

The SEND Implementation Plan: A real plan needed behind the rhetoric?

The SEND Implementation Plan promises support for young people with SEND in all aspects of their education including mental health and that they will hold delivery partners to account. It promises that a young person's needs will be identified early, and that the local SEND and alternative provision partnerships will provide education plans built on national standards as well as ensure that they will provide guidance to help mainstream settings promote mental health and wellbeing.

Fine words, but it's unlikely to happen as the Government has laid out.

The "National Standards" and 3 guidance packs are not going to be finalised until at least 2025. Even ignoring the fact that there might be a change of Government so the whole Plan is scrapped, it will be impossible for the inclusion plans being produced now to be compliant with national standards as they won't exist meaning young people will be subject to a postcode lottery for another two years. This is whilst help is needed now.

All children in all state funded primary schools have a new baseline assessment when they enter schools already, so it would make sense that this assessment contains diagnostic elements of the most common SEN and disabilities. Having a standardised test at entry would also help schools to work strategically towards supporting children with SEND as opposed to finding they need to support children in their older years when they may not have support processes in place. It's simple, doesn't need to wait for complicated standards and the stars to align. It can be put in place as just as a section of the tests. Sure, the content of the test would need input from the sector to ensure it was fit for purpose, but having this dialogue is only sensible. It means that everyone is working towards the goal of helping our young people collaboratively.

Indeed, the current lack of collaboration between government officials and what's happening on the front line is very concerning. Local councils are not being driven into bankruptcy because they are "hobbled by SEND problems" as Tony McArdle, the DfE's chief safety valve negotiator has claimed. EHCPs are not a golden ticket for parents who try and secure this support whether their child needs help or not. These children need the TA's that are often provided that would otherwise lose their jobs because of budget cuts. They need the online and blended learning pedagogy to learn "their" way. The children need the access to the social care that helps them communicate and interact. However, if the rhetoric is that local councils should spend even less of a discretionary budget on SEND education, all this help will be taken away and the only people who would be let down would be the most vulnerable in our society.

Let's make sure this doesn't happen.

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