

BRIEFING | JULY 2026

Joining up SEND

How government can make special educational needs and disabilities services more cohesive

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SEND reform is at risk from poor government coordination

- SEND teams have reportedly been hit disproportionately by NHS job cuts, despite being central to reform delivery
- Local areas have been told to commit to SEND reform plans, but ongoing reorganisations in councils and the NHS means they are planning for a future system that is still being redesigned
- DfE and MHCLG have each started their own uncoordinated attempts to align the government's various reform programmes

Ministers must make working together easier, not harder

- Report author Amber Dellar says:

"Ministers are currently asking schools, councils and health services to overcome barriers that Whitehall itself has created. If ministers want a more joined-up system, they need to get off the sidelines and build a system that makes working together easier, not harder."

How to build a more cohesive SEND system

1. DfE must make essential policy decisions about its vision for SEND reform, including guidance on 'prevention', before implementation is fully under way
2. DfE, MHCLG and DHSC should build a clearer national picture of spending and workforce capacity across SEND and children's services to guide decisions about reform
3. A minister in the centre of government must integrate SEND reform with the government's wider priorities for public service reform
4. DfE must establish a cross-government working group, commissioned by No.10 and bringing together DfE, DHSC and MHCLG, to oversee the implementation of SEND reform, resolve conflicts between departments and address problems raised by those delivering and using the system
5. A minister in the centre of government should ensure DHSC clearly explains how SEND reform fits alongside other health priorities
6. DHSC must work with NHS England to make sure workforce cuts in Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) do not leave SEND services without the required staff and capacity
7. The government should develop funding models that make joint working on SEND easier
8. The cross-government working group on SEND must create shared national systems and processes for SEND

The full report can be read and downloaded at:
www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/joining-send