

Empowering Every Pupil. SEND Support Makes a Difference.

By Cobham Hall School



30th May 2025

<https://www.cobhamhall.com/>



Education continues to evolve toward greater inclusivity with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision at its core, ensuring that no child is left behind. As the demand grows for high-quality, personalised education, the pressure on local authorities to deliver adequate support also increases. Independent schools are well-positioned to play a valuable role in redefining what inclusive education can and should look like.

SEND refers to children and young people who may experience challenges in learning or processing information in ways that differ from some of their peers. These needs can range from learning difficulties such as dyslexia, ADHD, or moderate learning difficulties (MLD) to emotional or mental health challenges including anxiety. They may also include physical or sensory needs such as communication difficulties, visual or hearing impairments, or difficulties with social interaction. Every child has unique needs, requiring a personalised and adaptive approach within a nurturing educational environment.

In the UK, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice, provide a framework for supporting children with challenges in their learning. These guidelines rest on important principles, including the right of children with SEND to access mainstream education, the development of coordinated Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCPs) for those with more complex needs, and the importance of genuine collaboration with parents and careers throughout the decision-making process. In addition to this, there is a strong emphasis on preparing young people for adulthood from the earliest stages of education.

Yet, while the legislation framework sets an ambitious and inclusive vision, the reality on the ground is far more difficult. Many families still face long waiting lists, limited resources, and staff working under significant pressure, making it difficult to access the support a child is entitled to. The growing number of EHCP applications reflects increased recognition of need. Underfunding and staffing shortages have made it difficult for local authorities to meet rising demand, often

requiring families to seek specialist provision far from home – adding additional strain to financial and emotional strain on those already navigating complex circumstances.

Independent schools are uniquely positioned to support pupils with SEND, offering environments that prioritise emotional wellbeing, academic success and personal growth. Key strengths of an independent SEND provision include specialist staff, purpose-built environments such as sensory-friendly spaces, therapeutic rooms and accessible outdoor areas and small class sizes enabling the ability to provide highly individualised education that many children with SEND would benefit from. Central to this support is the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), who plays a vital role in identifying a child's individual needs, guiding families and staff through the process and contributing to EHCPs.

Despite these strengths, collaboration between independent schools and local authorities is not always as seamless as it could be. Local authorities remain hesitant, rooted in misconceptions surrounding cost and outdated views perceiving independent education as inaccessible or elitist. However, many independent schools operate deeply within community values and thrive with a strong sense of purpose – a mission of inclusivity. Where strong partnerships have been established, the outcomes speak for themselves—shorter travel distances for pupils, reduced pressure on local settings, greater parental satisfaction, and most importantly, children receiving the right support in the right place.

The future of SEND education depends on strengthening collaboration between independent schools and local authorities, along with the continued investment, policy reform, and above all, listening to the voices of young people and their families. By working together local authorities, independent schools, educators and families, a system can be created to not only provide access to education but ensures every child can thrive within it.