The Day the SEND Wars Ended: DfE's 2026 Schools White Paper

23 February 2026



What Every Ambitious Leader Needs to Know (And No One Else Is Saying)

Today, something rare happened in education policy: the Government didn't tinker. It transformed.

In a single, coordinated release — the *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* White Paper, a landmark SEND consultation, the Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group report, five targeted factsheets, and a powerful speech from Bridget Phillipson — the Department for Education has drawn a line under a decade of broken promises, postcode lotteries, and family battles.

This isn't another incremental reform. This is the moment the system finally catches up with the reality every school leader has lived for years: **high standards and genuine inclusion are not enemies — they are inseparable.**

> *Phillipson said it best, and we're leading with her words because they cut through the noise:*
>
> *"I reject the lie that high standards and inclusion can't go together… High standards and inclusion, it's not one or the other. It's both."*

If you're a headteacher, trust CEO, or senior leader who has spent years

firefighting rising needs with shrinking capacity, today's package hands you the tools, the money, the legal backbone, and the national mandate to build the school you've always known was possible.

We've pored over every page of the 200+ documents released today. Here is the no-fluff, ahead-of-the-curve briefing that positions *you* — not the DfE, not the unions, not the think-tanks — as the one who turns this vision into reality first.

1. The End of the "Fight for Support" Era

New legal right: Every child with SEND gets an Individual Support Plan (ISP). Digitised. Co-produced with families. Evidence-based. Reviewed annually. Ofsted-inspected. Available *without* a battle.

EHCPs stay for the most complex cases, now underpinned by clear national **Specialist Provision Packages** (drafts later in 2026 — think health-style clinical pathways for severe learning difficulties, physical disability with personal care, etc.).

Children with EHCPs will also have a day-to-day ISP so support in class is seamless.

The game-changer no one else is highlighting yet: This shifts the default from "prove you need help" to "here's the graduated support you get as standard." Early intervention becomes routine, not heroic.

2. The £3.7bn Space Revolution Starts *This Year*

You flagged space as priority one — and the documents back you 100%.

£3.7 billion high-needs capital (2025-26 to 2029-30) to deliver **over 60,000 net new specialist places**, including the explicit ambition that **every secondary school will have an inclusion base**.

These aren't afterthoughts. They are calm, purpose-built zones for small-group work, sensory regulation, targeted interventions — the physical bridge that keeps children local, with their peers, while giving them exactly what they need.

Mainstream adaptations (classrooms, corridors, accessibility) get billions more. Special schools become outreach powerhouses.

Ahead-of-the-curve insight: The first capital allocations and place-planning rounds are already live in many LAs and MATs. Leaders who engage their estates teams *this half-term* will shape the bases that define their school for the next decade.

3. The Workforce Supercharge You've Been Waiting For

- **£200m+** — the largest SEND training investment ever — mandatory updates to ITT, ECF and NPQs from September 2025/26. Every teacher becomes a teacher of SEND.
- **£1.6bn Inclusive Mainstream Fund** (direct to *every* school and early-years setting over three years) for proven interventions.
- **£1.8bn "Experts at Hand"** — on-demand access to educational psychologists, SaLT, OTs and specialist teachers *without* an EHCP.

An average secondary gains the equivalent of an extra full-time specialist team every year.

What this really means by September 2026: Your staff will walk into school with new skills, new resources, and new backup — not just warm words.

4. The Decade-Long Roadmap with Iron-Clad Protections

Triple lock (verbatim from today's release):

1. No child loses effective support already in place.
2. Every child with a special school place in 2029 keeps it if they want it.
3. Transitions from EHCP to ISP for mainstream pupils only begin in 2030 — at natural phase moves — after the new inclusive system is fully built. Current Year 3+ pupils protected until end of secondary.

Consultation open until **18 May 2026** — your evidence will literally write the final rules.

The Leader's Playbook: What Positions You Ahead of the Curve

While others will summarise the headlines, here's what the smartest leaders are already doing:

Immediate (next 30 days)

- Download the five factsheets (mainstream, special, early years, post-16, parents) — share with SLT and governors this week.
- Book your estates/ SEND leads into a strategy session on the £3.7bn capital.
- Draft your consultation response — we'll publish a template guide next week.

By July 2026

- Map your inclusion base location and brief architects on the forthcoming national "high-impact adaptations" guidance.
- Audit current interventions against the new national framework.

By 2028

- Every teacher trained. Experts at Hand live. ISPs rolling out.

Bold prediction from the team that's been tracking this for months: By 2030 the schools that thrive will be those that treated today's announcement as a *strategic opportunity*, not just another policy wave. The trusts and leaders who co-produce, pilot fast, and document impact will attract the best staff, the strongest parental trust, and the most sustainable funding.

This Is Your Moment

For years, school leaders have been asked to deliver excellence with one hand tied behind their backs.

Today the handcuffs come off.

> *Bridget Phillipson closed her speech with a call that should be pinned on every staffroom wall:*
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> *"Now is the time to come together… To do what's right. To secure our common future. And to build a Britain of opportunity for all."*

We at The School Supply Network are not just reporting this. We are equipping you to lead it.

Over the next 12 weeks we will publish the definitive implementation series — one focused, practical, step-by-step guide each fortnight:

- Week 1: Planning Your Inclusion Base with the £3.7bn
- Week 3: Building ISPs That Actually Work (and cut workload)
- Week 5: Securing Your Share of Experts at Hand and the £1.6bn Fund … and more.

This is the coverage no other outlet will match — because we're not just covering the news. We're building the future with you.

What's your first move? Email us your questions. Tell us which implementation topic you want first.

The schools that lead this change will define the next decade of education in England.

Be one of them.