

SEND Reform Update

Timeline of SEND Reforms

- Every Child Achieving and Thriving White Paper, was released on **23 February 2026**. It sets out the UK Government's plans for reforms to schools and the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) system in England.
- On **9 March 2026**, Department for Education commissioned all councils to produce a SEND Reform plan which had to include:
 - Current system baseline
 - Maturity assessment
 - Reform priorities
 - Strategy and delivery model
 - Governance and accountability
 - Monitoring and success measures
- On **5 June 2026** DfE released hugely delayed guidance on Experts at Hand, the centre piece of Year 1 reforms – DfE therefore made clear that all plans nationally would likely require more work in the future
- Deadline for submitting the plan was **19 June 2026**
- KCC received much awaited SEND Ofsted inspection call on **22 June 2026**
- Report to CYPE Cabinet Committee in **July 2026** providing detail on the SEND Reform Plan
- First Experts at Hand specific engagement event for Key partners took place on **1 October 2026**

Timeline of Ofsted

- KCC received SEND Ofsted inspection call on **22 June 2026**
- Inspection took place over three weeks between **22 June 2026** and **10 July 2026**
- Outcome report released publicly on **18 September 2026**
- The SEND Local Area received the middle outcome - 'The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and that the partnership must work jointly to make improvements'.
- Of 35 inspections under this framework, three local areas have received a 1, twenty eight received a 2 and four received a 3
- This outcome means that the Local Area will be revisited in three years' time
- Local Area is required to publish a **Local Area Plan (LAP)** within 50 days of the report going public – for Kent this will be **20 November 2026**
- All Local Area Key partners are currently finalising proposed plans
- LAP to be considered at November CYPE Cabinet Committee

Current position

- On **2 October 2026** KCC received confirmation that its first draft SEND Reform plan had sufficient clarity to allow High Needs funding deficit payment to be released
- As per previous DfE advice, all successful councils were provided a list of areas within the plans that need to be strengthened before they are considered complete
- Current plans lack detail around how Experts at Hand will be delivered
- DfE have not yet indicated how and when councils are expected to share updated plans
- SEND Reform plan is scheduled to be discussed at January CYPE Cabinet Committee

Finance – How are SEN Services Funded?

- KCC & Schools are expected to spend around **c£850m** on SEND services in 2026-27, along with a High Needs Capital Budget of £125m (funded from a DfE specific grant)

Council – High Needs Block (Dedicated Schools Grant, DSG)	Council – Specific grants	Council – General Fund (Council tax & Other Sources)	Primary & Secondary Schools Budget & Inclusive Mainstream Fund
£205m State-funded Special Schools	£11m Expert at hands Offer	£73m SEND Transport	£222m Notional SEN Budget (Mainstream Schools)
£128m Independent Schools	£1m LA SEN Transformation	£11m SEND EHCP assessment, annual reviews & strategy	c£13m Mainstream Inclusion Fund
£85m Mainstream (including SRPs, individual children and CoS)	£1m Family Hub SEND Outreach	£6.5m Educational Psychology Services	
£34m Post 16	£2.5m Early Years Block DSG (SEN specific services & payments)		
£33m Alternative Provision (out of school support & Direct Payments & therapy)			
£19m Other SEND Support Services			
£4m Contingency			
Total = £508m	Total = £15.5m	Total = £90.5m	Total = £235m

- SEN services are funded from a mix of specific grants, council resources and school budgets
- The High Needs Block for 2026-27 is £379m, leading to overspend of £126m of which £17m has been covered from a transfer from primary & secondary school budgets, leaving £109m in-year overspend