

# Family Feedback on the Proposed SEND Reforms - May 2026

## Introduction

During our recent consultation work with families across Southampton, Southampton Parent Carer Forum gathered feedback about the proposed national SEND reforms and the potential impact these changes may have on children and young people with SEND and their families.

Families shared their views through:

- Conversations at SEND Get Togethers
- Workshops and engagement events
- Online feedback opportunities
- Direct discussions with parent carers
- Survey responses and consultation activities

The feedback highlighted significant levels of concern, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future of SEND support locally and nationally.

While some families acknowledged that parts of the reforms could offer opportunities for improvement, the overwhelming message was that families fear support could become harder to access and legal protections weakened.

## Overall Confidence in the Proposed Reforms

Families were asked:

“How confident are you that the proposed changes will improve support for children with SEND?”

The responses demonstrated low overall confidence in the reforms.

Confidence Levels

- 25% were extremely not confident
- 28.6% were somewhat not confident
- 29.5% felt neutral
- 13.4% were somewhat confident
- 3.6% were extremely confident

This means over half of respondents expressed a lack of confidence that the reforms would improve support for children and young people with SEND.

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## Key Themes Raised by Families

### 1. Fear of Losing EHCPs and Legal Protections

The strongest concern raised throughout the consultation was the fear that Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) may become harder to access or lose their current legal protections.

Families repeatedly expressed concerns that:

- EHCPs may only be available for the “most complex” children
- Legal rights and enforceable provision could be weakened
- Schools may be expected to meet needs without adequate funding or statutory protections
- Parents may have less ability to challenge decisions

Many families described already having to “fight” for support and worried the reforms would increase these barriers further.

Families told us:

“I already have to jump through hoops for my children to be noticed, this will just make it harder.”

“Children with SEND in mainstream are going to lose their EHCP and legal rights and won’t be supported.”

### 2. Children Falling Through the Gaps

Families consistently raised concerns that more children may go unsupported if thresholds for help increase.

Parents described current systems as already stretched and difficult to navigate. Many worried that children without diagnoses, without EHCPs, or with “lower level” needs may struggle even more to access support.

Key concerns included:

- Delays in identifying needs
- Reduced early intervention
- Long waiting lists



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- Lack of specialist provision
- Difficulty accessing professional input

Families told us:

“More children will fall through the system.”

“There is already not enough provision as it currently is.”

### 3. Pressure on Mainstream Schools

Families repeatedly recognised the efforts of individual school staff but raised concerns that mainstream schools are already under significant pressure.

Parents questioned whether schools currently have:

- Enough staffing
- Sufficient training
- Access to specialist advice
- Appropriate funding
- Time and capacity to meet increasing levels of need

Many worried the reforms may place even more responsibility onto schools without increasing the resources needed to deliver meaningful support.

Families told us:

“Not enough TAs in school to carry out support.”

“Mainstream schools do not have the staffing, training or resources needed to meet needs properly.”

### 4. Concerns About Funding and Cost-Cutting

A significant number of families felt the reforms appeared financially driven rather than needs-led.

Parents worried:

- Funding pressures may reduce support available
- Cost-saving may become prioritised over children’s needs
- Children may be pushed into unsuitable placements

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- Schools may be expected to “manage” needs without sufficient funding

Families also expressed concerns that reforms may shift responsibility without addressing the underlying lack of investment within the SEND system.

Families told us:

“It mostly seems to be tinkering around the edges.”

“The funding is insufficient for the scale of the challenge.”

## 5. Support for Children Without EHCPs

Many parents highlighted that children without EHCPs already struggle to access consistent support.

Families expressed concern that:

- Children may not receive help until they reach crisis point
- Schools may have inconsistent approaches
- Support may become more dependent on individual school resources
- Access to therapies and specialist advice may reduce further

Several parents felt the reforms risk creating a greater divide between children with statutory plans and those without.

## 6. Concerns About EOTAS / EOTIC Provision

Families also raised concerns regarding:

- Lack of clarity around EOTAS/EOTIC provision
- Support for children unable to attend school due to anxiety, trauma, EBSA, or unmet needs
- Fear that children may be left without suitable education pathways

Parents stressed the importance of recognising that not all children can access traditional school environments safely or successfully.

## 7. Emotional Impact on Families

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Throughout the consultation, families described high levels of:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Exhaustion
- Uncertainty
- Fear for the future

Many parents explained they already spend significant time advocating for support and worried the reforms may increase this burden further.

Families frequently spoke about:

- Feeling unheard
- Having to continually “fight”
- Lack of trust in the wider system
- Fear that children’s needs may become less visible

Positive Points Raised

Although concerns dominated the feedback, some families did acknowledge that:

- There are positive intentions within parts of the reforms
- Earlier intervention could improve outcomes if properly funded
- Better joined-up working between services would be welcomed
- Improvements to consistency across areas could help families

However, families consistently stated that meaningful change would only happen if reforms are:

- Properly funded
- Co-produced with families
- Supported by workforce development
- Backed by legally enforceable protections

Summary of Main Concerns Raised

Families highlighted the following as the biggest worries regarding the proposed SEND reforms:

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- EHCPs becoming harder to access
- Legal protections being weakened or removed
- Children losing support due to funding pressures
- Increased pressure on mainstream schools
- More children “falling through the gaps”
- Lack of specialist staffing and training
- Reduced access to professional input
- Lack of clarity around EOTAS/EOTIC provision
- Fear of children being placed in unsuitable settings
- Increased burden on already exhausted families

## Conclusion

The feedback gathered through this consultation process demonstrates that many families currently lack confidence in the proposed SEND reforms.

Families are not opposed to change. However, they want reassurance that reforms will:

- Strengthen rather than weaken support
- Protect legal rights
- Improve access to early intervention
- Increase inclusion meaningfully
- Be properly funded
- Recognise the realities families are already experiencing

Families repeatedly stated that meaningful reform must be developed with families, not for families, and that lived experience must remain central to future SEND developments.

Southampton Parent Carer Forum will ensure the themes and concerns raised through this consultation work are reflected within our ongoing strategic discussions and responses regarding the proposed reforms.