

Upcoming SEND Review: Policy Outlook and Practical Implications

Edequity AI Briefing Paper

July 2025



Written by Nya Woodruff, Edequity AI



1 Introduction

England's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system is facing a profound crisis. Annual spending soared to £10 billion in 2024, yet a National Audit Office (NAO) report found no consistent improvement in outcomes for children with SEN [4]. Local councils are burdened by a projected £5 billion deficit by 2026, driven by a 140% surge in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) since 2015[5].

In response, the new government under Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has launched a SEND Review, with a reform White Paper expected in Autumn 2025. This follows previous consultations and the 2023 SEND Improvement Plan, many reforms of which were delayed. With mounting pressure and political momentum, the government is now preparing to unveil a reset of the system based on the principle of delivering “better support for children” across both mainstream and specialist settings.

2 Anticipated Reforms in the SEND Review

2.1 Wider Inclusion in Mainstream Education & Early Intervention

Part of the review is expected to improve mainstream provision for children with additional needs. The government has signalled a “greater focus on mainstream provision and more early intervention” to meet needs earlier and reduce escalation[1].

Recent Department for Education (DfE) guidance, *‘Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life’* (July 2025), emphasises that “inclusive practice should be standard practice” in early years[3].

2.2 National Standards and Ending the ‘Postcode Lottery’

Currently, provision can vary by locality, where a child might get help in one county but be refused in another. The DfE has previously piloted “inclusion dashboards”, which are data tools giving a transparent picture of how each area performs on SEND provision and outcomes [6].

2.3 Reforming EHCPs and Legal Processes

Recent discourse has focused on the uncertainty over the future of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Whilst ministers have not yet detailed their plans, they refuse to rule out changes to the EHCP process. In 2023, the DfE announced it would be trialling digital EHCP templates to simplify and digitise plans across all councils.

We expect process reforms to make the system more efficient and less combative, while maintaining the core rights of children to necessary support.

2.4 Funding, Capacity, & Specialist Provision

The government is believed to be considering measures to address the costs of private special school placements and ensure better value for money in high-needs spending. Local authorities are calling on ministers to write off the accumulated

deficits or provide relief, as these debts will otherwise hit in 2026. While the review's focus is on structural reform, a one-time financial fix or transitional funding may be needed [5].

3 How Data & Analytics Can Help Underpin the New SEND Era

3.1 Measuring Outcomes and Accountability

A core problem highlighted by the NAO was the lack of improved outcomes despite heavy spending. Edequity's Datalake Builder can help schools and trusts track the progress of SEND pupils in real time, beyond annual exam results.

By aggregating data on academic growth, attendance, behaviours, and well-being indicators for students with SEND, Edequity can identify whether interventions are working. These insights allow school leaders to make evidence-based adjustments. Edequity could provide custom dashboards aligned to new national standards, which enables a trust to readily see how each academy performs on key inclusion metrics.

3.2 Early Identification and Intervention (Predictive Analytics)

Edequity's systems could analyse early development assessments, screening results, and even attendance patterns in the early years and primary school to flag students who might be at risk of developing learning difficulties or who have unaddressed needs. By identifying patterns, schools can intervene before the child falls far behind or requires an EHCP.

Edequity could help schools measure the impact of early interventions to ensure the strategy of investing early truly pays off. This data-driven validation can inform best practice and reassure policymakers that early intervention efforts are yielding results, supporting the business case for continued or increased funding in those areas.

3.3 Supporting Local Inclusion Plans & Collaboration

Edequity's platform could serve as a common data environment for MATs to interface with local authorities (LAs). For instance, if a MAT can present comprehensive data on the needs within its schools, it can better influence local inclusion efforts, perhaps showing that an area needs a certain type of special unit. Edequity might facilitate data-sharing dashboards that aggregate anonymised data across schools for a holistic view of local demand, helping LAs plan services, and making sure the MAT's contributions are recognised.

Edequity capabilities extend to using local datasets to help a trust anticipate upcoming trends. For example, if an LA projects a rise in students with increased needs, a trust might decide to train additional staff in medical needs or partner with a special school. By being the analytics bridge between institutions, Edequity can support a "joined-up" approach, turning raw data into actionable intelligence for stakeholders involved in SEND provision.

4 Using AI to support SEND Needs Assessment

To contextualise these suggestions with a practical, ongoing example, Edequity and Open Education AI have been working with the Bourne Education Trust (BET). [marginalgains.ai](#), a simple webapp, unifies BET Datalake content, internal SEND documentation, and a vectorised guidance knowledge base with AI chat and document creation for SEND work.

4.1 Aim

The project aims to pilot an AI-supported workflow for SEND Needs Assessments. During the Alpha phase, we are focused on refining the agent's accuracy through real user feedback, with the goal of enhancing professional practice and support for SEND across the Trust.

4.2 Key Capabilities

Edequity AI provides access to a dedicated SEND Assessment agent that streamlines key processes. Users can upload student documents, which are then automatically categorised and tagged. Through an intuitive chat interface, the agent assists in drafting essential documentation—including SEND Support Arrangements (SSA), Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) forms, EHCNA letters, and Provision Maps—which can then be exported and stored directly in the student's Document Library.

4.3 How this helps

The AI agent supports professionals by reviewing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) against SSA or application evidence, and drafting professional appeal letters that request revised, costed provision—enabling evidence-based challenge where needed. It also helps generate Provision Maps for costing ordinarily available provision and produces covering letters to accompany EHCNA applications, helping streamline and strengthen the assessment and support process.

While the EHCP process is likely to undergo reform, the foundational work demonstrated here remains highly valuable by establishing agile, evidence-based AI support for SEND documentation that can adapt quickly to new statutory frameworks and continue to enhance practitioner effectiveness.

5 Conclusion

Whilst we await the exact announcements of the SEND review, shifts in recent months and years suggests transformative change is approaching. Educators, school leaders, and trustees should begin preparing for a landscape with clearer standards, higher expectations for inclusion, and new ways of working across the education system.

The challenge is significant, but so is the opportunity. With thoughtful implementation, backed by data-driven insight and a collaborative spirit, the post-review era could finally deliver on the promise of “the right support, in the right place, at the right time” for every child [2].

References

- [1] Richard Adams. “Special educational needs bill in England hits record £10bn a year”. *The Guardian*, 2025.
- [2] Department for Education. SEND review: Right support, right place, right time. Technical report, Department for Education, 2022.
- [3] Department for Education. Giving every child the best start in life. Technical report, Department for Education, 2025.
- [4] National Audit Office. Support for children and young people with special educational needs. Technical report, National Audit Office, 2024.
- [5] Patrick Butler, Matthew Pearce and Raphael Boyd. “Ministers plan major changes to Send education in England”. *The Guardian*, 2025.
- [6] Samantha Booth, Freddie Whittaker. “SEND review improvement plan: Everything schools need to know”. *SchoolsWeek*, 2025.