National Governance Association
KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Tackling disadvantage in education

A toolkit for governing boards

November 2022

Special educational needs and disabilities



The expert organisation for school governors, trustees and governance professionals

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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is part of a series aimed at tackling disadvantage in education. It identifies the link between special educational needs and disability (SEND) and educational disadvantage, signposts resources, and includes questions for governing boards to explore.

We recommend that you first read our Widening the lens guidance which explains how to identify key areas of disadvantage in your organisation. Other toolkits in this series include **poverty**, **vulnerability, mental health and wellbeing** and **ethnicity**.

Making the link

The government's 2022 SEND green paper, *Right Support, Right Place, Right Time* acknowledged that the educational outcomes of children and young people with SEND often "fall behind those of their peers".

Governing boards are required to use 'best endeavours' (do everything they can) to ensure that pupils with SEND get the support they need. As well as ensuring individual needs are catered for, this includes ensuring educational disadvantage that is a result of SEND is tackled.

Children with SEND are usually entitled to one of two levels of support:

- **SEN support** is offered if the education setting notices that the pupil is not making expected progress and needs some form of additional support to meet their full academic potential.
- **Education, health and care plan's (EHCP)** are put in place when SEN support is not enough to meet a pupil's needs and a formal assessment of their needs has been carried out.

As there is no legal framework around SEN support offered by schools, pupils with additional needs do not have the legal safety net of an EHCP but yet are statistically at a significant disadvantage in their education.

What the evidence shows

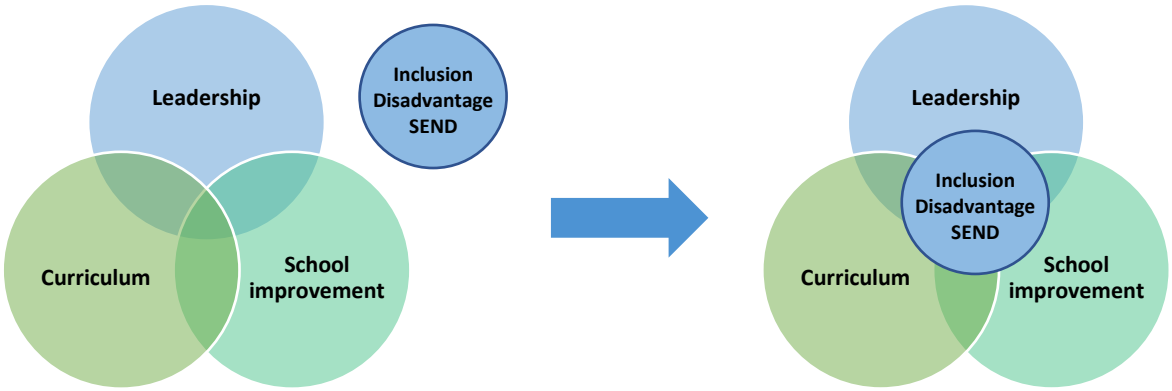
- Data published in June 2022 states that there are currently 355,566 children on an EHC plan but there are 1,129,843 children with SEN support (gov.uk, 2022).
- The experiences and outcomes of children and young people are poor, provision and interventions are often inconsistent, inadequate and late in meeting their needs. (SEND green paper, 2022)
- The percentage of pupils with SEN achieving the expected standard in KS1 teacher assessments (TA) in 2018/19 was less than half than that of their peers (DfE, 2022).
- In 2020/21, 18.3% of pupils with SEN achieved grades 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs, compared to 58.0% of pupils with no identified SEN (DfE, 2022).
- Children with SEN are more likely to be excluded from school (Timpson Review, 2019).

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Whole school culture and context

The Governance Handbook for SEND and Inclusion (Boddison, 2020) refers to the concept of 'Think SEND!' and emphasises the responsibility that every governor/trustee and every staff member has to look through the lens of SEND in their respective roles.

In his book Addressing Disadvantage in schools and colleges: The Essex Way, Marc Rowland talks about the importance of a consistent, collective understanding of inclusion and inclusivity and placing "inclusion at the heart of decision making and thinking":



Questions to explore:

- Is the learning environment and curriculum adapted to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND?
- How does the governing board ensure that their strategic decision-making is inclusive of pupils with SEND across all areas of governance?
- Are governing boards aware of the level of funding the school/trust receives to meet the needs of pupils with SEND (the notional SEND budget and top up funding).

The approach that is needed to embed inclusive practice across all schools regardless of type, phase and size has been outlined by Whole School SEND and includes the views of children and their families and professionals both school and sector wide.

Governing board responsibilities

Governing boards are responsible for ensuring that school/trust systems and processes do not pose as barriers to pupils with SEND. This provides a foundation upon which wider school practice is built on.

NGA's resources support governors and trustees to build an understanding of their responsibilities relating to SEND:

- SEND guide for governors and trustees
- SEND link governor/trustee role description
- Governing board SEND responsibilities checklist

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Top tip

While having an advocate or link for SEND on the governing board emphasises its importance, SEND remains the responsibility of the board as a whole and should be, as with all areas of disadvantage, central to decision making and setting the strategic direction.

Staff responsibilities

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has produced a guidance report with a summary of recommendations to help mainstream schools provide an inclusive learning environment for pupils with SEND.

The recommendations include:

- creating a positive and supportive environment for all pupils, without exception
- building an ongoing, holistic understanding of your pupils and their needs
- ensuring all pupils have access to high quality teaching
- complementing high quality teaching with carefully selected small group and one-to-one interventions
- working effectively with teaching assistants

Training and CPD

Questions to explore:

- How are staff at all levels developed and supported to meet the needs of SEND pupils?
- Are all members of the governing board aware of their responsibilities in carrying out SEND duties effectively?
- Have staff received training on preventative and de-escalation strategies when addressing the challenging behaviour presented by SEND pupils?

Resources

- Subscribers to NGA learning link can access an e-learning module on the role of the SEND governor aimed at helping governing boards carry out SEND duties effectively and support their school in achieving high expectations and good outcomes for pupils.
- Whole school SEND has a range of free online resources including SEND review guides and frameworks, leaflets for parents and other practical resources.

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Parental engagement

Engaging with parents/carers is one of the most important elements of supporting children with SEND. It is important to remember that parents and carers will be the experts when it comes to their child.

Questions to explore:

- What is the school doing to ensure it understands the views of parents, carers and the impact on the whole family in relation to SEND?
- How is the school involving parents and carers to agree strategies and support around learning and wider support for academic success and good mental health and wellbeing?
- What is the school doing to provide support for parents of pupils with SEND as they encourage pupils to learn?
- EEF have put together parental engagement guidance that includes reflective questions to help schools consider how they work with parents and carers to improve the learning of pupils with SEND.

Further reading

- Special educational needs in England, academic year 2021/22 – explore national statistics from GOV.UK
- SEND Review - right support, right place, right time – government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England
- Special educational needs publication June 2022 – this DfE report provides links to key data sources on children and young people with SEND
- The Governance Handbook for SEND and Inclusion: Schools that Work for All Learners - supports governors and trustees in developing effective strategic practice to ensure an inclusive culture in their schools

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