

Have your say on the future of education for children with autism

This paper contains tips and ideas for responding to the Government's Green Paper [Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability](#). **You must respond to the consultation by 30 June 2011.**

Some key things to remember when responding to the consultation

- > Use examples from your own life to help show why the Government should do certain things. For example, if you think that there are additional ways to improve early identification of autism, give examples of the problems caused when children are identified late.
- > Use examples of good practice too. For example, if your school has developed autism expertise or the local authority involves parents in the planning of local services, this is very useful to show how it can be done.
- > You do not have to answer all of the questions (there are 59 in total) in the Green Paper consultation document. You can comment on the specific proposals or write broadly about your experiences. Where possible, you should try and say whether you think the Government proposals will or won't work, and highlight consequences that the Government haven't thought off.
- > You can **respond to the consultation**, through our [online action](#). You can also use the [Government's consultation website](#) to respond in more detail about their proposals. You can also email your views to send.greenpaper@education.gsi.gov.uk or write to Consultation Unit, Department for Education, Area 1C, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn WA7 2GJ.
- > We would also like to see what you have told the Government to help inform our work. If you are happy to share your views, please send a copy to us at policy@nas.org.uk or by post to Policy Team, The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG.

Below is a summary of some of the key points from the Green Paper by each chapter and our view. You might find these useful when you are writing your own response.

Chapter 1: Early identification and assessment

The Government wants:

- improved identification through **health and development reviews for children aged 2 and 2 ½** and **extra health visitors**;
- statements of SEN to be replaced with an '**Education, Health and Care Plans**' for children aged 0-25. The new plan will give parents the same statutory protection as the current statement, and will be determined through a **single multi-agency assessment process**; and
- to **reduce** the time it takes to carry out a **statutory assessment** from 26 weeks to a maximum of 20 weeks.

What we think

- The Government needs to consider how to identify SEN later in a child's life: autism will not always be identifiable in children until after they are aged 2 ½.
- Health visitors should have appropriate training in autism.
- We welcome the 'Education, Health and Care Plans', but for it to work effectively it must be fully accountable. The statutory duties that the plan will put on education should also be placed on health and social care provision.

- Making the statutory assessment process faster and less burdensome is important, but when a statement is necessary, parents must be given sufficient time, support and information to input into the process.

Chapter 2: Giving Parents Control

The Government wants:

- local authorities and other services to set out a **Local Offer**. A Local Offer will provide families with information on all the support that is available to them and from whom;
- the option of a '**Personal Budget**' by 2014 for children with a 'Education, Health and Care Plan'. A personal budget lets parents choose how to spend money on services for their child, and key workers will support them to make these choices;
- parents of children with statements of SEN or a new 'Education, Health and Care Plan' to have a right to express a **preference for any state-funded mainstream or special school**, including Academies and Free Schools; and
- parents and local authorities to **always attempt mediation** before making an appeal to the Tribunal.

What we think

- Parents must be able to clearly see how services set out in the Local Offer support children with autism. The Local offer should be developed along the lines of the [Short Breaks Service statement](#), with opportunities for parents to be involved in planning.
- Key workers must understand autism, so that parents are being supported to make choices that will be appropriate and beneficial for their child's needs. A personal budget is only effective if there are the right services to purchase.
- School choice is only genuine if it can appropriately meet the needs of the child. Schools should set out exactly how they support children with autism.
- Mediation can be effective, but it must not lengthen the time parents have to wait to go to Tribunal in cases when mediation doesn't work.

Chapter 3: Learning and achieving

The Government wants:

- to introduce a new **single early years-setting and school-based SEN category** to replace School Action and School Action Plus;
- to **sharpen accountability** on progress for the lowest attainers, by introducing a new measure into school performance tables;
- to fund **scholarships and continuing professional development** for teachers developing skills in supporting children with SEN;
- **local networks** of schools where teachers develop specialist skills and knowledge of SEN to then be deployed across **local clusters** of schools;
- the Training and Development Agency to make sure **that online materials** for teachers on autism are widely available;
- special schools to **share their expertise** and services to support the education and progress and development of pupils in other special and mainstream schools;
- outstanding special schools to apply to become **Teaching Schools**, and more teachers will do initial training in special schools; and
- to encourage parents and communities to establish **new special free schools**.

What we think

- As part of the Local Offer, it should be clear how schools are supporting all children with SEN.
- All schools should have access to autism specialist support, with responsibility for meeting needs embedded throughout the school.

- Since every teacher can expect to teach a child with autism, there should be specific scholarships on autism, with incentives for teachers to take these up and share their newly acquired knowledge.
- Accredited online training materials focussed on autism should be supplemented with practical experience, by introducing more training placements in schools with quality autism provision.

Chapter 4: Preparing for adulthood

The Government wants:

- young people to receive early and well **integrated support** for, and advice on, their future as part of the single assessment process and Education, Health and Care Plan;
- **better quality vocational and work related learning opportunities** to enable young people to progress in their learning post 16;
- young people to have good **opportunities and support** to help them get and **keep a job**; and
- young people to receive a well **co-ordinated transition** from children's to adult health services, including annual health checks for disabled young people over 16.

What we think

- The extension of 'Education, Health and Care Plans' to 25 will help with transition, but there has to be support in place for those children without these plans.
- All local authorities and NHS Trusts must implement the Adult Autism Strategy and meet the requirements set out in the Autism Act statutory guidance.

Chapter 5: Services Working Together for Families

The Government wants:

- **local authorities** to play a pivotal role in ensuring the **co-ordination** in support for children with SEN, both on an individual level and on a **strategic planning level**;
- to review the training for speech and language therapists and educational psychologists;
- to explore how to **co-ordinate services** once the GP consortia are in place and for new Health and Wellbeing Boards to have responsibility for planning local services;
- a **national framework for funding** specialist provision for children with SEN that improves consistency across areas and allows continued local flexibility;
- to explore how the different **funding arrangements for special provision** pre-16 and post-16 might be better aligned; and
- to **reduce bureaucratic** burdens on frontline professionals, schools and services. For example, updating the Code of Practice by shortening it and incorporating into it other guidance.

What we think

- Linked to the local offer, local areas need to collect robust data to plan what services are needed.
- As committed to in the Adult Autism Strategy, the proposed guidelines on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) should support local authorities on how to better identify the needs of people with autism in their area.
- To help ensure joined up and more cost effective working in local planning and commissioning of services, the new Health and Wellbeing Boards proposed by the Health and Social Care Bill must include stronger representation from schools
- A quality standard on autism should be developed by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) to help guide commissioners on what a quality service for someone with autism looks like.

- Bureaucracy can be reduced to enable professionals to spend more time with families, but rights and key guidance should not be diminished. To help professionals and parents navigate the system, there must be a strong Code of Practice which sets out clearly what schools and local authorities should do to support children with SEN and how they can be held accountable.