

Research into the uneven distribution of pupils with SEND: Information for school staff

Why am I receiving this information sheet?

The National Foundation for Educational Research ([NFER](#)) is undertaking research into the uneven distribution of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across mainstream schools. In England, pupils with SEND are disproportionately concentrated in a small number of schools, particularly at the secondary level. This includes both those with and without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). However, little is currently known about the factors driving this pattern or its impact.

We are contacting you because we would like you to take part in a survey or interview, or because your school has a higher proportion of SEND pupils than others in the local area and is one of our case study schools. If you are working in a case study school, we would like to hear your views on the perceived benefits and challenges of working in a 'high SEND' school and explore how the school came to have its current SEND pupil profile. If you have been invited to take part in a survey or separate interview, we would like to explore how pupils with SEND in your school are supported to access the curriculum.

What are the aims of the project?

This project explores how pupils with SEND are distributed across mainstream schools and how this has changed over time. It will also examine the reasons behind this pattern, the opportunities and challenges this creates for pupils and schools, and its impact on both academic and non-academic outcomes.

The findings will be shared in accessible research reports, offering recommendations for policy and practice. Our goal is to inform government decisions on SEND, funding, and accountability to help create a fairer and more inclusive education system.

Who is conducting the project?

The research is being undertaken by NFER, which is the leading provider of independent educational evidence and assessments in the UK. As a registered charity, our mission is to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere and to support positive change across education systems. The project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

What will the project involve?

We would like to discuss different areas of focus depending on your role and involvement with the study. For staff in case-study schools, we would like to explore staff views on the benefits and challenges of being a 'high SEND' school, including how the school identifies SEND pupils, and how it supports pupils with SEND to access the curriculum. For staff

responding to the survey or a separate interview, we are interested in the support offered to pupils with SEND, and your views on your school's inclusivity and how this shapes pupils' experiences. There are no right or wrong answers to any of our questions—we simply want to understand your perspectives. All responses will be confidential, and no schools or individuals will be named in the research.

Why have you approached my school to take part?

Case-study schools were selected for having a higher proportion of pupils with SEND compared to others in their local area. Survey respondents and other interviewees were included to provide a broader perspective on schools' experiences in supporting pupils with SEND.

How will I benefit from taking part in the research?

By taking part, you will help us understand how schools with different proportions of pupils with SEND support both SEND and non-SEND pupils. Your insights will help identify effective practices and challenges, supporting schools and policymakers in improving support systems. Ultimately, this research aims to ensure more pupils benefit from the most effective strategies and approaches.

How will NFER use and protect the data collected?

The results of the project will be shared in a series of reports, giving suggestions for how schools and policy makers can improve the way they support pupils. The report will be published on the NFER website in spring/summer 2026.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and schools/interviewees can withdraw from the study at any time. With your agreement, the discussion will be recorded so that the researcher can take detailed notes. This recording will be deleted as soon as the notes have been written up. Full details of how your personal information will be collected, stored and used can be found in our privacy notice, which is on the [project web page](#).

Who to contact?

If you have any questions or would like further information about the research, please contact the Project Leader, Matt Walker, at m.walker@nfer.ac.uk.