

Monday 18th May 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Response to the Department for Education SEND White Paper Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the SEND Reform Consultation. We welcome the ambition to improve inclusion, early intervention and consistency across the SEND system. However, families, professionals and children and young people continue to have significant concerns around accountability, enforceability and the practical delivery of support within mainstream education.

As a local children, young people and families support charity, Challenging Perceptions works closely with children, young people, families, schools, professionals and wider services across Telford and Wrekin. Our work includes supporting families navigating SEND pathways, mental health support, advocacy, early intervention activities, youth groups, parent support, community engagement and creating opportunities for children and young people to have their voices heard. We regularly hear directly from families about the challenges they face accessing support, education, therapies and appropriate provision, alongside the emotional and financial impact this can have on the whole family.

As part of our work, we regularly attend strategic meetings locally and are actively involved in discussions around mental health, inclusion, neurodiversity and SEND system development. Through our engagement with CYP, families and professionals, we recognise that there are still areas requiring improvement locally, alongside wider national pressures affecting the SEND system. However, it is important to acknowledge that our local authority has already been taking active steps to improve SEND provision locally and has strengthened partnership working and developed co-production with families and wider stakeholders.

As a charity, we have seen engagement with Parent Carer groups and forums, local charities, schools and wider stakeholders, alongside a willingness to listen to lived experience and identify areas requiring improvement. We believe that continuing meaningful co-production and collaboration with families, voluntary organisations and professionals will be essential in ensuring future reforms lead to positive and lasting change.

This letter reflects feedback gathered from families, professionals, children and young people, alongside concerns raised through lived experience of the current SEND system.

Early Intervention

We strongly support the focus on early intervention within the SEND reforms, as many children and young people currently experience significant delays before receiving meaningful support. Early intervention must not simply mean identifying needs earlier; it must result in timely, practical and enforceable support being put in place before difficulties escalate.

Families consistently report that support is often only introduced once a child has reached crisis point, experienced repeated exclusions, school refusal, severe anxiety, emotional dysregulation, or significant

educational disadvantage. This reactive approach increases pressure on schools, specialist services and families, while negatively impacting children's wellbeing, confidence and long-term outcomes.

Early intervention should begin from the earliest stages of a child's development and continue consistently throughout education. This requires stronger collaboration between health, education, early years settings and family support services.

We would like to see:

- Improved developmental screening and neurodiversity awareness in the early years, including earlier identification of speech, language, communication, sensory and social interaction needs.
- Better integration between the EYFS two-year progress check, health visitor reviews and SEND pathways so concerns are identified and acted upon quickly.
- Joint assessments and information-sharing between schools, early years settings, Best Start Family Hubs, health professionals and local authorities to reduce duplication and prevent families having to repeat their story multiple times.
- Access to support before diagnosis. Children should not need a formal diagnosis to access reasonable adjustments or early intervention support.
- Greater access to speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, CAMHS and educational psychology at the earliest stage possible, rather than only once needs become severe.
- Special schools being funded to employ their own dedicated in-house speech and language therapists and occupational therapists.

There is also a significant need for improved SEND knowledge and confidence within early years settings. Many early years practitioners are working with increasing levels of complex needs but without adequate training, staffing or financial support. Workforce retention remains a major concern, particularly when many staff are on minimum wage despite supporting children with highly complex developmental and emotional needs. Early years settings report having to provide vital SEN support or interventions at their own expense while they wait for funding decisions, or as a requirement for being able to refer children to services.

Early intervention should also extend to supporting families, as parents often feel left without guidance when early concerns arise. Families require clear, accessible information about SEND pathways and terminology, the support schools are expected to provide with or without an EHCP, reasonable adjustments, referral routes, local support services and charities, and their legal rights within the SEND system.

Parent training packages should also be considered as part of early intervention support; by this we don't mean parenting courses. This training could include training in communication approaches such as Makaton, emotional regulation strategies, sensory needs, understanding neurodiversity and navigating SEND processes.

We would also support introducing standardised digital pupil passports or one-page profiles from an early age, which would move with the child between settings. These profiles should include the child's strengths and interests, communication preferences, sensory needs, anxiety triggers, reasonable adjustments, and strategies that support regulation and engagement. Implementing this approach would improve consistency across transitions and prevent children from having to repeatedly "start again" each time they move to a new setting or teacher. Parent input in this document would be required.

Concerns were also raised regarding the proposed SEND support tiers and whether children may be required to progress through "Targeted" and "Targeted Plus" stages before accessing specialist support or EHCP assessments, whilst we know now this is not going to be the case, It is essential that early intervention does not become a gatekeeping process which delays access to statutory support for children with significant or complex needs.

Children with clear and identifiable complex needs must still be able to move directly to specialist assessments and EHCP pathways where appropriate.

Finally, early intervention will only succeed if there is genuine accountability. Schools and services must not only identify need early but also demonstrate what support has been put in place, how progress is being monitored and what happens if interventions are not effective.

Early intervention without accountability risks becoming another administrative process rather than meaningful support for children and families.

"My child should not have to reach crisis point before support is put in place. Early help could have prevented years of anxiety and missed education." — Parent of autistic child

SEND Tiers of Support

While we recognise the intention behind introducing clearer tiers of SEND support through the Universal, Targeted, Targeted Plus and Specialist pathways, families and professionals continue to raise significant concerns about how these tiers will operate in practice.

There is currently insufficient clarity around thresholds, accountability, legal protections and decision-making responsibilities within the proposed model. Without clear national guidance, there is a serious risk that the tiered system could create further inconsistency and postcode variation across local authorities and schools.

Families are particularly concerned that the new system could unintentionally delay access to specialist support and EHCP assessments by requiring children to progress through each level sequentially. It must be made explicitly clear within statutory guidance that children and young people can move directly to specialist assessment or an EHCP where needs are already evident and complex.

Children should not be expected to "fail" at lower levels of support before accessing appropriate provision.

There are also concerns about the absence of a clear national definition for terms such as "complex needs," "Targeted Plus," thresholds for escalation, and what constitutes specialist-level intervention.

Without these definitions, decisions risk being subjective and inconsistent, varying according to individual schools, professionals, or local authority pressures.

The Universal Offer must ensure genuinely inclusive practice for all children and young people, but this can only be achieved if schools & early years settings have adequate funding, mandatory SEND training, access to specialist advice, and sufficient time and staffing to implement reasonable adjustments effectively.

Universal support should not rely on individual teacher knowledge or a school's financial situation, as families consistently report major inconsistencies in how SEND needs are identified and supported.

The Targeted layer should provide timely interventions for children whose needs cannot be met through universal provision alone, yet support may vary significantly between settings due to differing staffing levels, SEND expertise, and funding pressures. Effective Targeted support requires clear intervention pathways, access to specialist advice, evidence-based interventions, regular review processes, strong parental involvement, and transparent monitoring of outcomes, with concerns about long waiting times and delays in accessing specialist input.

The proposed Targeted Plus tier has raised significant concern, with fears it replaces provision for some children that are currently on EHCPs, leaving children with substantial needs in prolonged, under-supported provision. Clear national criteria for entry and exit, defined review timescales, multi-agency involvement, independent oversight, and parental rights to challenge decisions are essential to prevent Targeted Plus from limiting access to specialist provision.

Families also seek transparency regarding who decides tier progression, how evidence is considered, whether parental views are valued equally, and what appeal mechanisms exist, as many feel excluded from current decision-making.

The role of health professionals (such as Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, CAMHS, and paediatric services) must be clarified and integrated, as a graduated response cannot be effective without coordinated health input.

Questions remain over long-term funding, including the continuity of support when short-term intervention funding ends, and the consistency of provision across schools and local authorities, especially for children without an EHCP.

To build confidence in a tiered system, nationally standardised thresholds and guidance, legally enforceable expectations, transparent accountability, clear escalation pathways, independent oversight, mandatory multi-agency involvement, enhanced parental rights, and regular publication of local outcomes and waiting times are recommended.

Finally, the SEND tier system must remain flexible and needs-led, recognizing that children's support should reflect individual strengths, presentations, and experiences rather than rigid categories or financial constraints.

"I wanted adults to ask why I was struggling instead of punishing me for it." — Young person with autism and SEMH needs, age 14"

Accountability

A consistent theme raised throughout consultation feedback was the significant lack of accountability across the current SEND system. Families repeatedly described feeling that no single service, professional or organisation takes overall responsibility when support fails, provision is delayed, or children are unable to access education appropriately.

While the proposed reforms aim to improve inclusion and consistency, many families are concerned that increased responsibility is being placed on schools without sufficiently strengthening accountability, oversight or enforceable duties.

There is widespread concern that schools are often required only to “record, monitor and review” support rather than demonstrate that provision is consistently delivered and effective. Families report that even where legally binding EHCP provision exists, support is frequently reduced, delayed or inconsistently implemented due to staffing shortages, financial pressures or lack of specialist knowledge.

This creates significant anxiety regarding the proposed Individual Support Plans (ISPs), particularly if they are not legally enforceable.

If schools are expected to deliver support through ISPs and graduated response systems, there must be clear statutory expectations, transparent monitoring processes, defined consequences when provision is not delivered, independent oversight mechanisms, and accessible routes for families to challenge decisions.

Parents emphasized that accountability should extend beyond paperwork and compliance to focus on real outcomes for children and young people. Schools and services should be held responsible for whether children feel safe and included, can access learning appropriately, attend school consistently, receive agreed interventions, make social, emotional, and academic progress, and experience reduced anxiety and improved wellbeing.

There are significant concerns about inconsistencies between schools and local authorities, with families reporting that support often depends on individual school leadership, staff knowledge and confidence, school budgets, local authority interpretation of guidance, and the availability of services in a given area. This variability leads to unequal experiences for children with similar needs. To improve national accountability, there should be clear national inclusion standards, standardised SEND expectations across all schools, transparent reporting of SEND outcomes and spending, greater oversight from Ofsted and the Department for Education including knowing what powers they will have and monitoring to ensure reasonable adjustments are implemented consistently. Schools receiving SEND funding should be required to clearly demonstrate how funding is used, what interventions are in place, how support aligns with children’s identified needs, and whether interventions are achieving measurable impact.

Families have also expressed concern that SEND funding often becomes difficult to track once it is absorbed into broader school budgets, with little transparency about how it is allocated or prioritised. To address this, funding should be ringfenced for SEND and inclusion where possible, accompanied by

annual reporting to governors and families on SEND spending, stronger monitoring by local authorities, and co-produced accountability frameworks developed with Parent Carer Forums.

Families have also raised concerns about school complaint procedures, reporting that they often feel unheard, blamed, or dismissed when raising SEND issues, with complaints escalating due to poor communication and a lack of independent oversight. To improve confidence and fairness, SEND complaints panels should include independent governors from outside the school, an independent SEND specialist with expertise in inclusion and SEND law, and governors trained in both SEND and complaints procedures. Families should have access to transparent escalation routes when concerns remain unresolved, and it is particularly important that SEND specialists on panels are fully independent, with no prior involvement with the child or school.

Many families view tribunals as one of the few truly independent accountability mechanisms in the SEND system; despite recognizing that tribunal processes can be lengthy and stressful, they remain deeply concerned about any proposals that might reduce tribunal powers or limit parental rights, seeing tribunals as essential for holding local authorities and schools accountable when systems fail.

However, feedback also emphasized the need for balance, noting that decisions about placements and provision must consider the individual child's needs, health and safety, the needs of other pupils, and school capacity and staffing pressures. This underscores the importance of strengthening early accountability measures to address concerns before disputes escalate to the tribunal stage.

Families also highlighted a lack of accountability from health services within SEND processes, citing delays in accessing Speech and Language Therapy, CAMHS, Occupational Therapy, and paediatric assessments, inconsistent therapy provision, poor communication between health and education services, and limited attendance from health professionals at EHCP annual reviews. For SEND reforms to succeed, accountability must extend across education, health, and social care. Recommended measures include mandatory health involvement in EHCPs and specialist planning, clear response times for services, national monitoring of therapy delivery, live tracking systems for referrals, assessments, and EHCP timelines, and greater transparency regarding waiting lists and unmet needs.

Digital systems and live tracking of EHCPs, referrals and support plans were strongly supported by families. Any, digital systems must therefore be transparent, secure and co-produced with families.

Finally, accountability must include genuine co-production, ensuring that families, children, and young people are not merely consulted after decisions are made but are actively involved in designing local SEND systems, reviewing services, monitoring outcomes, developing inclusion standards, and evaluating the impact of funding. Without meaningful accountability, there is a significant risk that SEND reforms will create new layers of process without improving the real experiences of children, young people, and families.

“We spent more time fighting the system than supporting our son. Families should not need legal knowledge just to access help.” — Parent Carer

“I just want adults to do what they promised.” – Child aged 11

EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plans)

Families continue to express significant concern regarding the future of Education, Health and Care Plans within the proposed SEND reforms. While we recognise the intention to strengthen earlier intervention and improve support without requiring statutory plans, EHCPs remain a vital legal safeguard for children and young people with complex or long-term needs.

For many families, EHCPs are currently the only mechanism that ensures provision is legally protected, monitored and challengeable when support is not delivered appropriately.

There is widespread anxiety that proposed reforms may gradually reduce access to EHCPs by introducing alternative support pathways without equivalent legal protections. Families fear that children with significant needs may instead remain within Targeted Plus or other tiers for prolonged periods, even when needs clearly require statutory provision.

It is essential that EHCPs remain legally enforceable, that children with complex or long-term needs can still access EHCP assessments directly, that access is not restricted by local funding pressures or tiered support pathways, and that national criteria remain transparent and consistent.

Many families raised concerns regarding inconsistent thresholds across local authorities and schools, where children with similar needs receive very different levels of support depending on postcode, school capacity or interpretation of guidance.

There is also significant confusion about the future of post-16 EHCPs, how transitions into adulthood will be supported, and whether young people will continue to receive appropriate education, training, and preparation for adulthood after compulsory school age. Families urgently need clarity on post-16 arrangements, particularly for young people with autism, learning disabilities, mental health needs, and complex communication difficulties who may require ongoing support beyond school.

The quality and consistency of EHCP assessments was a major concern highlighted in feedback. Families reported long delays in assessments, poor communication throughout the process, inconsistent professional involvement, generic or vague wording within plans, difficulties securing health provision, and recommendations being reduced or altered due to funding pressures.

Needs assessments must remain holistic, evidence-based, and genuinely child-centred, considering not only educational attainment but also the child's broader developmental, sensory, emotional, communication, and social needs. Assessments should incorporate input from Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, CAMHS and mental health services, paediatric reports, sensory assessments where appropriate, social care and early help services, as well as the family's voice and lived experience, alongside observations across multiple settings.

Parents repeatedly stated that their concerns and lived experiences are too often minimised or dismissed when needs present differently at school. Families should be recognised as experts in their children and treated as equal partners throughout the assessment process.

Clearer guidance is also required regarding the definition of “complex needs”. Families raised concerns that the Department for Education still has not clearly defined what is meant by “complex”, creating inconsistency and uncertainty regarding access to specialist support.

Families have also raised concerns that health services remain insufficiently accountable in delivering EHCP provisions, reporting that therapies specified in EHCPs are not consistently provided, health professionals often miss annual reviews, specialist assessments are delayed, and coordination between education and health services is poor. EHCPs can only function effectively when education, health, and social care are equally accountable. Recommendations include mandatory health participation in EHCP reviews and planning, stronger monitoring of therapy delivery, national standards for EHCP quality, clear escalation pathways when provision is not delivered, and improved communication with families throughout the process.

Families also strongly supported the introduction of live digital tracking systems for EHCPs and referrals to improve transparency. Parents often feel left without updates or clarity regarding timescales and progress.

Most importantly, EHCPs must remain focused on improving a child’s quality of life, wellbeing, independence and access to education — not simply managing provision within financial limitations.

“I worry my support will disappear if the rules change.” Young person aged 13

*“An EHCP is not a privilege. For many children, it is the only reason support actually happens.” —
Parent carer*

ISP (Individual Support Plans)

While families welcome the principle of children receiving meaningful support without needing an EHCP, there are significant concerns regarding how Individual Support Plans (ISPs) will operate in practice.

The strongest concern raised repeatedly throughout feedback is that ISPs currently lack legal enforceability alongside uncertainty regarding how decisions would be made and monitored at school level

Families already experience difficulties ensuring schools deliver support outlined within legally binding EHCPs. Consequently, there is understandable anxiety that support within ISPs may become inconsistent, reduced or dependent on individual school capacity if there are no statutory duties attached.

Without stronger accountability measures, ISPs risk becoming advisory documents rather than meaningful mechanisms for support.

To be effective and trusted by families, ISPs should be nationally standardised, supported by clear statutory guidance, and include measurable outcomes with specified provision. They should clearly identify who is responsible for delivering support, include review dates and escalation pathways, be digitally accessible to parents, and set out clear parental rights to challenge non-delivery.

Families emphasised that if ISPs were properly delivered, monitored and resourced within mainstream settings, there would likely be fewer requests for EHCPs.

Concerns were also raised that schools might be required only to “record, monitor, and review” ISP provision rather than having a legal duty to deliver support consistently, creating a significant accountability gap. To address this, there should be independent oversight of ISP implementation, monitoring by Ofsted and local authorities with enforceable powers, regular review meetings with families, transparent reporting of the provision delivered, and clear complaint and escalation routes.

Many families suggested that there may be a need for an additional support level or document sitting between ISPs and EHCPs for children whose needs exceed typical school support but do not yet meet statutory thresholds.

The content and quality of ISPs will also be critical.

A high-quality ISP should include a detailed one-page profile highlighting the child’s strengths, interests, and aspirations, communication preferences, sensory and emotional regulation needs, reasonable adjustments, specific interventions and strategies, clear outcomes and review measures, and the voice of the child and family. ISPs should avoid vague language and generic strategies, ensuring staff clearly understand what support must happen, who delivers it, how often it takes place, what success looks like, and what actions are taken if progress is not being made.

Families strongly supported digital and portable ISPs that can move between schools and services, reducing repeated assessments and ensuring continuity during transitions.

Concerns were also raised regarding whether schools will receive sufficient funding, staffing and specialist support to deliver ISP provision effectively. Without investment in training and resources, there is a risk that expectations placed upon schools will increase without the capacity to meet them.

Multi-agency involvement within ISPs is essential. Health professionals, therapists and specialist services should contribute where appropriate rather than ISPs becoming education-only documents.

There is also concern that some children with significant needs could remain within ISP systems for prolonged periods without escalation, especially where schools or local authorities may be trying to limit EHCP numbers. To prevent this, there must be clear timescales for reviewing progress, defined escalation pathways, transparent criteria for moving to specialist assessment or EHCP consideration, and strong parental involvement in all decision-making.

Finally, ISPs must remain genuinely child-centred rather than process-driven. Their purpose should be to improve outcomes, wellbeing, inclusion and access to education for children and young people, not simply to reduce demand within the statutory SEND system and there must be strong accountability around ISPs.

SENDSCO

The SENDSCO role must become more strategic and influential within schools, with SENDSCOs as mandatory members of Senior Leadership Teams, protected time to carry out their responsibilities, greater involvement in SEND budgeting and provision planning, nationally consistent training

standards, administrative support, and mandatory training before taking on the role. Currently, inconsistency in SENDCO knowledge and expertise across schools directly impacts the quality of support children receive.

Teacher Training

Teacher training must include mandatory SEND experience and practical strategies for inclusion. This should involve mandatory SEND rotations in specialist settings during training, greater understanding of neurodiversity, communication needs, and trauma-informed practice, as well as training on reasonable adjustments, inclusive classroom strategies, sensory needs, and emotional regulation. Teachers should feel confident supporting SEND learners within mainstream classrooms rather than relying solely on specialist staff.

“Some teachers understand my autism and anxiety, but others don’t.” - Child aged 11

Specialist Provision Packages

While we welcome the focus on strengthening specialist provision, we have concerns regarding the proposed Specialist Provision Packages. Although the proposals acknowledge that some children and young people require coordinated specialist support beyond what mainstream settings can reasonably provide on a day-to-day basis, we are cautious about how these packages would be implemented and their potential impact.

Families and professionals have raised significant concerns regarding how Specialist Provision Packages will operate in practice, particularly around flexibility, accountability, funding and definitions of complexity.

Again, one of the strongest themes in the feedback was the urgent need for a clear national definition of “complex needs.” Families repeatedly expressed concern that the Department for Education has not yet clarified what constitutes specialist-level provision or the thresholds for accessing specialist support packages.

Without clear national guidance, there is a significant risk of inconsistency between local authorities, schools and health services, resulting in unequal access to specialist provision depending on postcode or local financial pressures.

Families are also concerned that Specialist Provision Packages could become overly rigid or diagnosis-led rather than genuinely child-centred.

Children and young people rarely fit neatly into a single category of need, often presenting with overlapping profiles such as autism and anxiety, learning disabilities alongside sensory needs, communication difficulties combined with SEMH challenges, physical disabilities alongside neurodivergence, or experiences of trauma paired with neurodevelopmental differences.

Specialist Provision Packages must therefore remain flexible and allow children to access support from multiple packages where appropriate, rather than restricting provision based on narrow categories.

Support should always be needs-led rather than diagnosis-led.

Families strongly emphasised that Specialist Provision Packages should address more than just education, focusing also on improving a child or young person's quality of life, independence, emotional wellbeing, communication, sensory regulation, community participation, and preparation for adulthood.

Specialist Provision Packages should be holistic and genuinely multi-agency, integrating education, health, and social care into a coordinated approach. A high-quality package should include specialist teaching input, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, physiotherapy where required, mental health support, sensory assessments and provision, assistive technology and communication tools, family support and training, behaviour and emotional regulation support, and transition planning with preparation for adulthood.

Families repeatedly raised concerns regarding the current lack of health involvement within SEND support and stressed that Specialist Provision Packages cannot succeed if health services are not fully integrated and accountable.

There were also strong calls for specialist schools to employ their own in-house therapists, including Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists, to improve consistency, reduce waiting times and ensure therapies are integrated into daily educational practice rather than delivered separately or sporadically.

Families consistently reported long delays in accessing therapies, with some children waiting months or even years for support, with significant impacts on communication, emotional regulation, physical development and access to education. The proposed Specialist Provision Packages must therefore ensure guaranteed access to therapies, clear delivery expectations, national monitoring of therapy provision, and shared accountability across both health and education services.

Concerns were also raised regarding how Specialist Provision Packages would work within mainstream settings.

Many families support flexible specialist outreach and inclusion support within mainstream schools where appropriate. However, there are concerns that children with highly complex needs could remain in unsuitable mainstream placements simply because specialist packages are being delivered there.

Specialist Provision Packages must not be used to delay access to appropriate specialist placements where mainstream environments are unable to meet need safely and effectively.

Children should not be expected to remain in environments that cause significant distress or dysregulation, lead to persistent school refusal or emotionally based school avoidance, result in repeated exclusions or part-time timetables, prevent access to meaningful learning, or place unreasonable pressure on the child, family, or school staff.

Families also highlighted the need for more educational settings that sit between mainstream and specialist schools, as there is currently a significant gap in provision for children who need more support than mainstream schools can provide but who may not require a full-time specialist school placement. Future specialist support models should therefore include flexible therapeutic provision,

small specialist learning environments, outreach support, transitional settings, and integrated education and health provision.

Funding arrangements for Specialist Provision Packages were another major concern. Families questioned what happens when temporary funding ends, whether schools will continue provision once funding periods expire, how packages will be reviewed and adapted over time, and whether financial pressures could influence access decisions.

There must be long-term, sustainable funding that prioritises children's needs over short-term cost-saving measures, alongside transparency in funding allocation and review processes to build trust with families.

Strong accountability mechanisms are also critical, with families seeking reassurance that Specialist Provision Packages will be legally enforceable, regularly reviewed, include measurable outcomes, have clear named responsibilities, involve parents in decision-making, and provide routes to challenge where provision is not delivered.

Parents and carers repeatedly emphasised the importance of co-production within Specialist Provision Packages, highlighting that families should be treated as equal partners throughout assessment, planning, delivery, review, and transition planning. Parents often hold critical knowledge about regulation strategies, communication approaches, triggers and anxieties, medical and sensory needs, and the types of support that are effective at home and in the community.

Finally, Specialist Provision Packages must remain centred around the individual child or young person rather than fitting children into predetermined systems or financial frameworks.

Their purpose should be to ensure that every child and young person with complex needs can access the right support, in the right environment, at the right time, with dignity, consistency and genuine opportunity to thrive.

“Too many decisions are made about children without actually listening to children.” — Young person with EHCP, age 18

Sufficiency and Planning

Families and professionals continue to express concerns around the lack of sufficient and long-term planning within the current SEND system. Too often, support is reactive and crisis-led rather than based on early identification, sustainable intervention and future planning. There must be greater national and local planning for the increasing number of children and young people with SEND, including forecasting future need, workforce capacity, specialist placements, therapy provision and post-16 support. Short-term funding arrangements create uncertainty for schools and families and can result in support being reduced or withdrawn once funding periods end. Long-term investment is needed across education, health and social care to ensure children receive consistent support throughout their educational journey and into adulthood. Planning must also include sufficient specialist school places, alternative provision, therapeutic support, transitional settings and pathways into employment, training and independent living. Without sustainable long-term planning, reforms risk continuing the cycle of delays, unmet need and crisis intervention currently experienced by many families.

“I don’t want to wait years for the support I need.” – Child aged 14 EHE now in special provision

EHE (Elective Home Education or Unplanned Home Education here in Telford)

There are growing concerns about the number of children entering Elective Home Education (EHE) due to unmet SEND needs, with many families reporting they feel they have no alternative when schools cannot meet their child’s needs or relationships have broken down. The SEND system must ensure that children are not pushed into EHE because of lack of provision or support, that families choosing EHE can still access appropriate SEND support, and that local authorities maintain communication and support pathways for EHE families.

“I left school because it became too stressful and overwhelming.” – Child aged 15

“We did not choose home education freely — we felt pushed into it.” – Parent Carer

Training

Consistent national SEND training is essential across all sectors, covering neurodiversity awareness, reasonable adjustments, SEND law and the Code of Practice, mental health and SEMH, communication needs, trauma-informed approaches, and co-production with families. Training should also be available for parents, helping them understand SEND systems and terminology, their legal rights and processes, communication methods such as Makaton, and available SEND pathways and support services. Families consistently report feeling overwhelmed by complex terminology and unclear systems.

Final Comments and Conclusion

We welcome the Department for Education’s recognition that the SEND system requires urgent reform and support the ambition to create a more inclusive, consistent and early intervention-focused approach.

However, families, professionals and children and young people continue to raise significant concerns around accountability, enforceability and access to support. There is widespread anxiety that reforms could unintentionally weaken legal protections if EHCP access is reduced without ensuring that alternative support systems, such as ISPs, are legally enforceable and consistently delivered.

Families consistently report:

- Delays in assessments and support.
- Inconsistent provision between schools and local authorities.
- Lack of accountability across education, health and care services.
- Difficulties accessing therapies and specialist support.
- Poor communication and limited co-production.

For this to succeed, there must be:

- Clear national standards and definitions.

- Robust accountability across education, health and social care.
- Legally enforceable support.
- Sustainable funding for schools and specialist services.
- Mandatory SEND training for staff.
- Meaningful co-production with families and young people.

Support must remain needs-led rather than diagnosis-led, and children should continue to have direct access to EHCP assessments where needs are complex or long-term.

We also strongly believe that inclusion cannot be achieved without proper and meaningful investment in:

- SEND staffing and workforce development.
- Specialist therapies and mental health support.
- Early intervention services.
- SENDCO leadership and training.
- Family support and accessible information.

Children and young people with SEND deserve a system that is transparent, inclusive, responsive and centred around their wellbeing, education, independence and long-term outcomes. Reforms must strengthen trust between families, schools and services while ensuring children receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

We urge the Department for Education to ensure these reforms strengthen (not weaken) children's rights, accountability and access to meaningful support.

Yours faithfully,



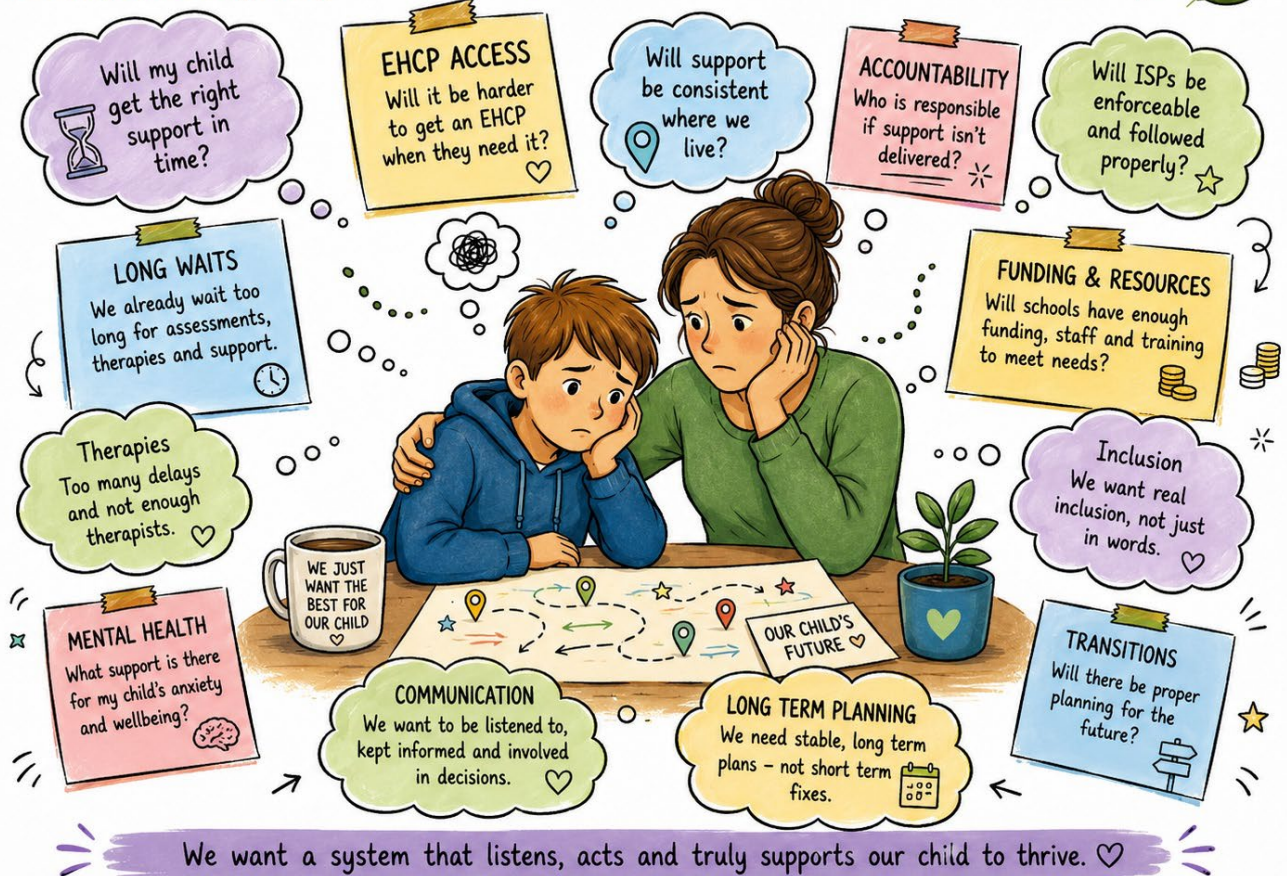
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Appendix: AI generated visual



WHAT WE'RE CONCERNED ABOUT

After the SEND reforms



We want a system that listens, acts and truly supports our child to thrive. ♥