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Guidance

Partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools (PINS) programme

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Applies to England

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This information is for those taking part in the partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools (PINS) programme, including:

- integrated care boards (ICBs)
- local authorities
- schools
- parent carer forums (PCFs) or other parent carer-led groups

It sets out:

- the expectations for the delivery of PINS projects in the 2025 to 2026 financial year
- where guidance on elements of the PINS programme has changed from the expectations set out in the previous financial year

References to the 'PINS programme' mean the national programme across all ICBs.

References to the 'PINS project' mean the local arrangements that are being funded by PINS in each ICB.

The Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England (NHSE) use the term 'neurodiversity' to encompass children of all neurotypes, including those who are neurotypical. [\[footnote 1\]](#)

We use the term 'neurodivergent' to describe those children who have a neurodevelopmental difference. [\[footnote 2\]](#)

Overview of the PINS programme

Partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools (PINS) is a national programme that brings specialist health and education professionals and expert parent carers into mainstream primary schools to:

- help shape whole-school special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision
- provide early interventions at a school level
- upskill school staff
- support the strengthening of partnerships between schools and parent carers

Programme aims

The PINS programme aims to leave a sustainable impact after the funded period and establish closer collaboration between education and health organisations, including by:

- working collaboratively across professional boundaries
- offering training for non-health staff
- creating environments that facilitate the best outcomes for children and young people

It will support a shift away from the need for diagnosis and more intensive levels of support for individual pupils to focus instead on:

- strengthening knowledge and skills
- improving environments to better meet the needs of all children, but with a particular focus on neurodivergence

This will demonstrate how a supportive learning environment and well-equipped school can improve positive outcomes for neurodivergent children, helping them achieve and thrive.

The PINS programme tests an innovative model for the effective and efficient deployment of specialist health and education professionals, focusing on supporting neurodivergent pupils. This cohort is a fast-growing group likely to benefit from more inclusive mainstream environments. An equally important strand of the PINS programme is to strengthen parent carer and school partnerships in mainstream education settings.

Programme funding and eligibility

The PINS programme will run until March 2026 and every ICB in England has the opportunity to take part. It is funded by DfE and supported by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHSE.

PINS projects for the 2025 to 2026 financial year

In the 2025 to 2026 financial year, the PINS programme will deliver 2 types of local project:

- continuing PINS projects – for ICBs which delivered a PINS project in the 2024 to 2025 financial year
- new PINS projects – for ICBs which did not deliver a PINS project in the 2024

to 2025 financial year

PINS local projects will support mainstream primary schools. Whilst DfE and NHSE recognises that support for neurodivergent children during transition from primary to secondary school is a particular need for many, the PINS programme has been tailored to provide bespoke, hands-on support to school staff and parent carers within primary settings.

Continuing PINS projects

ICBs that delivered a PINS project in the 2024 to 2025 financial year will expand the offer to 30 additional schools in their area.

In addition, support will be offered by ICBs to existing schools involved in PINS projects from the previous financial year to help them embed their learning and practice improvements.

New PINS projects

ICBs that did not deliver a PINS project in the 2024 to 2025 financial year will work with 40 schools in their area.

Local partnerships

Funding for PINS local projects is discrete, non-recurrent DfE funding and should be allocated exclusively to PINS activity. Funding will be routed via the ICB, but each local project will be delivered by a partnership that must include:

- the ICB
- local authorities that have schools where the project will be delivered
- schools
- PCFs or other parent carer-led groups

The partnership will be responsible for the oversight of the project and involved in all key decisions. There are several specific functions it should complete, including:

- providing suitable governance for the project, working strategically with parent carers and wider system partners
- completing the delivery plan and ensuring sign-off by all relevant partners

- agreeing the process for selecting schools to be part of the project and working with those schools to deliver the support offer
- agreeing the priorities for commissioning the support offer, in line with the analysis of school self-assessments – this should incorporate themes identified through children’s voice and parent carer surveys, where possible
- supporting the local PCF or other parent carer-led group to develop parent carer engagement activity in all participating schools
- engaging in national monitoring and evaluation activity

Governance

A local partnership governance group must oversee each PINS local project and include:

- the ICB
- local authorities that have schools where the project will be delivered
- parent carer representation – this may be via one or multiple PCFs, depending on the local authority areas involved and their capacity

DfE and NHSE recommend using an existing multi-agency partnership group with a SEND focus wherever possible.

The ICB must complete a quarterly written report for the PINS national delivery support team, which is made up of representatives from DfE and NHSE, in line with deadlines provided in advance. The partnership should ensure that all strategic partners – including local authorities, schools and PCFs or other parent carer-led groups – co-operate with the ICB and provide updates when requested.

Co-producing the PINS delivery plan

ICBs are the lead delivery partner of PINS and are being asked to complete a delivery plan that will set out how they will bring together the local area partners across:

- health
- local authorities
- schools
- PCFs or other parent carer-led groups

The plan should set out:

- what support may need to be commissioned
- how it will be commissioned
- how the funding will be allocated

It will be reviewed by the PINS national delivery support team to ensure that local partnership arrangements and the delivery steps set out will support successful delivery of the project.

Completion of the plan will enable the:

- agreement of a memorandum of understanding between the ICB, DfE and NHSE
- release of funding following the set-up phase

School selection for the 2025 to 2026 financial year

PINS projects in areas that participated in a PINS project during the 2024 to 2025 financial year will be expected to expand the project to work with 30 new schools per ICB area. ICBs will be responsible for deciding which schools to work with, in collaboration with local authorities and PCFs.

Based on learning from how systems identified schools in the 2024 to 2025 financial year, DfE will not provide ICBs with updated long lists of schools in their area. ICBs will instead need to use locally available data and intelligence to support their decision-making around school selection. As in the previous year, ICBs will decide whether to work with schools across multiple local authorities or in just one local authority.

PINS projects in areas that did not participate in a PINS project during the 2024 to 2025 financial year will be expected to work with 40 schools to deliver their project.

The PINS programme offer

PINS projects will provide 2 parallel and complementary strands of work for each participating school. These consist of:

- delivery of a package of tailored support by specialist health and education professionals, which could include training, resources, audits and reviews of provision
- a programme of parent carer engagement activity, which will include forming or

developing a parent carer group, and regular meetings between its representatives and the senior management team

Tailored support for new schools

The process for providing tailored support to new schools will mirror the approach taken in the 2024 to 2025 financial year. ICBs will require schools to use the same nationally agreed self-assessment tool to identify priority areas for support. This activity can begin as soon as school selection has been completed.

Schools will collate their findings and use them to assess themselves against high-level domains, including:

- leadership culture and values
- mental health
- readiness to learn
- teaching and learning
- environment
- communication

The local PINS project delivery team will help schools to:

- complete their assessment
- consider which support and interventions will most benefit them

Where it is possible to complete the parent carer survey and children's voice activity ahead of the support offer being agreed, the themes from these sources should also be considered.

In discussion with schools, local partners will decide on the most appropriate type, length and content of support. They will do this by matching the feedback from self-assessment responses to a range of interventions set out in the national menu of support. This menu of support has been mapped against the support available locally.

In parallel, local projects will also fund the PCF or other parent carer-led group to support schools in establishing parent carer engagement activity.

Continuing support for existing schools

Around 1,650 schools have been part of a local PINS project during the 2024 to 2025 financial year.

Funding will be made available to ICBs to continue supporting these schools in embedding the learning and approaches put in place to support neurodivergent children and young people.

This will enable schools to continue strengthening ways of working to:

- create a culture of inclusivity
- increase engagement with parent carers
- ensure that parental views are heard

Commissioning of tailored support

The menu of support is made up of evidence-informed approaches. It was developed in collaboration with education and health professionals, parent carers and young people. It should be used by ICBs and their partners to inform decisions about which interventions to commission to meet the needs and priorities of each school.

DfE and NHSE expect the governance structure – that is, the local partnership – in each ICB area to use evidence when making choices about which support to invest in and how best to implement the support offer to schools.

It is not mandatory to deliver everything on the menu of support, but projects should not commission interventions that are not part of the menu.

It is important that each PINS project builds on existing local resources and structures. This will maximise efficiency by expanding access to approaches with which schools are already familiar.

It will also support the legacy of the programme by increasing the reach and impact of existing offers. PINS funding will bring in additional resource, so if an area has already commissioned access to specific resources – for example, training – the PINS support should build on this by adding value or extending access. It should not duplicate or replace existing support with a wholly new offer.

Working with PCFs or other parent carer-led groups

Collaboration with parents and carers is critical to the success of the PINS programme. PCFs or other parent carer-led groups are key to the delivery of PINS at a strategic level, through their involvement in the local partnership and support of the project delivery team. The PCF or other parent carer-led group is also responsible for delivery of the parent carer engagement activity in

participating schools.

Evaluating the PINS programme

DfE commissioned a high-quality mixed-method independent evaluation at the beginning of the programme. It will run from March 2024 to September 2025.

The evaluation will continue to be conducted alongside the programme in the 2025 to 2026 financial year. It will be extended to run from March 2024 to September 2026, subject to approvals.

Year 1 runs from March 2024 to September 2025 and seeks to:

- understand how the PINS programme was implemented
- assess the suitability of PINS being rolled out more widely

Year 2 will focus on the embedding offer for schools and seeks to:

- understand how PINS was extended and embedded in different locations, identifying any barriers and enablers to delivery
- determine whether and to what extent the benefits of PINS can be sustained through a 'lighter touch' embedding offer for the existing schools cohort
- determine whether and to what extent PINS improved schools' ability to support neurodiverse pupils

To evaluate the project, ICBs and their strategic partners will be expected to co-operate with the appointed evaluator and provide information when requested.

This is a requirement within the specification attached to the MoU between ICBs, DfE and NHSE. It is possible that some evaluation activity will take place after the programme delivery period ends on 31 March 2026.

Contact

If you are interested in participating in your local PINS project, contact your local authority SEND service for further information.

If you are unsure whether PINS is being delivered in your local authority, contact the DfE PINS team at: PINS.Mailbox@education.gov.uk.

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1. Neurodiversity is the concept that everyone's brain is unique. It recognises the biological fact that we are all diverse – we all think, learn and act differently, and have different strengths. Neurodiversity recognises and celebrates the value

that these different strengths can bring. ↩

2. Neurodivergent children may have a formal diagnosis such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, etc. However, we recognise that many neurodivergent children do not have a formal diagnosis. Many of the approaches and interventions promoted through the PINS programme will be of benefit to all children, including those who may have other types of SEND, mental health needs or learning difficulties. Access to support provided through the PINS programme is not dependent on any formal diagnosis or assessment, and the list of conditions that may be supported is not exhaustive. ↩

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