

Truly Equal, Valuably Different

# **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

## **REFORM AGENDA – DELIVERY PLAN 2025-2030**

Delivering on the Executive's (draft) priority:

***“Better Support for Children and Young People  
with Special Educational Needs”***

February 2025



Department of  
**Education**  
[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN<sup>1</sup>) are Happy, Learning & Succeeding - they will receive the **Right Support**, from the **Right People**, at the **Right Time** and in the **Right Place**.

# Contents

Introduction	04
What does success look like ?	06
Early and Year One actions	07
Right Support: High quality, efficient and effective support that is evidence-based	08
Right People: having confident and highly skilled teaching and support staff who can access additional support to complement and enhance their practice	11
Right Time: effective early identification of needs and early intervention to meet those needs.	14
Right Place: appropriate and timely placements that effectively meet the needs of the child and provide an appropriate learning environment	16
Next Steps	18

## Introduction

The Executive has set out its immediate priorities for doing what matters the most today in its draft Programme for Government 2024-2027. These priorities will deliver meaningful change and lay the foundations to transformation for future generations. **'Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs'** is one of nine (draft) cross-cutting priorities for all of government and its partners across society. It is a blueprint for shaping a better and more inclusive tomorrow: one where everyone has a fair chance, can participate equitably and where the rights of all are respected and upheld.

This delivery plan has been developed following engagement with the **Education Authority (EA), Department of Health (DoH), Department for the Economy (DfE) and other key partners** and collaborative delivery will underpin the implementation phase.

## SEN Reform Agenda

The Department of Education's (DE) vision for all children is that **"EVERY child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding"**. This aspiration is no different for our children who face additional challenges to accessing learning. **Reform is urgent, and essential to deliver this vision, ensure inclusion and improve outcomes for learners who require additional support. The SEN Reform Agenda** (informed by the End-to-End Review (DE) and the EA's Transformation Programme) is **an ambitious framework for change and takes a whole system approach to tackling the issues underpinning current challenges in the system.**

A series of key actions have been developed focused on providing **the Right Support, from the Right People, at the Right Time and in the Right Place, marking the start of a five-year delivery plan to bring about meaningful transformation.** Systematic transformation will take time and investment, but it is vital that we respond meaningfully to make sure our education system works for **ALL** learners.

**Children and young people are at the heart of the SEN Reform Agenda.** The actions contained within this Delivery Plan are consistent with supporting inclusion for our children and young people with SEN. **One early action is to establish a think tank to change the way we refer to and speak about children and young people with SEN – this will be established in early 2025.**

## Systematic Educational Reform

**The SEN Reform Agenda will be aligned to the various other reviews and initiatives taking place within DE** including those on School Improvement, Curriculum, Workforce, the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy and the RAISE programme. This will facilitate a systematic approach leading to better outcomes for our children and young people with SEN, creating inclusive learning environments, offering sustainable, high-quality education with effective interventions and support, all while delivering greater value for money and return on investment.

## Enabling Actions

There are several enabling actions that are fundamental to delivering reform to bring about meaningful change over the next five years.

The current policy landscape requires clarity around the existing model of provision for children with SEN. Through this SEN Reform Agenda, DE will bring forward a **SEN Policy Statement to clearly set out the legislative position and the roles and responsibilities of the Department and the EA.** An outcomes framework will also be published to ensure we are moving in the right direction.

There is also significant work to be undertaken to rebuild **relationships, trust and confidence** in SEN provision. It is vital that the SEN Reform Agenda recognises the importance of building parental confidence in a system that places their children's needs at the centre and supports them to thrive.

Together these early enabling actions, led by DE in **Year One**, will set the tone of the SEN Reform Agenda and ensure that the necessary foundations are in place from which to build a sustainable model for the future.

Enabling Actions	Year 1
<p><b>Policy Statement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication and application of a SEN Policy Statement</li> </ul>	✓
<p><b>Relationships, Trust &amp; Confidence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint a <b>Special Educational Needs Champion</b></li> <li>• Set up a <b>Ministerial Expert Advisory Panel</b></li> <li>• Establish <b>Lived Experience Forums: Children/Parents/Workforce &amp; Community</b></li> <li>• Establish an <b>Enhanced Advocacy Service and a one-stop website</b> for parents<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	✓
<p><b>Outcomes Framework</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development of indicators in partnership with stakeholders</b></li> <li>• <b>Production and publication of outcomes framework</b></li> <li>• <b>Design of performance measures for actions and interventions</b></li> </ul>	✓

## Collaboration

**Collaboration across the Education Sector including all sectoral support bodies, Executive Departments and their delivery partners, Local Government, the Voluntary & Community Sector and the Private Sector** will underpin delivery of this SEN Reform Agenda. Cross Departmental collaboration is key, particularly with the Departments of Health, Economy, Communities and Justice (DoH, DfE, DfC and DoJ), to ensure access to the appropriate data to inform planning of the schools' estate, address workforce requirements and enhance support and interventions, as well as ensuring clear pathways of opportunity to move into adulthood, further training, education or employment for school leavers with SEN at post-16 and post-18/19.

<sup>2</sup> - The term parents refers to parents and caregivers

## Evidence Informed

Quality provision for children with SEN must be **underpinned by up-to-date, evidence-informed practice** and shaped by research on what works. The SEN Reform Agenda will draw on a wealth of expertise to shape delivery models that are based on up-to-date evidence of effective practice. It will ensure that provision is continuously evaluated to keep up with emerging evidence. DE will advance **data development** so that additional **data and research** can be used to facilitate delivery and monitor progress towards clear, agreed outcomes.

## Monitoring, Evaluation & Quality Assurance

Embedding a culture of monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance will be woven through all aspects of the Reform Agenda through the development of an outcomes framework that will identify key indicators against which progress will be monitored regarding the **'Right Support, from the Right People, at the Right Time and in the Right Place'**. This is important in demonstrating **tangible improvements that will benefit our children, parents, schools and the wider system**. An outcomes framework will be developed in collaboration with delivery partners by Spring 2025.

It is important also that **parents** are assured that their children's education provision meets their needs. **The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will be key in providing assurance to DE on the quality of SEN services across the continuum of provision.**

An **independent evaluation of the Delivery Plan** will be commissioned and will report at key milestones throughout the implementation. An **Annual Progress Report** will also be produced by DE.

### What does Success Look Like?

	<b>Children and Young People</b>	Our Children with SEN enjoy the benefits of inclusion and have the same opportunities as their peers without SEN
	<b>Parents and Carers</b>	Parents and Carers are assured and confident in the SEN Processes & Delivery Approach
	<b>Staff and Schools</b>	Staff and Schools are confident in and capable of meeting needs
	<b>Services</b>	Child and young person centred, high quality, timely, effective and efficient

Our vision is that “children and young people with SEN get the right support, from the right people, at the right time and in the right place”, thus enabling them to be happy, learning and succeeding (in line with the department’s corporate vision for EVERY Child).

### Success, in practice will look like:

	<b>Right Support</b>	High quality, efficient and effective support that is evidence-based
	<b>Right People</b>	Having confident and highly skilled teaching and support staff who can access additional support to complement and enhance their practice
	<b>Right Time</b>	Effective early identification of needs and early intervention to meet those needs
	<b>Right Place</b>	Appropriate and timely placements that effectively meet the needs of every child and provide an appropriate learning environment

## EARLY and PRIORITY YEAR ONE ACTIONS

Delivery on this Reform Agenda will require sustained funding; however, change cannot wait. Some actions are already underway or due to begin imminently, others are subject to the outcome of a bid to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Transformation Fund – these are outlined in the table, below.

Early Actions	
Immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task and finish group to examine nomenclature around SEN</li> <li>• Digitisation of the statutory assessment and review process</li> <li>• Streamlining of statutory assessment and review process to meet statutory timeframes which will facilitate ensuring timely confirmation of school placements</li> <li>• Strategic Area Planning for special education provision across the continuum of provision, based on projected need, ensuring full pathways across all key stages and a SEN-first approach to operational plans (OP) – OP2 2024-26 has been published with a SEN-First approach</li> <li>• Resource pre-school education settings to support children undergoing statutory assessment</li> <li>• Publication and implementation of a child-centred Graduated Response Framework</li> <li>• Implementation of child-centred Local IMPACT Teams</li> <li>• Review of quality and appropriateness of specialist provision in mainstream schools including evaluation of Specialist Provision Early Years Foundation classes</li> </ul>
Subject to funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transform the support model for children with a statement of SEN</li> <li>• Establish and deliver a pilot early childhood intervention programme</li> <li>• Trial and implementation of a Speech, Language &amp; Communication Programme including the introduction of Toolkits (with IT &amp; AI interventions)</li> <li>• Trial and implementation of an Inclusive Play Programme approach to provide wrap-around services including enhanced therapeutic services</li> <li>• Trial and implementation of a 'Nurture Plus' approach to provide wrap-around services including enhanced therapeutic services</li> <li>• Design and trial a 'Resource Hub' model which harnesses the expertise within Special Schools and develops their role to support inclusion across the wider school system</li> <li>• Research, design and trial of Inclusion methodologies to promote equitable inclusive learning experiences</li> </ul>



**RIGHT SUPPORT: High quality, efficient and effective support that is evidence-based.** The following sets out actions that enhance in-school support and resources to empower teachers and support staff to implement child-centred, effective, evidence-based interventions. This includes providing greater flexibility to schools to respond in an agile way to the needs of their pupils.

Theme	Right Support Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Support Inclusion	<p><b>Developing a longer-term plan to support Inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Publication &amp; Implementation of an Inclusive System Development Programme</b></li> <li>• <b>Develop &amp; test a series of priority actions/methodologies</b> as a foundation towards inclusion for children &amp; young people</li> <li>• Develop guidance for the creation of SEN-friendly environments, both physical and learning environments – informed by professionals across Education and Health</li> <li>• Trial &amp; Roll Out of Inclusive Education actions/methodologies in line with the Inclusive System Development Programme</li> </ul>	DE/ ETI / DoH / PHA	[Dark blue bar spanning Years 1-5]				
Child Centred Graduated Response Framework	<p><b>Publication &amp; Implementation of a child-centred Graduated Response Framework</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication of a child-centred Graduated Response Framework</li> <li>• Design of accompanying support resources</li> <li>• Professional Development Programme (Staff, Resources, Quality Assurance)</li> <li>• Roll out of Framework and supporting materials</li> </ul>	DE/EA/CCEA/ DoH/PHA /CnaG	[Dark blue bar spanning Years 1-5]				
Early Intervention	<p><b>Building a coherent &amp; targeted approach to Early Intervention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of special educational provision through a continuous and systematic cycle of identification, planning, taking action, monitoring, evaluation and review</li> <li>• Enhancement of in-school expertise and resource to enable schools to meet the needs of children with SEN in the classroom, reducing reliance on external support services</li> <li>• Pilot model to resource schools / education settings to support children with SEN at stage 1 through access to in-house expertise / learning support teachers and support staff / emotional / wellbeing support including nurture provision / access to creative and animal therapies</li> <li>• Enhance and further develop whole-school training on supporting children with different types of SEN;</li> <li>• Develop / consolidate evidence-based resources and guidance with input from Healthcare Professionals (e.g. Allied Health Professionals (AHPs), registered nurses, medical teams)</li> <li>• Pilot enhanced model of Educational Psychology direct early intervention support</li> </ul>	DE/ Education Settings/EA (Local Impact Teams)/ DoH/PHA/ VCSE / ++	[Dark blue bar spanning Years 1-5]				

**SEN REFORM AGENDA - DELIVERY PLAN 2025 - 2030**

Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Theme	Right Support Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
<p><b>Local IMPACT Teams</b></p>	<p><b>Implementation of child-centred Local IMPACT Teams</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of a model of child-centred specialist support services which meet the holistic needs of the child before a statement of SEN may be required</li> <li>• Qualified and experienced specialists working together as a single support team</li> <li>• Build on the expertise of staff through the introduction of a professional learning and qualification framework</li> <li>• Early years support will be accessible to all pre-school education providers</li> <li>• Develop, where appropriate, bespoke services to support children in Irish-medium education</li> <li>• Introduce outcomes-based performance measures in relation to outcomes for children</li> <li>• Working with Health &amp; Social Care services, Local IMPACT Teams should be further developed to be multidisciplinary with support available from a range of relevant disciplines including teachers / early years practitioners with expertise in supporting children with SEN, educational psychologists, autism specialists, behaviour specialists, mental health support services and range of therapeutic interventions including SLT, OT, Physiotherapy, nursing, medical teams, play therapy and other creative therapies</li> <li>• Trial and testing of digital support programmes and technologies including Artificial Intelligence methodologies and ensuring that all staff are trained in their use</li> </ul>	<p>DE/EA/DoH/PHA/ MCA / CnaG</p>					
<p><b>Statutory Assessment and Annual Review process &amp; support model</b></p>	<p><b>Resetting the statutory assessment and annual review process &amp; support model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamlining and digitisation of the statutory assessment and review process</li> <li>• Rigorous application of the child-centred Graduated Response Framework</li> <li>• Scope out options for consideration of prioritisation of requests for statutory assessment</li> <li>• Equitable referral pathways for all pre-school education providers</li> <li>• Monitor and ensure appropriate and timely application and cognisance of supporting information e.g. from Health &amp; Social Care professionals &amp; Educational Psychologists in line with legislation</li> <li>• Rigorous application and evidence monitoring of Annual Review process to meet need and support the child's progression</li> <li>• Appropriate appeals process</li> <li>• Efficient data capture and insight, sharing, monitoring and analysis</li> </ul>	<p>DE/EA/ Schools/Advocacy Organisations/DoJ/ DoH/PHA/</p>					

**SEN REFORM AGENDA - DELIVERY PLAN 2025 - 2030**

Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Theme	Right Support Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Statutory Assessment and Annual Review process & support model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High quality communication &amp; engagement with parents/families &amp; schools employing 360° feedback</li> <li>EA to review time allocation model for access to Educational Psychology support and assess impact on children with SEN / unmet need</li> </ul> <p><b>Transforming the support model for children with a statement of SEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transformation of the support model from one traditionally and predominantly based on almost universal one-to-one support to an evidence-based, whole-school and child-centred model of delivery support that includes greater flexibility for schools in how professional support is provided</li> <li>DE to produce a framework of support models and communicate this to schools and stakeholders</li> <li>Trial &amp; roll out of Inclusive Education Provisions in line with the Inclusive System Development Programme</li> </ul>	DE/EA/ Schools/Advocacy Organisations/DoJ/ DoH/PHA					
Curriculum	<p><b>Supporting access to the Northern Ireland Curriculum for children with SEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate review of curriculum design &amp; delivery for learners with SEN informed by Curriculum Review</li> <li>Utilise expertise from support organisations to produce a series of frameworks for accessing the curriculum including but not exclusive to for visually impaired children, deaf children, neurodivergent and neurodiverse children</li> <li>Roll out of Implementation of curriculum review recommendations specific to children with SEN</li> <li>Trial &amp; roll out a framework of pilots for Alternative Learning Methods</li> </ul>	DE/CCEA/ETI/RNIB/ Middletown/RNID/++					
Whole of Community Support	<p><b>Design and trial outside of school hours and term time enabling support programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trial and Implementation of a Whole of Community Support Enabling Programme outside of school hours and term time</li> <li>Optimise partnership working with community &amp; voluntary sector: map services already available; identify opportunities for expansion / collaboration – parenting support / training / summer provision / sports &amp; activities / creative &amp; animal therapies</li> <li>Collaborate with the Departments of Health, Economy, Communities and Justice to share appropriate data to inform planning and provision of services as well as ensuring clear pathways for further training, education or employment at post-16 and post-19</li> </ul>	DE/EA/Health/Local Government/ Voluntary & Community					



**RIGHT PEOPLE:** having confident and highly skilled teaching and support staff who can access additional support to complement and enhance their practice. The following sets out actions demonstrating a commitment to investing in the educational workforce. This will ensure a supported, valued and highly skilled workforce, equipped and empowered to build supportive learning environments for pupils with SEN. Health and Education will work collaboratively to ensure children who need it can access appropriate support from the relevant services including but not exclusive to Allied Health Professionals, regardless of their education setting.

Theme	Right People Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Workforce Strategy	<p><b>Publication &amp; Implementation of an Inclusive child-centred Integrated Workforce Planning Framework</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a child-centred Inclusive Integrated Workforce Planning Framework</li> <li>• Options will explore retention &amp; recruitment of Integrated Staff Teams, University Courses, Placements, Skills Academies, Apprenticeships etc</li> <li>• Options will explore creation of professional advisor roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Design of accompanying resources</li> <li>• Establishment of a strategic training programme</li> <li>• Develop a framework of professional learning in SEN for early years practitioners, teaching and support staff</li> <li>• Introduce mandatory accredited basic level of training in SEN for all education settings and quality assured specialised training in line with a changing pupil profile</li> <li>• Roll out of Framework and Supporting Materials</li> <li>• Increase Educational Psychology workforce</li> <li>• Create specific and protected education posts for allied health expertise (SLT/OT)</li> </ul>	DE/EA (Local Impact Teams)/CCMS/CnaG/DoH/DfE/HEIs/FECs/ETI/Schools/Middletown/V&C sector					
Enhancing the role of Middletown Centre for Autism	<p><b>Expanding the reach of the Middletown Centre for Autism in developing neuro-affirming practice across the system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Middletown Centre for Autism including research role, delivery functions and Inclusive Education</li> <li>• Roll out Implementation of Middletown review recommendations</li> <li>• Trial &amp; Roll Out Inclusive Education Provisions in line with the Inclusive System Development Programme</li> </ul>	DE/Middletown Centre for Autism /EA (Local Impact Teams)					

**SEN REFORM AGENDA - DELIVERY PLAN 2025 - 2030**

Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Theme	Right People Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Supporting Inclusion	<p><b>Design and trial an Inclusive child-centred Inclusion Capacity Building Programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research, design &amp; trial of Inclusion methodologies to promote equitable inclusive learning experiences</li> <li>• Development &amp; design of inclusion resources including a Digital Academy for the whole workforce</li> <li>• Development &amp; design of a coaching &amp; mentoring Inclusion Programme for the whole workforce, governing bodies and parent bodies</li> <li>• Development &amp; design of a coaching &amp; mentoring Inclusion Programme for local government and community &amp; voluntary sectors</li> </ul>	DE/EA (Local Impact Teams)/Middletown/ETI/HEIs/DoH/PHA					
Investing in Special Schools as Resource Hubs	<p><b>Design and trial a 'Resource Hub' model which harnesses the expertise within Special Schools and develops their role to support inclusion across the wider school system. (see also under Right Place)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and implementation of a Train the Trainers Programme for staff in Special Schools to develop their role as training providers</li> <li>• Trial the expansion and enhancement of outreach models in Special Schools</li> <li>• Trial the expansion of good practice in initiatives developed in Special Schools</li> </ul>	DE/Special Schools					
Investing in Classroom Assistants	<p><b>Investment in Classroom Assistants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design &amp; implementation of a new Classroom Assistant employment model</li> <li>• Design &amp; implementation of a fit for purpose SEN/Inclusion Classroom Assistant qualification</li> <li>• Design &amp; implementation of a Classroom Assistant career pathway programme</li> <li>• Design &amp; implementation of a framework of continuing professional development (CPD)</li> <li>• Design &amp; implementation of a Resource Portal for classroom assistants</li> <li>• Design &amp; implementation of a Train the Trainer Programme for Classroom Assistants to support/train other educational and community/voluntary settings</li> <li>• Create an area based network for Classroom Assistants for peer learning and support</li> </ul>	DE/EA/DoH/Middletown Centre for Autism/HEIs/FECs/ETI					

**SEN REFORM AGENDA - DELIVERY PLAN 2025 - 2030**

Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Theme	Right People Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Investing in Front-line Staff	<p><b>Investment in Teachers (including pre-school leaders)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define &amp; implementation of the minimum SEN/Inclusion subject content requirements for Initial Teacher Education courses (both PGCE and B.Ed)</li> <li>Define &amp; implementation of Early Professional Development (EPD) training for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT) offer to facilitate regular training in relation to SEN, disabilities and broader inclusive practice</li> <li>Design &amp; implementation of a Professional Learning Programme for teaching staff</li> <li>Design &amp; implementation of a Leadership Programme for SEN Learning Support Coordinators/ SENCos</li> <li>Design &amp; implementation of a Resource Portal for Teachers</li> <li>Design &amp; implementation of a universal SEN Training Programme targeted at all front-line staff</li> </ul>	DE/EA (Local Impact Teams)/sectoral bodies/Middletown Centre for Autism/HEIs/DoH/PHA					
Investing in Healthcare Professionals	<p><b>Investment in Healthcare Professionals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design &amp; implementation of a Health/Education professional training programme (including monitoring and administration of medication plans and supporting pupils with complex healthcare / acute behavioural profiles)</li> <li>Design &amp; implementation of an Educational Healthcare Assistant Career Pathway via the Special School Resource Hub Model</li> <li>Increase of undergraduate places for Allied Health Professionals and establishment of protected education posts</li> <li>Support for broader therapeutic post graduate places for Allied Health Professionals e.g. art/ music/ drama</li> <li>Trial and implementation of joint commissioning of appropriate Education/ Health professional posts</li> <li>Development of model of Healthcare Professional support which supports children in pre-school / school and provides support at whole school and individual child level. Consider an extension of the RISE NI model integrated with the EA Local IMPACT Teams (subject to analysis of current service provision) and the creation of specific education Allied Health Professional posts</li> </ul>	DE/EA/DoH/PHA/HEIs					



**RIGHT TIME: effective early identification of needs and early intervention to meet those needs.** The following sets out actions that facilitate the system’s ability to identify needs early and respond effectively at the earliest opportunity. Critical to this is the collection and sharing of data to plan and design an effective education system to meet children’s needs. A range of Early Intervention programmes will be developed, involving Education and Health professionals, which will ensure timely access to child-centred effective intervention.

Theme	Right Time Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Early Identification Digital Dashboard	<p><b>Design and implement bespoke data dashboard for children with SEN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and implement a bespoke integrated data dashboard for children &amp; young people with SEN                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Year 1 Scoping Study Commissioned</li> <li>Year 2 Design</li> <li>Year 3 Roll Out</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	DE/EA/DoH/PHA	■	■	■		
Focus on the Early Years	<p><b>Establish and deliver pilot early childhood intervention programmes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement programme for parents of children with SEN age 0-4</li> <li>In partnership with Health, develop, trial and implement a targeted programme for 2–3-year-olds with emerging needs that will include support for parents and families</li> <li>Trial and implementation of an Early Intervention and Assessment Centre approach for children aged 3-6 years which provides quality early education alongside Healthcare Professional support</li> <li>Trial and implementation of in-school support, including Healthcare Professionals to children in pre-school and foundation stage</li> <li>Trial and implementation of support models pilot in pre-school education settings including testing the introduction of SEN classroom assistants</li> <li>Trial and Implementation of an Inclusive Play Programme approach to provide wrap-around services including enhanced therapeutic services</li> <li>Address inequalities between statutory and non-statutory pre-school providers’ access to EPS and SEN support services.</li> <li>Resource pre-school education settings to support children undergoing statutory assessment</li> </ul>	DE/EA/DoH/PHA/ Playboard / CnaG	■				

Theme	Right Time Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Speech, Language & Communication	<p><b>Establish and deliver a pilot speech, language &amp; communications intervention toolkit &amp; programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial and Implementation of a speech, language &amp; communications programme including the introduction of Toolkits (with IT &amp; AI interventions)</li> <li>• Trial and Implementation of a Targeted Early Intervention Speech, Language &amp; Communication Programme for emerging needs</li> <li>• Delivery of public messaging campaign</li> </ul>	DE/EA (Local Impact Teams)/DoH/PHA / CnaG	[Activity Bar]					
Early Intervention Nurture Programme	<p><b>Early Intervention Programme - Enhanced Nurture Programme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trial and Implementation of a 'Nurture Plus' approach to provide wrap-around services including enhanced therapeutic services</li> </ul>	DE/EA/CnaG/DoH	[Activity Bar]					
Transitional Support Programme	<p><b>Transitional Support Programme at various stages of learner's journey</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of a transitional support programme at various stages of each child/young person's educational journey</li> <li>• Introduce agreed data sharing arrangements between Education, Health and Economy</li> <li>• Introduce child development 'passport' to include progress on milestones, interventions and learning profile, reasonable adjustments and equipment / support needs</li> <li>• Work with Health, Economy and Communities to develop appropriate pathways into adulthood for school leavers with SEN</li> </ul>	DE/EA/DoH/PHA/ DfE/DfC		[Activity Bar]				



**RIGHT PLACE: appropriate and timely placements that effectively meet the needs of the child and provide an appropriate learning environment.**

The following sets out actions demonstrating a commitment to ensure that all children receive a timely placement, are educated in a learning environment which is appropriate to their needs and within their locality to maintain a sense of community inclusion, that there is sufficient capacity across the education system and that all pupils have access to learning environments that are inclusive.

Theme	Right Place Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Role of Special Schools	<p><b>Addressing specific challenges within Special Schools and enhancing their role within local communities to support inclusion within a Northern Ireland context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish an Educational Learning Environments Framework that includes the role of and vision for all educational settings within the continuum of special education provision</li> </ul> <p><b>Trial &amp; Implementation of Special Schools as Resource Hubs / Centres of Expertise to support inclusion (see also under Right People)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link with universities to support research and evidence-based practice development</li> <li>• District-based outreach support teams to Mainstream Schools</li> <li>• Assessment Centres for identification of needs (links with Early Intervention centres)</li> <li>• Transitions post-16 and post-19 – exploring potential for post school apprenticeships within schools</li> <li>• Community outreach support service to Local Government, Community &amp; Voluntary Sector</li> <li>• Alternative Learning Methods Advice (IT &amp; AI)</li> </ul>	DE/EA/DoH/DfE/ HEIs/ Special Schools					
Timely Confirmation of School Placements	<p><b>Timely confirmation of school placements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish formal data sharing arrangements between Health and Education to inform planning for pre-school provision and placements</li> <li>• Ensure that the appropriate information on the continuum of special education provision options is available to parents to inform preference and nomination of school placement choices</li> <li>• Streamlining of statutory assessment and review process to meet statutory timeframes which will facilitate ensuring timely confirmation of school placements</li> <li>• Ensure robust Annual Review process which facilitates changes of placement appropriately and in a timely way</li> </ul>	DE/EA					

**SEN REFORM AGENDA - DELIVERY PLAN 2025 - 2030**

Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

Theme	Right Place Actions	Delivery Partners	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Timely Confirmation of School Placements	<p><b>Timely confirmation of school placements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of quality and appropriateness of specialist provision in mainstream schools including evaluation of Specialist Provision Early Years Foundation classes</li> <li>Scope suitable education offer for development of post-16 specialist provision in mainstream schools</li> </ul>	DE/EA/ETI	[Redacted]				
Area Planning	<p><b>Improving the approach to planning for a changing pupil profile.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Area Planning for special education provision across the continuum of provision, based on projected need, ensuring full pathways across all key stages and a SEN-first approach to operational plans</li> <li>Provide sufficient flex across the system to ensure that no child with a statement of SEN remains without an appropriate place</li> <li>Scope a move to full-time special school nursery provision in line with standardisation of Pre-school Education Programme</li> <li>Plan for post-16 specialist provision in mainstream schools</li> <li>Streamline Development Proposal requirements for special education provision</li> <li>Commence a phased approach to the removal of 'supernumerary' status of children with a statement of SEN</li> </ul>	DE/EA/DfE/CCMS	[Redacted]				
Capital Investment	<p><b>Capital Investment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of SEN Capital Investment Programme – to provide a strategic and proactive approach to capital planning as well as significant and sustained investment in appropriate facilities and equipment</li> <li>Publication of SEN Capital Investment Programme</li> <li>Explore social value in procurement of capital projects to include adults with SEN</li> <li>Develop guidance for Inclusive Design in Education, co-produced with Allied Health Professionals</li> <li>Inclusive Design Audit of all School Buildings &amp; Youth Provisions</li> <li>Inclusive Design Audit for all School Playgrounds</li> <li>Delivery of Inclusive Play Programme</li> <li>Articulate and evaluate, through a multi-faceted approach, the continuum of provision for all children with SEN and in particular, the quality of education across that continuum</li> <li>Explore Strule programme as model of best practice for inclusion</li> </ul>	DE/EA/Playboard/DoH/PHA	[Redacted]				

## Next Steps

**Delivery of this plan will require phased implementation, with appropriate governance and delivery structures in place and significant financial investment. Throughout the lifetime of the plan we will hold a ‘Big Conversation’ with children and young people, parents, schools, early years settings, the community and voluntary sector and youth organisations to maintain open channels of communication on delivery, to assist with the co-design of some individual actions and ensure that prioritisation of the plan is authentic.**

## Governance and Accountability

Appropriate governance structures and arrangements will be established, led by a Senior Officer within the Department of Education and reporting directly to the Minister to ensure that there is a clear focus on delivery of the Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan. Delivery partners including other Executive Departments and their ALBs and sectoral support bodies will be represented as appropriate.

A **Governance Framework** will be implemented (and applied to all delivery agents) encouraging transformational service delivery, financial sustainability and improved accountability with the following high-level principles:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement with the child and young person at the centre
- Determining the actions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Developing capacity, including the capability to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Managing risks and performance through internal control and strong public financial management
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

Sitting alongside these governance arrangements will be fora to ensure that the voices of those with lived experience are heard throughout the delivery of the Reform Agenda and the Big Conversation referred to above will be central to this. Practitioner and expert advisory input will also be features of the implementation phase to ensure that delivery maintains integrity with the theory of change outlined within the SEN Reform Agenda and that practice is evidence-informed.

**A SEN Reform Delivery unit will be established within the Department of Education to lead implementation.** This will be established and informed through best practice **Public Policy Implementation Science**, creating an integrated set of skills that will facilitate delivery as well as being a bridge between evidence/research, monitoring and evaluation, engagement, financial management governance and service providers to improve outcomes for children and young people. **Public Policy Implementation Science is well-suited to transformational reform in that it focuses on the best delivery agent implementing the actions to optimise outcomes for children and young people.**

Building a high-quality, sustainable model of provision for the future is critical to improving outcomes for our children and young people. We will ensure through the SEN Reform Agenda that financial investment is clearly **linked to measurable outcomes**. This will also mean being rigorous in assessing current arrangements to ensure that they are **truly maximised to benefit our children and young people**.

Whilst some actions contained within this Delivery Plan can proceed without additional funding, full implementation will require significant investment. The high-level estimated cost of delivery is £570m over a five-year period. Expenditure on SEN has increased 145%, from £254m in 2017/18 to an estimated £622m in 2024/25. This represents just over one fifth of the total DE final opening resource budget of £2.87bn for 2024/25. An analysis of the current SEN financial model has identified opportunities to re-structure existing resource towards more effective interventions and support, creating enhanced return on investment as well as opportunities for better outcomes for children and young people with SEN.

## **SEN REFORM AGENDA - DELIVERY PLAN 2025 - 2030**

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There are also opportunities to draw in additional investment. A bid has been made to the Interim NICS Transformation Board (at the time of writing the outcome of the bid is awaited) which if successful will enable us to commence the phased implementation of this long-term inclusive SEN Reform Agenda. We will also seek opportunities within Education and with other identified partners in Health and Economy, the voluntary & community and private sectors to jointly fund actions facilitating not only value for money, but a collaborative and child-centred approach to investment.

Costings will be finessed in detailed implementation plans and in collaboration with key delivery partners.

These arrangements will be critical to ensuring that investment and delivery is:

- targeted to meeting the needs of the children and young people with SEN; and
- responsive to ensure that an ethos of continuous improvement is inbuilt through the programme to refine and quality assure our approach to SEN provision.



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