

12th March 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

The Education Authority, in partnership with the Department of Education, is reforming the classroom support model for children and young people with statements of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Enhanced Support Model is a long-term plan to improve how children with special educational needs are supported in the classroom. It aims to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and give schools more flexibility to tailor support to your child's individual needs.

The planned classroom support changes are aimed at delivering the best possible outcomes for our children and young people and are part of the wider Department of Education's SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan.

Public consultation on the Enhanced Support Model will take place from 24th March until 19th May. It will help shape the changes and give you the opportunity to have your say. This will be a phased improvement programme – and plans will evolve in the coming years with input from you, our parents and carers, your children, teachers and school leaders.

In the coming weeks, we will be inviting you to share your views through workshops, online sessions, and in-person conversations. Your voice will help us design a model that works for all our children and young people with a statement of SEND.

We understand you will have questions regarding this project therefore we have included some frequently asked questions and a media release which is due for publication this afternoon. We will be back in touch in the coming weeks with further details regarding the consultation opportunities.

“To inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be.”

Education Authority

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The Enhanced Support Model is about collaboration, flexibility, and giving every child and young person the chance to thrive. We look forward to speaking with you and working together to build something better for our children and young people so that they can reach their educational potential and have the best possible start for the future.

Yours sincerely,



Tomas Adell

Chief Transformation Officer – SEN

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Media release - Consultation on classroom support reforms

The Education Authority will launch a public consultation later this month on reforming the classroom support model for children with special educational needs.

The planned classroom support changes are aimed at delivering the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

The public consultation will begin on March 24 and will run for eight weeks.

Tomas Adell, EA's Chief Transformation Officer, said: "This will be a phased reform programme – and plans will evolve in the coming years with input from children, parents, carers, teachers and school leaders.

"The public consultation will help shape the changes and will give everyone the opportunity to have their say."

Under the reforms, schools will have greater freedom to tailor classroom support to the individual needs of children. Where appropriate, they can move away from the current "one size fits all" model with its over reliance on one-to-one support for all children. Every child who needs one-to-one support will continue to receive it. The needs of children are paramount.

Under the reforms, new statements of special educational need will in future be focussed on the individual needs of each child. To ensure on the ground flexible decisions can be made by schools, statements will not be overly prescriptive in terms of classroom support options.

Any changes to existing provisions for children will be introduced carefully and sensitively, through the established annual review process for each child's provision.

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In advance of the public consultation, the EA is today publishing FAQs on the reform plans.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does EA mean by reform of the SEN classroom support mode?

This is a long-term plan to deliver better outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs.

The current system does not meet the needs of the child in the best way possible and is under intense strain.

Under the reforms, schools will have greater flexibility and freedom to tailor support to the individual needs of children. They can move away from the current "one size fits all" model with its over reliance on one-to-one support for children. This will mean wider and deeper support where appropriate eg small group learning sessions, use of different teaching methods, access to more specialist educational and health professional input.

When will this happen?

This will be a phased programme – and plans will evolve in the coming years with input from children, parents, carers, teachers and school leaders.

It will start with the launch of a public consultation later this month, giving everyone the opportunity to have their say.

Subject to the outcome of the public consultation, the next planned milestone will be June 2026 when a finalised classroom support model will be published, and new statutory assessment and statement guidance issued. Statements will in future be focussed on the individual needs of each child. In order to ensure on the ground flexible decisions can be made by schools, statements will not be overly prescriptive in terms of classroom support options.

Phased introduction of the new support model is scheduled to begin in September 2026 when all new statements of special educational needs will reflect the new approach. In this first phase, 40 special schools and 150 mainstream schools will adopt the new classroom support model. It will then be rolled out to different parts of NI in the years ahead.

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Will you be removing existing one to one classroom support from children?

Every child who needs one-to-one support will continue to receive it. The needs of our children and young people are paramount. This reform gives schools more flexibility to provide the most effective and appropriate support in each case.

Any changes will be introduced carefully and sensitively, through the established annual review process for each child's SEN provision.

There are concerns that a blanket one-to-one model of support does not meet the needs of the child in the best way possible and can unintentionally and unnecessarily isolate some children. When a young person is consistently paired through one-to-one support, they may miss opportunities to engage and interact with their teacher and classmates, participate in group activities and develop vital skills including skills to prepare for adult life. This isolation can often exacerbate feelings of difference and exclusion.

Is this reform about cutting costs?

This is not about cutting costs, it is about delivering better outcomes for children and young people. The current system is at breaking point and cannot keep up with the increasing levels of need. We need a model that is delivering the best possible support for our children and young people and one that can keep up with the year on year rising demand. What we currently have does not do this and is not sustainable.

Even if there were unlimited resources, the current classroom support model would need to be changed. Of course, we do not have unlimited funding, and we need to ensure that we use available resources in the most effective way. The priority must be to provide the right support in the right place at the right time.

Is this about reducing classroom assistant numbers?

Classroom assistants play an essential role in schools right across NI. There would not be an education system without them. Many children would not be able to attend school. The reorganisation of the classroom assistant workforce is not expected to create redundancies.

We want to retain the skills and experience that currently exist and build on them.

It is the case that the levels of growth in the classroom assistant workforce in recent years will not be sustainable in the years ahead. Many schools are already struggling to fill new posts based for additional one-to-one roles.

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The new enhanced model will allow us to use the excellent classroom assistant workforce we currently have in the best possible way and recognise the skills and experience they have. It will also provide classroom assistants with opportunities for more specialist roles, appropriately rewarded.

How can my voice be heard?

A public consultation will be opening on March 24. Please keep an eye on our social media channels and our website for further information and details of events. For further information on the wider Department of Education's SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery plan, please visit: [SEN Reform Agenda](#) | [Department of Education](#)

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