

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Solving the SEND Crisis](#), HC 492

Tuesday 10 June 2025

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 10 June 2025.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Helen Hayes (Chair); Mrs Sureena Brackenridge; Amanda Martin; Darren Paffey; Manuela Perteghella; Mark Sewards; Caroline Voaden.

Questions 194 -229

Witnesses

I: Dr Susana Castro-Kemp, Associate Professor in Psychology and Special Needs at the Centre for Inclusive Education in the Department of Psychology and Human Development, UCL Faculty of Education and Society (IOE); Dr Peter Gray, Co-coordinator of the National SEN Policy Research Forum, SSCYP (Strategy Services for Children & Young People); and Jo Hutchinson, Director for SEND and additional needs, Education Policy Institute.

II: Daniel Constable-Phelps, Executive Headteacher, St Mary's Primary and Nursery School; Conrad Bourne, Director for SEND, The Mercian Trust; and Nicole Dempsey, Director of SEND and Safeguarding, Dixons Academies Trust.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Susana Castro-Kemp, Dr Peter Gray and Jo Hutchinson.

Q194 **Chair:** We now begin our public proceedings of the Education Select Committee. Our evidence session this morning is the penultimate session in our inquiry on solving the SEND crisis. I welcome members and our witnesses. I invite our witnesses to introduce yourselves and to make any declarations of interest that you need to make, starting with Jo Hutchinson.

Jo Hutchinson: Good morning. I am Jo Hutchinson. I am Director for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities at the Education Policy Institute. I don't have any interests to declare.

Dr Castro-Kemp: Good morning. My name is Susana Castro-Kemp, Associate Professor in Psychology at University College London, Director of the Centre for Inclusive Education at University College London and psychologist by training. I am currently leading a research project



HOUSE OF COMMONS

comparing SEND policy and provision across a number of jurisdictions. I have no interests to declare.

Dr Gray: Hello. I am Peter Gray, I am Co-coordinator of the National Special Needs Policy Research Forum. I have worked for over 25 years as a consultant to local and national government on special needs policy and provision issues. I have got no interests to declare.

Q195 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I will begin our questioning this morning. We understand that the Government's goal is to have a mainstream education system that is inclusive for children and young people with SEND. In brief, how inclusive is mainstream education in England currently?

Dr Castro-Kemp: I will start by saying that my responses are informed by the research available. My current research highlights three main things as the main barriers for inclusivity in England. The first one is the current eligibility system and the thresholds for support. The second one is the lack of effective and comprehensive early childhood intervention systems and services. The third one is the lack of preparedness of the workforce. I can elaborate on these briefly.

There is a general understanding in the scientific literature that inclusivity is more than mainstream placement. It is about having a sense of belonging, feeling included in the school community. The current system in England does not promote eligibility for support services based on a thorough assessment of everyday life functions and needs. It follows that those needs are not fully met and, therefore, we are not promoting a sense of belonging.

We are learning from ScopeSEND project, which is the project where we are comparing jurisdictions on this issue, that in jurisdictions where a comprehensive early childhood intervention system is in place, there is also often a needs-based assessment in place because that is what happened in early childhood intervention. This then follows on to other phases of education quite nicely. This is the case in Finland but also other jurisdictions that we looked at, such as parts of Switzerland, and we know that other jurisdictions, like Ireland for example, are moving in this direction.

To overcome these barriers, based on what we see in other jurisdictions, we would have to have a thorough needs-based identification system, which is based on identifying needs but also strengths, more effective and comprehensive early childhood intervention and workforce training that is aligned with these models, not just more training but a different sort of training.

Jo Hutchinson: My research is more focused on data-driven, quantitative analysis of how the system is working and outcomes for children. The first thing from my Nuffield-funded project on SEND identification is that if we look at inclusion through the lens of who gets



HOUSE OF COMMONS

recognised as having SEND and who does not, it is very clear that inclusion in that sense is very variable from school to school within the system. Nationally we can see that that is at such a pitch that there is a certain amount of chaos going on within the identification system. It is hard to imagine, with that being the case, that we are in a good place.

There is also wider evidence that colleagues at EPI and elsewhere have undertaken that shows that we are having problems with inclusion in mainstream school at the moment. That includes things like high and increasing numbers of children having unexplained school moves or exits from the school system, the fact that we have attendance problems in school that are driving wider disadvantage gaps in attainment currently. We are losing large numbers of days to things like unauthorised absences and suspension, and that is rising over time.

Dr Gray: In answer to your question, I see inclusive schools in most parts of the country, so some very good practice with schools that have a good quality special needs offer that parents are confident with. There is a range of others that are less so. We have examples of very good practice in the country but it feels like those schools are swimming against the tide. It feels like that is in spite of the national system rather than because of it. It is too dependent at the moment, in my view, on the attitudes and values of individual heads and school staff.

If we look at the data nationally, we have seen a significant increase in the displacement of pupils outside of the mainstream system, either to specialist alternative provision or to other forms of alternative provision, including elective home education and not being at school full time. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this over the last 10 years or so.

I am aware that some members of this Committee will be strong advocates of Michael Gove's education reforms in driving up school standards, but in the context we are talking about here, we need to consider how far those reforms have promoted higher achievement for all of our pupils. That may include relative progress for some rather than absolute progress and also how far they have promoted progress in other important areas like personal and social development and resilience, which our young people need for their future lives. It is a question about how far that has happened or whether really what has happened is improved attainment test results for the majority. One of my questions is: has the special needs population been part of the casualty of that drive in things getting worse for them rather than better?

On the way forward, there is a need for greater national direction on inclusiveness that all schools can see and have reference to, but it needs to be part of the broader vision for education. In this country we tend to have a vision that is relatively restricted to improving standards and attainment, whereas there are a lot more things about education that are



important, not just for children with special educational needs but more broadly.

Q196 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Many across the sector—a lot of the evidence that we have received in our inquiry—have been calling for national standards for SEND support in schools. Do you agree with that call, and how urgent is that question about the consistency and also accountability of SEND support in schools?

Dr Gray: I think that it is one of those ideas that are good in principle, but if we look at how we achieve that in practice it is more complicated. For example, if we have national standards, do we have national standards for different types of need or disability, for the deaf, for autistic children, for children with Down syndrome and other groups? Do we have different standards for different phases of education, like early years, school and post-16? If it is too complicated in national standards, there is a question about how that links to accountability. How do you know that schools are adhering to those standards? I suppose that there could be an argument that it is better to have broader and more overarching expectations rather than expectations at that level of detail.

You will probably be aware from other evidence that you have received of the move towards trying to define ordinarily available provision. This is the provision that schools should all have in mainstream—and I am sure that will come up in further discussion—but we are experiencing issues about how to define ordinarily available provision. Do we do this at the levels of need that children should be catered for within mainstream ordinarily? The problem with that is that if you look at autism and things that are more to do with personal and social issues, the definitions can be quite subjective. It is not like saying, “This child is at this reading level and this child is at that reading level”. Levels of need are a bit of an issue if we do it that way.

It could be done with the provision that we expect schools to have in place but we have a diversity of schools in our system, some very small schools, some rural schools, some very big schools. It is difficult with different income for schools to expect the same thing from everybody. That is an issue. The other way that the previous Government tried to do it is a graduated approach. It is very sensible that you need to have done this before moving on to that, but we are conscious that there are some young people who have very significant needs that can change rapidly, who can’t necessarily wait to go through that process and where we need greater responsiveness.

One of the things that I will refer to, if we get a chance to talk about it this morning, is a need to strengthen more professionally-based processes for defining this—having professionals undertaking more peer moderation, more peer challenge about what is reasonable for a mainstream school to do. It is very powerful, in my experience, that if you have a SENCO from one school listening to a SENCO from another school saying, “I can’t do this”, that they are in a position to say, “Well,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

we do it, why can't you, and this is how we do it". Those processes for defining ordinary available provision can be very effective.

Dr Castro-Kemp: I very much agree with Peter on this. Having a common understanding of what is meant by high-quality provision for all is important, but one caveat of just standardising practice nationally without having a clear strategy underneath it is that it might make us neglect specific local needs. Going back to the research that I mentioned that I am currently leading funded by the Nuffield Foundation, we see in Finland, for example, that there are broad quality standards for training, understanding the values of inclusive education and for multi-agency working and what that means, but then specific systems and processes to implement that are very much decided at the municipality level. They address local needs and they are different between municipalities, and we see that in other jurisdictions as well.

If we have written standards alone, it might not be effective but that is not to say that we should not have written standards. They should be accompanied by a very clear strategic and systemic approach to inclusion.

Jo Hutchinson: There are a small number of things that we could possibly benefit from standardising on a national level. It definitely includes our approach to behaviour that is linked to SEND. It would include things like the acknowledgement of needs in whatever form that takes place in the SEND system and having a broad definition of needs within that. It is things like responsibilities relating to reasonable adjustments for children.

I believe that ultimately the end state we should be aiming for should rely more on professional judgment, but we are starting from such a low base at the moment that we need to put some things in while we do the job of improving teacher knowledge of special needs and disabilities, while we do the job of improving the availability of specialists within schools and the resources that are needed for an inclusive system to work.

Q197 **Chair:** The reason we are interested in this topic is because it seems at the moment that accountability within the system is very much loaded on to the EHCP part of the process. In addition to calls for standardisation of guidance and policies around SEN support, there are also some who are calling for SEN support itself to be put on a statutory footing. Could you briefly give us your comments on that suggestion and anything in addition to that that you think the Government could be doing quickly that would boost the quality and availability of SEN support at that level, that sits across all schools and is not dependent on the EHCP part of the process?

Dr Gray: You will be aware of the Welsh system, which may have come up, that has tried to extend statutory safeguards further along the continuum. Susana will be better placed than me to comment on that. I



think it has had some advantages but also not gone necessarily in the direction that we might have hoped.

On statutory, I am not sure that increasing statutory safeguards is the right direction. If you end up with a large number of individual children who have a statutory focus, it reinforces a view that the answer to this is all around individual provision whereas we are learning from other countries and other research that we need to strengthen school provision and school responsibility and evaluate at that level rather than individually. Coming back to Jo's point, I think there are aspects of this that could be clearer for expectations but I support what Susana said about professional accountability rather than hierarchical accountability being the key in how we do that.

Dr Castro-Kemp: We did a very systematic review of stakeholders' experiences of the different systems in the different jurisdictions. We observed in England—and I am sure this is not new for you—that the introduction of the Children and Families Act in the education, health and care process was seen by many practitioners as a tick-box exercise. One of the risks of turning SEN support statutory is that it will be seen as another tick-box exercise and enhance the pressure in the service. That is not to say we should not do that but we need to be aware that that might be seen as a risk.

When we look at the evidence from other jurisdictions, Scotland, for example, has a tiered support system and not all tiers are statutory. The tiers at the level of school support are not statutory and, interestingly, Scotland and Finland were the only jurisdictions where we found evidence in the scientific literature of positive experiences of the system from stakeholders. This has limitations, obviously. In England we are very good at publishing and disseminating research and negative views will be more apparent. It is also relevant that there is not as much research from Finland but the set of research that we have illustrates the positive views of the system seen in Scotland.

Jo Hutchinson: I am also a bit wary of changing the statutory framework again as opposed to focusing on what are the fundamentals of the training and the resourcing in mainstream schools.

Q198 **Mrs Sureena Brackenridge:** Dr Castro-Kemp, we will further consider the research that you have undertaken, in particular on how England defines SEND, the statutory support available through EHC plans and the criteria for eligibility.

Dr Castro-Kemp: In ScopeSEND we did a policy analysis across jurisdictions of the content of the policy and of the text. We also gathered evidence from the literature on stakeholders' experience. We are going to conduct interviews to complement that evidence and we should have more results by the end of this year. In our preliminary results, we looked at how the different jurisdictions define SEND and what is the eligibility threshold. We concluded that the different jurisdictions can be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

positioned in a spectrum between those that have a more medicalised approach to defining SEND and those that have a more needs-based approach to defining SEND.

We found that England is somewhat in the middle of this spectrum between a more medicalised approach and a more needs-based one. This is because although there is not a requirement in the Children and Families Act for a child to have a diagnosis to be supported, in practice what we see in the evidence review is that diagnosis has very much worked as a passport to access services, partly due to lack of guidance and effective training and processes in place to effectively assess function and needs.

Even if we focus on the language of the policy only, the definition of SEND provided is still relatively narrow compared to others, for example Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Finland where the policy text explicitly states that needs can advise for medical conditions or not. In Scotland, examples are provided that range from having a learning disability to bereavement, for example.

Also I will highlight that in Finland and Switzerland, which we positioned more in the needs-based side of the spectrum, they use a common language to document disability, which is the ICF, the international classification of function, which has been endorsed by the WHO as the gold standard to document specific needs and abilities. In Finland, they have the municipalities conducting the needs assessments with a variety of tools but they document that in a common language that is across disciplines and regions. It does not have to be the ICF. There are other common tools that can be used to describe needs as well.

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge: I feel that you have answered my follow-up question, which was going to be about lessons to learn from international models and other countries. Thank you.

Dr Gray: The thing that we are tending to miss at the moment is the impact of the current funding model for special needs that we have in England, which was introduced around 2013. It is what we call a pupil-led funding model. Children get funded as an individual child through EHC typically in mainstream. We know from international research on funding that this kind of model, a pupil-led funding model, is associated with a lot of negative characteristics. It tends to be driven by deficits and people emphasising deficits. It tends to promote the need for diagnoses. It tends to need to show that you failed rather than what you are trying to do for improving things. It is quite susceptible to demand characteristics of good parents or others who have more power and resource to push the resource.

A lot of countries in Europe now are moving away from this pupil-led funding model—Holland and Austria had it strongly—towards trying to fund schools wherever possible rather than fund individuals. There will be some individuals who need funding very much dedicated individually, but



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the numbers we have now got to are not really sustainable in that model. I think that is another feature of international research that is useful for us to have reference to.

Jo Hutchinson: A quick point of context on EHCPs is to mention that one of the findings of my research that was slightly more surprising was that the school the child attends is as important to whether they get an EHCP as whether they are recorded as having SEN support. Schools have a huge influence on that as well.

Q199 **Caroline Voaden:** As MPs, we hear from parents all the time about the difficulty of getting an EHCP, and the Committee has heard concerns that despite clear entitlement set out in the Children and Families Act 2024, local authorities are not consistently meeting their legal duties to children and young people with SEND. I will start with you, Peter. What changes do you think are needed for the definition of SEND, the eligibility criteria and the statutory support through EHC plans to help ensure that local authorities can meet their obligations?

Dr Gray: There are two things. One is local authorities over the last period have become regarded as the villains of the piece. They are not doing what they should be doing with statutory requirements and so on, and I don't think that is fair generally. Most people going into local authorities' special needs roles are doing it because they want to make a difference to the outcomes and experience of children and young people.

The question is what leads them to be in a different position or to be perceived in a different position. One of the key things is that the increase in statutory activity has rocketed. If you are a caseworker working in a local authority with SEN, you are dealing with a much bigger caseload now. The quality of relationships and communication between parents and local authorities has deteriorated to some extent because of that, too much being done online and through other forms of communication when really you need to have face-to-face discussions to resolve people's concerns and issues. Yes, local authorities should be held to account for their statutory obligations and expectations but also we need to look at systems for meeting children's needs that are less administratively demanding as in our current system.

The second point is that when I talk to parents and others about this term "entitlement"—and it is a very strong thing that parents will talk about and they are worried out there at the moment about losing their entitlement with what the Government may come up with—it is important to put behind what that means in practice. If we look at what EHCP entitles you to, it does not entitle you to positive outcomes for your child. There is nothing in the legislation that says because you have got an EHCP you will get positive outcomes, and you may not. It may set out specific inputs that are required to meet your child's needs but it does not determine the quality of the inputs. Those inputs can be very good—you can have a very good learning support system, but you might have a not very good one.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parents sometimes feel that it gives them more of a say in their communication with the school and they will be taken more seriously but it does not necessarily guarantee a good quality partnership with the school, which is very key to moving forward. We know partnerships between schools and parents are important for all children but for children with special needs it is even more important that that is the case.

My view about all of this is we may need, coming back to Jo's point, to continue with the existing statutory framework as a backstop but we ought to be looking for something more dynamic and responsive as a way of meeting children's needs rather than relying on what is quite a clunky system. There are lots of options that we should be considering there.

Q200 Mrs Sureena Brackenridge: How effective is the Equality Act 2010 in addressing barriers to education for pupils with SEND? What recommendations could be made to improve its implementation?

Jo Hutchinson: We need to go back to basics a bit on the focus and priority of this in schools. Realistically your route of redress is to go to court, which not many people will be able to do, but you can work on it from the other end by making that a part of any push to standardise how we think about reasonable adjustments in schools and so on by framing it within the Act. Pushing that up the discussion and debate in schools could be helpful.

Dr Castro-Kemp: I will add one point on the language of the policy. The term "impairment" is used, and if we consider the gold standard of the World Health Organisation's biopsychosocial model, impairment refers to difficulties in body structures. Many forms of disability do not derive from body structure issues and so a change in terminology towards more inclusive language can make a difference in better reflecting the lived experiences of those with SEND. As I said before, language seems to matter as we adopt it in policy and there is other research showing that more inclusive language tends to lead to more positive public engagement.

Dr Gray: I think the Equality Act has lost profile over the last period of time. There was quite a strong agenda, certainly in the first part of the new millennium, for removing barriers and this is about trying to remove access barriers for young people to access education and mainstream education as part of that. If you talk to most schools, they do not necessarily have much reference to that. I think there is too much talk at the moment of special school children. We tend to say, "This is a special school child", and of course people's definitions of what a special school child is vary a lot from school to school.

If we are looking at the Equality Act properly, we ought be thinking about what we do to remove barriers to access for a child. In the absence of a clearer national agenda on that, parents who want mainstream inclusion are left fighting their inclusion corner against potentially more negative



and hostile circumstances in some schools. I think that the Equality Act agenda needs to be dusted down and given a stronger profile.

Q201 Mrs Sureena Brackenridge: A further question. I have heard concerns that there are some local authorities that are refusing to recognise dyslexia. Based on your experience and expertise, what impact will this have and how does it align with the Equality Act? I am happy to open that up to whoever feels comfortable with answering it.

Dr Gray: It is fascinating when you have been involved in this area for so many years like I have. About 20 years ago dyslexia was in the same position as autism now really. It was the highest group of children for tribunals, for statements at the time, all the categories. There was a general feeling that it was an under-recognised and specialist area that needed much more attention. It moved, and that was partly in conjunction with the British Dyslexia Association, to much more of an expectation that all schools needed to understand dyslexia and be able to respond to it.

That has moved, certainly for a quite a period of time, into it is part of schools' bread and butter to meet those needs. Obviously some children have bigger needs than others, but if you ask the average SENCO in a mainstream school, or an average class teacher even, they would not say, "Dyslexia is not my business". I don't know about the area of local authority recognition. I think there was a time where there was debate about dyslexia, in the same way as autism, "Is this really a feature or because some parents push for that diagnosis" and so on. I don't see fundamental barriers for inclusiveness in that area or meeting needs but I am not saying that there should not be continuing improvement.

Autism is an interesting parallel because we are now in a situation where autism is the highest group of children for tribunals. Autism is the highest group for children in EHCPs. It is now 40% of all EHCPs are for children who have a diagnosis of autism. We are still seeing that as something different and special rather than something that we need to address. We have data that shows that it is 40% of children with EHCPs who have autism as a diagnosis but if you look at SEN support, autism is only 7% of the cohort. It is seen as something very different than what you want to do ordinarily.

The general direction, from my point of view, for both dyslexia and autism is we need to be improving ordinarily available provision and build on that while recognising that there are some children who have very significant needs and challenges that we need to address more substantially.

Jo Hutchinson: I have a slightly wider point that is still on the equalities issue that you are questioning us on. One of the things we found in our research was that where children have needs that may be less visible in school, they were most likely to end up not being identified as having SEN, despite having a profile that suggested that they might actually



have SEN. That happened particularly for children whose attendance at school was low, children who were very mobile moving between schools over time, children whose first language was not English. Also there seemed to be an issue around social, emotional and mental health needs that were more internalising, thinking of need types like depression and anxiety where most of the symptoms are inward on the child rather than outward into the classroom. We definitely found evidence that there are vulnerable groups that would fall into various buckets under the Equality Act that were appearing to either experience delays in having SEN identified or never being identified.

Dr Castro-Kemp: I think that is yet another symptom of a system that has relied for far too long on diagnostic labels for eligibility criteria. If a school hears dyslexia, they think they need to find the funding for the therapists and to action a number of things that if they had been in place before on the basis of having to fund needs, this would not be an issue.

Q202 **Manuela Perteghella:** Increasingly, parents and carers are forced to go to SEN tribunals and as a constituency MP families tell me that it feels like a continuous struggle just to get their children the support they need and deserve. Do you agree that the SEND system in England is adversarial? If so, what policies currently contribute to this and what changes could help make the system more collaborative and supportive for families?

Jo Hutchinson: At the heart, the root of the problem is that we are using EHCPs as a way of rationing scarce resources. We have local authorities in a position where they have to meet needs whether or not they have sufficient money. We have schools in a position where the curriculum, the accountability on them, the assessments and qualifications that they are using are potentially not well aligned to get the best results for children with special educational needs and disabilities. They have incentives to try to avoid the issue also. Then we have parents who are desperately trying to find a way to get their children's needs met within the environment in which the incentives are not working properly. I would focus on trying to improve that.

Dr Castro-Kemp: Our evidence review suggests that collaborations with parents are the most important issue to lead to more positive experiences of the system. That needs to be in place from early, but also this links to other things that have been said before. Effective early childhood intervention systems are family-centred, so the process of collaborating with parents in a more transdisciplinary way is there from the beginning.

Dr Gray: I agree with both of those. Some parents have very negative experiences and they are quite justified in giving you an account of those and all the rest of it. I think that there is a place in the system where trust has broken down quite substantially, where social media can amplify that as well so that parents almost have an expectation that things will



be difficult whatever their actual experience is. The impact of social media is much more powerful over the years on some of this.

My experience of parents is that, by and large, they have a very straightforward agenda. They just want their children's needs to be met and if they could have another way of those needs being met that they were confident with, they would be quite happy. We have got into this one-size-fits-all thing where it is all EHCPs and that is what you do. That is the only way you will be able to do that.

It comes back to what I was saying earlier about there are processes and mechanisms that are already starting in some authorities that promote a different, more collaborative relationship, not just collaborative with parents but also between local authorities and schools and schools with each other. Those are really interesting ways forward because we have a very negative presentation of special needs nationally and yet we have a huge number of people who are very committed to making things better. It is about how we harness that energy in a more positive way and get more positive news rather than the negative presentation that we have at the moment.

Q203 Chair: Can I push you slightly on the relationship between what you have just said and what you said earlier about accountability? It is undoubtedly the case that the evidence that we have had speaks very clearly to a lack of trust and confidence of parents in the system. If you have a lack of trust and confidence in the system, you look for accountability. At the moment the EHCP part of the process is where there is accountability, but you are not so keen on extending accountability in the ways that some witnesses have stressed it to us, to the ordinarily available provision in SEN support in schools. What pathway would you envisage of a support process that gives parents the confidence that not only will the support be there but that if it goes wrong there is proper accountability in the system for that?

Dr Gray: I think there is a continuing place for EHCPs or an equivalent as a sort of backstop for when things are going wrong and where parents feel there is no other way. I don't think it is a particularly effective process of guaranteeing accountability, as I indicated before around entitlement, but I can see from the parents' point of view that is an important aspect of it.

I will give you an example of an alternative way of approaching this, as I submitted in my evidence, with different funding models. There are about 15 authorities in the country at the moment that are running a model that is based on clusters of schools. This is typically a secondary school and its feeders or in urban areas it is a bit more complicated than that. A proportion of the funding available for mainstream pupils with high needs is devolved to that group of schools and the SENCOs who run that group are able to deploy that funding much more flexibly without having to go down the EHCP route to do it. They can use it much more dynamically for



shorter periods and put it in very quickly, rather than having to wait for the process to drag on to its end.

The anecdotal evidence from these authorities is that schools are very positive about it. They find it a very good process. They also learn a lot from each other by being part of a group and the challenge, as I mentioned earlier. Parents are happy with it as long as there is a backstop and it is not you can't get any EHCPs in mainstream, for example. That is not sustainable as an idea. They are happy about it because if the school feels able to meet their child's needs and they are confident that the school is able to meet their child's needs, people don't want to spend all their time on tribunals or doing all of this. They want the basic level of ordinary confidence.

Q204 Caroline Voaden: I don't know who would like to respond to this, but do you think we have over-complicated the system? Do you think that if the funding was there for a group of schools, say five or 10 schools, to have an educational psychologist, lots more teaching assistants, training in things like neurodivergence and how to make an environment more welcoming to a neurodivergent child, that might transform the system?

Dr Gray: I totally agree. The potential for clusters is huge because at the moment, if you take speech and language therapy, parents get very frustrated by waiting lists and having to wait for ages and eventually get some speech and language therapy. If you could get that front-loaded linking in with clusters, they could work with the schools and help shape what needs to happen individually, what could happen at group level or what could happen more through a training level.

We are losing people. Educational psychologists have a lot of training to do stuff. They are spending a lot of their time doing administrative work on EHCPs and a number of them are going into the private sector because they can get more money. It is similar with speech and language therapy. We are losing a lot speech and language therapists from the system and there is an erosion of that potential core level of support. If you could link those resources much more to clusters on an ongoing basis, you would have an increasing capacity to meet these needs ordinarily rather than having to do it through a very clunky process. I totally agree with you.

Jo Hutchinson: I mostly agree as well. I will add that we could make the job even easier if we did things like rebalance the emphasis on personal, social and emotional development over the whole span of compulsory schooling. At the moment, we measure at age five and then think it is completed at that age and magically will just sort itself out from thereon in. Our research found that while schools are focusing mainly on children's communication, language and literacy when they are picking out children for SEN support, the kids who go on to need EHCPs are much more associated with personal, social and emotional development. The more that we could cover that off from the outset in the curriculum, probably fewer problems would arise down the road.



Dr Castro-Kemp: I completely agree with what was said and I would like to make two points. The first is that our evidence review shows parents reported that they were overwhelmed with how bureaucratic the system is. This is particularly in England. The second point, based on what we observed, is that the inspectorate has a role to play here as well in supporting and facilitating that model instead of just evaluating. When we look at jurisdictions like Ireland, for example, there are many functions of the inspectorate. They are first to support and facilitate the communication locally to help build capacity and then to evaluate, which I think is quite an interesting model.

Q205 **Darren Paffey:** Moving on to think about the workforce, Dr Casto-Kemp, your initial findings concluded that we are narrowly prepared and that CPD is much less embedded here than it is in other countries. Could you say a bit about how you have defined and assessed that situation? Where are the countries that England should be looking to learn from to make sure that we have a workforce that is far more well prepared?

Dr Castro-Kemp: We looked at pre-service training and in-service training and CPD, continuous professional development, in ScopeSEND. We compared the jurisdictions on two main dimensions. The first one is the extent to which CPD is mandatory, in that there is a requirement for X number of hours per year, and the extent to which it is embedded in the everyday working life or mostly based on one-off courses and workshops. We know from a variety of studies on professional development that continued models of CPD that are embedded, coaching, for example, or other approaches, are more effective because they are more sustained over time.

Our jurisdictions were then clustered into four groups. There is one that has mandatory CPD, so a specific requirement of X number of hours, where this is highly embedded, and we have Scotland, Wales and Flanders and New South Wales in Australia here. We have another cluster where CPD is non-mandatory but highly embedded in the teaching culture, and this is the case of Finland and Ireland. We have a cluster of non-mandatory and mostly non-embedded in England and Northern Ireland, and mandatory and not embedded in Queensland, Victoria and Switzerland, although we looked at Fribourg in particular in Switzerland.

When CPD is embedded, there is a culture of personal and professional development and I think EPs here, as was said, could play a really important role. I highlight Finland where they have very close partnerships with universities for CPD, which is promoted by the municipalities in partnership with the universities but by the government as well. CPD is not mandatory but is encouraged and expected professionally, so it is seen more as a professional right rather than a professional obligation. I highlight the language used in the policy here as well.

Of course I am not advocating for CPD not being mandated. There are good arguments to do so as well, but the research suggests that more



important than having X number of hours required is to have a sustained culture of engagement in professional development that is more context specific as a right of the workforce. One of the things that has been suggested is that we should perhaps—and I think Peter alluded to it earlier—have a more embedded supervision model for the workforce in schools, a more iterative CPD where problems can be discussed and tested and discussed again.

Q206 Darren Paffey: A more open question to all the panel. If there were one or two priority actions that Government could take to deal with the CPD deficit that you have talked about in our system and to achieve the objective of making mainstream schooling more inclusive, what would those priority actions be? You get one or two shots each. What would you say?

Dr Castro-Kemp: One of the things that we really need, because we were trying to find it and we couldn't find it, is a thorough review of the content and the pedagogy, so not just what is included but how it is covered, in pre-service training and in-service training for the workforce. We just couldn't find it. I don't know if this will be covered by the curriculum and assessment review. I hope so, but if not I think this is an urgent piece of work that needs to be done. The second thing is to fund a model of supervision that is much more embedded and locally based.

Jo Hutchinson: I agree with everything that Susana has just said, particularly the supervision and embedding and making sure that there is ongoing professional development. That is partly because our understanding of a lot of the conditions that young people with SEND have change over time. It will not be possible to inject all the knowledge needed for a whole career during initial teacher training, nor is it likely to be very feasible to add that much to the curriculum in ITT, but it is possible to make it a priority across all the various phases of professional development that teachers go through.

Dr Gray: I think that workforce development has got very bitty over the last number of years. Colleagues on my forum who know more about this than me would argue for a more comprehensive approach to this that also includes early years and post-16, not just schools, and also cuts across other agencies, so it is not just education-specific. I agree that there are limits to workforce development around specific knowledge of disability areas, for example, which is facts and figures.

One of the things on your question that I think is interesting is that there is nothing in initial training for teachers about how you communicate with parents. We have this central issue of the value of parental partnership but we don't have any training for it. There was a programme as part of the national strategies before 2010 called Achievement for All. That provided a structure for teachers to talk with parents about a child's progress in a collaborative way rather than in a way of mutual blame, "It is your fault or it is my fault". That sort of thing as a basic element of teacher training and continuing work is very important.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q207 **Chair:** I will push you very briefly. At least two of you have said some things about the role of educational psychologists. Are they properly deployed at the moment and are there changes to the way that we use the expertise of educational psychologists that would make a difference?

Dr Castro-Kemp: Absolutely, yes, there are changes. This is not research that I have conducted personally but I supervise a lot of doctoral students who will become educational psychologists in the field. While they are trained within systemic models, they learn to do more than just assessments. They do consultation, they are trained on collaboration and communication with parents. In practice, this is not what is happening at all. There is some good research at UCL conducted by our doctoral students showing that the amount of time that they spend in assessment is a much higher proportion than in other aspects of the profession.

Dr Gray: I think the answer to your question is no. I had a background, before I got into my current role, in training educational psychologists some time ago. A lot of them would say that although they do some work that is more interesting, a lot of their diet is processing EHC needs assessments. It is quite repetitive work and does not draw on the skills that they have and should be able to contribute following their training. I think it is connected with how you do things like funding or the place of EHCPs and EHC needs assessment. If you do that right, that would release more capacity for intervention and a more constructive role than they have at the moment.

Q208 **Mark Swards:** We could probably extract an answer on this from your previous answers but I want to ask you directly in the short time that we have left, and I will start with Dr Castro-Kemp. How would you evaluate multi-agency working? What changes, if any, would you make to improve and promote collaboration across education, health and local authorities to change the situation for the better?

Dr Castro-Kemp: Thank you for that question. We have touched on some of this before but I would like to clarify that in research we tend to distinguish between three ways of doing multi-agency working. We have multidisciplinary work, which is where practitioners work independently with a child and are often not aware of the work of other practitioners and the goals for the child may be entirely different and sometimes even counterproductive. Then we have an interdisciplinary way of collaborating where there is some collaboration, practitioners are aware of each other, the speech therapist and the teacher and so on, but the goals and the interventions are not jointly developed. Then we have transdisciplinary collaboration where everything is co-produced and developed jointly from the start.

When we have a needs-based assessment—and this is what we see in our research in other jurisdictions as well—naturally we have to start working in a transdisciplinary way. When we have early childhood intervention, we also have to work in a transdisciplinary way. If we have a needs system



HOUSE OF COMMONS

in place in early childhood intervention that will facilitate a more effective way of working, which we currently do not have in England. That is one of the complaints that we hear from our stakeholders.

Jo Hutchinson: We touched on this a little bit on the overlap between the CAMHS system and the educational SEND system in my research. We found a surprisingly low overlap between the two. There are a lot of kids in CAMHS, at least for the large NHS trust that we had the data for in south London, who never had any record of SEND in the school system. This lifted the lid off for me as I discussed this finding with various people from the education side, from the psychiatry side, that there is no shared understanding about when mental health is SEND or is not SEND. There is a lot of assumption, and you can see in the patterns of the data, that kids with emotional disorders are less likely to be recognised as having SEND. Also kids who are late arrivals into the system were very unlikely to have been recognised, even though they might have found their way into CAMHS, which is also not an easy task for getting a needs map.

There is definitely a job to do here in building a shared understanding of what each service is contributing to the assessment of needs picture and also to the treatment or intervention.

Dr Gray: There have been some positive developments since the reforms, particularly for the appointment of designated clinical officers in local authorities who make the link between health and education. That has been a positive move for those two agencies understanding each other better and resolving issues. Apart from that, going back to our conversation about the cluster model, that helps bring professionals together, communicate better and interface better than traditional waiting lists or referral systems. If you have people there working together already, that helps break some of that down.

Q209 **Mark Swards:** To wrap up because we are short on time, the Government are proposing to make changes to SEND in 2026, next year. Would you like to add anything to the answers you have already given that you think the Government should focus on to make sure that education is inclusive for children with disabilities and special educational needs?

Dr Gray: We have not touched in detail on accountability apart from individual accountability through EHCPs. If we are moving towards more inclusive schools, we have to consider what school level accountability is. The Ofsted proposals for report cards include a dimension on inclusion, which we now have covered, but traditionally the SEN and inclusion area has not figured highly in school inspections. For me, there is something around how that is done best in what can be quite a compressed inspection process. It gives examples in their latest thing on the report cards of a school that is inclusive but needs to do better in its results. It also needs to cover the opposite of that, schools that are good on the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

results side but may not be so good on SEN and inclusion. There needs to be some issues around weighting in school inspections.

We have witnessed in area SEND inspections over the last period of time an increasing divergence between a school inspection system that has some fairly convergent expectations and an SEN reforms agenda that is about much more personalisation and individualisation. The two inspection processes of school inspection and area SEN inspection have similarly diverged. If we look genuinely at area SEND inspections, we ought to include the part that schools play in that, rather than assuming that this is like an extended local authority inspection. There are mismatches at the moment between those. I will not name them, but authorities have been criticised in SEN inspections for having some schools that are not inclusive enough, but that does not figure in their school inspections. It is about bringing that whole accountability process closer together.

Dr Castro-Kemp: I will briefly add that as we prepare to implement those changes, we should probably have a clear model for monitoring the change as well from the beginning, which involves those with lived experience at regular periods. That is clearly linked to better results and also with better public engagement with the Government.

Jo Hutchinson: My final thought is that the clear prize for making earlier interventions for children is better children's outcomes and, in the long run, lower costs, but we have to be realistic about the timeframes in which one can build that new inclusive mainstream system and not pull away lifeboats in the meantime. We have to be realistic about the fact that that involves investing up front.

Chair: Thank you very much. Can I thank all of you for your evidence this morning? If we have not had time to cover today any matters of detail that you would like to submit to us, please write to us after this session.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Daniel Constable-Phelps, Conrad Bourne and Nicole Dempsey.

Q210 **Chair:** We will resume our evidence session and I welcome our second panel of witnesses. A reminder for you before we start that at 11.30 am the bell will ring twice. We do not need to do anything about that. We can simply carry on and ignore the bell and it will stop, but that is a reminder of that. I invite our witnesses to introduce yourselves to us and to make any declarations of interest that you wish to make, starting with Conrad Bourne.

Conrad Bourne: My name is Conrad Bourne. I am the Director of Special Educational Needs at the Mercian Trust. I am also one day a week seconded to Nasen as the West Midlands Regional Lead for Whole School SEND.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nicole Dempsey: I am Nicole Dempsey. I am the Director of SEND and Safeguarding for Dixons Academies Trust, which is a trust of 17 schools, all phases, across the north of England, with a mission to challenge educational and social disadvantage to the north in the north. I am also seconded to Nasen Whole School SEND one day a week.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: Good morning. I am Daniel Constable-Phelps. I am the Executive Headteacher at St Mary's Church of England Primary School and Nursery in Southampton, and a small group of schools. No declarations.

Q211 **Chair:** Thank you all very much. We have invited you to give evidence to us because we understand that you are all modelling good practice on SEND provision in various different ways in your schools that you are responsible for. We are looking forward to hearing from you today about what works where you are based.

We understand that the Government's goal is to have a mainstream education system that is inclusive for children and young people with SEND. Could you give us in brief your assessment of the current inclusivity of mainstream schools? What is going well and what are some of the challenges that you see in your day-to-day work?

Daniel Constable-Phelps: On things that are going well, in the local authority I work for there has been a lot of work around innovation to support the cost of funding model that we heard about in the last session and making sure that we are able, as a group of schools, to think about the emerging needs of the children that we are admitting to the schools in our locality. That block delegation of the funding then supports us in thinking outside the box to be innovative, and that supports us in a system where often parents come to us straightaway wanting the EHC above all else. We have children entering nursery, for example, and the common goal of the parent is to try to seek the EHC because it is their perception that that is the only way to meet need.

The funding model for us enables us to think outside the box about how we support parents to understand SEND needs in general and also about how we can change schooling for children that is inclusive for all. In our group of schools, we are able to share that assessment and identification profile across the group of schools we are working with so that there is a commonality in approach for parents. They know what to expect when they join our schools. If they are finding areas like PSED a struggle for young children, this is what we do as an approach in the school.

Nicole Dempsey: The current system pushes schools to be reliant on top-up funding that is obtained by evidencing shortcomings and failure and it is difficult to get momentum with the evidence base and best practice that we have access to, but the system itself is not the problem. We have been able to do what we have done with the current system. After 10 years of learning, we should be improving and adding to that and working with what we have learned over the last 10 years, but lots of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

aspects of the current system have served us well. Assess, plan, do, review, graduated response—the EHCP provide a structure, information and guidance to us that we value.

We have had the most success where we have chosen to swim against the tide a little bit and push our SEND support and SEND provision down into the stability and security of the main offer. Nothing about the current system has stopped us doing that, but it certainly does not facilitate and make that easy to do. It feels like swimming against the tide.

For me, changes need to be made, but we have to be careful of implementing and supporting those changes and that we do not lose what is good and what we are intentional about in the current system. Unless we also address the things around the SEND support system that support it, we will have the same problems with any future system, whether that is brand new or an improved version of the current one. Those things for me are how teachers are trained, the guidance that is in the SEND code of practice, the access to supporting services such as CAMHS and ed psych. Unless we address these supporting issues, we are condemned to have the same problems with any future version as well.

It is important to me that we will talk a lot about the challenges and that is certainly the issue that we have come to discuss, but there are positives from the last 10 years as well. The two big ones for me are that, after 10 years of implementation, it is more in line with the UN's definition of inclusion as the progressive removal of barriers and to be looking to see what more we can do. That this is a point on the journey where we have that opportunity. In the 12 years that I have been a SENCO, when I think about the conversations I have had about SEND and inclusion, a theme is an increasing non-acceptance that less is enough for some children. That is a good situation to be in and a good problem to be part of solving.

Conrad Bourne: I suppose we will reach inclusion when we do not have to use the term any more. That is our ultimate aim. I absolutely agree with what colleagues have said here. The positive message about inclusion is that the focus has been more around inclusion. I have seen that in more schools that I visit in my 20-odd-year career and so that is positive. I see colleagues in schools trying hard to do their best with limited resources and challenging circumstances.

However, I have seen the focus on equality. Schools have challenges in the equity part. There is more provision, but does that provision fit the purpose? Schools often face challenges around the inclusive aspect of what they do. I often see schools with lots of provision, but does it fit that students' needs? Then when I look beyond the school, where is that level of belonging? Where does that school fit within its community? Where is the civic part of what schools do? That can knit the quilt together. I have seen schools have particular challenges there.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q212 Darren Paffey: Before I ask my question, for transparency, Daniel is the head of St Mary's, which is a wonderful part of the family of schools in my Southampton Itchen constituency. There is no conflict of interest, however.

Thinking about SEND support, we as a Committee have heard that what those who do not meet the threshold get can be quite varying in quality and consistency. Could you each talk about how, in your schools, you deliver that support for those who do not meet the threshold for EHCPs? We will maybe go the other way down the line this time and start with Conrad.

Conrad Bourne: The first point is a step back around the entry point and to when we consider a student of special educational need. There are key questions there for us around whether the curriculum or teaching is creating some of those barriers and whether we need to challenge gaps there, thinking that every student can reach that destination but it may be a different journey for them. The entry point is something to consider there.

On the framework for entry point, we have a range of qualitative and quantitative measures that we undertake with our students. We start off with a familial deep dive. We go all the way back to early parenthood and we start to look at some of that. We try to rule out lots of things on this journey.

Then we may move into some qualitative and quantitative other measures. We might look at psychometric assessments. We look at how they perform in the classroom. The parents and family and the wider stakeholder group is important in that. We want to know what is going on with the home life. Is that settled? What is happening with their health issues at the moment? What about social care? Any of those key aspects go into that matrix.

The code of practice gives us some pointers, but one challenge that I have always felt is that it does not give us the structure and framework. We have been anxious not to see SEND support as a gateway to an EHCP. It is a status that we are looking to work with a student and hopefully improve and move along so that they do not have to have that level of support any more. That has been one key difficulty for us. What is the framework around SEND support?

In my work with whole school SEND, we go into various schools and we see so much variability in the entry point to SEND, the structure around the SEND support, and then the outcomes for those students. We see so much variability across schools in that area.

Nicole Dempsey: SEND support is the vast majority of children that are identified with SEN, but it is the area of SEND where we have the least guidance and the least structure and the least exemplification. That and the non-access to supporting services for preventative and early



intervention are probably two of the biggest drivers of the overwhelming of the EHCP stage.

We have tried to build on the strength and stability of our main offer and learn from what our cohorts of children challenge us with and be willing to change and evolve to meet that, upskill and build confidence across our staff to meet more need as part of the main offer, and see SEND support as an extension or an enhancement of that main offer where we have the most strength and success.

Even though the EEF guidance came after we had started what we were doing, it much more closely represents how we work than the code of practice, for instance, in that we design whole school systems for our most vulnerable first, manage statutory SEND within collaboration with others, adaptive teaching within teaching and learning and SEND as part of our multidisciplinary—although now I have heard Dr Castro speak it is not multidisciplinary but transdisciplinary—pastoral team, and we use discrete intervention only sparingly and with a strong focus on the quality and the individuality of that so that those children can benefit from our best as well.

This approach has improved the quality, consistency and experience for our children who are identified as SEN at the SEND support stage but also upskills, builds confidence, and fosters a culture of togetherness and belonging and helps us to ensure that students who are at the EHCP threshold get the attention and individualisation that they deserve.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: I remember walking into my current school three years ago. It had been a situation where children who were on SEND support or EHCs were taught in corridors. The thinking behind that was that the specialist provision they needed or the additional input that came from an EHC, for example, was best made or placed by putting them in a situation that did not include adaptive teaching or practice in the classroom at a whole class level. We have changed that on its head. Every child now is taught in a classroom with a qualified teacher and given the entitlement they deserve.

To achieve that, we have had to go on a real journey of ensuring that inclusive practice is understood because, from where I am sitting and from what we know about legislation at the moment, the EHC is firmly grounded in a legal duty in the Children and Families Act 2024. SEND support is reliant on statutory guidance. The issue with that is the language that is used within that guidance. Instead of language like “you must provide the following”, it is “should”. That for me is why the quality you sometimes see varies. Particularly in my job where I go to different schools to help, I see that variability because what that should look like is not set in stone.

As a head, I might have the ability to then decide what I want for my school and how that looks. Another head who does not have the same co-qualification as I do may not have the same footing or the same



understanding of what that needs to look like. For me, we are coming back to semantics of how we use language, but how that is interpreted is important because reading the guidance can be the difference between someone who interprets what that should look like versus someone who is going off what it could look like.

Q213 Manuela Perteghella: We have had calls for putting SEND support on a statutory footing. In the view of the panel, would this help improve some provision in mainstream education settings and, if this happened, what might the impact be on schools and what would you want this to look like in practice? I will start with Conrad.

Conrad Bourne: I do not necessarily want to see SEND support on a statutory footing. I would prefer to see a better framework around SEND support and around expectations and some of the things that colleagues have spoken about here, in particular the universal offer. What does a universal offer look like? What are the expectations around that?

I find it a challenge when I go into schools and I see 157 students in SEND support. Are those students all getting additional to and different from and what does it look like and what are the challenges around providing that? Often when we peel back, we do not see that.

We are possibly adding another layer of challenge into a system that is already facing the challenges of the provision around education health and care plans. I am not closing the door to that but I see, practically, the difficulties of applying that across the school system.

Nicole Dempsey: We need to be careful with anything that increases bureaucracy and rigidity. My gut feeling is that it is unlikely to be helpful. It would still be impacted even if it were statutory by those wider factors that negatively impact on the system currently. We are already accountable for the outcomes of all of our learners and SEND support is already covered in the Children and Families Act and the code of practice. That needs updating but it is covered. We make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act and so there is accountability in theory. It is not that it needs to be made statutory but we need the guidance, the access to supporting services and the funding to be able to make that a reality.

We definitely need greater clarity and guidance in the SEND support space, but we need to be careful that this does not create bureaucracy and that it does not result in box-ticking whereby what is expected is prescriptive and can be considered to have been exhausted. Greater inclusivity cannot come from within that segregated space and the main offer and the universal offer needs to expand and be enhanced to receive and embrace greater diversity, not necessarily capturing the activity or codifying the SEND support space. By this I mean the need for specific guidance around the universal offering in the SEND support stage, access to services, how we understand inclusive leadership and create a culture of belonging for all children, and how we implement effective responsive



provision that does not take children away from their lessons and the shared experiences of education.

At Dixons we are increasingly using the phrase “classroom paramountcy” to try to capture the importance of prioritising all children being in the lessons and being cared for and learning in the lessons, not classroom at all costs but classroom if at all possible, and the work of inclusion being the work of making that more possible for more children more often. This is harder to achieve if SEND support is managed as separate and it comes more naturally when SEND support is fluid and responsive enhancements to the main offer, but that relies on proper funding to the main offer and access to services for preventative and early intervention.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: I sit on the fence on whether a statutory footing would support. From a parental perspective, I wonder if parents who want to know that their children are getting the best endeavours of a school would feel that a greater emphasis is placed on what their child is getting and take away the monopolisation of trying to get an EHC and to try to move that away from what currently happens.

I agree with colleagues about the code of practice and needing that to be updated. At the minute it lacks detail on how schools should determine if a child has more difficulty than a peer. How do SENCOs who are new to role make that decision? That takes experience and understanding of that, but if that statutory guidance does not make that clear, it is hard for you to know. It is the same for disabilities and the key message around preventing the use of facilities. What does that mean?

This is an opportunity here for us to rethink what the code of practice looks like and how that supports, but there is also an argument for whether SEND support would take some hostility out of the current situation where everyone is vying for an EHC.

Q214 **Manuela Perteghella:** My next question is for Conrad. The Committee is aware of your work on reducing the referral to assessment timeline for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. Can you please expand on how you have achieved this and what outcomes you have seen?

Conrad Bourne: Lots of failure, lots of persistence, many hours going down. I need to say that because often when you look at the top line of things, you can think it was a seamless journey to something that we have achieved.

I started off with the challenge of trying to reintroduce services that had been lost through local provision at no cost, which is an interesting challenge. I started that jumping forward with clinical students. We formed relationships with universities and we had our first art therapy student and then that moved to music therapy students and in the end we had about eight different therapy students. We were able to utilise our convening power of training professionals and doing that well because we



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have a long history of training teachers but also an alignment with our need of our students. That offered that as an additional capacity and it offered universities a training route that they previously had not had.

We were fortunate in that universities had changed their training models for therapists and allied health professionals and that they were now able to offer arm's length supervision. We did not actually have to have an art therapist in the school and so we could have that. Over the period up until now, we have had over 80 students in clinical practice who have trained with us and that goes from art therapy all the way to through to mental health nursing and everything in between.

That enabled me to create an argument and case that for the outcomes that we were producing with students who were working within their competencies because they were not fully qualified therapists, we needed a professional team to sit above that because we still needed to work with our most challenging and complex cases that we were still having to refer to external provision, in an environment where often students were waiting 18 months and, for an ASD pathway, up to four years. We now have a team that consists of speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and music therapists. We have assistants in that profile as well.

I was also anxious to have a provision that was focused on not just early intervention but sustained intervention. We heard from colleagues earlier around the issue particularly with educational psychology and the challenges there and I wanted to move away from assessment report and discharge so that we can work continually with students. We were moving then to a more developed and systemic approach to how we would work with students.

We have also been able to work across platforms and across agencies. We work closely with health. All our CAMHS referrals are dealt with in-house first in triage. I like to think we are the first line of CAMHS because my colleagues in my clinical team also spend part of their week working within the NHS and working with other agencies. CAMHS only gets the referrals that meet the CAMHS threshold. We find now that our students get seen by CAMHS early because of that. We have built that collaborative base.

We are able to reach across different NHS trusts for different provisions and often in schools we are pointed towards our local provision, the school nursing service and so on, but there are layers of NHS trusts.

Within social care as well, we are able to have more in-depth and timely interventions. We had a student, for example, who lost mobility in one of our schools. Within 48 hours one of our occupational therapists had undertaken an assessment of school and an assessment of home and had the report. We are able to turn some of these issues around quickly.



That support, as I said, is ongoing. We have complex cases. We have cases where we have to work with dialectical behaviour therapy or DBT. We have groups of students whom we consider to be at risk of suicide and require ongoing and insensitive work, right through to students who need small adaptations in the classroom that can have an impact where attendance improves and engagement improves quickly. It has been transformative for us.

Q215 Manuela Perteghella: Nicole and Daniel, we have heard that children and families have to wait a long time to get their EHCPs or to get an assessment and then the plan. How does your setting support children and families during this interim period?

Nicole Dempsey: We still work to, hopefully, the ideal of the referral for the plan, the referral for assessment, following a period of trying different provision and evidence building so that a lot of what the child will have secured through the plan is already in place in some form but, more often than not, that is not always easy to do. The EHCP itself is the key to accessing a particular service or getting certain provision or the funding that we need for certain provision. Sometimes we go down the route of putting in provision and evidence building when it is clear that that child needs something but the only way to get it is to jump through the hoops.

We found it to be most powerful and most important to have already built a positive and trusting relationship with families wherever possible. We work hard to build opportunities for teachers and leaders to have positive interactions with families when things are going well as part of our universal offer so that when things become more challenging, we have the opportunity to work with them collaboratively through difficult times.

The only way to deal with the issue of long wait times and non-access to the supporting services at an earlier stage is to deal with it directly and address those problems head-on. I worry that any work or any attempt to reduce the number of referrals being made or to raise the threshold for EHCPs is trying to manage a symptom and not a cause. Again, better guidance, access to supporting services and so on would have the knock-on effect of protecting that specialist layer for the children who need it so that they do not need to strive to access it because of deficits in our main offer.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: Similar to Nicole and Conrad, for us it is about trying to meet that need first and to understand that need and how it persists for the pupil and then thinking carefully about what that structured support looks like around the child.

I work in Southampton but we have been working with another city close to us, Portsmouth, on the neurodiversity profiling tool, which has been developed through the NHS. It is supporting us to think carefully about relationships with our families because often they come in with presenting needs that perhaps we do not see in school or perhaps the teachers say when they are filling in the assessment forms, "We do not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

see this, Daniel, and so where do we go with it?" It is helping to bridge those gaps but also making sure that families know that we are listening to them and we understand what they are telling us. That has been a real eyeopener over the past year of using it.

At the moment, it is a real push for us to make sure that our families come first, we are listening to them and we are understanding what their needs are because often we do not see 100% of the child's needs presented in school and it is important that they know that we are listening, we care and we are noticing.

We are similar but on moving that forward, it is utilising tools that are available for us to use our best efforts and endeavours with those children.

Q216 Chair: I will move us on in the interests of time so that we can get to all the topics that we want to cover. I want to ask Daniel. You have touched a little bit on your work of collaboration, but can you tell us a little bit more on the record about how your school collaborates with other schools in your local area? What are the benefits of that and also what are some of the challenges that you are contending with?

Daniel Constable-Phelps: Definitely. For our high needs funding locality clusters, we delegated funding from the local authority from its SEN needs block, which then is delegated to a group of schools to use as they see best. It is a commissioning model and so we are able to think about the presenting needs of the pupils within our area and then to think outside the box. We know through cognition and learning that there are more children with dyslexia than there have been for some years but our local authority at the minute does not have the ability, through the services we have, for someone to come out and look at a child from a level 7 trained perspective for dyslexia. We are training in-house, which means that in a commissioning model the group of schools that are now together benefit from having that expertise within the cluster.

In a partnership model, as an executive headteacher, it is about making sure that we are leading with SEND first. At a top level and thinking about our year, the prioritisation of SEND comes through and is threaded through everything we do from our school improvement perspective. From a partnerships perspective, it is about being innovative. That is the word that I use with my teams a lot. What needs do we see? How can we go out there and make sure that we are hyper-focused on making sure that we meet this? Dyslexia is one idea that we have done.

We have also used some of the delivering better value money in the last year to consider the needs of children who ordinarily might have gone to a specialist provision and creating provisions within our school. Years ago you might have gone to a resource provision but it might not exist at the moment and so we are creating them in-house. We have had real success with that. We had Ofsted a few weeks ago at one of the schools and that



was commended quite highly within the report, which is unusual because they tend not to touch on them unless they are a SEND unit.

It is about utilising every resource that is available to us to make sure that we can then meet the need but also create sustainability within the system so that, when the next child comes through with a similar presentation of need, we are there and we are ready to handle that.

Q217 Caroline Voaden: If we move on to look at the school curriculum, it would be interesting to hear whether you have made any adaptations to the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. How do your schools achieve good high academic standards while accommodating the needs of children with SEND? I will start with Daniel. Maybe you can all contribute a bit.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: Ensuring that every child is making progress is fixated in everything we do. From a top-down perspective as a headteacher, when monitoring, I regularly look at the progress that SEND children are making above all else. We have a similar strategy with disadvantaged as a whole. It is about making sure that the central focus on adaptation of the curriculum is taking us away from things that we did maybe 15 years ago around differentiation to saying that all children will get there but we need to scaffold the ability for that child to commit to understanding what we are doing.

The early career framework, or ECF, for teachers has helped us by starting to shape the thinking of the younger generation of teachers coming through. They are thinking of models of how children learn much more than potentially I did 15 years ago when coming into the system because I did not have the same training.

There are some challenges around things like the NPQs. We have many staff going out on those courses because we want them to be skilled in different areas such as senior leadership, headship for deputies and so on, but there is not the same focus on SEND. The knowledge and the ability to understand how you will lead on SEND is not there. Yes, you might have a SENCO in the school but I am the headteacher. I need to be able to lead with conviction what these children need and make sure that that provision is in place for every child. It is weighing that up.

Lots is going on that is positive and we have definitely been fortunate to work with Nasen around adaptive practice and all the work that goes into the webinars and the online teaching is massive. We are utilising technology to drill in and support teachers to upskill themselves, but some of the wider sector qualifications are not necessarily doing that as well.

Q218 Caroline Voaden: If I hear you right, you are saying that you have not adapted the curriculum but you are adapting the way you teach the curriculum to include all the children?



Daniel Constable-Phelps: Correct.

Nicole Dempsey: Our curriculum design always starts with powerful knowledge and high expectations of all. We always start with our most vulnerable and build from there. Again, we focus on quality of instruction, formative assessment, adaptivity and how our highly effective transdisciplinary pastoral team scaffolds and responds to the needs of learners for them to be able to access that. That is complemented by carefully selected individualised adaptations and provision. There is no real prescribed list or limit to what that might look like.

The most important thing for us, though, is that it has to exist within a school culture and the school culture that makes the difference. Effective curriculum delivery for all students is dependent on a highly functional and intentionally crafted school culture. That is always our first priority.

Conrad Bourne: We are talking about models of quality assurance and how we reflect and how we understand how our curriculum is moving our learners on. I will not tread on that.

We try to continue to strive to understand where the gaps are and how we can fill those gaps but meaningfully. What by that is how is our pastoral curriculum where we are trying to build that cultural capital? How does our academic curriculum react to that or match with that and how do we create some synergy and alignment with that so that we create real experiences for students in and out of the classroom? It is more of a holistic approach to how we look at curriculum development.

Q219 **Caroline Voaden:** A primary school teacher with quite young kids was saying to me last week that if we had fewer expectations on them with the ridiculous targets they have to get to in science and literacy, we could spend more time doing PSE and play and teaching them how to socialise with each other and become humans. The needs would be lower and they would be happier and more stable and they would have more chance of not having additional needs later on. Do you agree with that?

Conrad Bourne: That argument has merit for me. Testing has its place and assessment has its place and then that will remain and should remain as long as it is relevant. The question is probably about the relevance of some of the testing we do. Does it advance our knowledge? Does it advance the students in their development?

It is a real challenge for schools in this environment around the pastoral curriculum and academic curriculum. How can they utilise time and how do we try to create these alignments? It is a real challenge for school leaders who are faced by some of those pressures around assessment and measurement and those national outcomes.

Chair: Does anyone else want to come in on that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nicole Dempsey: We have certainly tried to build into our school day opportunities for play right up into high school as well and opportunities for socialising through things like family dining. For me, it comes back to that same thing. It is not the SEND support or the EHCP phase where that inclusivity and learning can come from. It is how you design the main to foster those skills and give those opportunities. Definitely, we have tried to do that but it feels like it is not in the SEND space. It is just who we are and helps us to be more inclusive as the norm.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: We sometimes have to think carefully about taking too many things out. We are hyper-focused on wanting to change life chances in Southampton. That drives every person on my team and recruitment and all of the things that we do. If we were then saying, "Let's do less of it to focus on the PSED", I worry that with the knowledge-rich basis of what the curriculum is providing children to better them and to help them sometimes be removed from poverty, how does that then level the playing field if we are aiming for that for every child?

I see the merit to that and, absolutely, as colleagues have said, we have had to adapt curriculums to be more focused so that children are coming in school-ready and that we support them with those things that potentially they are not ready for when they are admitted, but taking too much away from the curriculum then could destabilise what is becoming more of a level playing field with peers around the knowledge basis that is supporting them and gives them the life chances that we expect for them.

Q220 **Darren Paffey:** I want to ask a question about transition and how you prepare your pupils with SEND for the transition. For Daniel, that will be into secondary. For Conrad and Nicole, that will be into post-16. Can you say a bit about the steps that your schools take with that endeavour?

Nicole Dempsey: As with everything, anything around transition to post-16 we design with our most vulnerable in mind first. We work to establish strong links with our local community, colleges and sixth forms in particular, foster a community, anchor our cradle-to-career approach that acknowledges that all our students exist and need us to support them beyond the time they are physically with us. That aspect of it is there.

The most important thing for me is to remember that successful transition to post-16 and beyond and effective preparation for adulthood in general cannot be achieved through a careers programme or at transition points and that the opportunities to ensure students are prepared are there from the first day they walk in the door. We should be intentional and proactive and embracing them, particularly in how we design provision that is additional to or different for our students with SEND, finding opportunities in the day-to-day experience to build skills and confidence for the future, whatever that looks like for the age and



stage of the child, and being careful not to deskill or build dependency in how we support them.

Conrad Bourne: As Nicole said when she mentioned PfA, our lens is very much PfA. Where will this young adult be at the age of 25 to ensure that they are healthy, included in their communities and have the best opportunities for education and sustained employment. We know the metrics for that group are poor. All our learners undertake vocational profiling. We also undertake vocational rehabilitation. Our occupational therapists lead that with our most vulnerable learners. An intense piece of work happens with those learners as they go through their key stages to identify those challenges and barriers.

That also involves family because often we will find families are in circumstances where they may be reliant on certain services and provisions and so it is taking family through on a journey. That is a particular challenge, I know, in the supported internship space and in areas like that, which you may have heard of. It is, again, a holistic approach to what that child needs more broadly than school and their challenges and barriers. They may be, for example, in housing that is not sustained. That is a particular area of challenge. That may be intensive work that takes place outside school to support the family. It has to be flexible.

At the post-16 transition, we need to be, I feel, much better at not just securing pathways but the success of that pathway in moving the learner on to their next steps and being successful. We need to join up that space more in the post-16 space, absolutely.

Q221 **Darren Paffey:** Do you generally find you are able to get the data you need after they have left you to be able to make a judgment on that?

Conrad Bourne: It is challenging. We may have to have a conversation if we do not get the data around that, offering agency to all included, that this course is a course you might want to do, but we do not have any evidence to say that it is a strong course for moving a student on, let's say, to an apprenticeship or another higher-level piece of training. Yes, that is that is a challenge

Q222 **Darren Paffey:** Daniel, how does it work into secondary?

Daniel Constable-Phelps: We are lucky where we are. There are not too many secondaries around us and so that work is able to be bespoke and supportive of children particularly with higher levels of need where consideration is going into what the next setting might be. We work well with secondary colleagues and with the local authority on making sure that that transition is seamless and also that families are on board with that and that there is an approach for where we go.

A trickier transition for us at the minute is our youngest into school. There are many early years settings. We are lucky to be supported by the



Government with two of our schools opening school-based nurseries this year, which is fantastic, but it is that legacy of information. Coming back to what Conrad said earlier, sometimes when we identify need in a child, we need absolute clarity on what has happened to the child from birth. We are aware of indicative factors around ACEs and trauma now. It is making sure that we know all that information.

Sometimes that transition from early years into primary is not as smooth, largely because we feed into so many different providers, but that for me is the critical one that we need to get better because more children come in presenting with higher levels of need.

Q223 Amanda Martin: I want to come on to workforce but, if it is okay, I will quickly come back on something else. Do you think that the kids with SEND might be better to have the option to choose earlier for their next placement? I remember when I first started teaching they could pick in year 5 and then had the whole of year 6 to integrate with their secondary school. What are anyone's thoughts around that?

Daniel Constable-Phelps: From a primary perspective, yes. Year 5 is quite restrictive because in years 3, 4 and 5 you build up knowledge of the child, how they work best and what their needs might be. Thinking about the local provisions for parents in year 5 to 6 is hard because they have made a decision that then has a bearing on them in a year's time but we do not have the transition time with the next school. If we knew before it would afford us the ability to think about the nuances of each individual child and where they might go. Also, it might take away some parental angst because a parent with an EHC has that work. They suddenly have this massive decision to make and a small amount of time to make it. That sometimes is a barrier in itself.

Conrad Bourne: Our learners can take numerous opportunities, often in the last year, year 11, when they can have taster day sessions and start that transition quite early. We encourage that.

Q224 Amanda Martin: First, thank you for all the work that you are doing. I will ask you a question around workforce and training. The Committee has received evidence suggesting that the level of support available to SENCOs varies significantly depending on what school you are in and where you are in the country. How do you ensure that SENCOs are effectively supported in your settings? Secondly, do you believe that making their inclusion on the senior leadership team compulsory would enhance their effectiveness? I will go to Conrad first.

Conrad Bourne: I agree with previous commentators who talked about SENCO supervision. With our clinicians it is an absolute given of appointments that supervision is important. We should not underestimate the importance of supervision. For SENCOs at any career stage, supervision is important as they navigate that journey.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I am still surprised that SENCOs only need the qualification of either the ASEN or the NPQ SEND and then there is no other statutory requirement. I am a specialist teacher and assessor of dyslexia. To maintain that, I have to fulfil reassessment, recertification and ongoing professional development. That, for me, is an area that needs a rebalance. That may mean that we have different categories of SENCO, maybe up to expert SENCO. That may be a discussion point.

A SENCO should not necessarily be on the senior team because you may not want to be on the senior team as a SENCO. It may not be your career ambition. Also, we see SENCOs at different stages of their careers of becoming SENCOs. I see a number of colleagues in primary settings taking on the role of SENCO quite early in their teaching career and more so in secondary now. Often, as we see with senior leaders, you probably will not just be the SENCO. You will have other leadership portfolios and that means that you need a developed level of training to take on those. I would not want to put that pressure on.

Q225 Chair: If I could interject on that, I suppose a different way of looking at that question is whether somebody who has a SENCO qualification and is at an appropriate level of seniority should be on the senior leadership team, if you see what I mean. It is a different starting point.

Conrad Bourne: Yes, I agree with that line management of SEND and the NPQ in particular I see more of a leadership of SEND. It is not just a qualification to become a SENCO. There is a vehicle for that and I absolutely encourage that. I would not object at all to that being a statutory requirement in schools.

Nicole Dempsey: One thing that with hindsight I value highly in my career is that I happened to become a SENCO in a local authority that had a SENCO training programme that was additional to the national SENCO award and much more practical and connected us with local services and systems. Learning that that is not the norm has influenced my practice.

One thing I do in my role as Director of SEND for Dixons is lead our internal network. We try hard to use that to reduce SENCO workload and protect their time, upskill and distribute understanding and knowledge and confidence across leadership. When our SENCOs come on our in-house version of SENCO training, they need to bring either their line manager or their principal with them so that they are being upskilled alongside. We have taken other practical measures as well like embedding the assess, plan, do, review process into the calendar at trust level and so hopefully our SENCOs are never battling for that time with staff and things like that.

Hopefully, we are creating more conducive conditions for our SENCOs but they are more affected by the external factors that we have already spoken about. Reviewing the guidance around the SENCO role alongside reviewing everyone's role, teacher roles, middle and senior leaderships



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and heads, and then that being reflected in the code of practice and in the NPQ suite in particular is important.

As for SENCOs being on the senior leadership team, Conrad has already articulated a lot of what I was going to say and so I will not repeat it, but I will add that whatever that looks like, having advocacy and knowledge and understanding on the senior leadership team is an absolute must, but we do not want to create a perverse incentive where either great SENCOs are overlooked because they are at an earlier career stage or someone is given that title on senior leadership to tick the box but other people are doing the work without that accountability of the SENCO role. We definitely see strength in having senior leaders and principals that have been a SENCO at some point in their career. We see that clearly.

It does not necessarily get underneath the actual issue. It should not be that the SENCO needs to be on the senior leadership team for there to be that advocacy and understanding. If a school feels that it needs the SENCO on the senior leadership team for children with SEN's rights to be met, putting the SENCO on the senior leadership team will not make any difference.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: Controversially, they should be on the senior leadership team. My reasoning for that is around the accountability of the role. If we think that that is a strategic role within a school, having someone who is then able to lead on strategy across a school rather than within a department or a team is important. From my perspective, I expect my SENCOs to be expert teachers and be able to go in and diagnose where a teacher might need coaching and support but at the same time be able to support a child on an individual level with a needs assessment and what is going on with them.

For me, the protection that we are trying to put around each of my SENCOs as an assistant headteacher at the moment is around protection of the time because invariably if we add the "inclusion" word into that, their time can be taken up with behavioural matters or diverted away from issues that are pertinent to making sure classroom practice is improved for all children. I see the point exactly that colleagues are making but, from my perspective, it is about that prioritisation of classroom support but that needs a strategic thinker to then make sure that that is disseminated across an entire school.

Q226 **Manuela Perteghella:** You have already discussed how you have implemented a whole school approach to SEND. My question is about the role of training and CPD in achieving an inclusive approach to SEND. Nicole?

Nicole Dempsey: We have covered a little bit of this as well and the importance of the guidance in the code of practice being updated in light of subsequent research and understanding and putting a lot more emphasis on the universal in the SEN support stage and leadership of SEND across middle and senior leadership to be better reflected in the



code of practice and then the ITT and early career framework and the NPQ suite to be more reflective of that and to foster that. I do not have a lot of control of that.

Within my own trust, we found as we have taken on SENCOs and leaders and schools in some cases that often the CPD that they deliver focuses on broad areas of need or specific need types, is broad brush and generic and also has a lot of information that the teachers cannot directly use or apply. We always advocate three types of SEND CPD before that. That has a place but it is fourth in the priority list.

The first is SENCOs and leaders working collaboratively with leaders of teaching and learning and behaviour and culture to make those training sessions for staff inherently inclusive and about SEND as the norm. The second is to use CPD time, practice and coaching to teach our staff to use the specific strategies that we want them to use for all groups of children and individuals. The third is to spotlight specific individuals or groups of children who are in our schools.

By following that formula, our staff are able to apply it. It is much more real and much more practical to them. Also, they develop their understanding of different need types and broad areas of need through the relationships and understanding of the children that they have in front of them and how best to work with them.

Conrad Bourne: Some of this goes back to recruiting teachers with values that fit with the context of what you are trying to do. As a school, it is harder to teach values than teach teaching techniques. That is a real challenge in our school system when we are struggling to recruit teachers in the first place. Again, I agree with Nicole that training for us is more nuanced and career staged. Also, some teachers find particular challenges in the classroom with students who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. We know that. We are aware of that.

In the whole suite of training that is out there, what is the best training? My own view is a problem-based approach to training is an approach that we would tend to take in having the most impact for the time given to it. If I can be self-indulgent, I point colleagues towards things like the whole school SEND suite of CPD because it is a problem-solving-based approach led by practitioners in the field, which is highly relevant.

There is a whole mix. Some of it is self-directed. Some of it is directed by schools. For us, it would be based upon the conversation with teachers and understanding their need and challenges rather than whole school delivery on some of the things that Nicole has said that do not have a substantial return in impact.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: For me, it is about understanding where the school is at when you meet it. Sometimes when you go into a school, as Nicole was saying, you enter to support. How long ago is it since they last had a SEND audit or a review? That starts to unpick where the strategic



HOUSE OF COMMONS

aims of the school may not be so aligned with making sure that SEND is the top priority of the senior leadership team. In there, you then unpick why pedagogical approaches do not match what children need in classrooms. It is nuanced highly to the individual school that you are working with or that meets you.

For me, it is about making sure that we are trying to work away from, years ago, broad brush, "Let us all learn about ASD today. What do we all know?" It is the prioritisation of every day, as long as the lens of SEND is still going through that. I wonder whether some schools are looking at that at all. That is where, for me, the training should start. What is the need?

Q227 Darren Paffey: For time's sake, I have a quick couple of things on the notional £6,000 for SEND support costs. We have heard arguments about ringfencing it. What is your view and what would the impact of that be? Secondly, we have also heard arguments that it is insufficient. If you agree with that, what would be a sufficient amount? Who wants to start on the money?

Conrad Bourne: For my priorities, of course money is important and, if there is more money available, we will have it, thank you very much. It is more about, for me, what the school is doing. I see lots of provision in schools, but does that provision fit the student and enable them to make progress? You just alluded there to undertaking a SEND audit. Part of that has to be value for money. Where is the money being spent and what impact does that spending have? I have seen, working with clinicians, that that is the last conversation we have about money. It is more about how we connect together across systems and we can enable each other to work more effectively together and joining up. The money conversation often comes later.

Q228 Darren Paffey: Would your priorities be better enabled if the funding were either ringfenced or increased?

Conrad Bourne: Ringfencing, yes, with the premise of value for money and understanding where the money goes and understanding where we are having the best impact. Ringfencing gives us that because we know where the money goes. At the moment, the SEND notional budget is made up of various elements and pots, not just the SEND money. Therefore, it is not ringfenced.

Nicole Dempsey: Again, anything that increases bureaucracy and rigidity does not feel like it would be helpful and we would need to be careful with. Anywhere we are trying to manage SEN provision as something separate that is added on, it quickly becomes segregationist and unwieldy. However, if we have sufficient funding to the main budget and access to the supporting services that we need, it becomes much more natural and inclusive to build on and enhance your main offer. Rigidity and bureaucracy probably does not serve that purpose.



However, we have to consider that that £6,000, albeit problematic and a bit arbitrary, serves a purpose in evidencing the threshold for EHCP and we cannot take that away without replacing it with something. Again, the guidance on what a great universal offer looks like, what good SEND support looks like, how to use the assess, plan, do, review process and graduated response from the earliest stage, and being able to access the funding and services as part of what we do is the only way to make it so we are able to work in the way that we want and not rely on the EHCP system to get the things that we need.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: Nicole has summed that up perfectly. I do not believe that the £6,000 is enough. Part of the reason is the astronomical cost of services has gone up and that has not been in line with the £6,000 changing at all in the school's budgets.

There is inequality of cost sometimes. I am thinking about the provision that you might need to secure for a child and the cost of that in some local authorities whereby mainstream is charging £10,000 and it is £90,000 for another. It is crazy. Where does the LA go? What do you do as a school?

From our perspective, going back to what we said about the high needs funding block being devolved into groups, that then supports us because we are able to supplement the £6,000, like Nicole was saying, when we know what the need is and what we are trying to achieve with, "This is how much we need from this block of funding and this is how we will use it", and those governance safeguards being in place for groups of schools to make decisions on what is needed for the children they serve.

Darren Paffey: They were focused answers. Thank you.

Q229 **Chair:** Thank you. A final question from me. We have heard proposals from some of our other witnesses that it would make sense for part of the high needs block funding to be directed to the early years. Do you believe that would be beneficial and are there any other changes to the way that that funding is allocated that would support you to deliver for the children for whom you are responsible? I will start with Nicole.

Nicole Dempsey: Early years is not my area of expertise, but I have started talking now. Anything that feels like we are diverting money from one place to another in light of everything we have already discussed does not feel right. Robbing Peter to pay Paul is probably not the approach, even though it makes perfect sense to me to prioritise early years and those opportunities for early intervention and avoiding exacerbation through the system. It makes perfect sense.

We also have to remember that the opportunities for preventative, proactive work and early intervention continue throughout a child's education. It does not necessarily have to happen in the early years. At the first point we notice that there is something with one of our 15-year-olds, we want access to the services that support us and the guidance



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and the structures to be able to act as quickly as possible at that stage as well.

Daniel Constable-Phelps: The only advantage that I could see of devolving funding towards schools to make decisions on what that could be used for would be beneficial around—across my group of schools we run nurseries. Often those who are running the nurseries are frustrated that the level of support that is required to meet the need of a child has to be almost waited for because of developmental need and the need to make sure that the robust assessment is in place, as opposed to what we can do with our main school. Where we see an emerging need, we go out there and we are able to use that devolved funding.

That would be useful in EYFS settings because, at the minute, the system is you asking the local authority for funding and waiting for placement funding similar to an EHC for EYFS funding, for example, and the lag time of being able to then meet that need of a child who is emerging or a parent straightaway. I see that devolving that funding would be more supportive in making sure that we can utilise it quickly and effectively to meet the need that we are presented with.

Conrad Bourne: I can see that. The challenges I go back to, though, are the comments I made earlier about early intervention and sustainability. Projects like LSAC, PINS and so on are happening in primary schools and I would support all those, but what will be the ripples of that work if I am a year 10 teacher in a classroom or a year 9 teacher? Will there be any sustainability as those projects dissipate as we move into secondary schools? That is the key challenge for me.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed. It has been fascinating for us to be able to learn from your expertise and from the work that you are all doing in the schools where you work. Thank you for being here with us this morning. I say this to all our witnesses. If we did not get time to cover any points of detail today that you would like to make us aware of, please feel free to write to the Committee after the session and we welcome that as well. That brings proceedings to an end for today. Thank you.