

## SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan:

### What Early Years SENCOs and other EY professionals need to know

‘Our ambition is to create a society that celebrates, encourages, and enables the success of all children and young people, including those with SEND and in alternative provision. A society where we hold high aspirations for all children and young people, recognising that although success looks different for everyone, it is no less worthy of celebration.’ *SEND and AP Improvement Plan, 2023*, p.22

With this Improvement Plan, the DfE seem to have listened to the concerns of parents, young people and professionals in that there is a need to streamline and equalise the system so that it is easier for everyone to navigate, leads to better outcomes for children and young people and is financially sustainable.

To support EY SENCOs and other EY professionals, we have extracted the key changes which are most relevant; this is not intended to be a full overview of the Implementation Plan and if you wish to find out more detail, then we recommend that you refer to the Plan itself as well.

- The Improvement Plan has the ambition to improve the whole SEND system from the early years through to further education and beyond. As part of this, the intention is that each child will be able to attend the most appropriate early years setting.
- 5,000 Early Years staff are being funded to gain an accredited Level 3 EY SENCO qualification (this has already been announced and applications are already open, you may have seen this advertised <https://www.bestpracticenet.co.uk/news/best-practice-network-to-deliver-new-early-years-senco-programme> ).
- Early Language and Support for Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders will be set up to improve access to speech and language therapy – you may find that one of these is in your area.
- The formation of a set of evidence-based SEND and AP National Standards (from 2025) will establish what support should be ordinarily available in mainstream settings, and for those receiving SEN Support and with Education Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans). EY SENCOs and managers in PVI settings will need to ensure that their settings meet these requirements – many of you will already do so, and the standardisation of these may make it easier for you to implement improvements to practice towards which you have long been working.
- The National Standards will also clarify who is responsible for delivering provision and from which budgets. This should result in the financial responsibility for SEND being shared more fairly across education, health and social care.

## **SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan:**

### **What Early Years SENCOs and other EY professionals need to know**

- The intention is that the National Standards will improve provision for those receiving SEN Support, resulting in reduced need for EHC Plans and/or access to specialist provision, so that those whose needs are greatest are able to access the education they need; we will have to wait to see if this is in fact the case.
- The National Standards will be supported by SEND and AP 'practice guides' for frontline professionals from the end of 2025, targeting the most prevalent needs (SLCN, autism, SEMH).
- There is a recognition of the importance of the EY sector in particular with regard to early identification and beginning those sensitive conversations with parents about their child's needs.
- A review of the Early Years Educator (EYE) Level 3 criteria has taken place, including on the inclusion of SEND as a standalone criterion, and the response to this will be published later this year.
- The DfE will work with LAs and EY providers to consider whether changes to the SEN Inclusion Fund and other elements of EY funding are needed to ensure SEND funding arrangements are appropriate and to support the introduction of a national framework of bands and tariffs.
- You can read the SEND and AP Improvement Plan in full here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan>.