

SOUTHAMPTON PARENT CARER FORUM



ANNUAL SURVEY RESULTS 2026

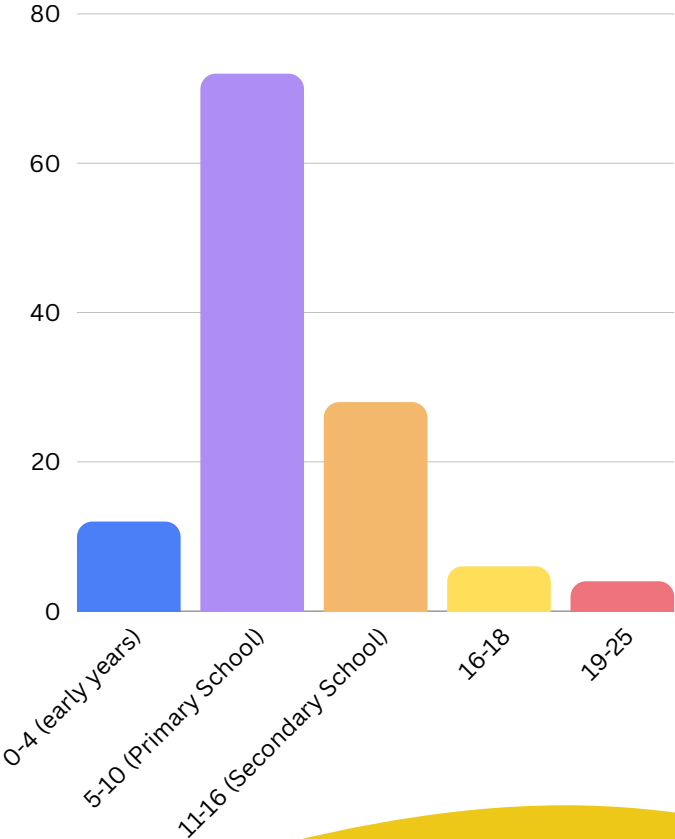
ANNUAL SURVEY RESULTS

This report presents the findings from our recent Southampton Parent Carer Forum survey, designed to capture the experiences, views, and priorities of families, professionals, and young people across Southampton’s SEND system. The survey focused on key areas including the Local Offer, the Education SEND Team, social care short breaks, transitions, the ongoing SEND reforms, and the support provided by the Southampton Parent Carer Forum.

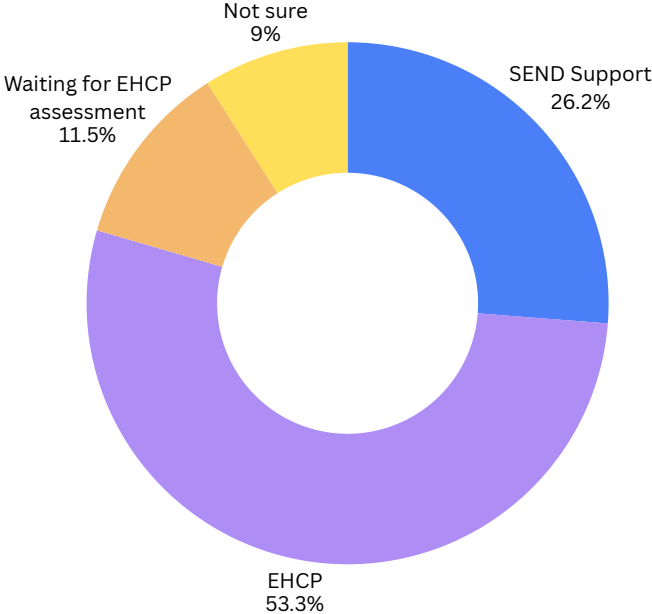
A total of 195 responses were received, including feedback from 122 parent carers, 58 professionals, and 15 young people. The range of responses has provided valuable insight into what is working well across services, where families and professionals are experiencing challenges, and what improvements people would like to see moving forward.

The purpose of this survey was not only to gather feedback, but to ensure that lived experience remains central to the development and improvement of SEND services in Southampton. The voices shared throughout this report highlight the importance of accessible support, effective communication, timely intervention, and genuine co-production between families, young people, professionals, and services.

Parent Question - How old is your child/ young person with SEND?



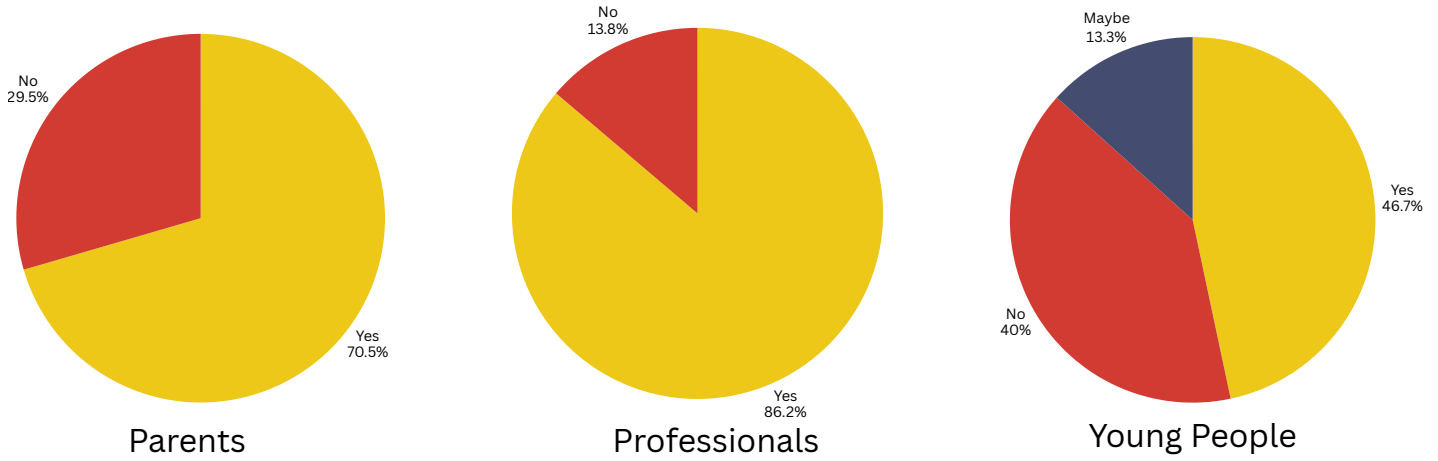
Parent Question - Does your child/young person currently have?



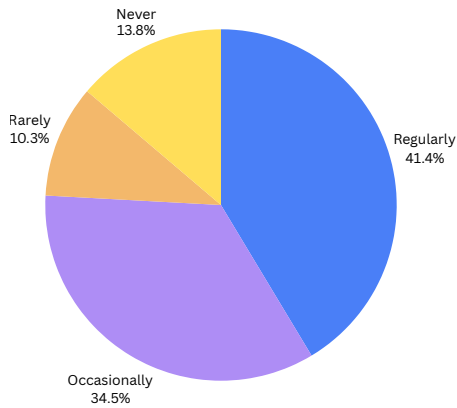
LOCAL OFFER

The Local Offer plays an important role in helping families, young people, and professionals understand what support, services, and opportunities are available across Southampton for children and young people with SEND.

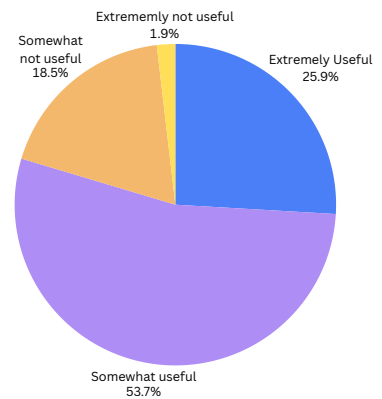
Question - Before today, were you aware of the local offer?



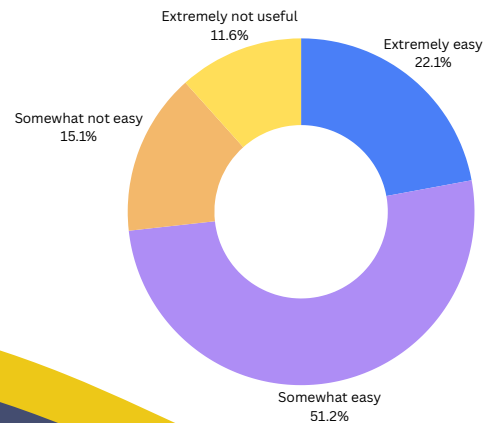
Professional Question - Do you signpost families to the local offer?



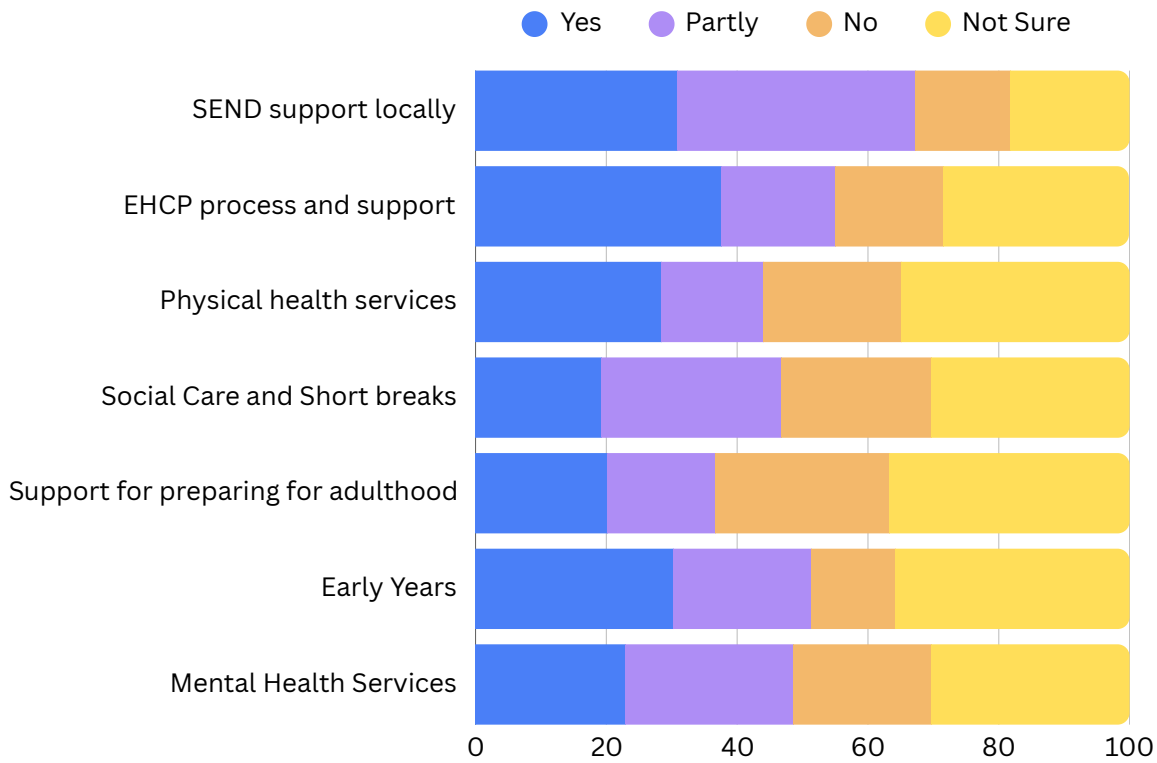
Professional Question - How useful do you find the local offer when supporting families?



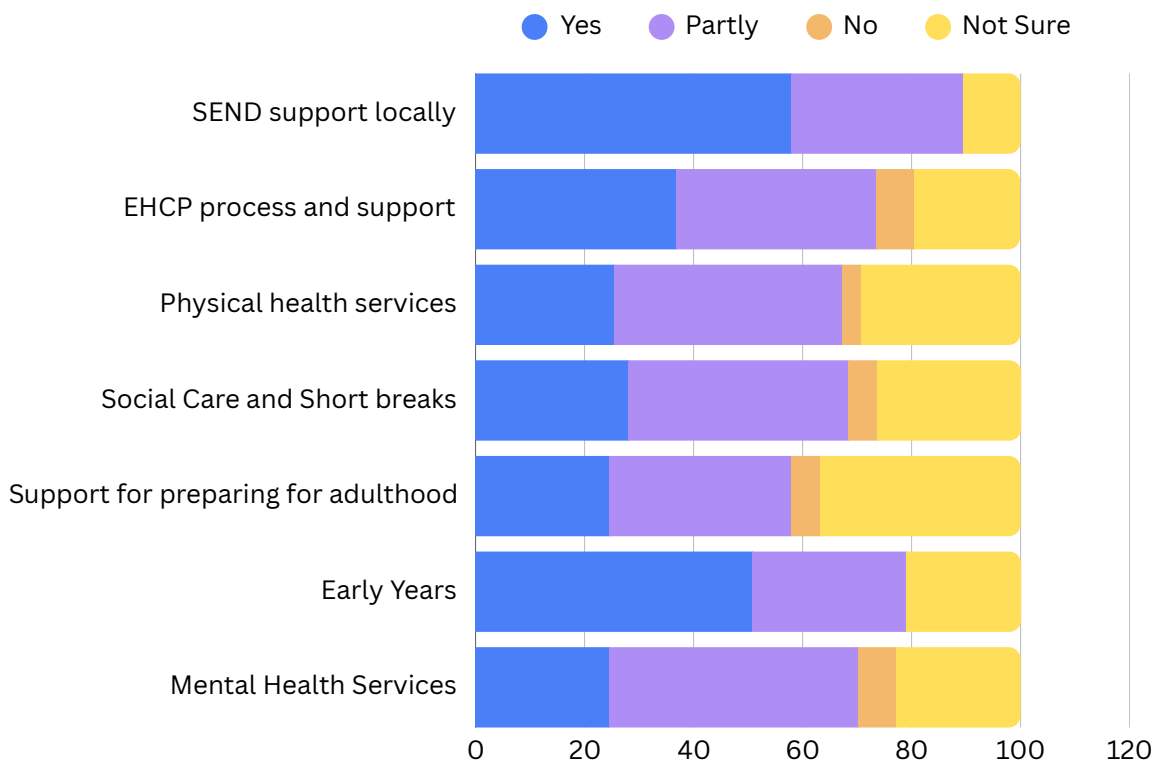
Parent Question - How easy was it to find the information you needed?



Parent Question - Did the local offer clearly explain?



Professional Question - In your view, does the local offer clearly provide information on?



Summary of responses

The survey findings suggest that both parent carers and professionals felt the Local Offer provides clearer information in some areas than others, with significant variation across different services.

- SEND support locally and Early Years information received the most positive feedback from both parent carers and professionals.
- Professionals generally reported greater confidence in the Local Offer than families.
- Parent carers were more likely to respond with “partly” or “not sure,” suggesting information can be difficult to find or understand.
- Physical health services, social care and short breaks, mental health services, and preparing for adulthood were identified as areas needing improvement.
- The findings highlight a need for clearer, more accessible, and better promoted information across the Local Offer, particularly around specialist and transition support.

Parents Question - What improvements would you like to see on the local offer website.

Summary of responses

- Families want the Local Offer website to be easier to find, easier to use, clearer, and more practical.
- Many respondents were unaware the website existed, highlighting a need for better promotion and advertising, particularly to SEND families.
- Families reported difficulties navigating the website due to unclear layouts, outdated links, large amounts of information, and excessive jargon.
- Respondents requested more step-by-step guidance around accessing support, including EHCP processes, complaints, school support, short breaks, respite, transport, holiday support, and post-16/adulthood support.
- Families wanted more detailed information about local services, clubs, activities, support groups, parent courses, mental health support, housing, ARFID, EBSA, EOTIS/EOTIC, Tourette’s, and support for children with high care needs.
- Some respondents felt the website was too autism-focused and should better reflect the wider range of SEND needs and disabilities across the city.

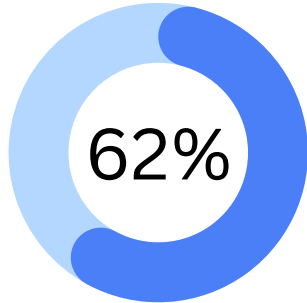
Make it much more user friendly. Less jargon. More contact for support in all areas

I think the website is great but I wasn’t aware of the website until today.

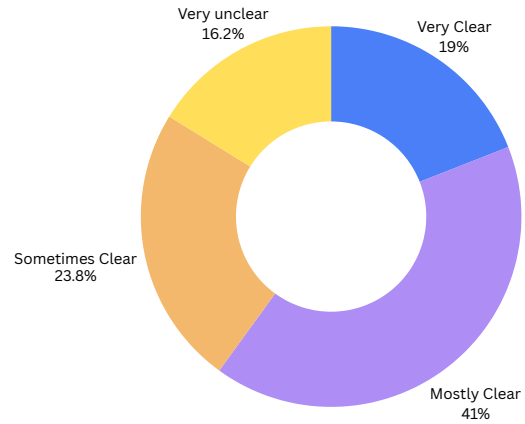
SEND EDUCATION TEAM

This section is just based on the families voice.

Question - Have you had any contact with the council SEND education team? 62% said yes



Question - How clear was communication from the SEND team?



Question - What is working well when dealing with the SEND team? What could be improved? And do you have a possible solution?

Co Production mostly worked well when we got there.

Give expectation of when you can expect to hear. Mostly; better coordination between internal SCC teams so there are no gaps for parents to navigate.

I felt they were very supportive in getting EHCPs for my children

Genuinely caring and dedicated people

I feel they want the best for my child but are overwhelmed and unable to offer the support, advice and guidance that parents need.

Too many different services, its hard to navigate and find out who you need to talk to and what questions you need to ask.

Question - What has worked well when dealing with the SEND team?

Summary of responses

- Positive experiences often centred around clear communication, prompt responses, and having a named or contactable member of staff.
- Families valued staff who were understanding, honest, friendly, and showed genuine care for children and young people.
- Support with EHCPs, school transport, exam provisions, referrals, therapies, Portage, and signposting to other services were highlighted as helpful.
- Several respondents said face-to-face meetings and direct phone contact were the most effective ways to resolve issues.
- Some families felt listened to and appreciated co-production approaches, classroom adjustments, ELSA support, and realistic advice.
- A number of responses recognised that staff appeared overwhelmed despite wanting the best for families.
- Responses also highlighted inconsistency in experiences, with outcomes often depending on the individual case officer or team member involved.

Question - What could be improved? And do you have a possible solution?

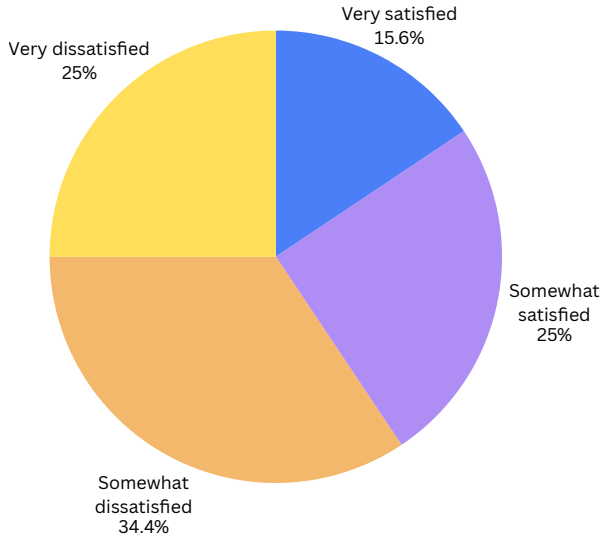
Summary of responses

- Communication was the most common area identified for improvement, with families reporting delayed responses to emails and calls, difficulties contacting teams, and a lack of regular updates.
- Many respondents highlighted concerns around EHCP processes, including missed statutory deadlines, delays, and a need for clearer step-by-step guidance and timelines.
- Families wanted better coordination between services and council teams to reduce confusion and prevent parents having to navigate gaps in support themselves.
- Several responses focused on the importance of professionals listening to parent carers and recognising lived experience, including understanding masking, mental health, and individual needs.
- There were repeated calls for earlier intervention, increased support, and improved access to services, including youth groups, SEN schools, home education support, and transition support into adulthood.
- Respondents suggested practical improvements such as online tracking systems, clearer written communication, callback phone systems, named contacts, and easier access to case officers.
- Some families expressed concerns about services not following SEND law or statutory guidance and felt trust and transparency needed to improve.
- A smaller number of responses highlighted positive experiences or felt no improvements were needed.

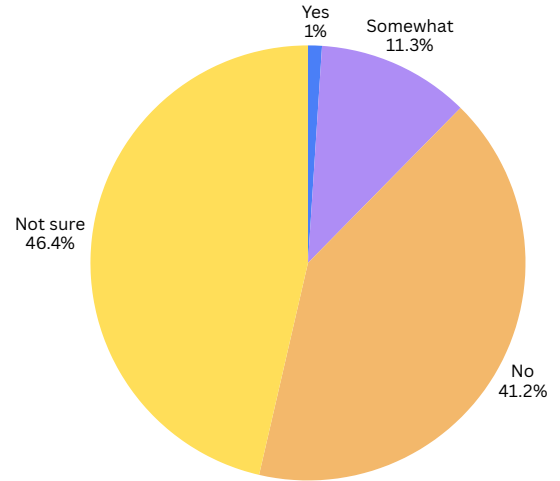
SHORT BREAKS

This section is just based on the families voice.

Question - How satisfied are you with short break provision?



Question - Do you feel there is enough short break opportunities available in Southampton?



Question - What improvements would you like to see in the short breaks or social care support?

More short breaks for all children not just for families in crisis

For children who meet criteria such as adopted/EHCP/ Higher DLA, there should be more respite care available.

Clearer guidance on how to access, even most professionals don't seem to know, and it took nearly a year of being passed from pillar to post before we finally found the right place

Local availability and offers for siblings

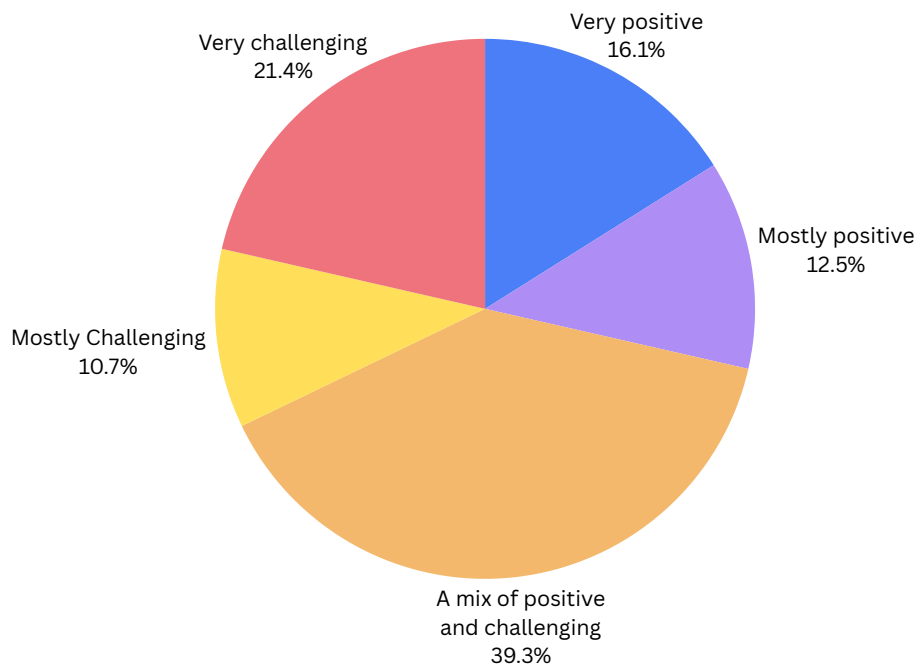
Easier to access, better eligibility criteria, more options

Summary of responses

- Families wanted short breaks and social care support to be easier to access, with clearer eligibility criteria and better information about what is available.
- Many respondents called for increased availability of short breaks, respite care, and SEND-friendly activities, particularly for children who do not meet crisis thresholds or are awaiting assessment.
- Parents highlighted the need for more flexible support that meets individual family needs, including support workers, transport, sibling inclusion, and a wider range of activities and providers.
- Several responses focused on improving communication, awareness, and guidance, with some families and professionals unsure what support existed or how to access it.
- Concerns were raised around restrictions on funding, lack of flexibility in how funding can be used, and difficulties arranging personal assistants and managing invoices.
- Families also wanted services to better recognise lived experience, listen to parent voice, and follow legal duties and statutory guidance.
- Staffing, funding, and the suitability of some provision were identified as ongoing challenges, alongside a need for more specialist and accessible support for children with complex needs.

TRANSITIONS

Question - How did your child's transition from early years to primary, primary to secondary or secondary to post 16 go?



Question - If you could change one thing about the transition process to improve it for families, what would it be?

Summary of responses

- Families consistently highlighted the need for earlier planning, better preparation, and more time to support successful transitions.
- Many respondents wanted increased transition opportunities such as extra visits, taster sessions, graduated starts, social stories, photographs, and opportunities to meet staff in advance.
- Better communication between schools, services, and families was a key theme, alongside the importance of parents and young people feeling listened to throughout the process.
- Respondents wanted stronger collaboration between early years settings, schools, SENCOs, and support services to ensure continuity of support and information sharing.
- Several families felt transitions should be more individualised, with schools taking greater time to understand children's needs, review EHCPs properly, and ensure placements are suitable.
- Concerns were raised about families having to "fight" for appropriate placements and support, particularly for children with higher levels of need.
- Families also highlighted the emotional impact of transitions and the importance of reassurance, consistency, staff training, and maintaining support beyond the early years.
- Overall, respondents wanted transition processes to be more child-centred, coordinated, and proactive, with clear planning and support from the earliest stages.

Question - How did the transition impact you and your family emotionally? (for example; stress, anxiety, confidence, feeling supported?)

Summary of responses

- The transition process had a significant emotional impact on many families, with stress, anxiety, worry, and emotional exhaustion being the most commonly reported experiences.
- Many parents described feeling unsupported, unheard, or left to manage transitions alone, particularly where communication or planning was poor.
- Several families reported increased anxiety, emotional dysregulation, meltdowns, school refusal, EBSA, reduced attendance, and worsening mental health for both children and parents.
- Some responses highlighted the wider impact on family life, including sleep difficulties, physical illness, relationship breakdowns, financial pressures, and parents reducing work hours to support their child.
- Positive experiences were linked to schools and professionals who provided enhanced transition support, including extra visits, social stories, regular communication, and proactive planning.
- Families consistently reported feeling more reassured when settings listened, understood individual needs, and worked collaboratively with parents.
- Overall, the findings show that well-planned and supportive transitions can significantly reduce anxiety and build confidence, while poor transitions can have long-lasting emotional and educational impacts on children and families.

**Stress, Anxiety,
confidence, low
attendance**

**More outbursts and
emotional collapse**

**My son transitioned very well.
The school especially made so
much effort to have extra
transition sessions.**

**Always masses
of stress around
transport**

**There was anxiety and lack
of confidence for my son
and a worry about what was
coming.**

**Often felt
attacked rather
than supported**

CONCLUSION

The findings within this report highlight both the strengths and the ongoing challenges experienced by children and young people with SEND, their families, and professionals across Southampton. While there were examples of positive practice, supportive schools, caring professionals, and effective communication, the overall picture shows many families continue to experience significant stress, anxiety, delays, inconsistency, and difficulty accessing the right support at the right time.

Families consistently highlighted the importance of clear communication, timely support, meaningful co-production, and services that genuinely listen to and work alongside parent carers and young people. Concerns were raised across multiple areas including EHCP processes, transitions, short breaks, social care support, and the proposed SEND reforms. Many families expressed fears around losing legal protections, worsening access to support, and increasing pressures on already stretched schools and services.

The emotional impact on families was also evident throughout the survey responses. Many parents described feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, unheard, or left to “fight” for support, while children and young people experienced increased anxiety, emotional distress, school avoidance, and reduced confidence during periods of change or unmet need.

Despite these challenges, families also identified what works well. Positive experiences were often linked to early intervention, proactive communication, strong relationships with trusted professionals, enhanced transition support, flexible approaches, and settings that took time to understand individual needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings within this report, the following recommendations are proposed:

Local Offer Recommendations

1. **Improve Accessibility and Navigation** - Develop a clearer, more user-friendly Local Offer with improved search functions, step-by-step guidance, timelines, and information organised in a way that is easier for families and professionals to navigate.
2. **Increase Awareness and Co-Produced Information** - Improve promotion of the Local Offer across schools, health services, and community settings while ensuring information is regularly updated and co-produced with families, young people, and professionals.

Social Care and Short Breaks Recommendations

1. **Improve Access and Clarity Around Short Breaks** - Provide clearer eligibility criteria, improved information about available support, and more transparent pathways into social care and short breaks services, including support for families awaiting diagnosis or assessment.
2. **Expand Flexible and Inclusive Provision** - Increase the availability of SEND-friendly short breaks, activities, respite, transport support, sibling-inclusive provision, and flexible funding options that reflect the individual needs of families.

Transition Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Early and Individualised Transition Planning** - Ensure transition planning starts earlier and includes enhanced support such as social stories, extra visits, phased transitions, and opportunities for children and families to build familiarity with new settings and staff.
2. **Improve Communication and Multi-Agency Working During Transitions** - Strengthen collaboration between early years settings, schools, colleges, services, and families to ensure information is shared effectively and children's needs are understood and supported consistently throughout transition periods.

SEND Team Recommendation

1. **Improve Responsiveness and Consistency Within the SEND Team** - Increase consistency in communication, response times, and case management across the SEND Team. Families highlighted the importance of having clear points of contact, timely updates, transparent decision-making, and professionals who listen to and work collaboratively with parent carers and young people.

The voices shared throughout this survey provide valuable insight into both the pressures families are facing and the changes that could make the greatest difference. Continued collaboration between families, schools, services, and strategic leaders will be essential in creating a SEND system where children and young people are able to feel safe, supported, included, and able to thrive.