

East Sussex Local SEND Reform Plan 2026-2029

Summary



What is a Local SEND Reform Plan?



In February 2026, the UK Government announced plans to reform the national SEND system. These changes aim to improve help and support for children and young people with SEND.

The Local SEND Reform Plan sets out how the local authority and its partners will implement these reforms locally. It explains:

- ✓ what changes will be made
- ✓ who is responsible for delivering them
- ✓ how progress will be measured
- ✓ how education, health and care services will work together

The plan is the responsibility of the 'local area partnership'. The partnership includes the local authority, the local NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB), schools, trusts, colleges, and other services that support children and young people with SEND. The local authority leads this work and brings partners together around a shared vision and set of priorities. Please note this plan is subject to approval by the Department for Education (DfE).

The Building Blocks for Change



The Local SEND Reform Plan is designed around four building blocks. These form the foundation for change needed to create an inclusive and sustainable SEND system.

The building blocks are:

1. Working with schools on inclusion strategies
2. Implementing 'Experts at Hand'
3. Strengthening system leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production
4. Delivering a SEND place Planning Strategy



Building Block 1: Working with school on inclusion strategies



The focus in this area is on Strengthening inclusion across education settings.
The roadmap below summarises some of the key stages of the plan:

We will:

- develop a new Universally Available Provision (UAP) and work with schools to implement it consistently
- work with colleges to develop a UAP relevant to their provision
- provide effective support and challenge to schools around their implementation of the UAP for Early Years
- work with schools and settings to embed our shared Vision for Inclusion
- support schools to develop their Inclusion Strategies
- review the use by schools and setting of speech and language interventions to identify and share good practice
- work with families to review and improve information on transition and Post-16 pathways



2026-27

We will:

- complete an audit of UAP implementation in schools and settings, identify priorities for further support and training
- support schools in undertaking peer support on the implementation of inclusion strategies
- work with colleges to deliver training on embedding UAP
- review and improve Year 12 transition model in colleges with enhanced pastoral care
- implement Post-19 planning reviews in colleges involving families, employment services and Adult Social Care



2027-28

We will:

- work with schools and settings with strong inclusive practice to develop system leaders, supporting others to improve practice
- embed a consistent approach and understanding of UAP in colleges
- review and update information about post-16 pathways



2028-29

Building Block 2: Implementing 'Experts at Hand'

The focus in this area is improving access to specialist support and local placements. The roadmap below summarises some of the key stages of the plan:



We will:

- implement our Experts at Hand (EAH) model for schools and settings to access support through a 'navigator'
- commission additional capacity of EAH professionals in key priority areas, including for: Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and specialist teachers
- launch a recruitment campaign for Therapists
- strengthen integrated specialist support through the Alternative Provision Task Force and Alternative Provision Outreach
- introduce new Best Start in Life Practitioners in early years settings and Family Hubs
- continue to progress work to reduce NHS waiting times for wheelchairs, CAMHS and neurodevelopmental pathways

We will:

- review feedback from schools and settings on EAH delivery to refine model
- work with colleges to develop a model for access to EAH support
- commission specialist teachers, including for social emotional and mental health needs
- review the East Sussex Alternative Provision Strategic Plan and ensure continued focus on reintegration of pupils
- continue the review of NHS waiting times and implementation of support whilst waiting measures

We will:

- embed an annual cycle for commissioning EAH resource
- fully embed new integrated model of EAH support and Family Hub support
- gather feedback from families on EAH support and access to key NHS services



2026-27



2027-28



2028-29

Building Block 3: Strengthening system leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production



The focus in this area is on strengthening system leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production. The roadmap below summarises some of the key stages of the plan:

We will:

- publish the new East Sussex SEND Strategy 2026-30
- commission the East Sussex Parent Carer Forum to provide co-production training for schools and settings
- set up a co-production panel with parents
- establish a new SEND Reform Focus group with young people
- commission SENDIASS to ensure sufficient access to information and advice for families in the lead up to full implementation of the SEND Reforms

We will:

- develop data dashboards to support governance and accountability for the SEND Strategy
- evaluate approaches to co-production in schools and settings and share good practice through locality clusters
- review feedback from families on information and advice and adapt services as required

We will:

- work with SENDIASS and the East Sussex Parent and Carer Forum to produce new information and advice in preparation for full roll out of the reforms
- embed best practice in co-production in schools and settings



2026-27



2027-28



2028-29

Building Block 4: Delivering a SEND place Planning Strategy



The focus in this area is on encouraging inclusive cultures and behaviours.

The roadmap below summarises some of the key stages of the plan:

We will:

- continue work to improve the quality and timeliness of EHCP assessments
- work with schools to open new specialist bases already in development
- invite expressions of interests from schools for new specialist bases
- work with colleges to develop a model of specialist bases for post-16 that will support transition and improve retention
- review school accessibility requests process to support children to continue in mainstream settings
- work with early years settings to ensure sufficient places and support early identification of SEND



2026-27

We will:

- work with the specialist base network to provide peer support for new bases and staff
- co-produce with families and children and young people information about specialist bases
- review and update the SEND place planning strategy once future capital allocations have been confirmed
- share information with schools on accessibility to share good practice and cost-effective solutions
- develop support and training for early years settings on suitability of the physical environment for inclusive practice



2027-28

We will:

- further embed the quality assurance framework for EHCPs
- support the opening of new post-16 special school provision in Eastbourne
- review and audit for any continued gaps in provision
- embed the process for agreeing accessibility works in schools



2028-29

Goals



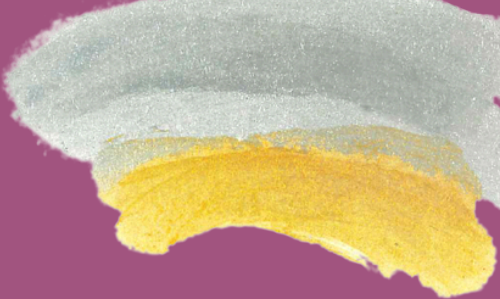
We will know we have achieved our three-year vision when:

- mainstream settings, schools and colleges demonstrate consistent inclusive practice
- more children and young people with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) remain in their local settings
- attendance for children and young people with SEND has improved
- fewer children and young people with SEND are being permanently excluded
- more children and young people with SEND are engaging in education, employment or training
- the Experts at Hand model is fully embedded and providing consistent support across the partnership
- there is increased local capacity in specialist bases and reliance on high-cost out-of-area placements has reduced
- children with the most complex SEND needs receive the right support in a timely way

We will measure progress towards these goals through:

- data comparison with national averages and local baseline data
- feedback from families across the local area partnership

The SEND Governance Board



The SEND Governance Board will monitor the delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan as well as the East Sussex SEND Strategy 2026-2030.

The Board represents many different groups and services. It includes:

- Parents and carers
- Young people with SEND
- Representatives from schools and settings
- Health professionals
- Education professionals
- Social Care professionals

An independent chair leads the Board.

The Board meets regularly to discuss progress and provide direction.