

## A closer look at the SEND & AP Improvement Plan with MP Claire Coutinho

With the promise to transform the SEND & AP education system across England, the [DfE](#) published its SEND and AP Improvement Plan on Thursday March 2nd, following the SEND Green Paper and Consultation, which was released over a year ago. MP Claire Coutinho, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, met with Twinkl's Georgina Durrant on the [SEND in the experts](#) podcast to discuss the Plan and its expected impact for children with SEND and their teachers and families.

The [podcast with the minister](#) presented an opportunity to discuss the many challenges faced by various stakeholders, where views and questions of Twinkl's members and listeners were shared with the MP and in turn how these will be addressed in the new plan.

One such question was, "How are you going to regain families and teachers' trust? Because there are a lot of people that are feeling very disengaged by the SEND system." Explaining the consultation process that informed the Improvement Plan, Coutinho agreed that parents and families "found the system really adversarial, it was a battle to try and get the right support... When you talk to parents and families, they have this paperwork bank which they can weigh by the kilo. It is so enormously depressing if you think about how much time they're spending on bureaucracy." And, when speaking to teachers and early years educators, Coutinho acknowledged that many had expressed that, "they weren't confident, they weren't sure what it is they should be doing. They could sense that needs were increasing. But they didn't feel necessarily like they had the tools to address this."

Coutinho explained that in order to address these issues with the current system and disparities in provision across the country, new national standards for SEN provision in schools will be implemented, because "in the exact same area, you could have families going through the very same thing, but getting very different results". The national standards will be informed by a steering group of parents and carers, and gather evidence and examples of best practice. 'So this is about a multi-step process of making sure that we can get the best possible evidence, work out what works, and then help everyone in the system to achieve that.'

Early identification of needs and implementation of support is another focus of the Improvement Plan. Coutinho said, "I think it's about making sure that teachers are well equipped in mainstream education to pick up on challenges that children are finding, and also having the right interventions to get them through that moment." As well as identification in schools, Coutinho stressed the importance of the NHS within this plan. "They are looking at innovative ways to diagnose autism as well, so that we're improving all of the pathways, as well to make sure that people can be diagnosed as early as possible and get that help as quickly as possible."

Teacher training, which was a key concern in SEND, was also addressed during the podcast. Coutinho explained, "we're looking at Initial Teacher Training and Early Careers Framework. So that's really embedded in teacher training as you begin, but we're also setting out best practice guides. The initial ones that we're working on [are areas where we've seen] these really big rises in needs. So mental health and well being, and autism, for example, will be two of the earliest ones, and early speech and language development, which again, post pandemic has been a challenge."

A new, funded NPQ leadership qualification for SENDCos will also be introduced. Coutinho was keen to emphasise the quality of this qualification. "We took lots of evidence about this, and we think this is going to be really, really high quality, and practical, and it's going to be quality assured by the Education Endowment Foundation and also Ofsted."

On local authority accountability for funding EHCPs, Coutinho said, "what we are trying to do in the plan, and hopefully that comes across, is get under the bonnet of why local authorities aren't delivering. There's actually usually quite a few things going on. It might be that they can't get access to the specialist workforce, which is why we're doing this joint strategy with health. It might be that they can't get the right sort of teacher training in place. So we're looking at those parts as well... We want to make sure that it's also about getting them the tools and equipment so that they can succeed because that's what we ultimately want is for them to deliver."

While the SEND and AP Improvement Plan is seen as a starting point, there are mixed reactions, especially due to the timeframe. Some outcomes are aimed at 2025, raising the question of what will be done to meet the needs of children and young people who urgently need this support now.

Hannah Lawrence, the Twinkl's SEND segment manager, said, "We know that many of our members have been calling for reform to the SEND and AP system for some time now, and we were delighted to be able to put some of our podcast listeners' questions to Claire Coutinho to find out more about what impact the Improvement Plan will have for educators, families, and children and young people. The SEND team at Twinkl are committed to sharing news, information and resources to support SEND educators in meeting the needs of their pupils."

The office of the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson was contacted for comment but they were unable to respond at this time.

To read more about the SEND and AP Improvement Plan visit Twinkl's Digest articles for [teachers](#) and [parents](#). Twinkl continues to support students, parents and teachers with [resources and tools](#) for SEND and will create resources to support educators to implement the SEND and AP Improvement Plan.

*The complete podcast is available at SEND in the experts with Georgina Durrant. [Episode 18: SEND and AP Improvement Plan Special with Claire Coutinho MP.](#)*

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