

SEND

WORKFORCE STATEMENT

A practitioner-led perspective on SEND reform

This statement reflects the views and experience of NASUWT members working across mainstream and specialist settings in England. It draws on direct engagement with teachers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and specialist practitioners and sets out a collective, experience-based perspective on the current special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system and the changes required to make it effective, sustainable and inclusive.

1. The system is under unsustainable pressure

NASUWT members consistently report that the SEND system is operating under significant and increasing strain. Across all settings, there are persistent gaps in staffing, specialist expertise, time, access to services and physical resources. As a result, provision is often reactive and dependent on the goodwill and personal commitment of staff.

These pressures are affecting relationships across the system. Members report that delays, inconsistency and a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities can create tension between schools, families and services, making collaborative working more difficult and placing additional strain on staff.

2. Workforce capacity is central to successful reform

Members describe a system characterised by unsustainable workload, insufficient protected time to plan and co-ordinate provision, and limited access to high-quality training and professional development. Expectations on schools and staff continue to grow without corresponding increases in capacity or clarity of role.

Recruitment and retention are significant challenges, driven by workload, accountability pressures and lack of support. Without addressing these underlying issues, reform will not be deliverable in practice.

3. Funding must be sufficient, consistent and aligned to need

Funding is a central concern for NASUWT members. There is a clear view that overall funding is insufficient to meet the current levels and complexity of need and that it is unevenly distributed, resulting in significant variation between local areas and settings. Further, it means that schools are often prevented from funding support for early intervention.

Members report that access to funding is often slow, bureaucratic and difficult to navigate. Their experience is that thresholds for support are frequently determined by available provision rather than by pupil need, and that the additional cost of meeting needs are drawn from the school's budget. There are further concerns about transparency and accountability, including whether funding for specialist support always reaches frontline provision and funding for health-run services, that are currently being paid for from education budgets.

These funding challenges are closely linked to workforce pressures, access to specialist support and the ability of schools to deliver inclusive practice. Without a funding model that is sufficient, transparent and aligned to need, wider reform will not succeed.

4. Policy and system design must be connected to classroom realities

NASUWT members consistently highlight a disconnect between national policy and the realities of classroom and school-level practice. Policy is often experienced as overly top-down, with insufficient recognition of the complexity of need and the conditions required to meet it effectively. They express serious concern about the lack of engagement with classroom teachers and SENCOs.

There is a lack of clarity in roles, responsibilities and expectations, alongside significant variation in access to support across different areas. This disconnect contributes to inconsistency, delay and frustration across the system.

5. Accountability, curriculum and assessment frameworks must be aligned with the SEND system

Current accountability, curriculum and assessment structures are widely seen as working against inclusive practice. Members report that the curriculum is often too rigid and not accessible to all learners, while assessment systems prioritise narrow measures of attainment and fail to recognise and value the progress of many children and young people with SEND.

Accountability frameworks, including inspection, create incentives that can discourage inclusive approaches. There is a clear need to align curriculum, assessment and accountability with the realities of SEND and the goal of inclusive education.

6. Genuine inclusion must be understood as belonging

NASUWT members are clear that inclusion is about more than which setting a child attends. Meaningful inclusion requires appropriate staffing, expertise, resources and environments that enable participation and help to ensure that the child is able to thrive and feel that they belong. This applies in mainstream schools, including special and alternative settings. There must be no 'inclusion on the cheap'.

Inclusion must also involve recognition of individual needs and identities and the creation of a genuine sense of belonging for children and young people.

7. All parts of the system should connect and work together coherently

Effective SEND provision depends on co-ordinated support across education, health and care. However, members report a system that is fragmented, with reduced access to local authority and specialist services, silo working between agencies and inconsistent support.

Delays, gaps in provision and poor transitions between phases and settings are common. A more coherent and integrated system is essential to delivering consistent and effective support.

8. The EHCP system requires reform, not erosion

NASUWT members express significant concern about the current operation of the EHCP system. There is widespread inconsistency in thresholds and processes, alongside administrative burden, delay and lack of clarity.

There are also concerns about risks to statutory protections. Members are clear that reform should focus on improving clarity, consistency and access, rather than weakening entitlements.

9. A whole-system approach to reform is required

SEND cannot be addressed in isolation. NASUWT members emphasise the need for a coherent, system-wide approach that aligns early years, schools, post-16 provision and adult pathways.

This must include effective integration between education, health and care, consistent processes and expectations, and clear national direction, alongside appropriate local flexibility.

10. Reform must be grounded in professional expertise

A consistent message from NASUWT members is that the voice of the profession, including class teachers and SENCOs, must be central to SEND reform. Teachers, SENCOs and specialist practitioners bring essential expertise and insight into what works in practice.

NASUWT members are calling for greater recognition of professional judgement, meaningful involvement in policy development and a move towards genuine co-production with those responsible for delivering the system.

Conclusion

NASUWT members are clear that the SEND system is not failing due to a lack of commitment at the frontline, but because of misalignment between policy design, resources, accountability and real-world need.

There is a strong willingness across the workforce to support genuine reform. However, this will only be achievable if changes are properly resourced, grounded in practice, aligned across the system and developed in partnership with the profession.

About Us

NASUWT is The Teachers' Union and is the voice of the teaching profession.

Our aim is to improve and protect the status, morale and working conditions of the teaching profession so that teachers and headteachers can provide the best education and support to children and young people.

We are committed to ensuring that teachers and headteachers are recognised and rewarded as highly skilled professionals, with working conditions that enable them to focus on their core role of leading teaching and learning.

NASUWT is proud to be led by teachers for teachers. Our democratic structures ensure that we are the voice of the profession and our decisions are rooted in the concerns of our members.

Our members are teachers and headteachers working in schools, early years settings and post-16 colleges.