
Research into the uneven distribution of pupils with SEND: information for local authority 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 your child attends a school with a higher proportion of SEND pupils than others in the local area, and this school is part of our study. We would like to hear your views on the school, including why you chose it for your child. We are speaking to parents of children with and without SEND.

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 hear your thoughts on the school, including why you chose it for your child. We are also interested in your views on how inclusive the school feels and how this affects your child's experience. There are no right or wrong answers—we just want to understand your perspectives. All responses will be confidential, and no schools or parents will be named in the research.

Why have you approached my school to take part?

We have identified schools that appear to have a higher proportion of pupils with SEND compared to others in the local area. We would like to understand how schools like yours came to have this profile and what impact, if any, a higher proportion of pupils with SEND has on pupils' school experience.

How will I benefit from taking part in the research?

By taking part, you will help us understand how schools with a higher proportion of pupils with SEND support both SEND and non-SEND pupils. Your insights will contribute to identifying effective practices and challenges, helping schools and policymakers improve support systems. Ultimately, this research aims to ensure that more pupils benefit from the strategies and approaches that work best.

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 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 audio 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