



The National Association of
School-Based Teacher Trainers

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ITT providers warn teachers are unprepared for rising SEND complexity in mainstream schools, as NASBTT announces plan to “bridge the gap”

Nearly two thirds of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers believe that teachers are not currently prepared to meet the government’s ambition to raise the complexity threshold for pupils with SEND entering mainstream schools.

The latest ITT Insights Survey, commissioned by NASBTT, reveals that 65% of the 75 respondents are concerned about teachers’ readiness to support pupils with more complex needs – and only 39% feel their own organisations are equipped to prepare trainees effectively.

When asked what specific training teachers need to deal with more complex needs in their schools, contributors emphasised that trainees must develop a deep understanding of both diagnosed and undiagnosed needs, including neurodiversity, SEMH, trauma and child development, while knowing when to seek specialist support. High-quality adaptive teaching and subject-specific strategies remain central to inclusive practice, with hands-on experience in diverse classroom contexts essential for translating theory into effective application.

The insights also underline the importance of strong collaboration between teachers, SENDCos, support staff, parents and external agencies, supported by clear communication and a robust graduated approach. Sustained, evidence-informed CPD – rather than one-off training – is seen as vital, alongside access to expert mentors, trauma-informed approaches and specialist pathways within ITT and ECF programmes.

Respondents cautioned, however, that systemic pressures such as limited time, funding constraints and rising levels of need are creating significant challenges for schools and new teachers.

In response, NASBTT CEO Emma Hollis commented:

“What is abundantly clear is that SEND and inclusion remain among the highest-priority issues facing ITT and the wider sector. The overarching message from this survey is unequivocal: effective SEND preparation must be holistic, practical and continuous, underpinned by the resources, expertise and structural support needed to ensure every teacher can confidently deliver inclusive, high-quality education for all pupils. We fully recognise that teacher training must evolve to meet the increasing complexity of pupil needs in mainstream schools, and advocate for enhanced SEND and inclusion training to be embedded within the ITTECF.

“With current policy shifts, there is growing anticipation that both the diversity and complexity of needs in classrooms will continue to rise. This will fundamentally reshape how schools operate and how teachers must be prepared. [Solving the SEND Crisis](#), the recent report from the Education Committee, calls for comprehensive training within ITT and clearer guidance for schools, MATs and education staff on delivering inclusive practice across its 209-page plan.

“Let’s be clear: SEND is a strategic priority for ITT, and we will not shy away from our responsibility to prepare trainees for the classrooms of the future. ITT programmes must look beyond the needs of the current system and proactively equip trainees for what lies ahead – where the complexity threshold in mainstream settings may be significantly higher. We must stay ahead of the curve and anticipate what inclusive, high-quality SEND provision will require in increasingly complex environments. Mainstream classrooms will inevitably need to be structured and staffed differently to support children with additional needs. Senior leaders and teachers must start considering what this means in practice, and new entrants to the profession must be ready for it.”

NASBTT is continuing to “bridge the SEND practice gap” in several ways, Emma revealed. In partnership with nasen, NASBTT has already developed an ITT [SEND Toolkit](#) offering support, resources and guidance to providers. However, she acknowledged that a gap remains between what ITT providers teach as best practice for SEND and what trainees experience in schools.

“This ‘cognitive dissonance’ is not a failure of schools, but a natural consequence of reform and the time lag between policy development, ITT delivery and classroom implementation,” Emma explained. “Ofsted’s TMV report identifies that while trainees feel their SEND training is strong, mentor understanding of high-quality SEND practice does not always align with centre-based training because schools are still adapting. Trainees are being taught high-quality approaches, but they are not always seeing these applied consistently in schools.

“We see ITT as a key driver of change to strengthen SEND practice in schools. Rather than adding more content to an already crowded curriculum, we advocate embedding SEND throughout the ITTECF. Working with Margaret Mulholland, SEND and Inclusion Specialist at ASCL, NASBTT is shifting from teaching to the mainstream majority and instead adopting an outliers-first approach.

“I am delighted to announce that we have a new project underway with Margaret that will involve a series of focus groups with NASBTT members to identify examples of strong practice and understand barriers to effective SEND integration within ITT programmes. This will inform a ‘state of the nation’ paper, followed by the co-creation – with selected members and expert witnesses – of a framework and mapped suite of resources and materials for 2026.”

Emma added: “NASBTT remains firmly committed to supporting the government’s ambition to strengthen SEND inclusion in mainstream settings. As this vision advances, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and confidence to meet increasingly complex needs – and we are determined to play our part in making that happen.”

The survey, conducted in October and November 2025, also highlighted several wider pressures on ITT providers:

- 88% say the recent reduction or removal of bursaries and scholarships in key subjects will negatively impact trainee recruitment.
- 76% report that the government’s plan to recruit 6,500 expert new teachers is not working.
- 55% are currently delivering the Postgraduate Teaching Apprenticeship, but only half of the remainder intend to do so in future. Only 3% offer the Undergraduate Teaching Apprenticeship, and 76% have no plans to introduce it.

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The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) represents the interests of schools-led teacher training provision in relation to the development and implementation of national policy developments. Our members include School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers, Teaching School Hubs, Higher Education Institutions involved in schools-led teacher training and a range of other organisations engaged in the education and professional development of teachers. We currently have around 175 members, including 100% of the SCITT sector, representing over 10,000 individual trainees and their mentors. NASBTT is a registered charity committed to promoting high quality schools-led programmes of training, education and professional development of teachers.

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