

Schools White Paper

Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny
Commission

Date of meeting: 14/04/2026

Lead director/officer: Sophie Maltby

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected:
- Report author: Sophie Maltby
- Author contact details:
- Report version number:

1. Summary

This report summarises the implications of the Government's Schools White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' for Leicester City, highlighting a shift towards more inclusive mainstream education for children and young people with SEND.

While the direction aligns with the Council's existing strategy, it requires accelerated delivery, strengthened practice in mainstream schools, and enhanced collaboration across services.

The local authority is also required to develop a Local SEND Reform Plan by June 2026 to set out how these changes will be implemented

• Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission are invited to:

- Note the publication of the Schools White Paper and its strategic direction
- Consider the implications of the increased emphasis on inclusive mainstream education for Leicester City
- Note that the direction of travel aligns with the Council's existing SEND strategy
- Note the requirement for the local area to develop a Local SEND Reform Plan

2. Detailed report

This report provides an update on the Government's Schools White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' and its implications for Leicester City.

The White Paper sets out a significant shift in the national education system, with a clear expectation that more children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), will have their needs met within inclusive mainstream schools. It emphasises that mainstream settings should be equipped to support a wider range of needs effectively, with high standards and inclusion seen as mutually reinforcing.

This represents a move away from a system that has increasingly relied on specialist provision, towards one where mainstream schools are supported, resourced and held accountable for delivering inclusive practice, with specialist provision focused on those with the most complex needs.

In Leicester City, the development of more inclusive mainstream provision has been a core priority. The broad policy direction of the White Paper therefore aligns well with the Council's existing strategy, providing national policy support and momentum for work already underway locally. However, the reforms will require a step change in the scale, consistency and pace of delivery, with increased expectations on all parts of the system.

The shift towards inclusive mainstream education will require continued strengthening of practice across schools, including greater consistency in what is ordinarily available, improved access to specialist advice, and more effective graduated responses to need. This will place increased emphasis on workforce development, leadership capacity and collaboration across schools and services.

The White Paper reinforces the role of the local authority as a system leader and convener, responsible for bringing together education, health and care partners to deliver integrated, place-based services. For Leicester City, this will require strengthened joint commissioning, effective sufficiency planning, and clear governance and accountability across the partnership. More broadly, the White Paper highlights the importance of early intervention, a broad and engaging curriculum, improved attendance and belonging, and stronger partnerships across education, health and care services. Schools are positioned as key community anchors, with services increasingly wrapped around them to support children and families.

Alongside the White Paper, the Government has published a SEND Reform consultation and requires all local areas to develop a Local SEND Reform Plan, setting out how the local system will align with national expectations.

National Timeline for Reform

The White Paper sets out a programme of reform to be delivered over the course of this Parliament and into the next decade, with early implementation beginning immediately. Key elements of SEND reform are expected to be introduced in phases, including initial system changes and investment from 2026–27, with further legislative changes and full implementation of new frameworks expected later in the programme.

Local areas are required to submit a Local SEND Reform Plan by June 2026, with Year 1 delivery commencing from 2026–27. This places an expectation on the local system to begin implementation at pace, while further national policy and legislative detail continues to be developed.

Delivery of these reforms will depend on workforce capacity across education, health and care, and the ability of the local system to implement change at pace while maintaining confidence among schools, families and partners

[Schools White Paper.pptx](#)

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial Implications

The Government has announced that councils with a DSG deficit at the end of 2025/26 will be eligible to receive a High Needs Stability Grant in the following financial year subject to approval of a Local SEND Reform Plan. The cumulative deficit at the end of the current financial year is forecast to be £44.7m, therefore if our plan is approved we should receive a grant of £40.3m in 2026/27.

The Local SEND Reform Plan builds on the existing SEND Transformation Plan which aims to achieve change and reform aligned to the DfE Change Programme Partnership (CPP). Progress is being made to reduce the rate of increase in expenditure growth by lowering average unit cost per pupil and limiting reliance on independent non-maintained special schools (INMSS) which tend to be significantly higher cost.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

Dated: 30 March 2026

4.2 Legal Implications

This report reflects a shift in national policy rather than introducing any new legal duties. The Council's responsibilities remain set out in existing legislation, in particular the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice.

The greater focus on inclusion within mainstream settings is in line with the current legal framework. However, as this is taken forward, the Council will need to ensure it continues to meet its duty to secure the provision set out in EHCPs, and that placements remain suitable to meet individual needs.

The requirement to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan by June 2026 does not create new legal obligations, but it should clearly set out how the Council will continue to meet its existing duties in practice.

Overall, there are no direct legal implications arising from the report from a social care and safeguarding perspective.

Signed: Sonali Unka – Principal Solicitor

Dated: 31.03.26

4.3 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The strategic direction set out in the Schools White Paper, and the Council's alignment with developing more inclusive mainstream provision, will directly impact individuals sharing the protected characteristics of Age (children and young people) and Disability (pupils with SEND). The overarching aim of the reforms is to advance equality of opportunity by ensuring that children and

young people with SEND have their needs met effectively within mainstream settings, promoting greater inclusion and parity of educational outcomes.

In order to demonstrate that the consideration of equalities impacts is taken into account as an integral part of the process of reviewing or amending existing services, an Equality Impact Assessment should be undertaken on the proposed Local SEND Reform Plan

Signed: : Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 31 March 2026

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

There are no significant, direct climate emergency implications arising from this report.

Implications arising from strategic plans developed in response to the White Paper should be given consideration as and when the relevant reports are submitted for decision

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 30th March 2026

4.5 Other Implications

Signed:

Dated:

5. Background information and other papers:

6. Summary of appendices: