Waltham Forest Parent Forum Consultation Response

1. **We want children, young people and their families to be involved in making better, evidence-based decisions about SEND, both in their local area and across the country. How can we make sure children, young people and their families have a genuine say in these decisions?**

   To ensure children, young people, and their families have a genuine say in SEND decision-making, it is essential to embed co-production and active involvement at every level. This includes establishing formal advisory panels and working groups with families and young people, providing accessible and regular opportunities for feedback, and ensuring clear, jargon-free communication about how input is used. Families and young people should be empowered through training, advocacy, and dedicated support contacts, with particular attention to equity and accessibility for all backgrounds and needs.

   Transparent reporting and statutory safeguards must be in place to hold authorities accountable and demonstrate on how family and young people's feedback shapes decisions.

   In summary, our participation must be respected, meaningful, and protected by clear processes and legal rights to make families true partners in SEND decision-making.

2. **How can we make sure that high-quality evidence and best practice inform decisions about SEND? Please share examples.**

   To ensure the new SEND system works well in schools, there must be a significant cultural shift towards proactive identification and support of all pupils with additional needs, especially those whose challenges are less visible—such as high-masking autistic children or those who appear to cope academically. We, as parents, are concerned that these pupils are often overlooked because they do not display externalising behaviours or disruptive symptoms. Addressing this requires robust staff training on recognising subtle signs of distress and masking, routine well-being check-ins, and implementation of assessment tools sensitive to hidden or internalised needs. Schools should also regularly seek and value input from parents, carers, and the young people themselves, who can offer critical insight into challenges that may not be evident in the classroom.

   Additionally, schools need adequate resources and leadership commitment to create an inclusive environment where flexible, differentiated support is standard practice. This includes investing in specialist staff, sensory-friendly spaces, and regular opportunities for open communication between families and school staff. Transparent decision-making processes and accessible routes for raising concerns are essential, as is ongoing monitoring to ensure pupils are not missed simply because they are quiet or academically able. Ultimately, the reforms will only succeed if supported by whole-school accountability, proper funding, and a shared ethos that values every learner’s needs, not just those that are most visible.

3. How can we ensure that children are best supported by the Universal offer?

To best support children, the Universal Offer must be:

- Clearly defined, consistently applied, and underpinned by statutory accountability.
- Adequately resourced, with a well-trained and supported workforce.
- Flexible, needs-led, and responsive to early identification.
- Inclusive in environment and culture.
- Co-produced with families and children, with transparent communication and accessible challenge routes.
- Supported by joined-up services and local partnerships.
- Accompanied by a fundamental change in curriculum and qualifications offering in every school (e.g. entry/ functional skills level qualification)
- Guaranteed of ongoing inclusion funding regardless of which political party is in power. The inclusion funding should also come with transparent allocation

It is also not clear how the Universal offer differs from Ordinarily Available Provision and how the workforce will manage the additional workload for differentiating/individualising the curriculum for SEND learners.

Failure to address these areas risks perpetuating inconsistency, eroding trust, and undermining the aims of the SEND reforms.

4. How can we ensure that children in the Targeted layer, are best supported?

Children in the Targeted layer are best supported through early and accurate identification of their needs, followed by timely, evidence-based interventions that are regularly reviewed. It is vital to involve parents and carers as equal partners throughout the process, ensuring their insights and experiences shape the support provided. There is great concern amongst our forum members that, when relationships with the school become fraught, the parents will have no clear path of escalation outside the school governing bodies, and this will become problematic. The local authority's accountability and oversight must remain in place as an escalation route. There are also concerns about the level of funding earmarked in the paper, which is completely inadequate considering there are more than 24000 schools in England.

Furthermore, clear, accessible information about available support and pathways should be provided to families.
Support should be documented in transparent, regularly updated plans that are jointly owned by families and settings. All staff working with these children should have access to ongoing SEND training and specialist advice, and schools should be equipped with sufficient resources to deliver targeted interventions and adaptive teaching. Effective communication and collaboration between schools, families, and external agencies are essential, alongside robust accountability by the local authority and peer review mechanisms to monitor the quality and impact of support. This approach ensures that children in the Targeted layer receive timely, tailored help without unnecessary delays or barriers.

5. **How can we ensure that children in the Targeted Plus layer, are best supported?**

Children in the Targeted Plus layer are best supported through access to a range of specialists such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and others, available to schools as needed, without delays caused by administrative barriers. Support should be detailed in meaningful ISPs specifying what support will be provided, by whom, how often, and how effectiveness will be measured, and should be co-produced with families. There is great concern amongst our forum members that, when relationships with the school become fraught, the parents will have no clear path of escalation outside the school governing bodies, and this will become problematic. The local authority's accountability and oversight must remain in place as an escalation route.

There are also concerns about the level of funding earmarked in the paper, which is completely inadequate considering there are more than 24000 schools in England.

Workload for staff should be managed through protected time, simple templates, and shared digital systems, while the SENCO role should be strategic with shared accountability across staff. There should also be robust tracking of provision and outcomes.

6. **How can we ensure that children in the Specialist layer are best supported?**

To ensure that children in the Specialist layer are optimally supported, there must be proper funding and resourcing of specialist schools, including investment in more specialist settings to accommodate the diverse types of SEND. Legal rights and statutory protections, such as those set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, must be retained and robustly enforced, with EHCPs remaining as legally binding documents that are regularly updated and properly implemented. Access to regular therapeutic services and SEND experts—including educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and other relevant professionals—should be increased, with waiting times for assessments and interventions significantly reduced.

Specialist support staff must be adequately trained and not overwhelmed by administrative burdens, ensuring that support is tailored to each child's needs and not simply a tick-box exercise. There should be strong accountability and independent oversight, including regular audits and the ability for families to challenge decisions through independent bodies or tribunals. Collaboration between education, health, and care services is essential to address the full range of children's needs, including independence in daily living skills. Finally, families must be treated as equal partners in decision-making, with their voices accurately reflected in support plans and ongoing communication to ensure that provision is delivered as promised. These measures, combined with a commitment to true inclusion and a culture of high aspirations, are necessary to ensure that children in the Specialist layer receive the optimal support they require.

7. **How do you think early years settings, schools, and college can best support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people?**

All settings, as well as young people who are home educated/ on EOTAS packages, need access to a range of mental health professionals, including educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and others. These professionals should be available on a regular or as-needed basis, not just for a few hours, to provide timely and expert support. Holistic approaches are recommended, with everything for each child digitised in one place so that families and professionals can access and coordinate support efficiently. This includes ensuring that support plans are meaningful, specific, and co-produced with families, and that they avoid vague language. It is not clear from the White Paper what the school role is as opposed to MHST and CAHMS teams, and who will provide the various tiers of mental health support. It is also not clear whether schools can use their Inclusion Fund to commission private therapists or organisations (e.g. Place2Be), so that would be a welcome clarification.

Schools can play an important part in the process by embedding mental health support training, prioritising their own workforce's wellbeing, creating inclusive spaces for staff and children to access (low sensory spaces, more break-out areas), and a more compassionate, trauma-informed approach. Blanket school policies should be a thing of the past - making reasonable adjustments to support social and emotional development and valuing neurodiversity should be fostered from the school leadership teams.

Finally, schools should listen to parent-led groups and families, who often have deep understanding of children's needs, and ensure that family voices are accurately reflected in support plans and decision-making.

8. **Do you agree that the refreshed 'areas of development' will support educators to understand and address barriers to learning and participation? Please explain your answer.**

   We are extremely concerned that the refreshed 'areas of development' do not adequately support educators in understanding and addressing barriers to learning and participation. The most obvious omission is that of 'cognition and learning' and learning disabilities from the new framework, when we know that for a lot of children with SEND, cognition is a significant barrier. Executive function is not equivalent to learning disability, and the distinction between learning difficulty and learning disability appears misunderstood in the refreshed framework. Also, the paper does not address the correlation between the areas of development, the support packages and the inclusion standards, who need to fit together to really support all SEND learners.
   The effectiveness of the new framework will depend on how these gaps are addressed and how clearly the areas are defined and implemented in practice.

9. **What arrangements would best support effective joint working between early years providers, Best Start Family Hubs, health, local authorities, and parents for children with SEND in the early years?**

   Best Start Family Hubs should serve as a single, accessible front door for families, offering a dedicated SEND offer led by trained practitioners who provide direct support and guidance to parents and children. Ideally, each family should have a designated key person or clear point of contact to help them navigate services, coordinate referrals, and provide continuity, reducing the burden on parents to chase support.

   Furthermore, local authorities must be held to account, as they have significant power over funding and decision-making. Effective joint working is undermined if local authorities operate by their own rules or are not responsive to families and other professionals. There is also a need for greater transparency and accessibility in communication, such as ensuring contact details for SEND teams are readily available to parents, and that parents can easily speak to relevant professionals.

   Families should be involved at every stage of the process, with their voices accurately reflected in support plans and decisions, rather than being diluted or summarised. Parents are seen as the experts on their children and should be treated as equal partners.

   Better integration and communication between health visitors, social workers, and other professionals is needed. Health visitors are often not included in referral processes or child development assessments, leading to children slipping through the net.

   There is also a concern about the lack of clarity regarding the roles and capabilities of new practitioners in the paper, such as SEN practitioners in Family Hubs, and whether they can make referrals or provide meaningful support. This needs to be clarified.

Another clarification required is around the accountability placed on private nurseries; will they be bound by the same standards that will be introduced for private schools? The white Paper is not clear on this point.

Overall, we call for a system that is transparent, accountable, family-centred, and well-coordinated across all agencies involved in early years SEND support.

10. **How can the early years foundation stage (EYFS) two-year old progress check and the Healthy Child Programme development review be improved so that children's needs are identified and supported more quickly? Please share examples.**

There is a need for integrated reviews that combine the EYFS two-year old progress check with the Healthy Child Programme development review. This integration is seen as best practice for early identification and intervention, allowing for a more holistic understanding of a child's needs and reducing delays in support.

Currently, parents often have to be persistent and proactive to get referrals and support for their children. It is recommended that health visitors and other professionals be better trained, connected and empowered to make direct referrals to relevant services, rather than relying on parents to chase and coordinate support. There is concern that health visitors are often not included in referral processes or child development assessments, leading to children slipping through the net.

We know from experience that referrals for support (such as speech and language therapy) can take six to twelve months, often because parental referrals were not accepted without professional validation. We strongly recommend that professional input is not a barrier to timely support, and to ensure that parental concerns are taken seriously and acted upon promptly.

For children under 5 with complex needs, improved information sharing between health professionals and local authorities can facilitate a fast track to specialist provision and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), ensuring quicker access to specialist support. A child diagnosed at birth or clearly in need of support at the 2-year health check should not have to wait until they become of school age to get the support they need, if they don't happen to attend a nursery or other early year placement.

In summary, the most effective improvements involve integrating the two-year checks, empowering professionals to act swiftly, reducing the burden on parents, enhancing communication and accountability, and addressing workforce and systemic challenges.

11. **What should the top three priority areas be for building and sharing evidence within the National Inclusion Standards?**

    Firstly, children need to continue having access to individualised and tailored educational support, rather than relying solely on generic, off-the-shelf interventions and packages. The standards should prioritise evidence that supports personalised strategies and recognises the unique needs of each child.

    Our members are concerned about the sources of evidence used to inform these standards, particularly for conditions like autism where the evidence base can be contested. Our second priority is that all voices, including those of neurodivergent individuals and families, must be represented, and that the standards should be informed by a broad, inclusive and neuro-affirmative range of evidence, not just traditional or potentially outdated research.

    Thirdly, the standards should be built on high aspirations for all children, ensuring that no child is dismissed or excluded due to behavioural challenges or other barriers. There is a call for the standards to address the triggers and underlying causes of behaviour, and to ensure that children are not simply grouped together without regard for their individual needs.

    These priorities reflect a desire for the National Inclusion Standards to be genuinely inclusive, evidence-informed, and focused on the best outcomes for all children, despite of academic ability

12. **What are the most important issues for national training to cover, to help support children and young people with SEND?**

    Key issues that national training needs to cover to effectively support children and young people with SEND include:

    Understanding what true inclusion is and how mainstream schools can be adapted to be genuinely inclusive, rather than simply segregating SEND students within mainstream settings.

    Comprehensive coverage of the various types of disability and learning needs that children may have, not just focusing on autism and specific learning difficulties, but also including more complex needs, internalising and externalising behaviours, speech and language difficulties, and the use of AAC devices.

    Training in communication, emotional regulation, sensory processing, neurodiversity, developmental language disorder (DLD), ADHD, autism, trauma-informed practice, and inclusive teaching strategies that work in ordinary classrooms.

Emphasising that behaviour is often a form of communication and that good SEND support is not about punitive measures but about understanding and responding to underlying needs. We also need a national approach to the practice of restraining children, based on the latest, neuro affirmative research and evidence-based approaches.

Ensuring that all teachers and staff are equipped to support a wide range of needs, including those that may not be immediately visible or that present as high-masking or internalised behaviours.

Providing practical strategies for managing diverse and complex needs in large classrooms, including empathy, understanding, and the ability to adapt teaching approaches.

Addressing the need for ongoing workforce development, realistic expectations of what teachers can manage, and access to advice and support when challenges arise.

These areas are considered essential for national training to enable staff to deliver high-quality, inclusive education for all children and young people with SEND.

However, we are not convinced that the training package mentioned in the White Paper (200 million over 3 years) is enough to cover even the cost of single training course, and therefore none of the points above is likely to materialise as a result of these reforms.

13. **What practical actions can help teachers, educators and leaders manage workload whilst implementing these changes?**

Schools should have access to simple, standardised templates and digital systems to reduce duplication and avoid teachers having to write lengthy plans from scratch. This streamlines administrative tasks and ensures consistency across settings.

There should be a national example or standard for what good provision looks like, so schools are not constantly reinventing the wheel. This helps educators quickly identify and implement effective practices without unnecessary extra work.

Leaders need to ensure that teachers and support staff have protected time for essential tasks, such as planning, collaboration, and attending meetings and training. This includes release time for teachers and support staff to focus on SEND-related responsibilities.

Sufficient funding should be allocated to provide support staff access to specialist advice, reducing the burden on individual teachers and ensuring that responsibilities are shared appropriately.

Reforms should be designed to provide meaningful support rather than becoming another layer of administrative burden. This means focusing on practical, impactful changes rather than increasing paperwork. We fear that the ISPs will become just that, another administrative burden on a workforce that is already stretched to its limits.

The responsibility for implementing changes and supporting SEND students should be shared among class teachers, pastoral teams, therapists, and local services, rather than falling on a single individual such as the SENCO.

The SENCO role should evolve into a more strategic leadership position, with protected time and involvement in senior decision-making, rather than being limited to paperwork and crisis management.

Attention should be given to staff wellbeing, as burnt-out staff cannot deliver consistent, attuned support. Training should reduce uncertainty, and staff should have access to advice and realistic expectations about what one teacher can manage.

These steps are intended to ensure that the implementation of changes is manageable, sustainable, and focused on delivering meaningful support to students rather than increasing administrative workload.

14. **How should the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) role evolve to better meet the needs of children and young people with SEND?**

The SENCO role should become a standalone, strategic leadership position, rather than being combined with other roles such as class teacher or designated safeguarding lead. This would allow SENCOs to focus fully on inclusion and SEND provision, rather than being overburdened with multiple responsibilities and paperwork.

SENCOs should be part of the senior leadership team (SLT) in schools, with protected time to participate in decision-making and to advocate for children with SEND at a strategic level. This would ensure that inclusion is embedded throughout the school and that SENCOs have the authority and capacity to influence whole-school practice.

There is a strong call for SENCOs to have dedicated administrative support, such as an assistant, to help manage the significant paperwork and coordination required. This would free up SENCOs to focus on supporting children, families, and staff, rather than being overwhelmed by administrative tasks.

The wellbeing and mental health of SENCOs should be prioritised, recognising the high demands and emotional labour of the role. Schools should ensure that there are enough SENCOs to meet the needs of their pupil population, and that the role is not set up to fail by being under-resourced.

SENCOs should have opportunities for collaboration and peer support, such as participating in local or regional SENCO networks, to share expertise and best practice. This would help address variability in the quality of SENCO provision and support professional development.

The role of the SENCO should be clearly defined as a SEND specialist, but it is acknowledged that not all SENCOs have the same level of expertise or training. There is a need for more consistent and advanced training for SENCOs, including legal and multi-agency working, to ensure they can effectively advocate for and support children with complex needs.

SENCOs should be released from school to attend multi-agency meetings and clinics (e.g., with paediatricians or other specialists), as their presence can provide valuable insights and improve coordination of support for children with complex needs.

The system should support SENCOs to work in genuine partnership with parents, valuing lived experience and ensuring that parental involvement is a core safeguard in the SEND process.

In summary, we are advocating for a more strategic, well-supported, and specialist SENCO role, with clear leadership responsibilities, adequate resources, and a focus on collaboration, wellbeing, and partnership with families.

15. What would provide assurance for families that an Individual Support Plan (ISP) is high-quality and contains the essential information?

ISPs must be made in consultation with parents/carers, requiring their agreement and ensuring their voices are accurately reflected, not diluted or summarised. Parents want to see their input genuinely valued and included point by point in the plan.

There is a strong call for ISPs to be legally enforceable, with clear accountability for their implementation. Families want legal backing similar to that of EHCPs, so that schools and local authorities are held to account if the plan is not delivered.

Plans should be regularly reviewed, personalised, and updated with specific, measurable actions that reflect the child’s current needs and progress, rather than being generic or reused year after year.

One area not addressed in the paper is how ISPs will be managed when a child is attending an AP/therapeutic school on a temporary basis – which setting is responsible for maintaining the ISP in these circumstances?

We want greater transparency in how ISPs are developed and implemented, with honest communication about what support will be provided, who will deliver it, how often, and how effectiveness will be measured.

There is also a desire for an independent overseer or adjudicator to ensure provision is being delivered as per the plan, rather than leaving all administration and quality assurance to the school.

Confidence in ISPs is linked to assurances of consistent funding for schools to deliver support, including dedicated support hours and sufficient staffing.

Families express concern about the lack of clear quality assurance for ISPs, noting that Ofsted inspections are infrequent and may not provide sufficient oversight. We want to know who is responsible for drafting, agreeing, and monitoring ISPs, and how implementation will be tracked and evidenced.

We are also concerned about how ISPs and funding will work for young people educated in alternative provision, such as therapeutic schools, residential placements, or home education, especially when these settings are not legally defined as schools. There is concern about who will oversee the ISP and manage funding in these cases, and a need for clear responsibility and oversight.

It is also not clear from the paper on who holds the digital ISP platform and how information will be shared across schools, local authorities, and health professionals to ensure joined-up support. This needs to be clarified.

Ultimately, families judge the quality of a plan by their lived experience and whether the promised support is delivered consistently and effectively.

These assurances, if in place, would help families trust that an ISP is both comprehensive and of high quality.

16. How can we ensure Individual Support Plans are clear, concise and practical for professionals to use?

ISP should follow a standardised format across all settings, with clear guidance on what content is required. This ensures consistency, makes plans easier to create and update, and facilitates smooth transitions between settings.

ISPs must include only essential information, such as the child or young person’s specific barriers to learning, the support and reasonable adjustments in place, and the intended outcomes. Plans should clearly state what support will be provided, who will deliver it, how often, and how its effectiveness will be measured, avoiding vague language like “access to support” unless it is specifically defined.

Making ISPs available in a digital, interactive format allows for easy access, regular updates, and integration with wider services. This reduces duplication, supports information sharing, and ensures plans remain current and practical.

Employing simple, shared templates helps professionals quickly complete and update ISPs without unnecessary complexity or repetition.

For children receiving targeted support, ISPs should reference evidence-based interventions, ensuring that the support provided is practical and grounded in proven, neuro affirmative strategies.

ISPs should be reviewed at least annually, with input from parents, young people, and professionals. This collaborative, ongoing review process ensures plans remain relevant and effective as needs change.

ISPs should be enforceable by law, and with independent, legal escalation routes when parents are concerned that they are not being implemented.

By implementing these measures, ISPs become user-friendly, focused on actionable information, and easily adaptable making them practical and effective tools for professionals supporting children and young people.

17. **How can we best support transition for young people with SEND, so that they are well supported into post-16 provision and further education, training or employment?**

We are very concerned that post-16 provision for young people with SEND is being undermined by funding cuts. The hollowing out of post-16 support is seen as a significant barrier to effective transition and ongoing support.

We need much more clarity around what happens after age 16, noting that 16 is still very young and that support is still needed beyond this point. We are calling for clear information and planning for post-16 transitions, including what support will be available, what pathways exist and how they can be accessed. We are also urging the government to incorporate the support required for post 16 learners to access their community and further education, e.g. travel training, self-advocacy, community safety etc.

It is extremely important to involve families and young people in planning and decision-making for post-16 transitions, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are met in further education and opportunities.

We are also concerned that this transition point will become one of the battlegrounds for reducing support (e.g. downgrading a child with an EHCP to Targeted Plus), which will come at the worst possible time in a young person's life, where there is a lot of anxiety and insecurity about their future. These transitions must be managed with empathy and provide the young person and their family with a sense of hope for their future, not a cliff edge to diminished life prospects.

In summary, we suggest that effective support for young people with SEND moving into post-16 provision requires adequate and protected funding, clear and accessible information about available pathways, flexible and individualized support (including for those in alternative provision), robust oversight and accountability, and meaningful involvement of families and young people in the transition process.

18. How can we make sure that every area can meet the full range of the needs of children and young people through Inclusion Bases?

We need schools to have access to a wide range of specialists, including educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, clinical psychologists, and staff fully trained in SEND needs, including anxiety and trauma. Most schools currently lack specialised teachers and staff shortages limit the involvement of teachers in addressing these needs. It is recommended that all staff receive simple, effective training (such as a distillation of the Cygnet/Early Bird courses) to reduce reliance on external experts and ensure a baseline of understanding across the workforce.

One area of concern for us is how rural schools will be able to meet the full range of needs of their SEND cohort. What will incentivise the redeployment of specialist staff in rural areas to meet those needs?

We cannot stress enough the importance of holistic approaches, with everything for each child digitised in one place for easy access by families and professionals. We call for dedicated SEND staff who are not overwhelmed by paperwork, so children do not become a 'tick box' exercise.

Schools should listen to parent-led groups who deeply understand these needs and be more connected to services like CAMHS. There is also a recommendation for actual autistic/ADHD adults to support children, and for schools to learn from alternative provisions that are already doing this well.

There must be proper investment and support for schools, including funding for support staff, specialist advice, and release time for teachers and SENCOs. There is concern that without sufficient resources, reforms could become another administrative burden rather than meaningful support.

SEND children sometimes require strategies that are the opposite of those used for neurotypical children. True inclusion is defined as SEND children being in the same classroom as their non-SEND peers, not segregated, and with their individual needs met through differentiated learning and classroom adaptations.

There is concern that many teachers do not want to teach SEND children, and that the success of Inclusion Bases depends on addressing this cultural and attitudinal barrier. We cannot stress enough the need for a significant increase in funding, training, and recruitment of specialist, willing staff.

We are also not clear on how schools will find space and staff for Inclusion Bases, especially for those designed to support children with externalising behaviours. We are sceptical about whether schools will want to host such bases and how they will negotiate the logistics.

The need for regular visits and monitoring by specialists is a must, as well as the importance of systems that support professionals to confidently identify and advocate for needs without fear of resource constraints.

In summary, we recommend a multi-faceted approach: robust investment in specialist staff and training, holistic and individualised support, strong connections to external and parent-led expertise, structural changes to ensure adequate resources, and a cultural shift towards empathy and true inclusion. We are also calling for ongoing monitoring and accountability to ensure that Inclusion Bases genuinely meet the full range of needs for all children and young people.

19. **How can we make sure that Inclusion Bases help children and young people succeed in mainstream settings?**

Inclusion must mean that SEND children are in the same classroom as their non-SEND peers, not segregated or spending most of their time away from their peers. This requires a shift in school culture and practice to embrace genuine inclusion rather than tokenistic measures.

These new structures will require proper, ongoing and ringfenced funding to ensure consistent support, including more teaching assistants (TAs), specialist support staff, and resources tailored to each child's needs. Without sufficient funding, schools cannot provide the necessary support for SEND students to thrive.

We are also concerned that there is no clarity in the paper on how one inclusion base per school will be able to cater for the diverse needs of any SEND cohort – does this mean children might still have to be educated far from home because their local school 's inclusion base cannot cater for their needs? If the assumption is that children with diverse needs, especially ones with internalised and externalised behaviours, will be supported to learn alongside each other, then any specialist teacher will confirm that this is a recipe for disaster that leads to punitive measures, school exclusions, school anxiety, EBSA and trauma.

Schools should have access to regular therapeutic services, SEND experts, and increased staff training. All staff should receive comprehensive training in SEND, including understanding anxiety, trauma, and neurodiversity, to ensure a baseline of expertise and reduce over-reliance on external experts.

Support should be tailored to each child, with everything digitised in one place for easy access by families and professionals. Dedicated SEND staff should not be overwhelmed by paperwork, and there should be more SEND staff and specialist-trained teachers and TAs.

Schools must listen to and act on parent concerns, involve families in decision-making, and ensure that family voices are accurately reflected in support plans.

There should be clear accountability for delivering support within these bases, with independent oversight and legal protections similar to those provided by EHCPs. Families should have the right to challenge decisions and access independent bodies for dispute resolution.

Schools need to rethink how learning is delivered, update teaching approaches, and embrace differentiated learning to meet diverse needs. This includes providing alternative qualifications and adapting the curriculum for all learners.

A significant increase in funding for TAs and support staff is needed, along with building adaptations to provide required spaces such as low sensory areas and break-out rooms.

Staff should lead with empathy and understand that SEND children may require different strategies than neurotypical children. Training should include trauma-informed practice and inclusive teaching that works in ordinary classrooms.

Regular check-ins with SENDCOs, structured meetings with families, and ongoing review of support plans are recommended to ensure that support is effective and responsive to changing needs.

In summary, the document calls for a holistic, well-resourced, and genuinely inclusive approach, with strong collaboration, accountability, and a focus on individual needs to ensure that Inclusion Bases enable children and young people to thrive in mainstream environments.

20. **Through the Experts at Hand offer, we want to ensure that mainstream settings can get quick specialist support for children and young people. What arrangements are needed between local area partners (education, health, social care) to deliver this Experts at Hand offer effectively?**

First, we need genuine collaboration and communication between education, health, and care systems, with a particular focus on bridging these systems to address not only educational needs but also independence in daily living skills, access to community services and ongoing health needs Regular and timely access to a diverse range of specialists, including educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, clinical psychologists, and other SEND experts is key. We are not convinced that the paper has addressed how current shortages in these professions, which present a significant barrier, will be addressed.

We are concerned that the overwhelming need for this service, coupled with the lack of experts available, will become another bottleneck for getting the right support quickly.

We are also concerned about the cohort of children who will be "downgraded" from having EHCPs to Targeted Plus support at points of transition. Who will make this decision, and can we, as parents, still challenge this decision at a tribunal? The paper suggests this is no longer the case, which causes a great deal of anxiety for parents with younger children in our group.

Another point not covered in the paper but that has surfaced through our forum members is whether social workers will become part of the Experts at Hand offering. The social worker team in most local authorities are chronically underfunded and unavailable, especially for providing much needed assessments at key transition points (e.g. PFA reviews). How will social care provision be resourced and funded properly to become an effective part of the EaH offer?

Additionally, we need holistic and digitised approaches, where all information for each child is accessible in one place to both families and professionals, facilitating coordinated support. We call for more effective communication and transparency between services, as well as the need for local area partners to ensure that families are not left to navigate complex systems alone. The arrangement should include clear pathways, regular updates, and a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities among partners.

There must be a focus on fair and needs-based allocation of resources, with transparent pathways and regular communication to ensure all sectors (early years, schools, and post-16 providers) can access support. For early years, existing infrastructures like Best Start Family Services may be leveraged, while alternative models may be needed for colleges.

Finally, the document points to the necessity of proper funding and resource allocation across education, health, and social care to support the Experts at Hand model, as well as the importance of ongoing training for all staff involved. Without these collaborative, well-resourced, and transparent arrangements, the effective delivery of the Experts at Hand offer is seen as unlikely.

21. What needs to be in place so that children and young people with low incidence, highly complex needs can always access the right specialist placement?

First and foremost, there must be a commitment to comprehensive and timely assessment, led by multidisciplinary teams with deep expertise in complex, rare, or overlapping needs. Early identification is crucial, as delays can result in missed opportunities for intervention and support. The assessment process should be holistic, going beyond checklists to capture the full nuance of a child's needs, and should be revisited regularly as these needs evolve.

Expertise must permeate the entire system. All professionals involved in decision-making—from local authority staff to school leaders and placement panels—should have access to, or direct input from, highly specialized clinicians, therapists, and educators. Regular, accredited training is essential to keep all stakeholders up to date with best practices and to prevent misclassification or misunderstanding of complex needs.

Access to specialist placements should be governed by transparent, nationally consistent criteria, not left to local policy interpretation or constrained by budgets. There should be a clear, well-resourced pathway for referral and placement, with national standards ensuring that if a child's needs match the criteria for specialist provision, they cannot be denied access due to funding limitations or local shortages. Parent and carer representation in placement panels and decision-making processes is vital to ensure transparency and accountability.

The system must provide a diverse, high-quality network of specialist provisions, strategically located and resourced to avoid geographic disparities. Where local provision is unavailable, there must be guaranteed funding and support for children to access suitable placements elsewhere, including residential or out-of-borough settings as necessary. National and regional planning, backed by robust data collection, will help ensure that provision matches current and projected needs.

Flexibility is also key. Each child's needs are unique and may change over time; therefore, provision must allow for personalized packages that include therapies, equipment, health support, and assistive technologies. Digital planning tools should support this personalization, ensuring plans are living documents that reflect real-time needs.

Family involvement is non-negotiable. Parents and carers bring invaluable insight and must be recognized as equal partners in all assessment, placement, and review decisions. Legal requirements for co-production, transparent communication, and written rationales for all decisions should be standard practice.

Integrated working across education, health, and social care is essential to meet the totality of children's needs. Funding and responsibility should be aligned across sectors, breaking down silos that lead to delays or gaps in provision.

Accountability mechanisms must be robust and accessible. If specialist placements are refused, families need timely and straightforward routes to challenge decisions, through independent mediation, ombudsman services, or tribunal processes. Systematic monitoring will help identify and address patterns of delay, refusal, or inequity.

Finally, the system must be sustainable and forward-looking. Protected, ringfenced funding and coordinated national and regional planning will ensure that capacity keeps pace with fluctuating demand, and that economic pressures do not erode access or quality.

22. How can Specialist Provision Packages be designed to effectively support the main types of need we currently recognise?

Specialist Provision Packages must be grounded in the latest research and best practice, developed and regularly reviewed by a national panel of experts. This ensures that the support provided is both effective and up to date.

Each package should clearly outline:

- The characteristics and profiles of the needs it addresses (e.g., speech and language difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, or other complex needs). It should include PDA, school anxiety, and trauma.
- Expected outcomes for children and young people.
- The special educational provision and necessary adaptations (such as environmental changes). They should avoid vague language and instead specify what support will be provided., who will deliver it, how often it will be delivered, how its effectiveness will be measured.
  The resources needed, including staffing, training, and equipment.
- The detail of day-to-day provision should be enforceable, not left to non-statutory documents.
- The design process should involve co-production with professionals, families, and young people to ensure that packages are practical, relevant, and responsive to real-world needs.
- Packages must be flexible and adaptable, reviewed regularly, especially at key transition points, to reflect changing needs.
- Clear accountability mechanisms to ensure the specified support is actually delivered.

In summary, Specialist Provision Packages should be nationally consistent, evidence-based, clearly specified, co-produced, flexible, and enforceable, with strong mechanisms for accountability and regular review. This approach ensures that the main types of need are effectively and equitably supported across the SEND system.

23. We propose that EHCPs will guarantee educational provision set out in a Specialist Provision Package, with day-to-day provision captured in Individual Support Plans. What is needed to make these proposals work effectively?

EHCPs and ISPs must both have clear legal enforceability, ensuring all substantive, child-specific provision is protected by law. There is grave concern that if ISPs are not legally enforceable, the day-to-day provision will not be delivered. There is also confusion as to how this will change the content of EHCPs – will they become hollowed out documents with just a mention of the Specialist Provision Package assigned to the child?

There must be transparent, accessible routes for families to challenge and escalate concerns, with independent oversight and effective redress.

Specialist Provision Packages should set a national baseline, developed with expert and stakeholder input, but must not limit more tailored or complex support, which should still be captured in legally enforceable documents. ISPs should be detailed, specific, and regularly reviewed, using standardised templates that allow for local flexibility.

EHCPs and ISPs must be co-created with parents, professionals, and young people, with clear, transparent review and amendment processes. Communication should be regular and accessible, ensuring plans reflect actual needs and lived experience.

Effective partnership between education, health, care professionals, and families is vital at all stages, with timely information sharing and input from relevant specialists.

Sufficient, ring-fenced funding is needed to recruit, retain, and train SENCOs, teaching assistants, and specialist staff. All staff should receive ongoing SEND training, and schools must have timely access to external professionals.

Funding must be stable, protected, and matched to the requirements of each package, with transparent reporting and independent audits to ensure resources reach children.

Both EHCPs and ISPs should be reviewed frequently, with strong oversight from Ofsted and local authorities, and parental involvement central to each review.

The system must promote whole-school inclusion, be accessible to all families (regardless of digital skills or language), and support a cultural shift towards valuing diversity.

Finally, the move to this system should be carefully phased, with robust support for families and settings, ensuring no loss of support during transition.

24. We propose creating a more direct route to Specialist Provision Packages and EHCP assessments for children under 5 with complex needs. How can we make sure this works in practice?

First, the process must prioritize early identification and intervention, allowing both professionals and parents to trigger assessments based on evident needs rather than waiting for formal diagnoses. This requires well-trained staff across early years settings, clear and accessible referral pathways, and a culture that empowers professionals to advocate for children without fear of resource constraints or local authority gatekeeping.

Additionally, the system must be transparent, consistent, and equitable nationwide. National minimum standards and published eligibility criteria should be established to avoid regional disparities and ensure fairness. Active parental involvement at every stage is crucial, with regular updates, clear information about available options, and formal inclusion of parental input in decision-making. Robust accountability mechanisms—including transparent tracking, ring-fenced funding, independent oversight, and legal safeguards for timely assessment—are vital to prevent delays and ensure the system remains focused on the child's needs rather than resource limitations. Sufficient investment in specialist staff will also be necessary to meet increased demand and deliver on the promise of timely, effective support.

25. **What would you expect to be considered as part of the needs assessment, for example evidence and expert or professional input?**

Evidence for a needs assessment should be comprehensive and not limited to a single professional's view. We are concerned about the level of expertise among those conducting assessments, as the so called "experts" often lack the necessary knowledge of specific needs or are not up to speed with the latest research and/or neuroaffirmative practices... It is important to involve a range of professionals, such as educational psychologists (EPs), speech and language therapists (SLTs), occupational therapists (OTs), and other specialists, in the assessment process. Parents and families' input is crucial, as they know the child best and should be involved at every stage. The assessment should be holistic, considering health needs as well as educational ones, and should not be solely diagnosis-driven but focused on the child's actual needs. There is also a call for transparency about who is involved in the assessment panels and what expertise they bring, as well as for co-production with families during the assessment and planning process.

26. **What factors should LAs take into account in proposing to parents and young people a list of potential settings to name on a plan?**

Local authorities should ensure that when suggesting potential settings to parents and young people for naming on a plan, the process is transparent, collaborative, and genuinely considers the individual needs and preferences of the child or young person. Families should be involved at every stage, with their voices taken seriously and accurately reflected, rather than being summarised or diluted. There should be no secretive decision-making; meetings and discussions about settings must include families as equal partners. The expertise and knowledge of parents about their own children should be respected, and the process should avoid fitting needs into rigid criteria that may not reflect the child's actual requirements. Additionally, local authorities must provide clear information about the options available, ensure that the rationale for any suggested settings is fully explained, and that the process is not driven solely by organisational convenience or cost considerations. Transparency about who is making decisions, their expertise, and the criteria used is essential to build trust and ensure that the chosen setting is truly in the best interests of the child or young person.

The settings must be able to deliver the appropriate Specialist Provision Package tailored to the individual needs of the child or young person. Furthermore, for a placement to be truly successful, the child must have access to the right curriculum offering, the appropriate qualifications, a peer group, robust transition arrangements and where necessary, to include transport arrangements (which is currently a separate process and additional barrier for families to navigate).

Parents should be encouraged to visit all the schools proposed and to have final say in the process, rather than being pressured to accept a placement.

Decisions should be made fairly, considering the needs of all children and young people in the area, and not just on a first-come, first-served basis.

However, the most important point is that parents and young people retain the right to request alternative settings that can deliver the relevant provision.

27. **What information and support do parents need to make a decision about which setting will be best for their child?**

We want clear, transparent, and accessible information about all available options, including what specialist packages are available and what supports other children with similar needs receive. We cannot stress enough the importance of being presented with and given clear information at every stage and in every situation, not just a summary or diluted version of our views. We also seek regular and reliable contact with SEND officers, more transparency around documents and learning plans, and information about external professionals working with our children. Additionally, we value being included in all meetings about our children, having our concerns taken seriously, and being involved in decisions rather than having cost considerations prioritized over our children's actual needs. We also want to see better communication between services, and more transparency around the criteria and rationale for suggested settings.

The most important point is that we maintain our legal rights, including the right to request alternative settings and to appeal decisions if we disagree with the local authority’s placement.

28. **What do you think is the right maximum length of time for a temporary placement in Alternative Provision (AP) schools? Please explain your rationale.**

    There is no one size fits all approach to this question. It is better to avoid setting an arbitrary. fixed maximum duration, and to instead ensure that placements remain flexible and responsive to individual needs, rather than being driven by arbitrary time limits. The importance of regular reviews, timely support, and avoiding situations where children are left in AP for longer than necessary or without appropriate educational input are much more important to consider. In some cases, and due to the unique offering of some Aps, they become the de facto permanent setting for some children who require an alternative approach to learning (e.g. forest schools)
    Our members were also not clear whether the intent is that APs will provide all Specialist Provision Packages, to cater for an extremely diverse cohort. This needs to be clarified.

29. **We have set out our plans to regulate Independent Special Schools (ISS) sector. Do you agree that these proposed changes will lead to suitable placements being available at a fair cost? Please explain why.**

    Aligning ISS responsibilities and oversight with other special schools to ensure fair admissions, strong SEND support, and financial transparency is preferable. However, many institutions and their corporate backers are profit-driven, so if the market becomes less lucrative, there's a risk of significant withdrawal and fewer suitable placements at reasonable costs. This will create a sufficiency issue that the government will need to address proactively by creating increased capacity and capability in mainstream settings.

    However, we are not convinced that any regulatory measures put in place will be enforceable – currently, the local authorities have no recourse to question academies over the way they use allocated funds from the high needs budget, so we have very little faith that you will be able to impose any regulations on ISSs.

30. **How should settings be held accountable for how they spend their Inclusive Mainstream funding?**

    Strong safeguards and accountability mechanisms are necessary if more SEND funding is to sit within mainstream budgets. Without these, there is a risk that funding could be absorbed into the general budget, leading to inconsistent provision and inadequate support for children with higher levels of need.

    Suggestions for accountability include ring-fencing or protected allocation tracking, mandatory provision mapping linked to EHCPs and SEND support plans, and external oversight to ensure funding is used for its intended purpose.

We also call for increased transparency, with schools required to publish a profile and an inclusion report detailing how they use the Inclusive Mainstream Fund to support SEND students and their outcomes. Post-16 colleges should be required to show how inclusion funding is used in their accountability agreements

One of the areas not addressed in the paper is the funding formula and distribution; we are specifically concerned about what happens for EHE/EOTAS children/ children in a temporary AP or therapeutic provision/ children with EBSA. Who receives the funding in those circumstances and how is it redirected from the mainstream settings?

Currently, parents cannot always verify that funding is used for the provision it is meant to cover, so having external oversight and clear reporting is essential.

There should be a national minimum expectation for what Inclusive Mainstream funding must deliver, to remove the postcode lottery and ensure a baseline level of support and specialist input across all schools.

Also, it is essential to have independent oversight, rather than relying solely on local SENCOs or school-level processes to ensure impartiality and fairness in decision-making and complaints.

31. **Do you agree that more SEND funding should sit directly within mainstream budgets? Please explain why.**

This would work only if strong safeguards and accountability mechanisms are implemented. Direct funding to schools could allow them to respond more quickly and flexibly to emerging needs, making early intervention more achievable and reducing delays caused by waiting for external approvals. However, we are concerned that, without proper safeguards, such funding could be absorbed into general school budgets and used for other purposes (e.g. staff salaries, utility bills), leading to inconsistent provision and the risk that children with higher levels of need may not receive appropriate support. To address these risks, we suggest including ring-fencing or protected allocation tracking, mandatory provision mapping linked to EHCPs and SEND support plans, and external oversight to ensure funding is used for its intended purpose. We also call for increased transparency, with schools required to publish reports on how they use the Inclusive Mainstream Fund, and for a national minimum expectation for what this funding must deliver to avoid a postcode lottery in provision.

32. **In relation to pooled funding, we propose that every school becomes part of a local SEND group. Do you agree that this proposal aligns with our aim for all schools to be part of high-quality, community-based trusts?**

In principle, all schools being part of a local SEND group could align with the aim of building community-based, collaborative systems. Potential strengths are shared expertise and resources, reduced isolation between schools, and greater consistency in provision across a local area. However, we are concerned about the practicalities and risks of such groups. These groups will only work if they are genuinely collaborative, non-hierarchical, and transparent in decision-making, with a clear focus on children's needs rather than organizational interests. There is a risk that local groups could become gatekeeping structures or cost management mechanisms rather than need-led systems. We are not clear on how resources and funding would be pooled and shared, what criteria would be used for grouping schools (e.g., proximity or provision packages), and how accountability and oversight would be maintained, especially in comparison to the current academy model, which we view as lacking sufficient oversight. We are also concerned that without strong accountability, children with less visible needs could be overlooked. The need for national minimum expectations and safeguards to prevent a postcode lottery in provision is vital.

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33. **How should disagreements about membership, provision, or funding in groups of schools for SEND be resolved?**

There should be a clear, defined escalation process for resolving disagreements within local SEND groups. This process should include independent oversight and thorough documentation of decisions and their rationale.

Parents must have access to fair and transparent dispute resolution pathways. This includes the ability to escalate complaints beyond the school or group level, potentially to independent panels or ombudsman services.

Decisions within local partnerships must remain clearly aligned with statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, particularly the requirements to secure provisions as specified in an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan).

There is concern about impartiality and fairness if disputes are handled solely at the school or group level. We need independent oversight, rather than relying on local SENCOs or school relationships, to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure fair outcomes.

The process should prioritize the child’s needs, legal entitlements, and evidence-based decision making. There should be a requirement to show how decisions align with statutory duties.

We are also not clear about the criteria for group membership and the risk that schools with higher numbers of SEND pupils or fewer resources could be excluded. Oversight is needed to ensure equitable access and prevent gatekeeping or cost-management practices that are not need-led.

In summary, disagreements about membership, provision, or funding in SEND school groups should be resolved through transparent, collaborative local structures with statutory and independent oversight, clear escalation routes, and a consistent focus on fairness, legal compliance, and the best interests of children and young people with SEND.

34. How can we ensure the most effective use of these local partnership groups?

Define the roles and responsibilities of all partners—including local authorities, health providers, education settings, and parents—to establish a foundation for successful collaboration and collective accountability for outcomes.

Empower local authorities to lead strategic planning, commissioning, and capacity building, ensuring that funding is used effectively to deliver real impact for children with SEND.

Prioritize authentic, non-hierarchical collaboration among all stakeholders, focusing on children's needs rather than organizational interests.

Ensure transparent and accountable decision-making, with clear documentation and rationale for decisions.

Involve a wide range of stakeholders, especially young people, parent forums, SEND rights groups, and school leaders, to ensure all perspectives are represented.

Establish clear escalation processes and independent oversight to resolve disagreements and safeguard against groupthink or undue influence.

Align all decisions with statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, particularly regarding the provision specified in EHCPs.

Prevent the use of partnership groups as gatekeeping or cost-management mechanisms; ensure they are need-led and focused on sharing expertise and resources.

Ensure collaboration does not compromise independent decision-making, especially where a child's needs require escalation.

These measures collectively ensure that local partnership groups function as effective, inclusive, and child-centred bodies, rather than as administrative or financial gatekeepers.

35. Which stakeholders are important for the success of local partnership groups, and why?

Children and Young People should have a say in the decisions made about them, and a conscious approach should be made to incorporate their diverse voices regardless of ability

Parent forums and SEND rights groups are essential voices for the child and parents, ensuring that the partnership is not purely education-based and that the child's and family's perspectives are represented. This is crucial for genuine coproduction and for decisions to be made based on children's real needs rather than administrative convenience or cost considerations.

School leaders are currently missing, but they are a necessary cohort in local partnership groups. Their participation is needed to fill a significant gap in representation and to ensure that schools are actively engaged in collaborative decision-making.

Professionals from health and social care (such as paediatricians, neurologists, and therapists) are important for providing objective expertise and holistic support, especially for children with complex or health-related needs. Their input helps ensure that decisions are evidence-based and that the full range of a child's needs is considered.

The inclusion of these diverse stakeholders is seen as vital for effective collaboration, transparency, and accountability within local partnership groups. It helps prevent the process from becoming insular or dominated by a single perspective, and it supports fairer, more credible, and more child-centred outcomes.

36. How can we build stronger collaboration and a culture of improvement through local SEND strategic plans?

Currently, the strategic plans are typically informed by representatives from health, education, and SEND teams. However, there is concern amongst our members that the usual contributors may not always have the required expertise, and it is recommended that a broader range of voices, including those with direct experience and expertise in SEND, be included. The importance of including parent-led groups and actual neurodivergent adults and young people is crucial, as they can provide deep understanding of needs and practical insights from their lived experience. It is also with mentioning that currently, school leaders are often missing from local partnership groups, but their participation is necessary to fill a significant gap in representation and to ensure that schools are actively engaged in collaborative decision-making.

Another current issue is that local partnerships lack clear terms of reference and accountability mechanisms, so the best laid plans on paper are never actually executed. We as a Forum have found ourselves stuck in an endless cycle of being asked to contribute to SEND strategic plans which go nowhere, and the same conversations are repeated every time there is a staffing change at the Local Authority's senior management team. We must ensure that everyone understands their purpose and expectations around making the system robust and providing continuity despite staffing changes. We would also welcome strengthening inspection and accountability through updated Ofsted and CQC frameworks, including the introduction of report cards to consistently evaluate inclusion and outcomes.

We also recommend the creation of an online library of best practice and inclusion resources, so that all schools have access to effective strategies and can use them to become more inclusive. This is intended to support a culture of improvement by making evidence-based resources widely available.

Forums and networks for SENCOs should be structured to encourage sharing of learning and experience, and that collaboration should be supported as part of their job roles. In fact, SENCOs should be part of the senior leadership team to ensure that inclusion is prioritized and adequately resourced.

Effective collaboration and improvement also require investment in workforce capacity, training, and retention. Without this, expectations on mainstream settings will increase without the ability to deliver.

By implementing these approaches, local SEND strategic plans can create a collaborative, inclusive, and continuously improving system that delivers high-quality support and better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

37. **What information, advice and guidance can best support children, young people and their families to ensure greater fairness across the system?**

It starts with consistent and properly funded SENDIAS Services, which are currently highly varied in their offering and capacity-led depending on location. Standardising and properly funding these services is essential for fairness.

Parent forums are also a key resource for families, but again, as with the case of SENDIASS, the White Paper lacks detail in what level of funding will be made available and what it will cover. Proper funding and support for these forums is crucial for ensuring that family voices are heard and that parents can access peer support and advocacy.

Effective support requires access to a broad range of professionals, including educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists (SaLTs), occupational therapists (OTs), and staff fully trained in SEND needs (including anxiety. EBSNA and trauma). All school staff must have substantial and continuous training.

Families and professionals should also have access to holistic, neuro-affirmative approaches, with all relevant information for each child digitised in one place for easy access and coordination.

There is also an increased need for independent bodies to assess and oversee support, as well as for clear accountability and transparency. Our members expressed limited confidence in school-level complaint handling and called for third-party or tribunal-level recourse to ensure fairness and impartiality.

Families will also need clear information about how the new system will work, including pathways, available support, and regular updates on processes such as waiting lists. Transparency around documents, learning plans, and external professionals is also required. Half termly meetings and reliable contact with SEN officers, as well as inclusion in all meetings about the child, are seen as important for families to feel involved and supported.

Legal requirements for parental involvement in developing support plans (such as ISPs) and legal accountability for these plans are also considered necessary to ensure that families are genuinely involved and that support is enforceable.

In summary, the most effective information, advice, and guidance have to be consistent, well-funded, holistic, transparent, and accessible, with strong independent oversight and genuine parental involvement at every stage.

38. Do you agree that a SEND specialist (e.g. a SENCO) should sit on the school complaint panel, when the complaint relates to SEND support and provision? Please explain why.

We strongly agree that a SEND specialist should sit on a complaint panel when the issue relates to SEND provision. This is considered essential because SEND cases require specialist knowledge of legal duties and provision standards. General panels may lack understanding of complex needs and statutory requirements, so having a SEND specialist ensures decisions are informed, fair, and grounded in practice.

The SEND specialist must be independent and not directly involved in the case. Their role should be to provide objective expertise, not to defend the setting. This independence is seen as crucial for improving the quality of decision-making, increasing parental confidence in the process, and enhancing the fairness and credibility of outcomes.

However, we are concerned that local SENCOs or school staff may not be neutral due to existing relationships within the school, which could compromise impartiality. Therefore, complaints and accountability should happen through a third party and not rely solely on local SENCOs or school relationships.

Also, many SENCOs have not received the appropriate training in terms of legal rights and dispute resolution, so the definition of a SEND expert needs to be clear and may vary depending on the nature of the complaint.

39. **This consultation outlines a series of measures intended to reform the SEND system. Some of these measures have already been finalised, and this is clearly indicated within the document. With this in mind, is there anything further you would like to contribute to help inform the remaining proposals that are still under consideration?**

We're seriously worried that parts of these reforms have already been decided without listening to families like ours. It feels like this isn't a real consultation, and that makes us scared for our children's future.

We don't feel confident about Individual Support Plans (ISPs). They aren't as clear or enforceable as EHCPs, and we don't know what happens if a school doesn't deliver on what's promised. Parents need to know they have real rights and routes to challenge things if support isn't there.

Funding needs to be fair and transparent. The Inclusive Mainstream Fund doesn't look like enough, and if it's not given out per pupil, it might punish schools that try to include everyone. We need proper funding so inclusion can actually happen, not just be talked about.

Parent involvement can't just be a tick-box. We want the law to guarantee that parents help shape ISPs, get regular updates, and always know what support options are out there. We need to be at the table for our children.

It's not just about ticking off policies. You actually need to ask and listen to children, young people, and families to know if inclusion is working, instead of relying on Ofsted reports or paperwork.

We're gutted that learning disability isn't mentioned in the new priorities, and we think the curriculum desperately needs an overhaul so that all children are included, even those who won't do standard tests.

There's nothing about how you'll keep teachers and TAs on board or help them want to work with SEND children. Most teachers aren't trained or supported to teach our kids, and no one's talking about changing that culture.

Schools need to change what and how they teach so everyone is supported. Where's the curriculum review? What about staff-to-child ratios? Without big changes, most schools simply can't support SEND children properly.

We like the idea of a single, digital record for each child, but many families don't have access to digital tools. How will we be included in these processes if we can't get online?

Lots of real-life scenarios are ignored: how will children with challenging behaviours be supported? What about home-educated kids, children with PDA, or those who need emotional support in busy classrooms? These aren't just minor details—they're our daily reality.

We don’t know how ISPs or funding will work for children in alternative provision, home education, or residential placements. Who’s going to be responsible for making sure they get what they need?

Staff training and early intervention are great, but they’re not enough. We need more well-trained staff, with proper support, so our children get what they need when they need it. Inclusion won’t work if it’s not properly funded and resourced.

We don’t support one-size-fits-all support packages. Our children are unique, with different needs that change over time. Support has to be based on real assessments and evidence, not what’s easiest or cheapest to provide.

Any changes that weaken legal rights or make it harder to challenge decisions are a huge step backwards. Families don’t fight for support because we want to, but because too often our children’s needs are ignored. The current law is fine—what’s missing is accountability and consequences when it’s not followed.

In the end, it’s simple: does the system give our children what they need, when they need it, so they can learn and thrive? That’s what matters.

Please, listen to us—really listen—and make changes that work for all families.

Waltham Forest Parent Forum

Collated by Korina Gerolazou