

Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) for Financial Year 2025-26

Frequently Asked Questions

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Section 1: Overview of the PINS Programme

What is the purpose of the PINS Programme?

The Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) Programme is designed to support neurodivergent children in mainstream primary schools at the whole-school level. It is needs-led, rather than diagnosis-led, therefore including children without a formal diagnosis. As such, each PINS project supports the needs of all children within a particular school setting, recognising the neurodiverse nature of classrooms.

Why is PINS focused on neurodiversity?

PINS in financial year (FY) 2025-26 builds on the success of previous programmes of activity (e.g. PINS FY 2024-25, Autism in Schools) by reaching a wider cohort of children across a greater number of mainstream primary schools. Neurodivergent pupils can benefit from a more inclusive mainstream environment and multi-disciplinary expertise. Given the focus on whole school intervention, however, we expect PINS to have benefits for other pupils with SEND as well as the wider pupil cohort.

When did the PINS Programme start?

PINS was first launched in January 2024, at which point eight Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) with strong local partnerships and the ability to mobilise quickly commenced their projects as our Early Adopter sites. The majority of ICBs formally started work on PINS from April 2024.

A second year of PINS activity was announced in February 2025, with further funding available for all ICBs to start or continue PINS activity until 31 March 2026.

Why is PINS specifically targeting primary schools?

PINS is part of the Government's ambition to break down the barriers to opportunity, enabling every child to achieve and thrive through an inclusive approach to SEND. By focusing on primary schools, we have the best opportunity to intervene at an early stage in a child's educational journey and build strong relationships with parents and carers. It also gives us a chance to reach children whose needs may have been missed due to the COVID-19 pandemic or who may need adjustments to attend school.

There are other projects which aim to deliver similar approaches around early intervention, and building capacity within mainstream settings, which cover early years (e.g. Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC)) and secondary phases (e.g. SAFE taskforces, Autism in Schools).

Section 2: General information for strategic partners

What national support will be offered to ICBs, PCFs, LAs and schools?

PINS is a national programme overseen jointly by the Department for Education (DfE), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England (NHSE), supported by the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF).

National guidance documents have been published to support mobilisation of PINS FY 2025-26, including: Explanatory Information FY 2025-26; Schools' Self-Assessment Tool; Menu of Support; and Children's Voice Self-Assessment Tool and Resource Pack. These have been revised and updated to reflect key learnings from PINS activity in FY 2024-25.

There is a small National Delivery Support Team who will provide support to local systems in developing and delivering their PINS offer in FY 2025-26. This includes regular Community of Practice events to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and resolve any common issues.

Additionally, Parent Carer Forums (PCFs, or other parent carer-led groups) who are involved in the delivery of PINS will be able to access monthly drop-in support sessions led by the NNPCF and NHSE family carer adviser.

Will all LAs be invited to be involved in the PINS Programme? How will LAs be decided by ICBs?

ICBs and local partners can choose where they run PINS FY 2025-26 depending on the size of the ICB. Some areas may choose to locate the project solely in one Local Authority (LA) area, whereas others may

wish to spread this across a number of different LA areas. This should be articulated as part of the Delivery Plan compiled by system partners.

When considering which LAs to work with, we encourage ICBs to be mindful of:

- The knowledge and capacity of local system partnerships (including PCFs or other parent carer-led groups).
- Each LA's capacity to participate, including the recognised PCF body (or other parent carer-led group).
- Relevant population factors (e.g. levels of deprivation) and identified levels of need.

How are schools being selected? Is participation mandatory?

Building on the success of the PINS Programme in FY 2024-25, which delivered to around 10% of all mainstream primary schools, PINS FY 2025-26 will be extended to a further cohort of mainstream primary schools.

The programme is being delivered by ICBs across England, to ensure national spread. ICBs will be responsible for deciding which schools to work with in collaboration with the relevant LAs and PCFs. Based on learning from how systems identified schools in FY 2024-25, we do not propose to provide ICBs with data to support this process. ICBs will need to use locally available data and intelligence to support their decision making around school selection.

We understand that some schools may not have the capacity to engage and being part of a PINS project is entirely voluntary for schools.

What types of schools can be included within a PINS project?

The PINS Programme is intended for mainstream primary schools only. All mainstream primary schools (maintained and academies) can be included, and it is for each local partnership to determine which schools to work with.

Why are independent or special schools not included?

As PINS FY 2025-26 continues to be a pilot programme that is restricted in reach, we are not including independent schools or special schools. However, we recognise that special schools in particular may well have a role in delivering support where they have relevant expertise to share with mainstream settings. We would therefore encourage systems to consider the role of special schools as part of the local support offer, in doing so reflecting the fact that relevant specialist expertise can be found across both health and education workforces.

Can secondary schools also take part in PINS?

No. PINS is a pilot programme specifically targeted at mainstream primary schools, providing the opportunity to intervene at an early stage in a child's education journey.

Whilst we recognise that support for neurodivergent children during transition from primary to secondary school is a particular need for many, the PINS Programme has been tailored to provide bespoke hands-on support to school staff and parents/carers within primary settings. Primary schools are generally smaller

in size and complexity than secondary schools, and there are other projects which deliver similar approaches around early intervention in secondary settings (e.g. SAFE taskforces, Autism in Schools).

We continue to encourage PINS participants to facilitate the involvement of colleagues from secondary schools in relevant support sessions, provided this does not result in any additional cost burden for those primary schools formally engaged in PINS.

Can an ICB invite more than 30 new schools to be part of the PINS Programme?

For ICBs which participated in a PINS project in FY 2024-25, PINS projects will be expected to expand to work with 30 new mainstream primary schools in FY 2025-26. ICBs may work with more than 30 schools where they are confident that they can a) fulfil the PINS Programme delivery expectations within the agreed budget and b) ensure that each participating school receives the agreed quota of support. ICBs should speak to the National Delivery Support team before agreeing to engage more than 30 schools.

For ICBs which are new to the PINS Programme, the expectation is that they work with 40 schools.

What is the 'embed' offer for existing schools?

Around 1,650 schools took part in PINS projects during FY 2024-25. Funding will be made available to ICBs in FY 2025-26 to continue to support this initial cohort of schools. The aim of this funding is to help embed the learning and approaches put in place to support neurodivergent children within these settings. This will enable schools to strengthen further their ways of working and maintain cultures of inclusivity. In addition, funding will support continued work alongside parent carers to increase engagement and ensure that parental views are heard.

Is 'embed' activity expected to follow a specific national model? Or can our approach be determined locally?

As detailed in Section 3.3 of the PINS Explanatory Information FY 2025-26, ICBs are expected to support schools involved in PINS during FY 2025-26 to embed the learning from PINS interventions. As a minimum, we expect local project delivery teams to facilitate or commission a termly community of practice for this purpose. Importantly, however, the content of these sessions should be determined locally, as well as any further 'embed' activity which is deemed beneficial to the existing cohort of schools.

Beyond termly communities of practice, the National Delivery Support Team has purposely not been prescriptive in specifying a national model for 'embed' activity. This is in recognition of the fact that local system partners are best placed to determine the appropriate offer for their settings, responding both to population need within the area(s) and particular themes from the previous year of PINS activity. We also recognise that some systems have proactively taken steps in FY 2024-25 to prepare for (and, in certain cases, implement) legacy activities and resources to ensure PINS interventions continue to have a sustained impact across all schools.

Each local system will be asked to outline their proposal for 'embed' activity as part of the Delivery Plan for FY 2025-26, which will be reviewed by the National Delivery Support Team before a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is agreed between the ICB, DfE and NHSE, and funding is released.

Why are the timescales for the PINS project so tight?

The original funding for PINS FY 2024-25 was the result of a successful Shared Outcomes Fund (SOF) bid, with all monies required to be spent by the end of the financial year (31 March 2025). Similarly, funding for the expansion of PINS FY 2025-26 has been awarded as part of a one-year Spending Review (SR) process across Government, which is again tied to the financial year.

We appreciate that timings remain tight in FY 2025-26, and the National Delivery Support Team will continue to provide as much support as possible to areas to enable them to participate.

Can PINS projects run across the full academic year (September 2025 – July 2026)?

No. Due to recent financial planning cycles (a standalone SOF bid for FY 2024-25 and a one-year SR for FY 2025-26), it has not been possible to release PINS funding to coincide with school academic years.

We appreciate that this has resulted in some operational challenges for local systems, particularly with regards to the scheduling of support in the summer term. The National Delivery Support Team will continue to provide advice and support to help to overcome these barriers.

How do I find out which schools in my area are taking part in PINS?

ICBs are working with local partners (including LAs and PCFs) to identify which schools would best benefit from being offered the opportunity to take part in PINS FY 2025-26.

If your LA is participating in PINS FY 2025-26, we recommend contacting your LA SEND service to check which schools in the area are participating.

If you are unsure whether PINS FY 2025-26 is being delivered in your LA, please contact the National Delivery Support Team for advice.

Will PINS have any benefits to schools (and LAs) who are not part of the pilot programme?

PINS provides the potential for wider shared learning around outcomes and best practice, both between schools and LAs that are selected to participate and those which are not. Several local partnerships have made use of PINS materials (e.g. Menu of Support, Self-Assessment Tool) and locally developed resources to support complementary work in schools not currently receiving funding for PINS.

Section 3: Information for ICBs

How much funding is available for ICBs to deliver PINS? What can this funding be used for?

The funding available for PINS FY 2025-26 is £9.5m nationally. This is non-recurrent funding which needs to be used for delivery by 31 March 2026.

Each ICB will receive a fixed amount of funding at the start of the project, which should be used to:

- Provide suitable governance for the local project, working strategically with parent carers and wider system partners.
- Complete the PINS Delivery Plan, ensuring sign off by all relevant partners.
- Agree the process for selecting schools to be part of the PINS local project and working with schools to deliver the support offer.
- Agree the priorities for commissioning of the support offer, in line with the analysis of school self-assessments. This should incorporate themes identified through the children's voice and parent carer surveys, where possible.
- Support the local PCF (or other parent carer-led group) to develop the parent carer engagement activity in all participating schools.
- Engage in the national monitoring and evaluation activity.

In addition, ICBs involved in PINS FY 2024-25 should offer support to existing schools to embed the learning from previous interventions (including the parent carer engagement strand). Up to 15% of each ICB's budget can be used for this purpose.

PINS funding cannot be used to deliver individual interventions to individual children and instead adopts a whole-school approach.

National evaluation costs are being funded directly by DfE.

Can funding be used to provide schools with classroom resources that improve inclusive whole school practice?

Wherever possible, ICBs should spend their full PINS delivery funding on the costs of specialist support to schools, as per the menu of support. It is important that all participating PINS schools are offered 37.5 hours (5 days' equivalent) of individualised support.

If an ICB holds unused PINS delivery funding after this, it is possible to use remaining funds for schools to purchase small-scale revenue items that improve inclusive whole school practice. These resources should be strongly linked to support provided as part of the PINS project (for example, online communication provision licences or sensory equipment, following input in these areas). This spending should not exceed 5% of the total PINS delivery funding.

It is not permissible to use PINS funding for capital spending, where spending results in an addition to or the improvement of the fixed assets of the school (e.g. school building projects, permanent outside play equipment).

Prior to using PINS funding for school revenue spending, please consult the National Delivery Support Team to discuss planned spending.

Will ICBs have to repay PINS funding if the number of schools participating is lower than expected?

ICBs and local partners should endeavour to onboard a full cohort of new schools for PINS FY 2025-26. Every effort should be made to ensure that schools remain engaged throughout the project. As per the MoU between each ICB, DfE and NHSE, uncommitted funding will need to be returned to Government via the mandate process.

What are the reporting arrangements for the PINS Programme?

The ICB will be required, on a quarterly basis, to complete a written report for the PINS National Delivery Support Team, which must be submitted in line with the deadlines provided. The deadlines for submission and templates for each quarter will be provided in advance. LAs, PCFs and schools are expected to cooperate with the ICB and provide updates when requested.

Each quarterly report will be followed by a meeting with the National Delivery Support Team. The purpose of this meeting is to provide support for local partners to ensure individual PINS projects remain on track.

The ICB local project delivery team lead will be expected to attend and give a verbal update on progress in between the submission of the formal quarterly monitoring reports. The National Delivery Support Team will agree with each ICB the appropriate rhythm for these conversations.

What progress has been made around the PINS evaluation?

DfE undertook a successful tender to secure the services of a consortium led by CFE Research for the purposes of evaluating PINS FY 2024-25. The contract was originally awarded in March 2024 and will run until September 2025. Pending approvals, we are looking to extend the existing evaluation contract for an additional 12 months.

The evaluation will provide both quantitative and qualitative information on the impact of the programme and this learning will be used to inform future policy development in this area. We expect to receive a report of FY 2024-25 findings in September 2025, followed by a final report in summer 2026, should the contract be extended.

Will the focus of the PINS evaluation in FY 2025-26 be different?

Yes. DfE commissioned a high-quality mixed method independent evaluation at the beginning of the PINS Programme, to run from March 2024 – September 2025. The evaluation will continue to be conducted alongside the programme and will be extended to run between March 2024 – September 2026, subject to approvals.

The first year of the evaluation (March 2024 – September 2025) currently seeks to understand how the PINS Programme was implemented and assess the suitability of PINS being rolled out more widely.

The second year of the evaluation will focus on the embedding offer for schools and will seek to:

- Understand how PINS was extended and embedded in different locations, identifying any barriers and enablers to delivery.
- Determine, whether and to what extent, the benefits of PINS are able to be sustained through a 'lighter touch' embed offer for the existing cohort of schools.
- Determine, whether and to what extent, PINS improved schools' ability to support neurodiverse pupils.

Are PINS evaluation costs expected to come out of the FY 2025-26 funding given to ICBs?

No. Evaluation costs for FY 2024-25 and FY 2025-26 are being funded centrally by DfE.

Does PINS align with other linked SEND programmes and incentives? How will you ensure there is no duplication?

System partners who are involved in other SEND-related initiatives are welcome to participate in the PINS Programme. Though the offer and what is being tested may vary across different projects, PINS is intended to feed learning into wider reforms including work around access to specialist workforces (in partnership with DHSC). However, this will not be immediate as these wider reforms will run over a longer time frame.

The National Delivery Support Team links into policy and reform programmes across DfE, NHSE and DHSC.

How does PINS link to the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme?

The ELSEC programme is jointly funded between DfE and NHSE. It is a pilot programme with nine pathfinder sites. Each pathfinder is piloting the use of pre-qualification support workers working with staff and children in education settings. The aim is to improve early identification of children with speech, language and communication needs, and increase the universal and targeted interventions available to support children's speech and language development. Like PINS, ELSEC fosters a whole school approach to supporting children's needs and enhances the skills of the people working with them through staff training, support and coaching.

Section 4: Information for PCFs

What is the role of parent carers and Parent Carer Forums (PCFs)?

Collaboration with parents and carers is critical to the success of the PINS Programme. Parent carers are key partners in the delivery of PINS, and we therefore expect PCFs (where possible) or parent carer-led groups to be actively involved in the coordination and implementation of your local PINS project.

PCFs are representative local groups of parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities. They work alongside LAs, education, health, and other service providers to ensure the services meet the needs of children and families.

PCFs are funded by DfE to work strategically with LAs and health partners in relation to their SEND delivery and implementation. Additional funding for PCFs (or other parent carer-led groups) via PINS is specifically to facilitate constructive relationships and joint working with parents and carers.

We do not have a PCF in our local area. Can we still participate?

We acknowledge that some areas may have alternative routes for parent carer involvement. The PINS model requires active involvement of a parent carer-led group within each locality, including have them as delivery partners, and this should be the recognised body for that local area.

There are regional NNPCF networks who may be able to support or assist if you are unsure about the best local parent carer-led organisation to work with.

What are the benefits of working with parents and carers? What are the core objectives for PCFs in PINS?

There are many benefits to schools and LAs of working with PCFs, including: sharing knowledge and experiences of support and services; promoting opportunities where parent carers can contribute to service design; and facilitating feedback to improve the experience of families.

PCFs (or other parent carer-led groups) taking part in PINS projects will work with the ICB and LA partners to develop and deliver the project, including by participating in the local governance board.

In addition, PCFs (or other parent carer-led groups) will support new schools participating in PINS FY 2025-26 and facilitate 'embed' activity within schools who participated in PINS FY 2024-25. Further information can be found within Section 4 of the PINS Explanatory Information FY 2025-26.

What are the expectations of PCFs with regards to 'embed' activity?

This will vary depending on the degree to which parent carer involvement is self-sustaining within individual schools which participated in PINS FY 2024-25. If there is a specific requirement for a PCF (or other parent carer-led group) to deliver bespoke 'embed' activity to existing schools, this should be funded from within the 15% dedicated budget held by ICBs for this purpose (and in addition to funding provided to PCFs specifically for parent carer engagement in new schools).

For those PCFs (or other parent carer-led groups) commissioned to deliver specific 'embed' activities, governance arrangements within the local partnership should reflect this. As a minimum, we would expect PCFs (or other parent carer-led groups) to be involved in the design and delivery of a termly community of practice for schools.

How will PCFs be monitored on the use of their PINS funding?

ICBs should assure themselves that PCFs are carrying out their expected activities as part of a local PINS project. The National Delivery Support Team recommends that local arrangements for financial monitoring between ICBs and PCFs should be set out clearly at the point at which funding is transferred (e.g. via a MoU).

The National Delivery Support Team will monitor the passporting of full funding from ICBs to PCFs to minimise any delays or disruption. However, PCFs will not be required to submit their PINS funding accounts or to provide spending reporting to the national team.

Will PCFs have to repay funding if the number of schools participating is lower than expected?

No. PCF funding is agreed locally based on the number of schools taking part in the PCF local area. If for any reason the agreed number of schools is lower than expected, we will not be requesting any return of funding from PCFs.

How can we ensure that safeguarding processes are in place at primary schools for delivery of the PINS project? Is it necessary for PCF members to undertake DBS checks specific to PINS activity?

Schools participating in PINS are required to adhere to the existing procedures and processes in line with the statutory guidance: [Keeping children safe in education 2024 \(KCSIE\)](#).

In summary:

- In most cases, PCF representatives will not be working with children as part of PINS Programme activity.
- Schools are advised to complete a risk assessment (see KCSIE paragraphs 3.11-3.14) to support them in determining the most appropriate arrangements to ensure these adults can safely come into school.
- If local PINS projects or individual schools wish to commission their PCF to deliver the children's voice activities (which form part of the self-assessment process), an enhanced DBS certificate (which does not include a barred list check) will be appropriate for each individual.

Section 5: Information for schools

Will a school's capacity to engage affect their likelihood of being selected (e.g. smaller schools without dedicated staff to fulfil SEND roles)?

We understand that some schools may not have the capacity to engage. Being part of the PINS project is entirely voluntary for schools, and school selection should be determined in conversation between the responsible ICB and local partners (including LAs and PCFs).

The programme has been designed so that interventions can be tailored to the particular needs of each school. Current internal SEND capacity is not a prerequisite for schools to benefit from PINS funding and each area has a local project delivery team who are supporting selected schools to participate. Our learning from PINS FY 2024-25 indicates that areas were creative in supporting schools to participate, including 'buddying' smaller schools with larger ones, or planning joint interventions and support to overcome geographical barriers.

How much specialist support will schools receive?

The offer of support from the PINS Programme is 37.5 hours (5 days' equivalent) of input per school, according to identified needs within individual school settings.

ICB-led local partnerships will work with schools to identify and commission specialist support that aims to build the capacity of schools to meet the needs of neurodivergent pupils.

How will schools identify their support needs?

Schools will complete a Self-Assessment Tool to enable them to identify priority areas for support. Outputs from the Self-Assessment Tool will be complemented by feedback from parents and carers (each local

PCF will run a survey) and input from children at the school (we have provided a Children's Voice Self-Assessment Tool and Resource Pack).

Local project teams will review schools' self-assessment responses alongside the Menu of Support and work with schools to identify the interventions that best meet their priority needs.

How will children's views feed into a school's PINS project?

The voices of children themselves are central to the PINS Programme. The National Delivery Support Team has produced a resource pack for schools to support them when collecting children's feedback. Participating schools are expected to seek the views of pupils, especially those children who may benefit from the programme, to inform school support priorities.

How will schools select the most appropriate specialist intervention for their needs?

The Menu of Support has been developed with input from a range of stakeholders (education and health specialists, parents and carers, children and young people) to support schools and local partnerships in identifying the most appropriate interventions for respective settings. Content within the Menu of Support is split across six key domains:

1. Leadership, Culture & Values
2. Mental Health
3. Readiness to Learn
4. Teaching and Learning
5. Environment
6. Communication

Local project teams will work with individual schools using the Menu of Support to agree the length, type, and content of the intervention appropriate for the setting.

Where possible, the content for the interventions should prioritise using resources, staffing and programmes already available locally (e.g. Autism Education Trust, Nasen) as well as locally based groups currently supporting neurodivergent children.

Who will deliver the specialist support to schools?

Specialists can be from a range of professional backgrounds (across both health and education sectors) providing they have the right skills and experience to be able to deliver interventions. They may include, but are not limited to:

- Occupational Therapists
- Speech and Language Therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Clinical Psychologists
- Nurses
- Mental Health Support Teams
- Community Wellbeing Practitioners
- Educational Psychologists
- Specialist Teachers

- Expert parent/carers with lived experience

When will specialist support be delivered to schools?

Local project teams will have flexibility to commission the timing and pattern of delivery which works best for individual schools (e.g. twilight sessions, shorter sessions targeted towards specific staff groups) providing all delivery is completed by 31 March 2026.

Whilst we expect the majority of support to be delivered in person, some online delivery may be possible where the nature of the intervention can be delivered in this way.

Will all schools have to move at the same speed or is there flexibility in timelines?

There is flexibility in timelines for delivery in each school providing the overall programme of support can be completed by the 31 March 2026. Local partnerships will be able to schedule the programme of support into each school based on local capacity and commissioning arrangements.

Can the environment of the school itself be the focus of a PINS project?

The fifth domain in the Menu of Support is Environment (5). This covers the physical and sensory environment of a school.

The communication environment of a school is covered under a separate domain, Communication (6).

Can schools arrange support for individual children through the PINS project?

No. The focus of PINS interventions is to deliver whole school support and PINS funding cannot be used to deliver individual (1:1) interventions to individual children. As such, all children within the school are likely to benefit. The focus of the evaluation will also, therefore, be at the whole school level, rather than understanding individual outcomes.

Is it possible to utilise PINS project funding to cover school staff backfill (i.e. supply teachers or teaching assistants)?

It is a core expectation of the PINS Programme that each participating school receives 37.5 hours (5 days' equivalent) of input. The delivery budget has been determined based on the expected costs of providing this to the total number of schools each ICB will engage. There is an expectation that schools who participate in PINS will make staff available to participate in relevant sessions. Therefore, as a norm, backfill costs for staff time will not be payable.

However, there are some limited circumstances in which the lack of backfill funding may prevent a school from participating in PINS activity. We expect this to be the case only where a school can provide evidence of extenuating circumstances, and where there is no alternative source of funding available to provide cover.

Whilst this is ultimately a local decision, the National Delivery Support Team will want to be assured that funding backfill costs will not:

- Set a precedent that no contribution (in staff time, not financial) is required from schools who participate in PINS.
- Reduce the available delivery budget to other schools involved in the programme.
- Mean that the school in question receives less than the intended 37.5 hours (5 days' equivalent) of specialist input through PINS.

List of common acronyms

Acronym	Definition
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DfE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
ELSEC	Early Language Support for Every Child
FY	Financial Year
ICB	Integrated Care Board
KCSIE	Keeping children safe in education 2024
LA	Local Authority
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NHSE	NHS England
NNPCF	National Network of Parent Carer Forums
PCF	Parent Carer Forum
PINS	Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools
SAFE	Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed (taskforce)
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SOF	Shared Outcomes Fund
SR	Spending Review