



PARENTS OPENING DOORS (PODS) PARENT CARER FORUM SEND REFORMS RESPONSE: May 2026

Summary of Family Feedback on the “Every Child Achieving & Thriving Consultation”

“Together we can Make A Difference”.

PODS Parent Carer Forum is the formally recognised, independent peer-led organisation, founded in 2008, representing and involving families of Children and Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), aged 0-25years.

Parent Participation and Involvement

Is when parent carers and professionals work together, recognising each other’s knowledge, to make informed decisions about services that make the best use of resources.

This means that services can better meet the needs of families with children & young people with disabilities and additional needs, so resources are not wasted on services which parents and families do not take up.

Effective parent participation happens when parents have conversations with and work alongside professionals, in order to co-design, develop and improve services.

Working with parent carers and family’s helps professionals to understand what needs to happen to develop services that meet families’ needs and also helps parent carers understand the complexity involved and the challenges faced by the professionals who have to bring about that change. Working together and sharing knowledge enables parent carers and professionals to find solutions that work.

This response represents the experiences of 180 parent carers, gathered through discussions, social media engagement, workshops at PODS Hub, discussions at events, strategic rep board, phone calls, emails and wider community work in schools and legacy reporting from the PINS Project.

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Core Response (Paragraph 1-10).

1. Loss of Legal Rights and Accountability

Families overwhelmingly fear that the reforms remove or weaken statutory protections that currently exist through EHCPs. Key concerns include:

Loss of enforceable rights if EHCPs are replaced with non-statutory Individual Support Plans (ISPs).

Reduced ability to challenge decisions, with appeals becoming narrower or unavailable and how this will work, with complaints direct to school, how will these be monitored and again accountable. Will a SEND governor truly be able to be impartial.

Existing rights are already routinely ignored, so removing legal recourse would leave families with no mechanism to secure provision.

Accountability gaps: without legal duties, schools and LAs may not deliver what is written in plans.

This is the single strongest and most consistent theme across all responses.

Families tell us that they need the accountability that an EHCP provides, and do not have the confidence of the proposed ISP system.

2. Fears About the New Three Tier ISP System

Families are deeply sceptical about the proposed ISP tiers:

Concern that complex children will be forced into predefined “boxes” as part of the specialist support parameters that don’t reflect individual needs. Some children fall into more than one of these support parameters and what will happen in this case.

ISPs seen as a barrier to accessing intensive support, rather than a pathway and at what stage will a pathway begin.

Concern that if an issue is seen at home, and not at school – how will these needs to be identified and families believed.

Worry that children who would previously qualify for an EHCP will be downgraded into lower tier plans with fewer rights. Families are understandably worried about the Y6-Y7 transition process and whilst a primary is a nurturing environment, a secondary is completely different.

Anxiety that the system will be used to ration support, not improve it and families will have further fights and hoops to jump through to access.

What support will be available without a diagnosis ‘label’ that fits into the specialist support parameters.

It is clear that families need legal protection, and not just reassurances.

ISPs should not replace EHCPs where they are needed and the assessment process needs to be clear and short.

Information and outcomes in ISPs need to be enforceable and families need to have trust in a system to support their child, and limit bureaucracy.

Need to ensure accountability and documentation needs clarity and updated to meet needs of the child/young person.

3. Mainstream Inclusion Without Resources

Families do not oppose inclusion in principle — but they strongly oppose forced inclusion without capacity:

Children already struggling in mainstream will be pushed further into unsuitable settings.

“More money for mainstream” does not equal more trained staff, more stability, or more specialist input. Families don’t feel there is enough investment in their schools to meet the complexity of needs of the children.

Schools are already unable to deliver what is in current EHCPs; giving them more responsibility without resources is seen as setting them up to fail. Families tell us that even with EHCPs their children’s needs are not met and families are calling for more transparency around how the funding is spent (on their child).

Risk of increased trauma for children placed in environments that cannot meet their needs. The emotional impact for children who cannot attend school or who are expected to attend without adequate or appropriate support in place.

Inclusion bases or units need adequate funding (for staff and resources, specialised therapies) and accountability and there must be a whole school culture of inclusion where these bases are set up.

They cannot become bases for ‘holding’ children as a stop-gap measure.

National standards are an important factor, and specialist staffing to support appropriately and safely.

4. Workforce and Capacity Crisis

Families repeatedly highlight that the reforms ignore the severe workforce shortages across:

Educational psychologists, Specialist teachers, Therapists, SENDCOs, Support staff

Concerns include:

The system cannot deliver the proposed reforms with the current workforce.

SENDCOs will be overwhelmed if statutory responsibility shifts to schools.

Teachers themselves have expressed opposition to major reforms without increased support.

SEND Reforms should focus on workforce investment and concrete plans for training and support to ensure a futureproof workforce.

5. Funding Pressures and Cost Cutting Fears

Families believe the reforms are driven by financial pressures, not children's needs:

Parents fear the reforms aim to reduce costs by reducing access to specialist provision and legal entitlements.

Concern that mainstream schools will be expected to deliver specialist support without adequate funding.

Investment in early intervention and support is important and this needs to be ringfenced and accounted for.

It's important that specialist settings remain and routes to access this are clear for all concerned – families and professionals alike and these settings are needs led.

6. Loss of Specialist Provision and Placement Options

Children who need specialist or independent placements feel as if they are being denied due to cost or lack of places and this leads to expensive and lengthy and stressful tribunals. Where this is because of local sufficiency there must be better planning for commissioning in place.

Under the new system, many of these children may no longer be classed as "complex", leaving them unsupported in mainstream.

This risks long term harm, disengagement from education, and poorer life outcomes.

Worryingly for some families are reaching crisis before support is put in place. Whilst we understand the rhetoric that support is needs led rather than diagnosis led, it means that if needs are not identified appropriately, it's difficult to understand provision needed.

It's important that mental health is seen as an increasingly important element of the SEND support landscape and support in staffing and specialist care offers (including experts in hand) must be included.

7. Emotional and Practical Impact on Families

Families describe the current system as:

A constant fight, Traumatic, Exhausting, Inconsistent, Unfair

They fear the reforms will:

Increase conflict, increase trauma, Reduce trust.

Make advocacy harder.

Leave children without the support they need to thrive.

Several families shared personal stories of children who are already struggling, and who would be further harmed if legal protections or specialist support were removed.

It's important for families to be able to speak up and be involved. If they are not, it's important to find out why and how they want to be communicated with. It is not fair for them only to be heard at complaints and tribunals stages.

Development of a Charter to support coproduction and parent carer engagement is a key method to develop trust.

8. Concerns About the Children's Wellbeing Schools Bill

Families also link the reforms to the proposed restrictions on elective home education:

Parents may lose the ability to withdraw a child from a harmful or unsuitable setting.

LAs could override parental judgement about what is in the child's best interests.

Combined with reduced legal rights in school, families fear being trapped in systems that cannot meet need.

9. Transition

Transition to adult services and post-16 education remains a key area requiring improvement, with a clear need for earlier, more coordinated planning that prioritises long-term outcomes such as employment, independent living, and community participation.

Families still experience fragmented support and a lack of clarity around pathways beyond school, particularly at key transition points (Year 9 onwards and post-18).

There is a need for stronger collaboration between education providers, health and social care services, and local authorities to ensure continuity of provision, as well as greater access to high-quality, inclusive further education, training, and supported internships.

Embedding person-centred planning, improving information and advice, and ensuring that adult services are prepared to meet needs in a timely way are essential to achieving more successful and aspirational transitions.

10. Overall Message from Families

Across all responses, the message is consistent and powerful:

Families want reform — but not reform that removes rights, reduces accountability, or forces children into unsuitable settings without the resources to support them.

They fear the proposals will:

Reduce support, reduce rights, increase trauma, Increase conflict.

Prioritise cost cutting over children’s welfare.

And ultimately, they worry the reforms will worsen outcomes, not improve them.

Wider Experiences of families in Telford & Wrekin

As part of our discussions with families and gathering experiences through our annual survey process, we asked families a key question:

“In your view, what do you think could make things easier for your family right now”?

Parent carers identified a number of consistent themes around what would help ease pressures on families at this time. These reflect a need for timely support, better communication, flexibility for working families, and services that genuinely understand and meet children’s individual needs.

Faster access to assessments, diagnoses and support

One of the strongest messages was the need shorter waiting times for ASD, ADHD, SEMH and other assessments, with many families describing waits of months or years.

Parents felt earlier diagnosis and intervention would prevent escalation, reduce family stress, and help schools and services understand children’s needs sooner.

Families also highlighted frustration at needing a diagnosis before accessing meaningful support, particularly for children who are masking or coping academically.

EHCP processes and education support

Many respondents said things would be easier with:

Timely EHCP assessments, reviews and amendments, within statutory timescales.

EHCP provision being consistently delivered, monitored and enforced.

Less need for parents to “fight”, chase responses, or resort to complaints and tribunals.

Parents called for greater SEND understanding in mainstream schools particularly around behaviour as communication, reasonable adjustments, and mental health needs.

Better transitions between settings (early years to school, primary to secondary, and post-16) were frequently requested.

Improved communication and being listened to

Families consistently asked for:

Clearer, more joined-up communication between education, health and social care.

Professionals who listen to parent carers, value their expertise, and involve them meaningfully in decisions.

Transparent feedback, timely responses to emails, and clearer information about processes, roles and thresholds.

Poor communication was often described as a key source of distress and mistrust.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing support

Many families said access to appropriate mental health support for children and young people would make a significant difference, particularly during crises.

Parents noted services often felt rigid, neurotypical in approach, or inaccessible for neurodivergent children.

Support for parent carer mental health, emotional wellbeing, and loneliness was also highlighted as important.

Support that fits working families and real life

Working parents highlighted barriers such as

Appointments, groups and forums held only during school or working hours.

Lack of evening, weekend or flexible provision.

Families asked for services to better reflect the realities of work, transport limitations, and caring responsibilities.

Access to social care, respite and short breaks

Many families said things would be easier with:

More respite, PA support and short breaks, especially for children with complex, medical or PMLD needs.

Services that are genuinely inclusive and appropriate, rather than one-size-fits-all or unsuitable environments.

Clearer criteria and fairer decision-making around eligibility and outcomes-based budgets.

Practical support and information

Parents requested:

Better signposting and guidance, including step-by-step explanations of SEND pathways and available support.

More practical advice on managing behaviours, routines, sleep, sensory needs, and everyday challenges.

Easier access to community activities, SEND-friendly provision, and transport-accessible opportunities.

References

Working Together Charter:

https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/info/1/home/112/telford_and_wrekin_send_working_together_charter

PODS Parent Carer Forum:

<https://www.podstelford.org/forum/about-the-forum/>

Thank You

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all Parent Carers who took the time to participate in the SEND Reform White Paper consultation. Your insights, experiences, and honest feedback are invaluable in helping to shape a system that better supports children and young people with SEND.

By sharing your voices, you have contributed to strengthening future provision and ensuring that services reflect the real needs of families. Your engagement and commitment to improving outcomes are greatly appreciated, and we are truly grateful for your continued support.

Thank You

Jayne Stevens, Strategic Lead, Parent Carer Forum

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