

# Improving Access to Funding for a more inclusive early years system



 Dingley's Promise

Transforming the Early Years for children with SEND

Manifesto for  
Early Years  
Inclusion

# Funding – the current challenges



## The current situation

The current situation for local authorities, early years education providers and families of children with SEND is in crisis. Numbers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are rising quickly across the country and adversely, places available for children with SEND are scandalously low.

- Settings are in many cases being forced to fund SEND support themselves.
- The link between Disability Access Funding and Disability Living Allowance makes the application of funding extremely complex and time consuming for parents.
- Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding has a complex application process and is often given for less hours than the child's entitlement.

Our research reflected that 85% of settings felt the ratio changes will make it harder to support children with SEND.

The Local Government Association research in 2023 found that 9 in 10 local authorities were worried about local capacity to deliver the new entitlements

Early Years Alliance research in 2022 showed that 92% of settings stated that they have had to fund the costs of SEND support themselves.

## Our Recommendations

- Unlink Disability Access Funding from the Disability Living Allowance to allow funding to be accessed earlier and more easily for those who need it.
- Simplify Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding processes, ensuring they cover a child's whole entitlement (including under 2's), to increase access to early education and allow settings to provide the right support at the right time.
- Ring fence High Needs Block funding for children with high needs in the early years, to ensure that needs can be met effectively in settings and that specialist resource can be brought in at the earliest time, to have the greatest possible impact.

# A Call to Action

## A vital change is needed - De-link Disability Access Funding (DAF) from Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

In order for a setting to get Disability Access Funding (DAF) the child must have Disability Living Allowance (DLA), which the parents have to secure through a complicated application procedure. This puts significant pressure on families, and for many parents it is simply too early in their journey to feel comfortable making the application. Consequently, DAF is underspent in many local authority areas.

Removing the link between DAF and DLA would make DAF funding more easily accessible. DAF funding should be available to all children who have a SEND professional involved with them.

DAF and high needs funding are currently available and therefore this process requires ring-fencing funds for early years rather than incurring additional funding costs

## The Problem

- Local authorities in many cases are unable to spend their DAF funding.
- Families are under extra pressure to apply for DLA, which is often stressful and difficult for them.
- Settings are unable to access DAF funding directly and therefore are more likely to turn children away if there is no financial help.

## The Solution

- DAF funding would go to support the children who need it, rather than being swallowed up by local authority systems when it is underspent.
- Reduced stress on families around applying for DLA, and increased family trust in the system.
- Settings more likely to support children with SEND inclusively with the opportunity to access immediate funding when they arrive.
- Reduction in numbers of parents reporting being turned away from settings and increase in uptake of the early years entitlements among children with SEND.

# What you can do...



The current funding system for many children with SEND is simply not working.

Many settings are having to fund SEND support themselves. With limited resources, some are being forced to decline places for children with SEND, despite equality duties.

As outlined in the recent government SEND and Alternative Provision plan, the best start in the early years is critical for an inclusive education system, however due to funding pressures on local authorities and settings, children with SEND are being turned away and parental trust in the education system is being lost at the earliest stage.

It is critical that we act now to lift the pressures, particularly in light of the new expansion of entitlements which is having a further impact on the available provision for children with SEND. We are facing a further deepening of this crisis.

We know that decision makers are listening to our voices and are beginning to recognise the problems faced by families and early years settings. It is time to amplify that voice to bring about change.

## Call to action

Our recommendations focus on changes which could be made quickly and at minimal cost but have a direct and immediate effect.

To support these changes, we need settings and families to raise these issues with their MP.

**Download our letter to MP's and share this with your local MP via email to ensure your voice is heard**

**Or sign our petition to join our movement for positive change in the early years.**



Together we can build a fairer and more inclusive  
early years sector