

# Written evidence from the National Autistic Society [NDS0022]

## Inquiry: National Disability Strategy

### Introduction

1. Autism is a lifelong disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that while there are certain difficulties that everyone on the autism spectrum shares, the condition affects them in different ways. Some autistic people are able to live relatively independent lives, while others will need a lifetime of specialist support. It affects more than one in 100 people in the UK.<sup>1</sup>
2. The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading autism charity. Since we began 60 years ago, we have been pioneering new ways to support people and understand autism. We continue to learn every day from the children and adults we support in our schools and care services. Based on our experience, and with support from our members, donors and volunteers, we provide life-changing information and advice to millions of autistic people, their families and friends. We also support professionals, politicians and the public to better understand autism, so that more autistic people of all ages can be understood, supported and appreciated for who they are.
3. The National Autistic Society provides the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism (APPGA). We supported the APPGA in carrying out an inquiry in 2019 into the impact of the Autism Act 2009, a landmark piece of legislation that remains the only piece of legislation dedicated to improving support and services for a specific group of disabled people.
4. This submission will address the implementation and development of the Government's National Disability Strategy with a focus on the elements of the strategy related to autism. Overall, while this strategy has some big long-term goals, like ensuring fairness and equality, it's still not yet clear how the Government will meet many of them. If the Government is truly going to transform disabled people's lives, we ultimately need a concrete plan and investment.
5. The National Autistic Society is happy to provide any further information that the Committee would find useful, or to provide oral evidence if required.

### Autism as a disability under the Equality Act 2010

6. The Equality Act 2010 is clear that autism is a disability, in terms of it being an impairment that has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on the autistic person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. However, for many people on the autism spectrum, autism is a hidden disability. This means that the wider public may not be aware of the things they struggle with and their need for support or adjustments.

### **How was the National Disability Strategy developed? How have stakeholder contributions informed the strategy?**

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<sup>1</sup> The NHS Information Centre, Community and Mental Health Team, Brugha T et al (2012), *Estimating the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions in adults: extending the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey*, Leeds: NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care.

7. The National Autistic Society is a member of the Disability Charities Consortium (DCC), alongside nine other leading not-for-profit disability organisations. Together, we set out a manifesto ahead of publication to set out what we want to see, as well as providing solutions and areas for change which we think must be at the heart of the Government's National Disability Strategy, to tackle the barriers that disabled people face in their daily lives.
8. As part of the DCC, we wanted to see the following things in the National Disability Strategy:
  - clear and sizeable actions that will be taken, including details of how long they will take, how much money is needed and how the success of these will be measured
  - checking and taking responsibility for progress, including leadership and involvement of disabled people
  - engagement with disabled people that is accessible and meaningful. Online data collection must be one part of a wider consultation, with many options for people to take part
  - clear, timely and accessible ways for people to take part and get updates on progress.
  - a clear way forward to bringing change to disabled people's lives.
9. Members of the DCC, including the National Autistic Society were invited to stakeholder roundtables on a range of themes. We shared the Government's survey when it was published.

**How effectively is the Government communicating with disabled people and involving them in the implementation and further development of the strategy?**

10. On the 13<sup>th</sup> June, the Minister for Disabled People issued a statement announcing that the Secretary of State would be “pausing a limited number of policies which are referred to in the strategy or are directly connected with it”. However, since then there has been no public communication with disabled people on what areas of the strategy are being paused. There has not yet been any detail given around an update on progress made in year one of the strategy. We are concerned that the lack of communication with disabled people on what is happening with policies means that there is limited scope for accountability on the delivery of the strategy.

**How well are the goals in the strategy being funded and measured for success?**

11. It remains unclear what measures the Government will use in the future to monitor progress implementing the strategy. However, where commitments in the NDS had been sourced from other Government documents (for example the National Autism Strategy) there will be measures contained in those other documents (for example the Year One Implementation Plan to the National Autism Strategy),

**What progress has been made on the strategy so far? How quickly can some of the short term goals be met?**

12. As stated above, it is unclear what measures the Government will use in the future to monitor progress implementing the strategy. Without a clear process for monitoring implementation, this is a difficult question to answer.
13. There are a few short term goals made in the Strategy on which we comment as part of our response to the questions on health inequalities, employment and the SEND Review.

Public Understanding

14. There is one key short term goal in the strategy related to autistic people which we would like to focus on which is that in the National Disability Strategy, DHSC said they would launch the first ever national initiative to raise understanding of autism. In the strategy there is a commitment to

develop the initiative by autumn 2021 by working with autistic people and their families and the voluntary sector. DHSC propose to trial and evaluate the impact of the initiative by May 2022.

15. By July 2022, DHSC has neither developed a public understanding initiative, nor trialled or evaluated the impact of the initiative. It has created a specification document. The National Autistic Society's research shows how vital public understanding is to make real change for the lives of autistic people, which is why DHSC delays in producing the public understanding initiative as set out in the national disability strategy is particularly disappointing.
16. Polling that we did in 2015 suggests that 99.5% of people have heard of autism<sup>2</sup>, but our research found that just 16% of autistic people and their families feel the public understand what it means to be autistic. Poor public understanding of autism has profoundly negative consequences for autistic people. Our research showed that 79% of autistic people and 70% of families felt socially isolated because of this lack of public understanding of autism. Just 24% of autistic adults and 26% of family members told the APPGA's 2019 inquiry<sup>3</sup>, that public understanding of autism had improved since the Autism Act was passed in 2009.
17. The strategy also highlights that the promised initiative would emphasise the diversity of the autistic community, including the presentation of autism in women and girls, the LGBTQ+ community and autistic people from ethnic minority backgrounds. This is particularly important in terms of public understanding as the effect of people's different identities are not well understood. We have heard through our own work and from the APPGA inquiry that autistic people from these groups can end up feeling particularly isolated and that awareness and understanding of autism in some communities (eg BAME communities) falls behind that of wider society. This means that certain autistic people miss out on getting vital support. Witnesses talked about how important it is to improve understanding of how different identities intersect, for example, what it means to be an autistic woman, autistic and black, or Muslim, gay, or non-binary. This needs to be part of the public's understanding, and must also be acknowledged by care and support services.
18. The impact of the lack of public understanding in relation to how autism effect women and girls, can be seen in the statistics in the recently published policy paper *Building the right support for people with a learning disability and autistic people*. The paper sets out that the number of inpatients who have a diagnosis of autism (and no learning disability) has increased by nearly 20% from March 2017 to January 2022. And that this increase has been largely driven by an increasing number of female autistic inpatients. In January 2022, compared to March 2017, there has been a 70% increase in autistic females and a 2% decrease in autistic males who are in mental health hospitals. This highlights the need for an effective public understanding initiative that would lead to more females being diagnosed earlier with autism and gaining the support they need before reaching crisis levels.<sup>4</sup>

### **What progress is being made to reduce health inequalities for people with learning disabilities and autism?**

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<sup>2</sup> Too Much Information: [https://nen.press/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/TMI\\_Campaign\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_290316-1.pdf](https://nen.press/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/TMI_Campaign_Report_FINAL_290316-1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The Autism Act, 10 Years On: <https://pearsfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/APPGA-Autism-Act-Inquiry-Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Building the Right Support for People with a Learning Disability and Autistic People Action Plan (July 2022): [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1092537/Building-the-Right-Support-for-People-with-a-Learning-Disability-and-Autistic-People-Action-Plan-accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1092537/Building-the-Right-Support-for-People-with-a-Learning-Disability-and-Autistic-People-Action-Plan-accessible.pdf)

19. The Care Quality Commission (CQC), released a report<sup>5</sup> last year that finds many autistic people are not getting the care and support they need.
20. Last year, more mental health wards for autistic people and people with learning disabilities were rated inadequate compared to mental health wards in other NHS or independent mental health services (8%)<sup>6</sup>. Twenty percent were rated as requires improvement. Therefore, it is crucial that the Government and NHS urgently tackle the crisis in mental health services that sees autistic people hitting crisis and being admitted to these wards.
21. We know from the CQC's findings and our own 'Left Stranded'<sup>7</sup> report that coronavirus has deepened existing inequalities, including access to good quality health, mental health and social care services. This disparity, however, is not new. Without the right support at the right time, autistic children and adults' needs can quickly escalate and even spiral into crisis. The Government must act, by providing the long-term funding the adult social care system and the NHS need. The cost of inaction will be huge.
22. We welcome areas where progress has been made to help reduce inequalities. In March 2021, the NHS announced the Learning Disabilities Mortality Review (LeDeR) programme will be expanded and improved to include autistic people. This will help improve care, reduce health inequalities and prevent premature mortality by reviewing information about the health and social care support autistic people had received before they died.
23. We are also pleased to see the Government has introduced a requirement for CQC registered service providers to ensure their employees receive learning disability and autism training appropriate to their role. This requirement is set out in the Health and Care Act (2022). It will be delivered in the form of the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training in Learning Disability and Autism which we at the National Autistic Society helped to develop. This is vital as it means health and social care staff will understand the needs of people with autism in their care and have the confidence and skills to ensure they can access the healthcare they need.
24. However, there are a number of areas where health inequalities for autistic people are particularly apparent. Despite some progress moving people with a learning disability out of mental health hospitals and into the community, the number of autistic people in inpatient facilities has increased. In 2015, autistic people made up 38% of the number in mental health hospital, now it is 61%.<sup>8</sup> The Government have set out in their Draft Mental Health Bill and the Building the Right Support Plan, proposal to change the definition of 'mental disorder' in the Mental Health Act that will prevent autistic people being wrongfully detained in mental health hospitals.
25. While this is a welcome and long overdue change, it isn't enough to stop the scandal of autistic people being wrongfully detained and stuck in mental health hospitals. A lack of progress on this issue, along with a social care system at breaking point, means too many autistic people don't get the support they need early on, and can spiral into crisis and end up in hospital.

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<sup>5</sup> State of Care (May 2022): <https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-report/state-care>

<sup>6</sup> State of Care (May 2022): <https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-report/state-care>

<sup>7</sup> National Autistic Society, Left Stranded: The impact of coronavirus on autistic people and their families in the UK (September 2020): <https://s4.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/1573224908/63117952292/width=-1/height=-1/format=-1/fit=scale/t=444295/e=never/k=da5c189a/LeftStranded%20Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Learning disability services monthly statistics from Assuring Transformation dataset: data tables (June 2022 publication): <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/learning-disability-services-statistics/at-may-2022-mhds-march-2022-final/datasets---at>

26. Government must push ahead with reforming mental health law, and properly fund the social care system to provide the support autistic people need. Without it, this scandal won't end.
27. We often see evidence that autistic people are subject to health inequalities in terms of receiving adequate and effective treatment for co-occurring mental health conditions due to a lack of understanding about autism. For example, 2021 research suggests that whilst it is largely accepted that 20-30%<sup>9</sup> of those in treatment for anorexia nervosa show diagnostic features of autism, the impact that this has on experiences of symptoms and treatment is not fully understood by professionals involved in their care.
28. This shows, misunderstanding of autism results in less effective treatment outcomes and impacts on engagement with relevant services. We also know that in particular autistic girls and women may be misdiagnosed with mental health conditions including personality disorders, further delaying access to the correct diagnosis and suitable support. In order to reduce health inequalities, it is necessary to address gaps both within understanding of autism with a particular focus on women as well as other groups such as BAME and LGBTQ+ individuals amongst mental health professionals, as well as an absence of support services tailored for autistic people both in the community and in hospital.
29. We believe a key factor in reducing health inequalities for people is to reduce autism diagnosis waiting times so people are better able to access all the support they need. In the autism strategy, as part of the Government's commitments to reduce health inequalities, they pledged to invest £10.5 million to test and implement the most effective ways to reduce diagnosis waiting times for children and young people, the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on waiting lists, and proactively identify those who are waiting for an assessment and are at risk of crisis.
30. So far, the effect of this investment has been minimal and in fact the latest NHS data shows between April 2021 and March 2022, the number of patients with an open referral for suspected autism has increased from just over 90,000 to nearly 120,000. This is an increase of 39%. Of the patients with an open referral, 82,076 had referrals which have been open for at least 13 weeks.<sup>10</sup>

### **What progress has been made on reintroducing annual health checks for people with learning disabilities?**

28. As set out in the National Autism Strategy, Newcastle University are conducting a study to look into whether annual health checks will benefit autistic people.<sup>11</sup> This study has three stages and the first two of the three have been completed and now the study is in the pilot phase which is to take place from 2022 - 2024. The National Autistic Society are supporting this work by running focus groups with autistic people to gather information on their views on

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<sup>9</sup> Babb, C., Brede, J., Jones, C.R., Elliott, M., Zanker, C., Tchanturia, K., Serpell, L., Mandy, W. and Fox, J.R., 2021. 'It's not that they don't want to access the support... it's the impact of the autism': The experience of eating disorder services from the perspective of autistic women, parents and healthcare professionals. *Autism*, 25(5), pp.1409-1421.

<sup>10</sup> Autism Statistics, April 2021 to March 2022 (June 2022): <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/autism-statistics/april-2021-to-march-2022#highlights>

<sup>11</sup> Health Checks for Autistic Adults:

<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/autismhealthchecks/aboutourproject/#:~:text=We%20will%20pilot%20the%20Autism,to%20start%20in%20January%202021.>

autistic people being offered annual health checks. Of particular interest are those from the LGBTQ+ community, Black Asian and other ethnic minority groups and those who are or have experienced homelessness, as previous surveys conducted by NICE did not have a diverse enough sample population.

**How will the National Disability Strategy support people with learning disabilities and autism into work and help them to progress in work? What more could the Government do to deliver for disabled people who are further away from the job market?**

29. We know that the Disability Employment Gap is still too wide, with around half of disabled people in work, compared to over 80% of non-disabled people.<sup>12</sup> But data from the Office of National Statistics published last year shows that the autism employment gap is even wider, with just 22% of autistic people reported to be in paid work.<sup>13</sup> This is a shocking figure and even lower than data previously suggested in our surveys.
30. We are disappointed that the Government did not take the opportunity to set a new target for improving the employment rate for disabled people.
31. We are very pleased that the Government worked with us to design an autism framework to transform the service available to jobseekers on the autism spectrum. This will initially be trialled in 15 Jobcentre Plus sites. The framework explores how to support autistic people into employment, ensuring jobcentre appointments with autistic customers take place in the right environment and educating local employers. We want all Jobcentre staff to understand autism, be able to think about their practice and make the necessary changes to the support and environment that autistic people need.
32. We look forward to our continued work with the team at DWP to get jobcentres working better for autistic people, and to get more autistic people in the jobs that they want and deserve.
33. We also welcome the development of Access to Work Adjustments Passport as promised in the strategy. The government launched its pilot scheme in December 2021, and it is now underway at University of Wolverhampton and Manchester Metropolitan University.
34. Through Access to Work, disabled people can benefit from grants worth up to £62,900 to cover the cost of specialist equipment needed to support them to do their job. A passport will be offered to students who already receive extra support while studying at university, capturing information about their condition and the adjustments they already benefit from, avoiding repetitive disclosures when it comes to applying for the grant once they start work.
35. It is crucial that the Government commits further to tackling the Disability Employment Gap, including for autistic people. Although a priority outcome highlighted in the strategy is to reduce the disability employment gap, the strategy could have set a new, more ambitious goal. We are worried that out of all disabled people, autistic people seem to have the worst employment rate. The Government must improve the support and understanding disabled people, including autistic people, get to find and keep work.

<sup>12</sup> Disability employment Gap

<https://s3.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/1573224908/63516243370/width=-1/height=-1/format=-1/fit=scale/t=444848/e=never/k=59f99727/TMI%20Employment%20Report%2024pp%20WEB.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> ONS data on disability employment

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2020>

## **Does the SEND review provide a framework that will meet the needs of young people with learning disabilities and autism with the best opportunities?**

36. We believe that the SEND review represents an important opportunity to address many longstanding issues in the SEN system. Currently, too many autistic children and young people have a poor experience of school. Education Health and Care plans are of a very mixed quality and very often services are not being delivered even when they have been written into a plan. Families still face a cliff edge when their autistic child leaves education, and the lack of support in school and for transitions leads to poor aspirational and employment outcomes.
37. We are hopeful that the Government addresses many of the huge issues affecting the SEND system, identified in successive education reports. We have examined the proposals in the Green Paper and although elements of the proposals are welcome, much of it falls short of the change needed to bring a real difference to the lives of many autistic children.
38. Autistic children represent the largest group going to SEND Tribunal. The Government's own figures<sup>14</sup> show that the number of legal appeals is rising steadily and that findings are in favour of the child in 95% of cases. This is an indication that Councils consistently fail to uphold the law, meaning autistic children and young people are routinely denied the provision and support to which they are legally entitled. The Government needs to do more to ensure that legislation is followed and autistic children's rights are secured. We strongly believe that evidence of a poorly performing system is not alone sufficient evidence for legal change and we strongly object to any weakening of children's rights or entitlements.
39. According to the latest SEN data (16/06/22),<sup>15</sup> there are 103,429 autistic young people with an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan. We are in principle supportive of proposals for a standardised and digitised EHC plan process and template. This could particularly benefit schools that sit on county borders as well as special schools, which typically take pupils from several different Councils. Our hope is that there is a smooth and orderly transition to this new standardised, digitised process, with improved accessibility to education and medical professionals. It will be important for the voices of disabled children, parents and professionals are listened to in the development of these improved and standardised process.
40. There is a significant risk that with the introduction of a new national standard on Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments, the current threshold - set out in section 36 of the Children and Families Act (2014) - will be raised. The Government's wording in the Green Paper is unhelpfully vague and does not confirm that this is not the case. At present, it is clear when an assessment should be carried out and that threshold is based on the needs of a child. It would be inappropriate to change this as it would lead to thousands of autistic children not getting the right support.
41. We believe there are two fundamental issues that drive delays in getting an EHC assessment and support:
  - a. There is insufficient resource in the system to meet demand, based on children's needs. As above, the system should be properly funded.

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<sup>14</sup> Tribunal Statistics Quarterly: July to September 2021 (December 2021):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2021>

<sup>15</sup> Special educational needs in England (June 2022): <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2021-22>



- b. Insufficiently resource focused on SEN Support to stop children developing increasing levels of need. The Governments plans in the Green Paper note this, but fails to give detail about how it will make sure resource is targeted specifically at SEN Support.
42. In our Left stranded report<sup>16</sup>, we also found that during the coronavirus pandemic many parents experienced a reduction in support and services. In our recent School Report,<sup>17</sup> parents told us about the negative impact on the mental health of their autistic children. In addition, many autistic children's needs will have changed since lockdown, and therefore as well as to catch-up tuition, autistic children may require greater mental health and wellbeing provision. This all needs to be reflected in the Review.
43. We are concerned that any form of national banding and tariff system could be used as an opportunity to reduce costs with minimal visibility and accountability, with children and young people with SEND paying the real price.
44. Tariffs must be set at the level to match actual need to avoid levelling down and also to address any gaps in provision. A cap in funding could seriously affect staff and parental confidence in the SEND system. In our most recent survey,<sup>18</sup> 74% of parents said their child's school place did not fully meet their needs, therefore confidence is at an all-time low. If funding bands and tariffs are aligned with the National Standards, there is a danger it could set a ceiling on funding for more specialist provision thus leaving schools with responsibility, but insufficient funding for young people who need more specialised support.
45. The Government proposes a set of standards for how complaints related to the SEND processes and provision should be dealt with and who is responsible for resolving concerns. The proposals will require mediation before a complaint can go to appeal. We are concerned about how this would work, as many parents have to go to Tribunal just to get their children's basic entitlements.
46. Since 2014, it has been a requirement for parents to either participate in mediation or attain a certificate to say they have considered it before going to appeal. Mediation generates mixed responses from parents. In some instances, parents have experienced a willing local authority and a skilled mediator. In other cases, Learning Authorities may not attend at all, send inexperienced SEN mediators or even bring their own legal representative, which goes completely against the spirit of mediation.
47. Based on the experiences of the parents we hear from, we are extremely concerned about this proposal and strongly believe the Government should reconsider. As set out above, the current system is broken, leaving parents fighting for the right support. Meanwhile Councils face tight finances and insufficient resource to provide the support that is needed. Mediation would simply not work within this context: relationships have broken down, faith has been

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<sup>16</sup> National Autistic Society, Left Stranded: The impact of coronavirus on autistic people and their families in the UK (September 2020): <https://s4.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/1573224908/63117952292/width=-1/height=-1/format=-1/fit=scale/t=444295/e=never/k=da5c189a/LeftStranded%20Report.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> National Autistic Society, School report 2021 (November 2021): [https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/OHTGORW0HHJnx\\_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf](https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/OHTGORW0HHJnx_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> National Autistic Society, School report 2021 (November 2021): [https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/OHTGORW0HHJnx\\_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf](https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/OHTGORW0HHJnx_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf)



lost, decisions are made based on existing services and cost. Therefore, mediation would simply lead to further delay to children getting the right support and eventually still having to go to tribunal.

48. The Government proposes improving mainstream provision, building on the Schools White Paper, through teacher training and development. We do think this is a step in the right direction, but it doesn't go as far as saying that all teachers must have autism training, which is vital.
49. The need for whole school autism training is exemplified in our recent research.<sup>19</sup> Only one in 12 autistic children in our survey felt that other students at their school knew enough about autism. Other children's understanding is vital to enable young autistic people to make friends, work with their peers and feel accepted and supported. Seven in 10 autistic children said school would be better if more teachers understood autism. This is consistent with our previous education research in 2017. This is an entrenched issue that autistic children and young people face. High quality autism training is the key to implementation of the autism strategy. With greater awareness and understanding, schools are better placed to provide the support that autistic children and young people need.
50. There is support from teachers for inclusion of children with special educational needs, but many lack the confidence and knowledge to effectively support autistic pupils. This can have an adverse effect on their education. In the APPGA's Autism in England report,<sup>20</sup> fewer than five in 10 teachers said that they felt confident about supporting a child on the autism spectrum.
51. We applaud the Government's ambition and commitment to develop the workforce but this is unobtainable without developing more highly skilled SEN professionals. This won't be possible through Level 3 qualifications, alone. Moreover, here is much more work that needs to be done to upskill the Private, Voluntary or Independent (PVI) workforce to identify and provide for the needs of the youngest children. Opportunities to upskill will also help with staff retention and give staff increased confidence to create inclusive learning environments. It is also important that the SEN training and understanding of SEN system extended to school governors and relevant staff in Councils.
52. We believe the role of SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) has become increasingly unsustainable. From our focus groups with parents of autistic children, we've learnt that SENCOs are having to juggle the roles of SENCO and teacher and they're not able to get sufficient time out of classes to lead work across their schools.
53. The SENCO is the lynchpin of an effective SEND provision in a school, but many SENCOs do not have sufficient time to ensure that provision is in place to meet the needs of learners with SEND in their schools. Instead, they spend the majority of the time as a SENCO gathering evidence for EHC needs assessments. These SEN experts should be allowed more time to do their job. The pressures faced by SEND professionals is clearly demonstrated by the high rate of burnout: 12.3% of SEN teachers leave the profession – that's nearly double

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<sup>19</sup> National Autistic Society, School report 2021 (November 2021): [https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/OHTGORW0HHJnx\\_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf](https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/OHTGORW0HHJnx_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Autism and education in England 2017 (2017): <https://www.autism-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/APPGA-autism-and-education-report.pdf>

the rate of other teachers.<sup>21</sup>

54. The Green Paper states that the Government has already increased funding to schools. Nevertheless, it's entirely unclear if any of this has been spent on SEN Support. The Government needs to be certain this money is being spent on supporting SEN students in the right way. This is vital to tackling delays to EHC Plans by reducing demand and improving children's outcomes.
55. The Government pledges to increase its total investment in the schools' budgets by £7 billion by 2024-25, but it is vital that commitments are made to SEND Support. Our research has found that the majority of parents feel there is an inadequate quality of support.<sup>22</sup> Most believe there are insufficient professional resources or intervention. We would like to see sufficient, long-term funding in place to give autistic young people the quality education they deserve.
56. A lot more needs to be done to improve school transitions for autistic children and young people. Transitions can be particularly stressful and challenging periods for autistic children, young people and their parents. We would like to see a long-term plan in place to support autistic children and young people with transitions. Special attention should be given to building up social and decision-making skills, confidence and self-esteem, employability skills and vocational skills which relate to the young person's gifts and interests.
57. We call on the Government to:
  - a. Secure autistic children's rights and entitlements better
  - b. Tackle the delays in getting support and improve the support that is on offer.
  - c. Involve autistic children and their parents in the decisions that are being made about them
  - d. Put an end to the needless battles. Getting the right support should not depend on where you live, but on what your needs are.
  - e. Take a whole school approach to autism training to improve autism understanding.

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<sup>21</sup> School Teachers' Review Body: Twenty-seventh Report – 2017 (July 2017):

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/626156/59497\\_School\\_Teachers\\_Review\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/626156/59497_School_Teachers_Review_Accessible.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> National Autistic Society, School report 2021 (November 2021): [https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/0HTGORW0HHJnx\\_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf](https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/0HTGORW0HHJnx_c0HLZm0HWvpWc/NAS-Education-Report-2021-A4%20%281%29.pdf)