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Centre for Applied Education Research

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IMPACT CASE STUDY

From Research to Reform — How NIHR ARC Yorkshire & Humber helped inform School White Paper

Background

The Yorkshire & Humber Applied Research Collaboration (YH ARC) focuses on addressing the major health challenges faced by our population. A clear demonstration of this mission in action can be found in the Government's landmark Schools White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving, published on 23 February 2026.

The White Paper sets out reforms to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream education — and the research that helped shape those reforms has direct roots in Yorkshire & Humber.

The NIHR ARC Contribution

In November 2024, the Department for Education commissioned an independent Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group (NDTFG) to produce recommendations to inform the Schools White Paper's SEND reforms.

Professor Mark Mon-Williams, Chair in Cognitive Psychology at the University of Leeds and Director of the Born in Bradford Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER), was a member of that group.

Born in Bradford CAER, operating as part of YH ARC, had built the peer-reviewed evidence directly relevant to the questions policymakers were exploring. The NDTFG report explicitly draws on YH ARC research examining:

- How early "school readiness" signals later "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" risk

- How early developmental measures relate to "persistent absenteeism"

Both are central to designing the kind of early, preventative system the White Paper now commits to building.

CHALLENGE

Policymakers needed robust evidence on how to identify and support neurodivergent children earlier and more effectively.

They also needed evidence to make a fundamental shift away from marginalisation of children with SEND towards a system that combines high standards with genuine inclusion — in the words of the White Paper, treating these as "two sides of the same coin."

The Policy Impact

The NDTFG report fed directly into Chapter 3 of School White Paper — Sidelined to Included — which sets out the Government's vision for transforming outcomes for children with SEND.

Each of White Paper commitments reflects the evidence-based, early intervention approach that YH ARC and Born in Bradford researchers have spent years building the case for.

Alongside the White Paper, the Government published its consultation "SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First" — inviting views on how these commitments should be implemented in practice.

Why This Matters

The impact of YHARC research extends far beyond academic journals.

By embedding researchers in policy processes — and by producing evidence that speaks directly to the decisions policymakers face, we have contributed to the policy that will affect the lives of over

1.7 million

with SEND in schools across the country.