How to ensure the UK Education System is inclusive for SEND children

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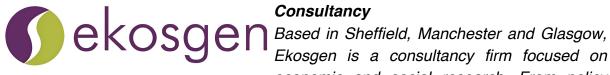
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Briefing Note:

UNICEF defines inclusive education as one that:
> "*Includes all students, and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements. This means making sure that teaching and the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets are appropriate for all children at all levels. Inclusive education means all children learn together in the same schools.*"[1]

According to the Department for Education, a child has special educational needs if: "they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her." 'Special educational needs' and 'disability' are defined differently in law and guidance.[2]

Overview:
- Firstly, we will provide an overview of the characteristics of the current system in place to support SEND children, and the pressures the system faces.
- Secondly, we will describe the experiences of SEND children in the school setting, both academically and socially.
- Thirdly, we will describe the experience of SEND individuals once they have left school, in terms of further education, career progression and day to day experiences.

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[1] UNICEF (2017), Inclusive Education: Including Children with disabilities in quality learning: what needs to be done?, Inclusive Education - Including children with disabilities in quality learning: what needs to be done? (unicef.org), (p.1).

[2] HM Government (2022), *SEND Review: Right support, Right place, Right time*, SEND Review - right support, right place, right time - government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England (publishing.service.gov.uk), (p.87).

Government policy and structure of current system:

Pupils with Special Educational Needs are becoming an increasingly prominent demographic.

- As of 2022, there were 1.49 million pupils with special education needs (16.5% of all pupils). The figure is lower than it was in 2010, but has been steadily increasing since 2016.[3] In 2020-21, 9% of children had a disability.[4]
- Pupils with SEN are classified under two categories:
    - SEN support: These students, which make up 12.6% of all students (1.13 million), received varying degrees of extra support, from a class teacher and SEND Coordinator, with the school's usual curriculum.
    - Education, Health and Care Plan: There are 355,600 pupils with an EHC plan (4% of all pupils and 24% of all SEND pupils. The plan, informed by an assessment, formally outlines the needs and level of support required by the pupil. The document is used by Local Authorities when deciding what is best for the child. The number of pupils with EHC plans has slowly been increasing since 2017.[5]

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[3] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)* , (p.6)

[4] Ibid, (p.18).

[5] Ibid, (p.6).

- SEND children have many different types of needs. As of January 2022, 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder' was the most common amongst pupils with EHC plans (31.3%). For pupils with SEN support, 'Speech, language and communication needs' were the most common (25.1%). Other types of need include: social, emotional and mental health; moderate learning difficulty; specific learning difficulty; physical disability; severe learning difficulty, hearing impairment; visual impairment, profound and multiple learning difficulty, multi-sensory impairment; SEN support but no formal assessment of type of need; other.[6]
- Boys are more likely than girls to have SENs. 15.4% of boys received SEND support compared to 9.2% of girls, and 5.6% of boys had an EHC plan compared to 2.2% of girls.[7]
- Free school meals are more prevalent amongst SEN students (37.2%) compared to pupils without (19.7%).[8]
- Pupils with traveller heritage or black ethnicity have above average levels of pupils with EHC plans.[9]

Despite government reforms to improve the quality of provision, inequalities still exist.
- The SEND system was significantly reformed in 2014. The government launched a review of the system in September, with the findings published in March 2022, in response to "widespread recognition" that the system was still failing to improve outcomes for SEND children.
- The largest proportion of children with EHC plans attend state-funded special schools (39.4%). 29.7% of EHC children attended state-funded primary schools, compared to 21.6% who attend state-funded secondary schools.[10]
- The number of EHC children attending independent schools has increased significantly, from 5.3% in January 2015 to 7.0% in January 2022.[11]
- 21.7% of independent special schools were rated as "inadequate" or "needs improvement, compared to 15% of state mainstream schools and 8.2% of state special schools.[12] Independent special schools do not provide a suitable learning environment, particularly compared to state special schools.

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[6] Ibid, (p.7)

[7] Ibid, (p.7)

[8] Ibid, (p.7)

[9] Ibid, (p.8)

[10] Ibid (p.9)

[11] Ibid (p.9)

[12] National Audit Office (2019): Support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in England, (p.42).

- The cost per pupil in independent special schools is £50,000 compared to £20,500 for pupils in state special schools.[13] Councils are wasting money and in 2017-18, 81.3% of local authorities overspent their high-needs budget.[14]
- A part of the 2014 SEND Reforms, all pupils with a statement of SEN would move onto an EHC plan over a transition period which lasted until March 2018.[15]

The system for supporting SEND children is coming under increasing pressure.
- There has been a 2.6% real term funding reduction for students with high needs from 2013-14 to 2017-18 as there has been a rise of 16.8 of pupils with EHC plans but funding has only increased by 7.2%[16]
- The number of EHC plans issued by local authorities has increased by 10% between January 2021 (430,700) and January 2022 (473,300).[17]
- There were 93,000 requests for an EHC plan from parents/carers during 2021, the highest since records began.[18]
- Parents of SEND students describe being left uninformed by the school, including potentially being unaware that the school suspects their child to have a SEND.[19]
- The number of appeals against ECH plans made by parents of SEND children was 9,184 in 2021.[20] This figure has been increasing sharply since 2015 (3,126) after the 2014 SEND reforms. The most common type of need identified in SEND appeals continues to be Autistic Spectrum Disorder (47%).[21]
- The high needs budget stands at £9.1 billion over 2022-23, an increase of more than 40% over three years.[22] Despite this, spending is outstripping funding, with two-thirds of local authorities having deficits in their dedicated schools grant

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[13] Ibid, (p.34).

[14] Ibid, (p.29)

[15] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)* , (p.15).

[16] Ibid, (p.7).

[17] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)* , (p.15).

[18] Ibid, (p.15).

[19] Supporting SEND: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-send/supporting-send#the-importance-of-homeschool-relationships

[20] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)* , (p.15).

[21] Ibid, (p.16).

[22] HM Government (2022), *SEND Review: Right support, Right place, Right time*, SEND Review - right support, right place, right time - government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England (publishing.service.gov.uk), (p.8)

budgets as a result of high needs cost pressures. By the end of 2021, the national total deficit was over £1 billion.[23]

● 76 out of the 141 local authority inspections in March 2022 resulted in a written statement of action, which indicates significant weakness in SEND arrangements.[24]

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[23] Ibid, (p.11).
[24] Ibid, (p.8).

Experience of SEND children at school

SEND pupils have lower levels of attainments and achievement compared to their non-SEND peers.
- In 2018/19, 25% of SEND pupils achieved a good level of development in the Early Years Foundations Stage Profile.[25]
- The percentage of SEND children achieving expected standards in Key Stage 1 teacher assessments in 2018/19 was 30% in reading, 22% in writing and 33% in maths. The percentage for non-SEND children was 83%, 78% and 84% respectively.[26]
- Only 22% of SEN students reach their expected Key Stage 2 level in reading, writing and maths, compared to 74% of non-SEND children.[27]
- In 2020/21, only 18.3% of pupils with SEND achieved grades 5 or above in English and Maths GCSEs, compared to 58% of non-SEND pupils.
- Only 4.5% of SEND children in alternative provision achieved grades 9-4 in GCSE English and Maths in 2018/19.

SEND pupils report having more negative experiences of school life.
- A large-scale social survey on SEN and non-SEN students found that having SEN is independently associated with being "unhappy" about school, 12% more than non-SEN students.[28]
- The Children's Commissioner's Big Ask Survey found that many SEND children felt they had not received enough understanding or tailored support for their needs, left feeling excluded, unable to form relationships with children their own age, and bullied.[29]

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[25] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources.* Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk) , (p.11).

[26] Ibid (p.11).

[27] HM Government (2022), *SEND Review: Right support, Right place, Right time*, SEND Review - right support, right place, right time - government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England (publishing.service.gov.uk), (p.10).

[28] Barnes (2017) The wellbeing of secondary school pupils with special educational needs, (p.69).

[29] HM Government (2022), *SEND Review: Right support, Right place, Right time*, SEND Review - right support, right place, right time - government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England (publishing.service.gov.uk), (p.21).

- SEND children face delays in accessing support due to the process being time-intensive and bureaucratic.[30]
- SEND pupils are not always placed in the best setting for them. Some children end up in specialist provision even when their needs could be better met through high-quality targeted support. Additionally, children who do require specialist provision are having to battle with restricted capacity due to increased requests. Those with more complex needs face long journeys to school, resulting in increased costs for school transport. Pressures in capacity have resulted in more children being placed in independent specialist provision.[31]

SEND pupils have more limited options regarding extracurricular activities.
- An observational report on a sample of SEN pupils found that 78% of their activities are directed primarily by adults, but 72% of those activities had their preferences built in.[32] SEN pupils have limited opportunity to explore their interests through their own initiative.
- A study has suggested that further education extracurricular participation for students with disabilities is positively correlated to achieving a post secondary degree.[33]
- There are geographical mobility issues for disabled children, and many areas do not have a local communal area to use for recreation or for school clubs.[34]
- 22% of low-income students do not take part in any extracurricular activities compared to 2% of middle class students. One of the qualitative factors stated for this reason is lower income students tend to also be on SEN support.[35]

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[30] Ibid, (p.24).

[31] HM Government (2022), *SEND Review: Right support, Right place, Right time*, <u>SEND Review - right support, right place, right time - government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England (publishing.service.gov.uk)</u>, (p.248).

[32] Pellicano et al (2014) My Life at School: Understanding the experiences of children and young people with special educational needs in residential special schools, (p.49).

[33] ibid, (p.51)

[34] Department of Education and University of Bath (2021) An Unequal Playing Field: Extracurricular Activities, Soft Skills and Mobility, (p.23).

[35] ibid, (p.25)

The experiences of SEND individuals after school:

Fewer SEND children stay on to post-16 education.
- 89.2% of 16-17 year olds with an EHC plan were in education and training in March 2021, compared to 93.9% of non-SEND children.[36]
- In 2019/20, 8.4% of EHC pupils went onto Higher Education by age 19, compared to 20.8% of pupils with SEN support and 47.5% of non-SEND children.[37]
- In state-funded schools, compared to students without SEND, the rate of exclusion of pupils on SEN support was 5.4x more in 2017/18.[38] This is a reason why children on SEN support are comparatively less likely to go to university.

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[36] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)* , (p.13).

[37] Ibid, (p.13).

[38]National Audit Office (2019): Support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in England, (p.44).

- EHCPs can be retained longer than necessary, causing young adults to be forced into education.[39]

SEND individuals tend to have more limited job prospects.
- According to a 2017 DfE report, only 63% of surveyed work experience coordinators offer work-related activities to SEND pupils and only 26% of those offered supported internships.[40] There are limited opportunities for SEND students to gain practical experience, affecting their outcomes later in life.
- A study in 2016 looked at outcomes at age 20 of people who had learning or behavioural difficulties at age 15 and found that literary and behavioural difficulties correlated with dropping out of high school, while numeracy and social difficulties were associated with NEET status (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).[41]
- In 2020-21, only 5.1% of adults with learning disabilities aged 18-64 in receipt of support from social services were in paid employment.[42]
- 67% of children who have been cautioned or sentenced for an offence receive SEN support. One in four children and young people in young offender institutions have SEND.[43]
- At age 27 young people with SEN are 25% less likely to be in sustained employment than their non-SEND peers.[44]

SEND individuals tend to struggle more with day to day experiences.
- In 2020-21, 78.3% of adults with learning disabilities aged 18-64 who were receiving support from social services lived in their own home or with their families.[45]
- Discussions towards independence between support workers and SEND people, but many support workers are not committed to ensure action is taken to ensure independence.[46]

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[39] Department of Education (2022) SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years, (p.54).

[40] Hanson et al (2017) Transition programmes for young adults with SEND, (p.9).

[41] Carroll et al (2017) SEN support: A rapid evidence assessment, (p.18).

[42] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)* , (p.14).

[43] HM Government (2022), *SEND Review: Right support, Right place, Right time*, SEND Review - right support, right place, right time - government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England (publishing.service.gov.uk), (p.20).

[44] Ibid, (p.21).

[45] Department for Education (2022) *Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources. Special educational needs publication June 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)* , (p.13).

[46] Martin, K et al (2011) Young people with special educational needs/learning difficulties and disabilities: research into planning for adult life and services, (p.15).

- There are significant concerns raised by parents about their children with learning disabilities, regarding their ability to manage their finances properly as they may be intellectually younger than their physical age.[47]
- 74% of special educational needs co-ordinators said they do not have time to ensure SEN students can access the support they need.[48]

[47] Ibid (p.17).
[48] National Audit Office (2019): Support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in England, (p.44).

Insight:

Overview:
The Briefing showed us that the system is under pressure. In this insight we have two main aims. Firstly, we wish to explain what inclusive education means in practice and why it is important. Few would argue against ensuring that every child, regardless of need and ability, should have access to the same level of high quality education. No child should be made to feel unwelcome in their educational setting. Despite this commitment, the term 'inclusivity' can appear ambiguous. Inclusivity could apply to a wide variety of different needs and attributes. In order for policymakers to make informed decisions, improve the opportunity and educational experiences of SEND children and produce policy which works towards a goal, they need to know how this inclusivity links specifically to special needs and disabilities.
Elaborating on the benefits of inclusive education will act as a further impetus for change.

Secondly, we wish to lift the lid on the inner workings of SEND support in schools in order to better understand what is happening. The complexities of the system were revealed to us in the briefing, thus requiring further research to fully grasp what is working, what is not working well, and why that is the case. These reports try to understand the system in its entirety, and as the system is extensive, the voices of those actively involved can often get lost in statistics. Therefore, we took it upon ourselves to conduct informal, qualitative interviews with 3 individuals who themselves have either been a student receiving support or a member of staff giving support. These people on the frontline are best placed to know what needs to change so as to better support SEND children.

There are three sections to this insight:
- 1) a section defining inclusivity and describing why inclusivity, in relation to SEND students, is important.
- 2) a section highlighting the evidence gathered by official bodies and academic reports which sought to identify the reasons why the SEND system isn't operating at its best.
- 3) a section outlining the findings from interviews we conducted ourselves with 3 anonymous individuals who have personal experiences with the SEND system. These individuals will be represented by a letter.

What is inclusive education and why is it important for SEND pupils?

The Warnock Report in 1978 introduced special educational needs as an umbrella term for negatively labelled conditions such as "speech and language disorders" and "visual disability and hearing disability". It suggested that 20% of children who fall under this category need additional support.[49] Without it, these children are unfairly assessed and their growth is limited. This report does recognise that children have varying levels of required support, and proposes three levels of integration: Functional, Social, and Locational.[50] Functional integration shares the traditional definition of inclusion, where special needs and mainstream children are educated together. Social integration ensures all children share the same social space, whereas Locational integration ensures all children study on the same site. Inclusion may be thought of as not excluding SEND students from academic and personal success, and giving SEND students support allows them to utilise their potential.

Studies have shown a positive correlation between more children on the SEND register and aggressive behaviour from students.[51] There is some debate between both the reasons why and the effect this has on other students. Risk factors such as socio-economic status, and school urbanity interact with each other when aggravated to the school level, making it harder to tell how influential SEND students have on other students and themselves. Conversely, improvements towards the treatment and support towards SEND students should mitigate the impacts of other risk factors.[52]

Repeating UNICEF's definition, an inclusive education is one that "includes all students … whatever their abilities and requirements". This involves tailoring "teaching and the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets" so they are appropriate and enable sufficient support. Whatsmore, inclusive education

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[49] Baroness Mary Warnock in Conversation with Liam Lawlor, (p.2).
[50] Nasuwt (2008) Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, (p.51).
[51] Oldfield (2012) Behaviour difficulties in children with special education needs and disabilities: assessing risk, promotive and protective factors at individual and school levels ,(p.88).
[52] ibid, (p.308).

means "all children learn together in the same schools".[53] UNICEF also provided three key reasons why inclusive education is important:
- "It improves learning for all children"
- "It promotes understanding, reduces prejudice and strengthens social integration."
- "It ensures that children with disabilities are equipped to work and contribute economically and socially to their communities."[54]

UNICEF then goes on to outline what is required in order to have inclusive education. This includes:
- "Commitment and investment from education ministries
- Support for teachers and students
- Promotion of respect for diversity and inclusive learning
- High expectations of all students
- Safe and inclusive environments
- Partnerships between parents, organisations of people with disabilities and schools.
- Systems to monitor progress".[55]

These requirements show that the inclusiveness of an education system is heavily dependent on the operation of the education system, its framework and the resources available. UNICEF sees the state as having a key role in ensuring inclusive education, as demonstrated by the 'checklist of actions governments must take to make inclusive education a reality'.[56]

This definition of inclusive education is echoed by FutureLearn, describing it as "a teaching model whereby all students, regardless of their ability, learn together in one environment".[57] There are different levels and types of inclusion, but the one which currently characterises the UK education system for SEND children is 'mainstreaming'. Here, disabled students start education in a separate classroom away from the main classroom. If students perform well, then they can be integrated into the main classroom when they are ready. This system means that all students will attend the same educational facility, whilst not being so overwhelmed. The system is much more flexible so a child doesn't need to move to another school if they are not yet in the main classroom. As a result, any friendships, relationships and confidences that have

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[53] UNICEF (2017), Inclusive Education: Including Children with disabilities in quality learning: what needs to be done?, Inclusive Education - Including children with disabilities in quality learning: what needs to be done? (unicef.org), (p.1).

[54] Ibid, (p.2).

[55] Ibid (p.3).

[56] Ibid (p.4).

[57] FutureLearn (2021), What is inclusive education, and how can you implement it?, What is inclusive education, and how can you implement it? - FutureLearn, (accessed 24/2/23).

been established already won't be lost. FutureLearn goes on to outline three key benefits of inclusive education. These include:

- Boosting student confidence by tackling low self-esteem and encouraging a sense of belonging.
- Improving communication skills by increasing the size of social circles and amount of interaction, which prepare them for the workplace.
- Ensuring that all students receive the same high quality of education and have access to the same lesson content.[58]

This reveals the importance of ensuring that there is sufficient space in mainstream state schools for SEND children to both attend on a regular basis but also have their own separate classrooms if and when they need it.

Three different takes on inclusion have been covered: Warnock, UNICEF and FutureLearn. The difference between them is to what extent inclusion should be valued over "special" education, tailored and exclusive to SEND children.[59]Both integration and inclusion are necessary for SEND children, and schools in general. Every SEND child has different needs and abilities, so there is no "one-size fits all" solution; schools should often affirm the support given to each child and consider whether it is appropriate. Ultimately, learning in one environment is preferable and very important to SEND children, but it is reckless to enforce this inclusion without considering the consequences. Therefore, inclusive education is not important as a necessity for SEND students but as a goal which teachers, parents and support staff should encourage SEND students to strive for.

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Mintz et al (2015) Towards a New Reality for Teacher Education for SEND,(p.27).

How local authorities are failing SEND students

It is difficult to improve the SEND system if the problems aren't identified well. When inspecting schools, Ofsted does not separately grade SEND provisions, but 56% of their overall short inspection reports referred to SEND.[60] However, without a focus on

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[60] National Audit Office (2019): Support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in England, (p.10)

why or how the inclusion of SEND students affected behaviour and academic performance, it is very hard to judge the support given to SEND students. Ofsted's long inspections do give a lot more detail, but they aren't done as often.

The Ofsted and Care Quality Commission found significant weakness in 47 of 94 local authority areas they inspected for the effectiveness of SEND support. The reasons attributed to this was low engagement between children and parents, weakness in leadership and ineffective collaboration across agencies.[61] The disparity between local councils is very clear when it comes to support given to SEND, with some areas having more special schools than others.

In 2018-19, the Department of Education provided £33.7 billion for mainstream schools, with an average of £4,000 per child, and up to £6,000 extra for each SEND child. While some school programmes dedicate some of the additional money for SEND-specific schemes, funds are also funnelled into schemes which provide benefits to other children, on top of SEND children.[62] From our research and interviews, we found that this may cause disadvantages to the support given to SEND children, as it may not be tailored to their special educational needs or disabilities.

The funding system for SEND provisions is very unsustainable. Local authorities frequently enter deficits. Authorities receive a "school block" funding and a "high-needs block" funding, and to resolve deficits on the latter block of funding, they often transfer money from their schools blocks or from their reserves. By 2019, the total net values of all local authority reserves had fallen by 86.5% to £144 million.[63] These reserves are not infinite, so authorities cannot rely on reserves as a source of additional funding. Transferring money from schools block funding means all children lose access to shared resources, including infrastructure and teaching material, so authorities are very reluctant to transfer money as there is a big tradeoff

A joint investigation between ITV and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism found a £1.3 billion deficit in the SEND budget from councils, with an increase of £450 million from the previous year. The same report noted how councils are actively trying to reduce costs by placing children in places far away from their home. 43,000 children with special needs are placed outside their local area, and more than 100 children are placed over 200 miles away from their home. Further evidence suggests councils are complicating the process for children to receive SEND support, as a way to save

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[61] Ibid, (p.11)
[62] Ibid, (p.27)
[63] Ibid, (p.36)

costs.[64] Ultimately, the structural failures of local authorities is not only unsustainable, but already causing irrevocable damage to thousands of families.

However, there are other issues plaguing SEND students, and one of these is teacher support. In 2008, 47% of trainee teachers were good or very good with preparation to work with primary school SEND children, compared to 55% with secondary school SEND children. In 2014, this improved to 64% with primary SEND children and 76% with secondary SEND children.[65] We believe that making the local authority system more efficient would have spill-overs with teacher quality, as a proportionately higher amount of the high needs block could be allocated to training teachers.

[64] ITV (2022) https://www.itv.com/news/2022-04-28/children-with-special-educational-needs-denied-education-due-to-funding-crisis

[65] UCL (2015) Towards a New Reality for Teacher Education for SEND, (p.13)

What are the first-hand accounts of people who experience the SEND system?

Interview No.1:

A is in Year 13 at a Sixth Form college, studying for her A-levels. In the summer of 2022, she was officially diagnosed with moderate dyslexia. Despite this, her school has not granted her extra-time during exams. **A** is an example of where a student has passed through the education system without their special need being picked up upon until it is too late. **A** knew that she had been struggling academically, and believed that she simply was less intelligent than her peers due to not getting the same grades. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **A** never sat GCSE exams; consequently her moderate dyslexia was never picked up on. She believed that she got accepted into her chosen college based on inflated teacher assessed grades.

She recalls that during Year 12 her psychology teacher, a former dyslexia assessor, recommended that **A** complete the school's own dyslexia test. The test, which lasted 20-30 minutes, produced the result that **A** was moderately dyslexic. The school consequently recommended that she take a private dyslexia test to verify. The test, which lasted 3 hours and cost over £300, also reported **A** to moderately dyslexic. **A's** dyslexia makes it take longer for her to process information. However, despite the 20-page report produced by the test which outlined her dyslexia, the school has refused to qualify **A** for extra time during her exams. This decision is very problematic for her, mainly because it could mean that her dyslexia, without support, will make it harder to achieve higher grades, which will then have an impact on which university she will get accepted to. **A** is disappointed that she may not be able to go to her preferred choice of university, and instead has to change her choices to universities with lower entry requirements. The college has written to the universities to inform them of **A's** circumstances, but universities do not lower their entry requirements for students with learning difficulties. Without the extra time, **A** feels she will struggle to get the grades she needs.

However, **A** has received support from her college in other ways. For example, she attends twice-weekly study support sessions, each 30 minutes long. These are a one-to-one session with a member of staff where they go over exam techniques, such as how to get the most marks by writing as least as possible. **A** was supposed to have the same tutor throughout her two years at the college but this has not been the case. **A** does see these sessions as useful. Additionally, the school has provided **A** with a laptop which she can use in lessons and exams. This has enabled her to have the powerpoint slides up on her laptop during lessons so she can go at the pace she needs. She has stated that the teaching staff have been very supportive, regularly checking whether she needs any more support. The college leadership and exam officer, contrastingly, have been the least supportive. Upon consideration of her experience, **A** has recommended that every secondary school student should undertake a dyslexia test upon arrival. This would make it much harder for a case of dyslexia to go unrecognised. Furthermore, it would have been beneficial if **A** had previously had teachers, like her psychology teacher, with a similar level of awareness of dyslexia. This shows that teachers are best placed to be able to identify students' needs first.

Interview No.2:

L has been a primary school teaching assistant, specialising in support for children with Autism, for the past 25 years. She started by discussing the structure of the school she works at. **L** works at a mainstream primary school in south west london, which has an opportunity base for 40 children with autism. All these children have EHCPs and the spectrum of different types of autism present is "massive". For example, one child is non/verbal and has very little understanding of their external surroundings. **L** believes that the child is unlikely to stay in their school much longer as it is not suitable. The facilities at the school for SEND children have changed significantly over the years. They started off with a porta-cabin in the grounds of the school to act as a base. Presently, after an extension, the school has 4 normal sized classrooms dedicated to SEND students. There is also the option of a separate playground for the SEND children. According to **L,** SEND students spend most of their time in the base classrooms. The 4 classrooms are home to 4 mixed year groups: Nursery and early years; years 1 and 2; years 3 and 4; and years 5 and 6. If necessary, some SEND children will be kept in the nursery and early years class for an extra 2 to 3 years until they are ready to move up to the next year group. However students still have to move up in order to be ready for the move to secondary school. The number of students in each class ranges from 8 to 12. The ratio of teaching assistants to SEND students depends on the needs of the individual children, but in **L's** situation there are 5 adults to 9 children. There is a base leader who has oversight of the SEND students and the operation of the bae.

This was followed by a description of the broader system in which the school operates within. The base operates as a chain of different bases across the borough within its Local Educational Authority (LEA), with the base being funded and operated by the local Council. The council determines admissions to the base, so if a space becomes available, a child is sent to the school by the council (regardless of that child's age and which year group the space is in). All the children that attend the base live within the borough. However, some students live on the other side of the borough from the school, thus face a longer journey to school. To support them, the school has council 6, 16-seater buses to collect SEND children from home and school each day. Each bus, operated and paid for by the council, will have a driver and 1 or 2 escorts depending on the passengers' needs. Within the borough, there are 3 other primary schools which have their own opportunity bases, each specialising in different needs (for example hearing impairment).

L then went on to talk about what a standard day at the school looks like for a SEND child and types of support are available. At the start of every day, each pupil is provided with a timetable. Each timetable outlines what the pupil will be doing that day, with a 'Now, Next, Then' stage. This so the pupil knows exactly what they will be doing that day, making transition between tasks easier and less stressful. Each pupil will start with an easier task which they can complete with little assistance, as a way of boosting motivation. SEND pupils who have had to travel longer to get to school will get the chance to play on the playground equipment before lessons start. In order to make sure that SEND children are able to make it through the day, they are allowed time in the 'sensory room' and regular breaks. **L** believes that SEN pupils are well supported, particular when it comes to different types of therapies available (e.g. drama, occupational, speech). Additionally, when it comes to school transition, 3 open days are arranged at their future secondary school. The handover process is well-developed, with all of the primary school's reports on the pupil moving onto the secondary school, the SEND coordinator of the secondary school visiting to meet the SEND pupils, and each SEND pupil receiving two 'social story' books, which contain pictures and information about their new school. The move to secondary school can be an incredibly difficult process of SEND pupils. Pupil progression is also encouraged, with targets set for each child. There will be an annual review and report produced for each SEND child. SEND children are integrated into Maths, Music and PE lessons, and sometimes assembly. The base also organises board game sessions where SEND students can interact with non-send students.

L finished by commenting on the areas of success and areas of improvement for the system. **L** felt that there has been progress in making sure SEND children are sent to the school most appropriate for them. **L** also commentated on how training and Continual professional development is available to SEND support staff two or three times a year on application. Although for new staff at the school there is Autism

awareness training during Inset days, there will never be SEND students in a classroom without a SEND teaching assistant. **L** believes that the set up at her school works well, and that mainstreaming is beneficial for all children at the school for they become more accepting of one another. However, despite these successes, issues and challenges still remain. The main one raised by **L** is that the school is oversubscribed and there is not enough space within the school to accommodate those who need a place. There are some students in the main school who should be in the base, but can not due to lack of space. For students who do not get a place at the school, **L** doesn't know what happens to them. **L** believes that SEND pupils would receive better quality support if money was invested in schools for building works and extensions, so extra classrooms could be added. This would enable more admissions and smaller class sizes, but also upgraded furniture and resources, creating a more aesthetically pleasing environment Additionally, more regular training for staff would also be appreciated. **L's** experience has shown us that the setting in which SEND children learn is very important.

Interview No.3:

J is currently in his first year at university and was diagnosed with autism and dyslexia during Year 8. **J** started by recollecting his experience of secondary schooling and the

levels of support he received. He attended a well-funded state boarding school in East Anglia, which had the option of boarding. This additional source of income meant that the school had millions to invest in its SEND provision. **J** first started to realise he was struggling with his learning at the age of 12-13. His family paid for him to have a private diagnosis (due to NHS waiting times). After being diagnosed with autism and dyslexia, the school put in place a lot of support for him by the end of year 8, which included a laptop. A special needs specialist spoke to the school, giving advice and instructions to teachers, with all teachers being made aware of **J**'s disability by being sent the relevant paperwork at the start of the year.

During the gap year he took before coming to university, **J** participated in the National Tutoring Programme. This experience opened his eyes to how different the quality of SEND provision is across the country. **J** spent his gap year participating in the National Tutoring Programme, working as a tutor for students at 3 deprived schools in Northern England. **J** gave support to what were predominantly SEND students by chance with their English GCSE resits. In one school, 25% of the students were SEND. **J** told us that since the early 2000s, there has been a push by the government to reduce the number of children going to Special School and instead encourage them to integrate into mainstream schools. Cuts to local authority budgets have made funding SEND pupil's places at special schools increasingly unaffordable, resulting in some SEND students going to a school based on price not suitability. Parents are left fighting the council's decision in the courts, which in itself is expensive. **J** also brought to our attention a qualification called ASDAN which SEND students who would struggle to get a qualification could take instead of a language. However, after the reform to GCSEs and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, ASDAN was taken out of the curriculum.

A major problem raised by **J** was poorly paid, low quality, unqualified SEN Coordinators (SENCO) and Teaching Assistants in schools, a problem particularly evident in the schools **J** tutored in. In order to be a SENCO, having a special qualification before starting the job is not a necessary requirement so long as you work towards obtaining one whilst in the job. SEND support staff are very poorly paid, with an average annual salary of £14,000 a year. SENCO's average salary is £25,000. This lack of staff funding is having serious consequences. One consequence is that ECHPs are routinely ignored by secondary schools and sixth form colleges, with students not having a meeting in 5 years to discuss their plans with staff (as opposed to the expectation of every 6 months). Many staff don't know how to evidence extra-time exam requirements, leaving SEND students sitting exams without the necessary support. The issue is that good teaching assistants are becoming increasingly rare due to the poor starting salary.

Another problem is that after the 2010 reforms to education funding and structure, a disconnect has emerged between how mainstream schools are managed and funded compared to how SEND provision is. Through the academisation programme, which has increased rapidly over the past decade, schools which are academies (independent from local authority control) can apply for funding directly from the government. SEND provision, on the other hand, is still administered and financed by the local authorities. SEND provision has not caught up with changes affecting the whole system. Because Local Authorities have an increasingly less to do with schools, **J** reports a brain drain in councils, with those who know how schools operate leaving. The problem is that councils are the ones who write ECHPs, however they are detached from the people implementing it. The SEND system was designed for when schools were still under local authority control. **J** was open to the idea of secondary schools having a base which specialise in supporting specific special needs, as opposed to the current system where secondary schools are having to cater to a vast array of different needs.

J finished by identifying what he believes to be the main problem with the SEND system. The main problem, according to **J,** facing the SEND system is the waiting times to get an NHS diagnosis. Currently there are 100,000 young people waiting for an autism test. According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, no one should have to wait more than 3 months for a diagnosis. However, the National Autism Society has reported that 80,000 of those waiting (80%) are having to wait longer than 3 months. The Guardian has reported that in some cases this can be up to 5 years. This consequence is that children's special needs are not picked up. Undiagnosed students with poor SAT results are presumed to just be low achievement. They will then receive lower expected grades, which all the while the students are meeting these grades, little more is done to help the student. **J** believes that there is no effective differentiation between SEND students and low achieving students. On the other hand, more able students can compensate for their special needs, meaning again their needs are not picked up. Pupils are disincentivised from getting a diagnosis, for if diagnosed, the school is obligated to provide support and resources. **J** suggested ways to try and tackle the waiting times, mainly in terms of increasing supply. There could be an element of de-regulation, whereby if a GP has referred a child to get diagnosed, then the school will start providing support. Additionally, perhaps the government could subsidise private sector tests. **J** has shown that SEND children can have very different experiences of support and the system designed to support them is not working at its best. The general operations are incoherent, and the level and quality of supply cannot meet the demand.

Conclusion:

Our insight has taught us much about what inclusive education actually means and the operation of the SEND system at both the macro and micro level. In order for education to be inclusive for SEND students, the key factor appears to be the environment and space in which children learn. The needs of the child have to come first and these needs cannot become a barrier to achievement. In particular, all children need to learn in the same schools and share spaces. However, this must be balanced with the needs of some children to have their own private spaces. Therefore, any attempt to increase inclusivity must take this balance into account. In terms of the broader system, the main issue appears to be the low quality of support SEND students and their families receive from local authorities as well as the lack of funds available to spend. The debts incurred lead us to conclude that a fresh approach is required and the role of local authorities in SEND support needs to be reviewed.

The interviews we conducted have provided us with unparalleled understanding of the experiences of those involved in the system, as well as the reasons why the system is the way it is. In our first interview with **A**, the main problem was that not enough is done to detect special needs earlier. The result is that many students may pass through education undiagnosed (thus penalised) or diagnosed too late. **L's** main concern was that demand outsripped supply for places for good SEND provision. **L** also showed us the benefits of having a mainstream school which contains a base specialised in certain needs. **J** revealed to us that SEND children have very different experiences based on where they go to school and their material circumstances. Major problems involved low qualified, low paid support staff; the disconnect between increasingly autonomous schools and SEND support which remains stuck under local authority control; and the dangerously long waiting times for NHS diagnosis. Our findings have painted a picture of SEND students being excluded from high quality

support based on factors beyond their control. Our policy recommendations are heavily inspired by this research.

Policy Recommendations:

Overview:
SEND individuals struggle academically, socially and financially, compared to their non-SEND peers, yet councils are still facing massive funding deficits. Notably, the government attempted to reform the system in 2014, but outcomes for SEND children have not improved. Current policies have simply failed SEND individuals and their families, and we have found structural issues which need to be amended. To do this, we suggest policy recommendations which we believe are realistic and will bring the optimal long-term outcomes for all parties involved:

- **Action 1 -** Universal screening for dyslexia in secondary school.
- **Action 2 -** Increase awareness of SEND amongst pupils through the National Curriculum.
- **Action 3 -** Improve pay, training and qualification of SEND teaching assistants.
- **Action 4 -** Centralise oversight of SEND support to the national government.
- **Action 5 -** Invest in building works to school, dedicating space for SEND students.

Inclusion for SEND students within schools will result in beneficial outcomes for their educational attainment, but also help reduce discrimination at a later stage. SEND individuals have potential which is inhibited by the current system, but they are as invaluable as anyone else in society. The education system seeks to arm every student with opportunities to identify and achieve their goals, and we believe the integration of SEND students is essential for the education system to truly be effective.

Action 1: Universal Screening for Dyslexia in secondary school

Early intervention to identify SEND is extremely effective with mitigating the social and academic effects faced by students with SEND. This is because support can be given immediately to ensure the child is learning well, and their long-term outcomes will be better. We believe an appropriate policy would be universal screening for dyslexia, as it *is* cost-effective and can be set up within a few years. The greatest benefit of universal screening is that dyslexia can be identified at a low cost per child.

It is important to note that screening is distinctly different from formal diagnosis in that screening establishes the probability of having or developing a SEND but cannot ascertain whether a student has a SEND. If screening is positive, it means there is a

probable chance of the student having a SEND, and further resources can be allocated for formal diagnostics. Conversely, if screening is negative, it means the student likely doesn't have a SEND, and thus, a formal diagnostic test is not necessary. However, the reliability of screening determines how effective a strategy for dyslexia screening in schools will be.

If a test gives false negatives, it means students who do have SEND are overlooked and their educational outcome will fall behind other students. Conversely, if a test gives many false positives, it would drain the budget allocated for SEND students by wastefully suggesting formal diagnostic tests for students who don't have a SEND. However, screening tests are fairly accurate: a comparison between QuickScreen dyslexia screening and an independent diagnostic assessment demonstrated a 93% accuracy rate for the screening.[66] The cost of diagnosing a SEND too late is higher than doing a diagnostic for a false result.

There are numerous types of tests for dyslexia, each targeting different indicators of dyslexia. In Kindergarten, tests are most successful when tasks involve phonological awareness, letter-sound association, and phonological memory. For older children, oral vocabulary, word identification and reading comprehension would be effective tasks.[67] While intervention at the earliest possible stage is preferable, there may be some students who experience dyslexia symptoms at a later stage. As a result, universal screening at least during the start of secondary school, and KS4 would give enough time for students to receive the support they need to learn and prepare for exams.

Action 2: Increase awareness of SEND amongst pupils through the curriculum

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[66] QuickScreen (2022) https://qsdyslexiatest.com/research (Accessed 05/03/2023)
[67] National Center on Improving Literacy (2019) Screening for Dyslexia (p.20)

Special Educational Needs is an umbrella term encompassing many different learning difficulties, which are distinctly different from each other. Pervasing within the treatment of SEND individuals is the lack of awareness to their specific needs by employers, teachers, parents and authorities. The fundamental cause behind this is that despite being taught to accept SEND individuals, and recognising the category of SEND, most people don't understand the mechanisms behind the symptoms of SEND, or how to deal with it. This information gap can be tackled by studying SEND within the curriculum.

Compared to other policies proposed to help SEND students, this is a relatively inexpensive one, requiring structural change. Furthermore, increasing awareness of SEND can help reduce prejudice and misunderstandings. A survey about disabled people found that public awareness regarding how common disabilities in the UK are is low. Within a sample, 60% thought the total number was 20% of the population or less, while 41% thought it was 10% or less. However, the actual number is 22%.[68] The report also acknowledged that people tend to overestimate and so the actual perceived figures may be lower. We hope that by educating students on the various forms of disabilities and special educational needs can reduce the prejudice people with SEND face in their daily lives.

The same survey found that one in three disabled people feel prejudiced again. 75% of non-disabled participants thought they needed to care for disabled people, which may not be the right strategy, as it can be seen as patronising.[69] On the other hand, 32% thought disabled people were less productive due to their disability, which may not be the case. While the two above figures have remained constant from 2011 and 2018, the survey found a 10% less perceived prejudice in 2018, which means people think the situation for disabled people has improved when it hasn't.[70] While this survey was on disabled people, the experiences of SEND are similar. The inexperience of employers, colleagues, and the general populace in working with SEND people can have negative impacts on the opportunities SEND people have as adults.

Therefore, incorporating SEND awareness within the curriculum means students should learn about the different types of SEND, how to treat people with SEND, and have discussion on what limitations SEND people do have, but most importantly, the limitations they *don't* have. We hope that this will improve the treatment of SEND people while at school and as adults but also give indicators to students whether they may have a SEND or not. In our interview with **A**, she mentioned that she did not know what dyslexia actually was, despite knowing that it existed as a disability. If she did know the symptoms in advance, she could have suspected having it. The ideal

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[68] Scope (2018) The disability perception gap (p.7)
[69] ibid (p.10)
[70] ibid (p.16)

outcome of educating students on SEND is that they can discuss with their friends and their parents, and then if they have suspicions of having a SEND, they can talk to a professional for a diagnosis.

Action 3: Improve pay, training and qualification of SEND teaching assistants

The role of a SEND coordinator or teaching assistant can be very emotionally taxing. SEND children have complex needs which require either extensive experience or thorough training in order for staff to sufficiently meet those needs. The problem encountered in our interviews was dwindling numbers of experienced SEND staff remaining at schools combined with declining numbers of new, well-trained entrants into the system. The low pay of SEND staff needs to be addressed if there is to be any chance of increasing the number of people joining and remaining in the profession. We believe in bringing the salary of a SEND teaching assistant between £25,000 to £30,000 a year. Anything in excess of £30,000 would make the policy unaffordable. There is a real need to appreciate the work that SEND staff do and how much they help SEND students feel welcome in the world, giving them the platform to build a successful and happy life. Teachers are reliant on SEND support staff, for without them non-SEND students would be harmed by decreased amounts of attention. Furthermore, higher salaries and opportunities for career progression will lead to greater job security, which means experience is not lost and there is no detriment to the wellbeing of SEND children having to lose bonds forged with staff.

Training and qualifications are another component which needs to be addressed. Our interview with **A** showed us that few teaching staff are aware of the signs of special education needs. Our interview with **L** showed us that more regular training and continual professional development would be appreciated. Our interview with **J** showed us that it is possible for there to be low-qualified, poorly trained SEND support staff to be working in schools. Therefore, TA training should be as rigorous and in-depth as teacher training, but with a greater focus on understanding special needs. In order to increase uptake, the status of SEND staff needs to be elevated, and the reputation of the qualification could be a way of achieving that. A degree-apprenticeship route may be more appropriate than a wholly university route. We call on the government to enact two policies. Firstly, making sure that all teaching assistants are trained in detecting and supporting SEND. This will help with identifying students earlier and increase flexibility in provision. Secondly the government needs to set a target for the number of teaching assistants at 400,000 (up from the current level of 275,800 but below the number of teachers at 465,500).[71] If the basic salary for

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[71] National Statistics (2022) 'School workforce in England', *GOV.UK, Statistics: school workforce - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)*.

teaching assistants was £25,000 and the target was reached, it would cost the government £10 billion annually.

Action 4: Centralise oversight of SEND support to national government

The system of local authorities overseeing SEND support has been grossly inefficient, with SEND students being under supported and placed far from home. Local authorities are facing massive deficits for each SEND student they are responsible for, and being held accountable for their own budgets, their natural response is to deny SEND students and their families helpful support, as it would incur additional costs. We propose that the oversight of SEND support and funding should be centralised to the national government.

With the national government responsible for SEND funding, schools can apply for funding from the government directly, instead of local authorities. This proposal removes the "middleman" as local authorities gain their income from the government. Being unequipped to deal with SEND students in schools with poor leadership and communication, the layer of local authorities only adds bureaucracy, making life horrendous for parents of SEND children. It should be the schools who have the power and who are in the best position to communicate with parents.

For this system to work, we also recommend that Ofsted evaluate each school's SEND provisions in their inspections, to ensure SEND children are being supported well by their respective schools. Through centralising the support system, it may be easier to work with the NHS for a diagnosis, and if implemented, dyslexia screening. The success of this policy can be measured by how closer children are placed to their homes, and whether the cost per SEND child improves.

However, changing the structure of SEND support will take a lot of time, as it would be difficult for schools to take on the roles which the local authorities formally have. Policies would have to be implemented beforehand to ensure schools have the staffing

requirements before being able to apply for money from the government directly. The government can trial out this system in areas where local authorities are notoriously weak and then compare the results to areas where local authorities are strong, before deciding on a nationwide implementation.

Action 5: Invest in building works to school, creating additional space for SEND students.

The policy to invest in building additional classrooms, specifically for SEND students, is inspired by our interview with **L**, where she spoke of a lack of places for SEND students in the base at primary level. The result is larger class sizes, SEND students having to sit in mainstream classes and some SEND students not getting a place in their preferred choice of school. We believe that increasing capacity in primary schools for existing SEND bases will help improve the experience of SEND pupils, for classes will be less crowded, pupils will learn in nicer environments and they will have more of a chance of attending the school which best suits their needs. Additionally, this policy should not be excluded to just primary schools. We also learnt through our interviews that secondary schools do not have bases like the ones in some primary schools, which focus on provision for a certain need. Instead, students with a wide variety of different needs are grouped together with the secondary school expected to meet all of these needs. We believe changing this would mean the child gets better quality support and the school could operate more efficiently. There will be schools that have bigger unused grounds than others, thus more space to expand and add additional classrooms. Therefore the government will need to embark on a programme assessing which secondary schools would be appropriate for which type of base.

This policy still links to the key characteristic of an inclusive education where all children can learn within the same school, for it potentially reduces the need to have special schools at the secondary level which cater solely to SEND children. Having a mini-special school 'added onto the side' of a mainstream school would enable the best of both worlds, creating a sort of permeable membrane between the two. The government has recently embarked on 'The School Rebuilding Programme', where they plan to invest in the major rebuilding and refurbishment of schools and sixth-form colleges across the country.[72] The programme was announced in June 2020. There are already 400 projects underway, with plans to complete 50 projects every year. Schools are prioritised according to their condition. The criteria for getting investment is focused primarily on the structural integrity of the school building and whether the building's current condition poses a risk to safety. We call the government to add to this criteria, mainly in terms of the potential and feasibility of adding extra classrooms for SEND students and making the schools SEND friendly in general (for example, adding lifts, sensory support etc).

Conclusion:

The aim of this report was to get to the heart of the SEND system and understand the experiences of those on the ground, so as to gain awareness of what works and what doesn't. Consequently, we could propose policies which will effectively make the education system more inclusive for children with special educational needs. Often when dealing with social problems, only certain parts of the problem are dealt with by piecemeal legislation. A whole system approach is required and our policies are designed to do that. We recognise that these policies require significant investment and will result in a lot of restructuring of the system. However, with our recommendations we have tried to simultaneously achieve inclusive education and cost-benefit analysis. This is by ensuring that all children, not just SEND children, benefit from the changes. For example, increasing awareness and acceptance of

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[72] Department of Education (2022) 'About the school rebuilding programme', *GOV.UK*, About the school rebuilding programme - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), (accessed 8/3/23).

SEND will help make society a more welcoming place. If SEND children can receive the support they need, they are given a platform in life to be self-supporting and successful, contributing to the overall health of the economy. If teaching assistant numbers are increased, all students gain. The short term costs will be reimbursed by long term benefits. This is the benefit of having mainstream education all the way through to secondary school, for if all children learn in the same environment, all the benefits can be felt by everyone.