



Impact of SEND Reform on the existing pressures created by reductions in ASGSF funding

The reduction in the Fair Access Limit applied to ASGSF funding has already significantly constrained our ability to deliver Theraplay as an evidence-based, relationship-focused intervention. For the wider population with no access to funding our ability to support families may only be in limited local authority areas who have integrated the approach in the not for profit VCSFE Sector organisations who aim to target gaps in service provision nationally. We see an escalating number of families in crisis with no access to free or low cost support.

The proposed direction of SEND reform risks further compounding these challenges by increasing pressure on already reduced therapeutic provision without corresponding investment in relational and trauma-informed early intervention services.

Theraplay has historically operated as both an early preventative offer and a specialist therapeutic intervention for children and families experiencing developmental trauma, attachment difficulties, and relational instability. However, reductions in ASGSF funding have already led to shorter interventions, reduced therapeutic intensity, and less capacity for parent and carer support.

Within this existing context, SEND reform is likely to increase demand on services such as Theraplay UK (TUK) in several significant ways.

Increased demand for early intervention without sufficient funded provision

The SEND reform agenda places strong emphasis on earlier intervention, inclusion, and keeping children within mainstream settings wherever possible. While these aims are positive, there is a significant risk that reforms will increase expectations on families, schools, and therapeutic providers without restoring the funding necessary to deliver the depth of intervention required.

As ASGSF funding has reduced, many children are already only receiving crisis-level or short-term support. If SEND reforms lead to thresholds for specialist provision becoming higher, or greater reliance being placed on community and family-based support, services like Theraplay are likely to see increased referrals alongside reduced capacity to respond effectively.

This risks creating a system in which expectations around inclusion and stability increase while the therapeutic infrastructure required to sustain those outcomes continues to diminish.

Increased pressure on families and carers

Families caring for children with complex trauma and attachment needs are already experiencing the impact of reduced ASGSF-funded intervention. We are increasingly working with families who have no other professional support or educational provision in place for their children. Inability to access specialist support, shortened packages and reduced parent support leave many carers managing highly challenging behaviours with insufficient therapeutic guidance.

SEND reform may further intensify this pressure if families face additional barriers to accessing specialist support, longer waiting times, or increased responsibility for coordinating care across systems. Without adequately funded relational interventions, there is a risk that families become overwhelmed earlier, leading to increased placement instability, school breakdown, and emotional distress for both children and caregivers.

For many families, Theraplay has acted as a stabilising intervention that strengthens relationships, supports co-regulation, and prevents escalation. Reduced access to this support, combined with wider SEND system pressures, risks leaving families feeling increasingly unsupported and isolated.

Impact on schools and alternative education settings

Theraplay UK (TUK) also works extensively with schools, alternative education providers, and wider professionals to integrate Theraplay-informed approaches into classrooms and educational environments. This work supports emotional regulation, relational safety, inclusion, and engagement in learning for children with complex attachment and developmental needs.

In principle, this aligns closely with the aims of SEND reform, particularly around inclusive practice, early intervention, and reducing escalation. Embedding relational approaches within educational settings can significantly improve children's ability to access learning, maintain placements, and build positive relationships with trusted adults.

However, the reality within schools and alternative provision settings is that capacity and funding are already extremely limited. Schools are increasingly managing high levels of unmet SEND need alongside workforce pressures, reduced specialist support, and constrained budgets. While there is strong interest from schools and professionals in implementing Theraplay-informed practice, many settings do not have the financial resource, staffing capacity, or protected time required to fully embed and sustain the approach.

As ASGSF funding has reduced, opportunities for consultation, training, reflective practice, and ongoing therapeutic support to educational staff have also diminished. This limits the effectiveness and consistency of implementation and places additional

strain on school staff attempting to manage increasingly complex presentations without adequate specialist input.

There is therefore a significant risk that SEND reform expectations around inclusion and early intervention will outpace the system's actual capacity to deliver them. Without sufficient investment in therapeutic support, workforce development, and relational practice within schools, educational settings may struggle to meet the needs of children with developmental trauma and attachment difficulties, leading to increased exclusions, placement breakdown, emotionally based school avoidance, escalation into more specialist provision and neurodivergent burnout which has very serious implications for long term mental health.

For TUK, this represents a growing challenge: demand for relational and trauma-informed support within education continues to increase, while the funding structures required to deliver sustainable whole-system implementation continue to reduce.

Impact on Theraplay UK (TUK)

For Theraplay UK, the cumulative impact of reduced ASGSF funding alongside SEND reform pressures presents significant operational and clinical concerns.

TUK is increasingly required to respond to higher levels of complexity within shorter timeframes and reduced funding. This creates tension between evidence-based clinical recommendations and what can realistically be delivered within commissioned packages.

There is also concern that SEND reform may unintentionally shift greater responsibility onto therapeutic providers to compensate for gaps elsewhere in the system, despite reduced funding and workforce pressures. This risks:

- Increased waiting lists
- Reduced therapeutic intensity
- Greater staff burnout
- Difficulty maintaining fidelity to evidence-based practice
- Reduced ability to provide preventative and relationally focused work

Over time, this may undermine the sustainability of specialist trauma-informed services and limit the sector's capacity to contribute meaningfully to the preventative ambitions of SEND reform.

Risk of increased downstream costs

The combination of reduced ASGSF funding and increased SEND system pressures risks creating greater long-term financial and social costs. Where early relational

intervention is limited, children are more likely to experience escalation of need requiring:

- Specialist CAMHS involvement
- Alternative education provision
- Social care intervention
- Placement breakdown
- Residential care
- Youth justice involvement

The reduction in preventative therapeutic capacity therefore risks directly undermining one of the central aims of SEND reform: reducing escalation through earlier support.

Conclusion

The current reduction in ASGSF funding has already weakened the ability of services such as Theraplay to provide sustained, preventative, and relationship-based intervention. The proposed SEND reforms risk exacerbating this existing picture by increasing demand on families and therapeutic providers without sufficient investment in the relational support systems required to achieve reform objectives.

Without alignment between SEND reform ambitions and adequate therapeutic funding, there is a significant risk that families, schools, and services will experience increased pressure, while children with the most complex relational and developmental needs receive increasingly fragmented support.

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