

Government ends runaway independent special school fees

24.2.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Children's progress put first as government ends runaway independent special school fees.

Thousands more children with SEND will get the support that helps them achieve and thrive under new government action to end spiralling independent special school costs and reinvest funding where it makes the biggest difference to pupils' life chances.

It comes ahead of the Government's schools white paper, which will be a golden opportunity to change the course of children's lives for the better, moving away from a one size fits all approach to one where every child belongs and where high standards and inclusion are two sides of the same coin.

Independent special schools charge an average of £63,000 per child per year – more than twice the £26,000 cost of a state special school. Yet there is no evidence children do any better. Over 30% of these schools are backed by private equity firms, with public money intended for children and young people with the most complex needs instead flowing into private profit.

For the first time, clear national price bands and strengthened standards will ensure every specialist placement delivers real progress for children – not higher bills for councils – ending the postcode lottery that families have faced in securing high-quality SEND support.

Demand for SEND support has risen sharply in recent years, driving an over-reliance on expensive independent special school placements. Today's measures will reset the specialist sector so that funding is focused on what matters most - high-quality education, better progress and stronger life chances for children.

And for those children who we know can thrive in mainstream schools with the right support, new research shows that children with SEND perform half a grade better at GCSE than their peers in special schools.

Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson said:

For too long, families have faced a postcode lottery – fighting for support that depends on where they live, not what their child needs. That ends now.

We're cracking down on providers who put profit before children. New standards and proper oversight will ensure every independent special school placement delivers real outcomes for children – not unreasonable bills for local authorities.

This is about building a system where every child with SEND can achieve and thrive, at a school that's right for them and delivers the life chances they deserve.

Under the plans:

- New national price bands will end unjustified fee variation for the same provision, giving

councils the confidence to challenge poor value placements.

- New statutory SEND-specific standards will ensure every independent special school delivers consistent, high-quality support and clear outcomes for pupils.
- Full cost transparency will show exactly how public money is spent.
- Local authorities will have a formal say on new or expanding independent provision so places are created where children actually need them.

Where special schools are the right setting for children with the most complex needs, the new framework will ensure places are high-quality, locally planned and financially sustainable.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA, said:

It is good the Government has set out plans to regulate independent special schools and measures to control costs.

While in some cases an independent school can be the best place for a child to attend, it is wrong that when councils' own costs are soaring that some providers are setting unreasonably high prices and making significant profits from state-funded placements.

To reduce the reliance on independent special schools, we look forward to the Government's Schools White Paper ensuring more children with SEND get the care and support they need in schools and other mainstream settings.

These measures complement work already underway to create an inclusive education system, including £3.7 billion to deliver 60,000 specialist places in mainstream schools and £200 million to train all teachers and teaching assistants to support pupils with SEND.

This forms the foundations of the government's reform plans, centred around the belief that children with SEND can thrive in mainstream settings with the right support.

For example, when looking at comparable pupils with EHCPs, the data shows that not only are those in mainstream schools considerably more likely to be entered into GCSE exams, but those who are, achieve around half a GCSE grade higher in English and maths than their peers in special schools.

That's a half a grade which could mean the difference between a pass or fail at one of the most important academic milestones.

The forthcoming Schools White Paper will build on these reforms, setting out further action to strengthen oversight, improve inclusion and ensure public funding is directed to the support that delivers the best outcomes for children and young people.

NOTES TO EDITORS - Data referenced can be found [HERE](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-ends-runaway-independent-special-school-fees>