

Our policy recommendations

1. **Reorganise funding**

Money matters and boosting investment in babies and toddlers with special educational needs and disabilities to give them the strongest start is essential. However, positive changes can also be delivered within existing budgets by reorganising the current funding regime without adding costs.

Policy Recommendations:

Unlink Disability Access Funding (DAF) from the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to allow settings to access funding earlier and more easily.

We fully back this call from [Dingley's Promise](#)'s Manifesto for Early Years Inclusion, to unlink DAF from the DLA. Accessing adequate, timely funding (e.g. to recruit specialist staff) is a barrier for settings in supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities, yet we know that in many areas the DAF is not being fully used and/or getting to the settings that need it most. It is an example of red tape creating an unnecessary barrier to inclusion. This proposal will increase access for settings to early years SEND funding, by removing the need for families to apply for DLA in order for a setting to access DAF.

Remove conditions on use of free childcare entitlements so that it can be used for Home-Based Learning ('Portage')

Home-based learning (or 'Portage') allows early years educators to come into the homes of children whose development is better supported in a 1-1 setting in their home environment and work alongside them and their parents to identify and support their development needs and help them plan their next steps. Portage is a home visiting pre-school service with a track record of boosting speech, language and other developmental milestones and often acts as a pathway for a child with special educational needs into a nursery or childminding place where they can thrive.

Many families with a disabled child struggle to use their childcare entitlements to access a nursery or childminder place. They and their child would benefit from access to home-based development and the information, advice and support a Portage worker brings in recognition of their child's specific disabilities, strengths and needs. Introducing flexible use of free childcare entitlements for families to use for home-based learning could be a game-changer in providing the early specialist support they need, provided of course that Portage is available in every local area and that it is a pathway to formal setting at the right time (and not a

replacement for it). Removing conditions only to use the childcare entitlements on a nursery or childminder place is a cost-neutral opportunity to boost parental choice and flexibility and help to narrow the poor relatively low take-up of childcare places by families of a child with special educational needs.

2. **Champion truly inclusive nurseries**

In a truly inclusive setting children with SEND benefit from additional therapies, specialist workforce and a supported pathway to the right school. Our children's nursery in Basingstoke, Hampshire proves how this approach supports all children to thrive, in a way a universal offer alone could not. By making a SEND specialist 'hub' fully integral to a nursery open to children with and without disabilities, made possible through a diverse funding model, it brings disabled and non-disabled babies, toddlers and pre-school children together, encouraging them to explore, interact, and grow, side by side. As well as providing quality, tailored support for children with SEND and their families (evidenced by the number of children who go onto a mainstream primary school or other appropriate setting), this model also supports disadvantaged children, looked after children and children living with complex family situations (for whom targeted funds may not be available) to thrive.

Policy Recommendation:

Advancing holistic funding models

A truly inclusive nursery is possible through a diverse funding model that combines national government childcare funding entitlements with block funding or top-up funding from local authorities and health agencies, and in some circumstances voluntary or fundraised income. We recommend an expansion of inclusive nurseries on the Hampshire model described above, enabled by a diverse funding portfolio. To deliver the best possible start for every child, inclusive nurseries should be available in every local community.

3. **Deliver tailored help and guidance – the 'Navigator' model**

A significant challenge for parents in getting the right help for their child in the early years is navigating a complex health, care and education system. Kids has pioneered the SEND Community Navigator model in one local area to provide a single point of contact for rounded support and guidance to ease the burden on families. The SEND Navigators we employ work in partnership with the family to build a personalised support plan, before providing practical and emotional support, connecting families with local services and working to help the family access the right provision and support.

Policy Recommendation:

Give families access to Navigators through Family Hubs

Based on our pilot, Navigators can be delivered at relatively low cost, and our experience suggests they deliver significant benefits to the families, including supporting a very high percentage of families to secure an appropriate early years' placement for their child with SEND.

Each Family Hub in England should provide access to a tailored support programme. Via the Family Hub, every family with a baby, toddler or pre-school child with SEND would be assigned a named individual (Navigator). These Navigators will support them to know their entitlements and to access the right local services and placements to support their child's early education and development.