

Question 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree that both specialist and mixed MATs should coexist in the fully trust-led future? This would allow current local authority-maintained special schools and alternative provision settings to join either type of MAT.

CONTENTS

SNJ's response to Question 11	1
Responses from parents/SNJ readers	3
██████████	3
██████████	4
██████████	4
██████████	4
██████████	5
██████████	7
██████████	7
██████	7
██	7
██████████	8
██████████	8

SNJ's response to Question 11

1. What makes the government think that MATS provide better provision than single school trusts? What makes the DfE think that having a MAT that has its own AP and specialist provision will improve either provision or the support for children? Where is the evidence for this? It seems just plucked out of a big hat of "big ideas" with nothing to back it up.

2. Neither the Schools Bill nor the SEND Green Paper give any reliable evidence that Multi-Academy Trusts are the solution to the current widespread issues in SEND. There is, however, evidence that academies fail some students with SEND in that they identify fewer, reduce their numbers compared to community schools, and exclude them at a higher rate. This is well-known to the DfE yet ignored in your proposals.
3. In ensuring that most trusts are mixed with mainstream, special, and alternative provision there is a risk that children with SEND (diagnosed or not) end up in a merry-go-round, shunted off to AP for behavioural issues, then off to specialist once diagnosed. Then, if following DfE proposals to end EHCPs as soon as possible, shifted back to mainstream, and so the cycle continues when the child still cannot cope back in mainstream. If the money no longer follows the pupil where AP is concerned, but the trust owns all the schools, it doesn't matter to them where the child is; they just become a hot potato being shoved from one school to another.
4. What happens in this scenario if a child requires specialist provision that doesn't match what is provided by the MAT? We have grave concerns that children will be sent to unsuitable specialist provision as it is the only one available.
5. We believe one way to stop this is by requiring a mandatory EHC Needs Assessment for any child at risk of exclusion, or a move to AP to understand why they are having difficulties. A school would not be able to move them until this has been finalised. This would ensure that a timely assessment is made, needs are identified and a decision on whether or not the school can be supported to meet those needs is made. This would prevent schools 'shunting' children off.
6. One of the claims is that with all kinds of schools within one trust then expertise can be shared. But if a Trust only has one kind of special school that expertise is limited. If you want a specialist-only MAT, how do you do this locally?
7. If a MAT is mixed, where is the incentive for the mainstream schools within the MAT to be inclusive? Why should they bother to provide expertise or accessible buildings when it would be easier for a child to be moved to the specialist school in the MAT?
8. The Government is trumpeting its £2.6 billion in capital funding and seems to think that mainstream schools will opt to use it to make their schools more accessible. This is incredibly naïve, especially when many schools need so much remedial work after so much underfunding. The

likelihood that they will use it to install accessible toilets or lifts or wider doorways or create wheelchair-friendly classrooms is laughable.

9. New special free schools to reduce LAs' dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficits won't work as the LA won't control the school as they'll all be part of Multi-Academy Trusts.
 10. Additionally, where is their incentive to be able to support children with "low-incidence" needs such as deaf children?
 11. Having a mixed MAT does not address the issue of having provision close to home. Only having accessible schools - both structurally and provision-wise, does this.
 12. SEN Transport is estimated at £800 million a year. It's a major reason why families end up at the SEND Tribunal, or with their child in inappropriate local provision if they can't fight. None of these proposals will improve this.
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Responses from parents/SNJ readers

NB: These views are those of parents for whom we have acted as a conduit for their response to the Green Paper. The views expressed from here are not necessarily those held by Special Needs Jungle.



1. A mandatory EHC Needs Assessment should be carried out well before and if not as soon as a child is at risk of exclusion, managed move or a move to AP to understand why they are having difficulties?
2. It is not rocket science that something is not working, an AP, managed move or exclusion does more harm than good.



1. All schools should have the choice and not be forced.



1. Forced academisation is the Tory agenda however, there is insufficient evidence to show academies are better than maintained schools.



1. I do not agree with a fully trust-led future because they do not offer anything for SEN children like my daughter apart from damage and harm.
2. Most mainstream schools are currently ill-equipped to identify and effectively support needs. Yes, it's a good idea to have a properly inclusive education system, with improved mainstream provision supported by early and accurate identification of needs, high-quality teaching, prompt access to targeted support. However, mainstream schools are SO far behind when it comes to identifying and supporting SEND that we must maintain the current specialist schools (and build even more of them) so there is a strong specialist system with access to specialist and/or alternative provision for those with more complex needs.
3. For ALL children it would be better if all academy trusts take their role of working with and supporting SEND children properly. This includes the school attitude to rules and discipline which do not work for all SEND children – particularly those autistic children with PDA.
4. We have a massive problem that children labelled “troublesome” are shunted to alternative provision without any assessment of their needs. It should be mandatory that ALL children at risk of exclusion or a move to AP should have an EHCP needs assessment to understand more about their difficulties.
5. But the biggest problem we have is a lack of specialist provision. There is nothing near me that is appropriate for my daughter so we are at home on an EOTAS. She wants to attend a school but years of being in the wrong place has led to a complete mental breakdown and now we are in

recovery. If there had been a good appropriate specialist school nearby perhaps we could have avoided this trauma and heartache.

6. The type of school/provision that we need and is missing where we live is one for academically able, autistic and highly anxious children who need a low-demand, calm, strength-based and flexible school (so a realistic approach to attendance). There is a huge need for this type of school. I am on a local WhatsApp group with 74 participants with autistic daughters in a similar situation to us – not able to attend school due to emotional avoidance.
7. If we had identified our daughter's needs sooner we may have been able to move to a specialist provision elsewhere in the country. It is not realistic to expect every disabled child to be able to attend local provision. There are some excellent independent specialist schools with great results – we were impressed by West Heath in Kent – so any state specialist provision needs to match up to these schools.



1. I fundamentally disagree with the government's ideology around academisation and MATs. This has removed local accountability and democracy from education and has privatised schools.
2. Setting this aside, in response to these questions: I do not agree that most trusts should contain a mix of mainstream, special and alternative provision schools. Different providers should specialise in what they do best. This would make it too easy for mainstream schools to abdicate their responsibilities towards children with SEN in their schools, particularly those without EHCPs, and assume that this would be delivered by the special and alternative settings within their MAT.
3. I believe this would also lead to more children being shoehorned into unsuitable provision because of a need to meet attendance and behaviour targets in mainstream and because MATs will be chasing the increased money that special/alternative provisions attract. This would also lead to an even greater focus on and drive for academic attainment rather than a rounded, diverse education setting for all.
4. I think it should be mandatory for all children at risk of exclusion or a move to an alternative provision to have an EHC needs assessment to understand why they are experiencing difficulties. The vast majority of

children want to do well in school, and poor behaviour or attendance is a communication of unmet needs in the vast majority of cases.

5. There is a lack of specialist provision for autistic children who need small class sizes, a calm, quiet learning environment, trauma and neurodiverse-informed staff, and policies which don't penalise children's disabilities or try to force them into neurotypical behaviours (positive behaviour approaches, ABA etc). This is particularly true for children who are academically average or above average, whose needs are not met by special schools that are geared to learning disabled children primarily. We have been so far unable to find a suitable provision for our child across a 50-mile radius.
6. It is unrealistic for all children to be able to attend local provision because some children's needs can only be met by very specialist and small providers, who may not be local. LAs do not have the budgets to set up suitable provision or commission it.
7. All mainstream schools should have mandatory trauma training and disability training. They should be required to actively look at how they can understand and accommodate children's SEN needs and move away from an ableist and neurotypical model. OFSTED should judge them on how well they do this and meet the needs and provision set out in EHCPs and other documents for children without EHCPs. This should also extend to teaching all children in school about disabilities and disabled people's rights, and challenging thinking about how they behave and think about disabled peers.
8. I would like the government to make funding available to schools to provide quiet space for children who need time out from the classroom to regulate, and it should be a mandatory requirement of all new build schools to incorporate a suitable space for this purpose - my child's new space does not have this built-in, a massive missed opportunity. There should also be funding available to schools for inclusive play and sports equipment.
9. The government should review teachers' pay to attract and retain teachers. Most importantly a systematic review needs to take place in education to move away from the relentless focus on exams, performance and a narrow curriculum. And school funding should be increased to avoid teachers having to buy their own equipment so that schools can adequately meet needs.



1. I strongly disagree with the premise of this question. I do not believe that all schools should be in MATs or that this will improve the education system generally or SEND provision in particular. It is unclear how pupils with SEND will benefit from being taught in a MAT, however, they might be structured. MATs may bounce children around between different schools and AP within the MAT – this is not in any child's interest.
2. Some academies are very unwelcoming to SEND children. My son initially asked for my high-functioning ASD grandchild to go to a local academy. They could not have been more hostile, writing a long letter to the LA saying that they didn't want any more children with EHCPs and that my grandson didn't belong in a mainstream school - both unlawful statements.



1. The move to academies is inherently discriminatory for children with SEND. It allows for too much localised practice and, with the drive to show results, means that the priority will be compliance and behaviour without understanding truly what behaviour communicates, or how to help children access their learning.
2. It will mean more traumatised and abused children in schools and is a lazy move on the behalf of the government when the system already shows very clearly that it is not able to operate within the law without close scrutiny and accountability. Even your Tsarina, Birbalsingh, shows scant understanding of SEND law and doesn't believe in diagnosable neurodevelopmental conditions and certainly will not make any lawful adjustments to ensure children have their individual support needs met.



1. This should be a choice not decided for the school



1. We have an inherent mistrust of MAT and their running of education purely as a business. With their narrow curriculum, closed-off attitude to working with parents and their bullying and controlling behaviours

towards children with SEN (isolation policies, attendance policies, clothing policies, behaviour policies).

2. Therefore we would be wary of abuse of power and flexibility by the trusts to which would doubtless be only in the favour of the Trust and not of the child.



1. I totally disagree with this. Academies are businesses and will only continue what some schools do already. Money provided for an individual is lost and spread across all provision. Alternative provision for excluded and troublesome pupils is not the place for SEN children. Specialist separate buildings within a campus may work but this is effectively having a specialist Specialist school.



1. Mixed MAT trusts would mean that councils lose control of their schools and hence parents would lose accountability which is already poor. The only way this would work would be if the accountability of the schools for specialist provision was extremely high and well planned and financed. Can this be guaranteed?
2. Children at risk of exclusion should all be given EHC needs assessment to help identify the reasons for their difficulties. Local free special schools should be available to all and we could certainly benefit from more of them in Cumbria due to the large nature of the county. Low incidence needs should be catered for within local schools.