

Boosting SEND Provision with £740M Allocation

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The UK government has announced a major investment of £740 million to fund 10,000 new school places for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This initiative forms part of the government’s broader Plan for Change, which seeks to improve inclusion and opportunity across the education system. The funding will support the expansion of specialist units within mainstream schools and the development of new places in special schools. The aim is to ensure that more children can attend schools close to home, receive the tailored support they need, and thrive alongside their peers.

Currently, fewer than 10% of mainstream schools have specialist SEND units. Meanwhile, the number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) attending independent special schools has surged from 7,000 in 2010 to 26,000 in 2024. The latest figures reveal a gap of around 8,000 places in state special schools, highlighting the urgent need for action.

The funding can be used flexibly to create inclusive environments—such as breakout spaces for self-regulation or investment in assistive technologies. It complements a separate £1 billion investment aimed at creating 44,500 new places in mainstream schools by 2028 to meet growing demand.

Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson emphasized that this investment marks a turning point for families who have long struggled to secure appropriate

education for their children. She noted that the goal is not only to create enough school places but to ensure they are the right kind of places, helping to close the gap in SEND provision inherited from previous years.

One example of success is Barking and Dagenham London Borough Council. Previously facing a shortage of specialist classrooms, the council implemented a 10-year expansion strategy. Today, nearly half of all local schools have resourced provision, allowing children to be educated in their communities. According to recent analysis, at least 15,000 more children could benefit from such models of specialist provision within mainstream settings.

Marie Ziane, Headteacher of Becontree Primary School in Dagenham, highlighted the positive impact of capital funding. Through modifications and creative use of existing spaces, the school has enhanced learning experiences for children with autism, while also fostering a more inclusive environment for all students.

The announcement coincides with the release of new data pointing to an urgent need for SEND system reform. Sarah Clarke and Jo Harrison, Co-Chairs of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums, welcomed the capital funding and stressed the importance of ongoing collaboration with the Department for Education. They also called on local authorities to work closely with parent carer forums to ensure the lived experiences of families inform local implementation.

Reforms to the SEND system aim to identify and meet children's needs earlier and to support mainstream settings in becoming more inclusive. This aligns with government efforts to expand school-based nurseries, which often serve a higher proportion of children with SEND.

The funding guidance released today encourages local authorities to use capital grants to expand SEND provision in local mainstream schools. This should help reduce the stress families face in securing suitable school places.

Iveson Primary School in Leeds offers a model example. Its resourced provision, The Aviary, provides a flexible, adapted curriculum for children with SEND. This enables students to develop confidence and life skills while integrating with the wider school community. Headteacher Hayley Marshall reports that the inclusive approach has had a profoundly positive effect on students, staff, and families alike.

This £740 million funding initiative forms part of a wider government plan to create 54,500 new school places, reinforcing its mission to ensure every child has access to a good local school, regardless of background or ability.

In addition, the Department for Education has confirmed £2.1 billion in funding for 2025-26 to improve school and sixth-form college infrastructure in England. This marks a £300 million increase from the previous year and will help schools invest in essential maintenance like heating, windows, and roofing.

Amanda Allard, Director at the Council for Disabled Children, welcomed the investment and stressed the importance of local authorities supporting inclusive education. She encouraged local areas to share best practices and develop inclusive learning environments where all children can grow, learn, and feel part of their communities.