahead, we will know that our strategy has been successful when we have ceased to rely so much on separate structures and processes for children with SEN, because their interests are embedded in all aspects of policy and their needs are met effectively in local schools and early years settings. We will know we have made a difference when:

- children with SEN have their needs met as soon as they become apparent, without the need for a period of failure
- children with SEN feel valued members of their school community
- the barriers that divide mainstream and special schools have disappeared and all schools work in partnership with other services and the voluntary sector to meet the needs of local children

- there is much greater consistency in the quality of provision that children with SEN receive in school, from the local authority and parents are confident of this.

We have asked Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to evaluate progress in delivering this strategy. We will consider whether, in the light of his advice, any further changes are needed to remove barriers to learning and participation that prevent children with SEN from making the most of their education.

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Please quote ref: DfES/0118/2004
D35/PPSTERL/0104/64

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