

Respond to the EA SEN Consultation by the 22nd May

The Education Authority is seeking views on planned changes to how SEN support is delivered in mainstream schools. Their proposals under the 'Enhanced Support Model' include cutting one-to-one classroom assistance and giving schools more freedom to decide what support to put in place.

UNISON is encouraging members to participate in the consultation but **not to use the online survey**. This is because the **questions are restrictive and leading** and the data will be used to endorse the EA's plans, without recognising the concerns you may have. Send your views in by emailing the address SENDTransformation@eani.org.uk

UNISON's suggested response is below but we urge you to adapt these bullet points to what you want to say and add your own views, opinions or concerns. **Please add anything from your direct experience as an education support worker that may have been overlooked.** UNISON's policy team will also be submitting a detailed report based on everything we have heard at the Classroom Assistant Good Work Roadshow events.

NOTE: In public consultations, responses that are too similar to each other may be disregarded or counted together as a single response so please take time to adapt the suggestions below and add your own words.

I am a Classroom Assistant and my role is... *(job title and type of setting you work in)*

This is a submission to the Education Authority's consultation on the Enhanced Support Model. I am choosing to respond via the email address provided as I do not believe the online survey will allow me to fully express my views.

The key question in the consultation is 'do you agree with the proposed new enhanced support model for children and young people with a statement of SEN?'

No, I do not agree with the proposed enhanced support model for the following reasons:

- There is not enough information about what the enhanced support model will mean for children, principals and SENCOs having to take on extra responsibilities, and the Classroom Assistant role.
- I agree that the education system needs to work better for children with SEN but I do not believe that these changes will fix that because it is likely to mean schools having to do more with less.
- The EA and the Department has made very negative statements about the value of one-to-one classroom assistance and these do not reflect my experience working with children or the experiences of the teachers and parents who say that one-to-one support is crucial in most cases.

- Working with small groups of children is already common practice in many schools but it is not always the best way to meet each child's individual needs.
- There are commitments made in the consultation to improve the training and career progression provided by the EA. Classroom Assistants have been asking for this for years and have been undertaking training on our own time and at our own expense. Many of us already have qualifications and specialist skills but this is not recognised in our pay.
- The EA should invest in enhanced training and career development for Classroom Assistants but there is not enough information about how these new qualifications will work and how they will shape job descriptions, pay and grading.
- The proposals place more responsibility on schools to decide what support is needed to meet the needs of children across the whole school. This could mean that Classroom Assistants are overlooked in favour of other types of support.
- Nursery and Foundation Assistants have been overlooked in the consultation, even though they support children with SEN before they have a Statement.

Instead of moving forward with the Enhanced Support Model, I think the EA should:

- Pause the process and work with trade unions, schools, parents and children's rights groups who are concerned that the planned changes are going to make things worse, not better.
- Invest in the Classroom Assistant workforce to improve our pay, terms and conditions, training and recognition of our experience and qualifications.
- Continue to work with trade unions to end temporary employment and guarantee access to 52-week contracts.
- This will improve recruitment and retention so that we have enough skilled, experienced Classroom Assistants to deliver educational support when and where it is needed.
- Listen to the frontline staff to find out what works and what doesn't. One-to-one support delivered from as early a stage as possible gives children the best start in their educational journey. Other ways of providing support can also work but not if we are understaffed.
- Classroom Assistants in Specialist Provision classrooms must have access to the full range of training and enhanced support available in Special Schools. They should be paid on the ASEN grade.
- Nursery and Foundation Assistants should be included as they provide vital early intervention for SEN children but are not paid in a way that reflects the reality of their role.
- Focus on ending the delays in the statementing process – this is the real reason the system is not delivering the best outcomes.
- Respect the value of investing in SEN support – we believe in inclusion and every child's right to an education. The EA should not be on a mission to cut costs.