

Mind the gap: New Government SEND White Paper is a welcome first step - but schools need to know how we get there.

Today, as the Government unveils its long-awaited SEND White Paper, education experts at Momenta Connect are calling for the Government to listen to responses to the white paper consultation and provide clear guidance.



London, United Kingdom Feb 23, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Today, as the Government unveils its long-awaited SEND White Paper, education experts at Momenta Connect are calling for the Government to listen to responses to the white paper consultation and provide clear guidance on how we will build this brave new vision for SEND.

The SEND system in England is considered "broken" by many, with rising Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) numbers, high costs, and significant pressures on local authority budgets. Last July, the Children's Commissioner for England Dame Rachel de Souza sounded the alarm on the proliferation of unregistered alternative provision that she claimed was forming a "shadow SEND system" in areas where mainstream and specialist services are unable to meet spiralling demand. Fast forward to today, and vulnerable children are still being educated in some of the least regulated environments, as pressure on the SEND system shows no signs of abating.

Momenta Connect provides tailored support at every stage, from early diagnostic and therapeutic intervention, to school attendance support and multi-disciplinary programmes that help children re-engage with learning. Momenta Connect has welcomed proposals designed to keep more children with additional needs in mainstream education. The Government's focus on earlier identification and

improved access to support, reducing reliance on EHCPs, is welcome.

The White Paper pledges to move away from a universal statutory approach to supporting children with SEND. Instead, a four-tier approach will be adopted. Most children will receive SEND support at Tier 1 (whole-class teaching), Tier 2 (school-led targeted support) or Tier 3 (specialist-led targeted support), with EHCPs becoming Tier 4 plans, which will only be issued to children with the most complex and special needs.

Every child assessed to have SEND will be allocated an Individual Support Plan, even where an EHCP is not granted. This is to ensure greater transparency of accountability and consistency of provision across mainstream schools. To complement these changes, the Government has promised an additional estimated £3.8–£4bn in funding for SEND provision over the next few years. This funding will be used to bolster mainstream SEND provision, as well as early intervention and specialist services. Ensuring this money reaches frontline schools as quickly and transparently as possible will be vital if these reforms are to have any meaningful impact. With £200m funding promised for SEND Teacher Training programme and more expected, these proposals are still ambitious for schools and will take time to deliver.

[Momenta Connect's](#) SEND specialist and clinical lead, Dr Kieran Lord, said:

“The vision set out by the Government today is exactly what the sector has been waiting for. Inclusion has got to be the ambition, but we must also be realistic about what it takes to get there.”

Schools are under unprecedented pressure as they try to manage rising levels of neurodiversity, mental health needs, attendance issues and workforce stress. Throw into the mix ambiguous policy proposals and trying to re-engage the high numbers of pupils and parents who have been let down and lost trust in the existing education system, it's a tall order. The rollout will need to be carefully managed, and how do we work to deliver SEND to the current cohort of children who are waiting for things to change?”

“The intention to reserve EHCPs for the most complex needs and to reassess plans at key transition points, such as the move from primary to secondary school, where needs can be effectively met without a statutory plan, represents a significant cultural shift. That will require clarity, workforce capacity and careful transition planning so families have confidence that support remains robust.”

“We need structured collaboration between mainstream and specialist settings, investment in early-intervention programmes, and better-defined routes for children to access specialist support without leaving their local school. As the SEND White Paper processes continue to roll out, we need to ask ourselves: where does the expertise exist to make this new approach a reality?”

With decades of experience in SEND, [Momenta Connect](#) partners with mainstream schools, families and local authorities to help children with SEND receive specialist support without having to leave their local area. Commenting on the White Paper, Emma Sanderson, Director at Outcomes First Group said:

“The proposals contained within the White Paper signal a clear recognition that our SEND system is in crisis. Whilst today's legislation outlines a welcome shift in approach, echoing calls from specialists for greater inclusion and early intervention, there is a real risk that without specialist provision playing a key role in delivery, these ambitions will become another policy that's difficult to decipher, let alone implement.”

“As leaders with national expertise in both mainstream and specialist SEND provision, we’re hearing time and time again from schools that they want to and are committed to, helping more children with SEND thrive in mainstream settings. But they can’t do it alone. Schools need a way to bridge the gap between mainstream and specialist expertise and need access to specialist support without pupils having to leave their local area.

“The move to a tiered SEND framework has the potential to provide much-needed clarity. However, Tier 2 and Tier 3 support will only succeed if schools have meaningful access to specialist expertise. The proposed national ‘Experts at Hand’ service is a welcome step, but implementation details and capacity planning will be critical. The expectation that secondary schools develop dedicated inclusion bases provides an opportunity to formalise that bridge between mainstream and specialist provision. Inclusion hubs should act as centres of expertise to bolster whole-school inclusive practice, rather than becoming siloed places.”

Following this period of consultation and prior to the White Paper becoming legislation, schools will have to bridge the gap between current practice and the proposed changes, while maintaining current standards for pupils.

[Momenta Connect](#) will be hosting a series of free, drop-in webinars following the publication of the White Paper to break down key policy changes and share practical strategies to support children with SEND in mainstream schools.

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