

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, April 28, 2026, 3:43 PM
To: +Comm Education Public Email
Subject: Evidence Submission: The Post-16 "Cliff Edge" for Cognitively Able SEN Students

To the Committee for Education,

I am writing to provide urgent feedback regarding the current provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) transitioning from school to Further Education in Northern Ireland, specifically in relation to the **SEN Regulations 2026**.

My son is currently in Year 12 at a specialist unit within [REDACTED]. He is a "bright" child with Autism and ADHD. While he is cognitively capable, he suffers from significant social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. He has required intense, constant supervision and classroom assistance throughout his secondary education.

I wish to highlight a severe gap in our current system for children like him:

- **The Incompatibility of FE Provision:** My son is transitioning to the Northern Regional College (NRC). However, the only "supported" courses available are titled "Inclusive Learning." The college has already expressed concern that he will be "bored" because these courses are designed for students with cognitive or learning disabilities, not for bright students with behavioural support needs.
- **The Lack of Behavioural Pathways:** Northern Ireland lacks post-16 facilities that focus on behavioural regulation for cognitively able students. The alternative options, such as some training organizations, often lack the specialist SEN support required and can expose vulnerable young people to environments that exacerbate poor behavioural habits.
- **The "Statement Gap":** There is a distressing lack of continuity as a child moves from the Education Authority (EA) to a Further Education college. I have been informed that his Statement of SEN becomes effectively "ineffective" once he enters NRC. This leaves a child who has been under 1-to-1 care for five years suddenly expected to navigate a high-pressure vocational environment with minimal support.
- **The Risk of Criminalization:** For bright children who are behaviourally unsupported and under-stimulated, the risk of disengagement and eventual entry into the justice system is a very real fear for parents.

The current system appears to equate "SEN" only with "cognitive struggle." It fails to account for the hundreds of children who have the intelligence to succeed but lack the

behavioural maturity to survive in a standard college setting without the same level of support they received in school.

I urge the Committee to consider how the 2026 Regulations will bridge the gap between the EA and the Department for the Economy, ensuring that a child's support doesn't end at 16 just because they have a high IQ.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further or provide more detailed evidence of our struggle to find a safe, stimulating, and supportive placement for my son.

Regards,

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