



See Every Need Discussion Forum Report

2026 Report on the Schools White Paper

Report collated from information, suggestions, and the lived experiences of constituents and support services in Southend West and Leigh

8 April 2026



INTRODUCTION

In Southend West and Leigh, See Every Need has provided a number of opportunities for local families, charities, advocacy groups, schools, and healthcare workers to contribute to an ongoing discussion on SEND reform. After two events designed to directly inform and influence the Schools White Paper, the latest Discussion Forum brought previous contributors back to the table to comb through the Government's proposals, identify positives, suggest improvements, and raise questions.

I am grateful to everyone who gave their time, expertise and lived experience to contribute to the See Every Need Discussion Forum and subsequent engagement reflected in this report. Families, young people, school leaders, practitioners, and voluntary and community sector organisations across Southend West and Leigh were united in their willingness to engage constructively with the proposed reforms, often whilst themselves navigating a SEND system that places significant emotional, practical and financial strain on them.

This report brings together those voices in full. It does not present abstract opinion, but rather grounded insight into how the Schools White Paper will transform the SEND system currently experienced locally, where proposals look set to succeed, and where the Government's suggestions may fall short.

Broadly, See Every Need contributors welcomed the ambition of the Schools White Paper and the recognition that the current system is unsustainable. At the same time, they were clear that ambition alone will not deliver change unless reforms are underpinned by clarity, capacity, accountability, and sufficient investment at the point of delivery.

Whilst there was an understandable level of scepticism after years of unrealised ambition and promises, there was not a rejection of SEND reform. Instead, See Every Need contributors echoed a collective call to ensure that these reforms work in reality for those who rely on them most; particularly those children and young people with complex or less visible needs, families without the capacity to advocate endlessly, and the staff and services already operating at the limits of what they can do. The themes set out across the three sections of this report reflect a strong local consensus: that equity must be designed into the system itself across all tranches, layers, and services, and that no child should lose support, dignity, or opportunity as these reforms are implemented.

I submit this See Every Need report in that spirit: as a constructive contribution to national decision-making, rooted firmly in local experience right here in Southend West and Leigh.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David', is located below the main text. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.





Collaboration & Decision-Making

Across all contributions, there was strong consensus that collaboration must move beyond consultation and become embedded within accountability, decision-making, and legal protection. Families, schools, young people, and the voluntary sector consistently reported that current systems function only when parents are highly resourced, confident, or persistent. Participants emphasised that the reformed system must work for those with the least capacity, not rely on exceptional advocacy which at present has resulted in the best outcomes – and in some cases, the only outcomes.

Meaningful Participation of Children, Young People and Families

Participants strongly supported the principle of co-production but stressed that participation must be genuine, ongoing, and influential.

Key messages included:

- Children and young people must be involved directly in decision-making, including through:
 - SEND Youth Forums
 - College and post-16-based engagement
 - Transition planning into adulthood, considering any and all post-16 provision
- Engagement must extend beyond parents of younger children; young adults' voices are currently marginalised despite facing some of the most complex transitions.
- Families must be able to:
 - Easily and accessibly understand decisions
 - Influence plans effectively
 - Challenge outcomes through a clear legal process where necessary
- Concerns were raised that:
 - Engagement too often occurs after decisions are effectively made.
 - Families are expected to attend multiple meetings, complete complex documentation, and understand technical language (e.g. SMART targets) without adequate assistance.
 - Digital-only systems risk excluding families without access, confidence, or capacity.

See Every Need contributors clearly stated that participation builds trust *only* when families and young people can see what changed as a result of their involvement.



Accountability, Legal Rights, and Trust in the System

For anyone seriously looking to reform the SEND system, it will not be surprising that one of the biggest issues for so many is the need for clear and effective accountability.

For See Every Need respondents, there was much discussion around accountability specifically on:

- Individual Support Plans (ISPs)
- Transitional reviews of need
- Potential loss or replacement of EHCPs

Common questions that were reflected in the comments from many respondents that I believe need addressing included:

- Who is accountable for the quality of ISPs?
- What happens if parents disagree with an ISP?
- Where is the legal route to challenge an ISP, including tribunal access?
- What happens if a child loses an EHCP—and how can that decision be appealed?

Without these questions being addressed effectively in any Government proposal, contributors shared the concern that ISPs risk becoming unenforceable documents and families would subsequently lose legal protection without clarity on any available redress. There were also concerns that the regular reviews implemented before a young person transitions to the next key stage in their education could be used as a mechanism for reducing support (referred to by one respondent as “trimming the fat”), rather than safeguarding and adapting provision.

As such, See Every Need respondents shared the consensual view that any reformed system without clear, accessible routes to challenge is *not equitable*. Legal clarity for ISPs in all its forms, as well as alternative provisions and EHCPs is foundational and necessary, not optional or fluctuational depending on luck or geography.

Local Partnerships, Governance and System Simplification

The need for improved, or even basic, synergy between different bodies locally was a common theme throughout all See Every Need stages – whether that be a partnership between parents and education settings, these settings and the local authority, local health services and other SEND components, or a combination of these, respondents repeatedly made it clear that there had to be a far greater emphasis on these partnerships being effective, regular, and sustained.

Resultantly, See Every Need participants broadly supported strengthened local partnerships but warned against any fragmentation, duplication and over-complex governance structures.





They also noted that any SEND partnership boards should be fully and holistically inclusive of education, health, social care *and* the voluntary sector, which have in many parts of the UK, including Southend West and Leigh, plugged gaps that should never have materialised in the first place. SEND partnership boards should all be explicitly inclusive of therapists, mental health professionals, and specialist nurses so as to be applicable to the widest possible range of needs.

In the context of upcoming Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), it was suggested that a more streamlined arrangement could be devised, such as a singular SEND partnership board or Parent/Carer Forum (PCF) per area, which would help to reduce the likelihood of duplication of the same conversations across multiple boards.

Here in Southend West and Leigh, and indeed across the whole City, we are fortunate that there a number of strong, reliable, and invaluable resources for parents outside of the Local Authority and education setting. Indeed, throughout See Every Need, there has been strong recognition and commendation of the roles that PCFs, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, and SEND charities and peer-support networks have played in helping local families and young people.

However, concern was raised that commissioned charities are often drawn away from frontline support into administrative requirements, and that any Best Start Hubs or new partnerships cannot solely rely on this becoming reality, otherwise engagement structures risk burdening the very groups they rely on.

Local partnerships work best when roles, accountability and routes to influence are explicit and streamlined, and so any reform of the SEND system must make these compulsory and regulated across the UK, to avoid geographical variation in efficacy or standards.

In summary, See Every Need contributors strongly support the principle of shared decision-making as included in the Schools White Paper, but are clear that collaboration must be structural rather than symbolic. Families, young people, schools, and the voluntary sector consistently reported that participation without accountability risks becoming tokenistic, particularly where legal rights, challenge routes and influence over outcomes remain unclear.

There is a strong local expectation that reforms around Individual Support Plans, transitional reviews, and local governance arrangements must be underpinned by clear legal safeguards, accessible routes to redress, and transparent accountability. Meaningful collaboration is most effective where systems are simplified, where roles and responsibilities are explicit, and where engagement demonstrably shapes decisions rather than merely responding to them.





Support & Provision

With the strong reference to Inclusion Bases in the Schools White Paper, discussion around support and provision primarily centred on avoiding unintended harm, particularly where inclusion is applied too rigidly or without sufficient specialist alternatives. There was strong agreement that a one-size-fits-all models could risk exclusion, and that support must be needs-led, flexible, and dignified.

Layered Support and the Risk of Incentive-Driven Escalation

Participants broadly accepted the concept of layered support as detailed in the White Paper, but remained sceptical about implementation. It was raised by some participants that the current SEND system often incentivises parents and schools to escalate need in order to access support, and undoing this instinct would take time and require very clear paths to support and communication channels.

Consequently, some contributors were concerned that a layered model risks:

- Adversarial relationships
- Threshold-driven conflict
- Schools becoming load-bearing without authority or funding
- Families having to “aim” for a particular layer to secure appropriate help.

The layers for ISPs should therefore be flexible pathways, not hierarchies of permission.

Inclusion Bases, Alternative Provision and the “Forgotten Middle”

As previously mentioned, Inclusion Bases featured heavily in discussion, with support in principle but deep caution about how these might function in practice.

Participants stressed that Inclusion Bases risk becoming a cost-saving substitute for specialist provision and a form of segregation within mainstream. Additionally, it was mentioned that Inclusion Bases and flexi-school models can be stigmatising and embarrassing for older children in particular. As such, any implementation of Inclusion Bases must acknowledge the importance of social identity and individual dignity.

Alongside this, a strong emphasis was placed on the “forgotten middle”, which were described as children whose needs are too complex for mainstream but not deemed complex enough for specialist placements. These young people could therefore become particularly vulnerable to exclusion and unmet need.





See Every Need participants were clear that Alternative Provision (AP) and EOTAS are legitimate educational pathways, not failures of service, and therefore needed more attention within the White Paper. It was also commented that AP must not be reframed as mainstream by another name, and that children who cannot attend school must not be forced back by Government-imposed 2029 targets.

Satellite Spaces as a Credible Alternative

Satellite spaces were strongly supported only under strict conditions, providing they are stable, permanent settings, and not temporary to solely facilitate routes back to mainstream.

Instead, the best approach for satellite spaces would be for them to prioritise:

- Relationship-building
- Therapeutic staffing
- Gradual, young person-led engagement
- Maths and English
- Creative skills
- Practical skills
- Therapeutic learning (e.g. through arts, media, sports)
- Restoring confidence and belonging, not reinforcing failure

Those most sceptical of Inclusion Bases made the very clear and agreeable point that “inclusion” as a concept must be defined by wellbeing and belonging, not physical presence in a school building.

Curriculum Flexibility and Educational Purpose

The need for curriculum reform, away from its current rigidity, was described by one attendee as “the elephant in the room”. See Every Need contributors shared accounts of SEND learners being shoehorned into inappropriate academic models, statutory curriculum requirements limiting meaningful learning, even in SEN settings, and the isolation of young people who feel “inferior” to peers for having different learning needs and approaches.

Attendees agreed that a flexible and holistic curriculum should instead be able to adapt according to need, and offer education focussed around functional skills, communication, emotional regulation, and independence and life skills.

Both education and parent contributors alike detailed the benefits of having clear ability and authority to design bespoke curricula, with the freedom from statutory curriculum expectations where these do not meet need. It is clear that, for See Every Need respondents, a flexible curriculum underpins meaningful inclusion and that without it reform cannot succeed.





Early Years, Equipment and Practical Barriers

Alongside high-level statutory and rules-based changes needed, See Every Need participants also highlighted some more tangible and specific concerns that could be better addressed by the Schools White Paper – namely, chronic delays in equipment provision, particularly for children with complex physical needs. This has often resulted in children outgrowing equipment before it arrives and thus ends in a significant waste of time, money, and opportunity to make a meaningful impact in a young person’s education.

Suggestions were made for:

- Fast-tracking for clearly identified complex needs
- Routine “Team Around the Child” meetings beyond EHCP processes
- Investment in early years provision and peer-support models

With these things in place, that would mean that early and practical intervention would prevent escalation and therefore the long-term financial cost.

Local views on support and provision underline a clear warning against rigid or one-size-fits-all models of inclusion. See Every Need contributors consistently emphasised the need for flexible, needs-led pathways that respect a young person’s dignity, wellbeing, and individual circumstance, particularly for children who cannot thrive in conventional mainstream environments.

Inclusion Bases, Alternative Provision, EOTAS, and satellite hubs can all play a valuable role, but only where they are properly resourced, clearly defined, and experienced by children as supportive rather than stigmatising. Across all groups who contributed to See Every Need, whether they be parents, educators, advocates, or charities, there was strong consensus that curriculum flexibility, early intervention, and fast-tracked practical support are essential to preventing escalation and long-term harm. Without these safeguards, SEND reform risks reproducing exclusion under a different label.





Systems, Partnerships & Transitions

A fully functional SEND system provided coherent and cohesive support, that helps that young person transition from childhood into adulthood as they navigate their education journey. For this final section, we focussed on system coherence, the importance of strong leadership and smooth transitions. Participants consistently warned against reforms that rely on staff or parental resilience rather than robust system design.

Early Years Systems and Family Hubs

Early intervention is crucial, and participants supported a lot of the measures suggested by the Schools White Paper that seeks to ensure that there is as much effective early intervention as possible.

See Every Need contributors commented that measures such as structured collaboration between early years, health, Family Hubs and parents, alternative access routes to hubs for families not well served by standard models, and greater involvement of health visitors and trusted community partners would be a major improvement to the current system and be widely supported by parents and professionals alike.

Nevertheless, concerns remained around the need to address what one parent described as “Jekyll and Hyde experiences” which demonstrate the inconsistency between school support and home support. This was described as the situation families face wherein their child copes well in the school environment through masking and other mechanisms, but subsequently return home exhausted which can lead to them feeling and behaving much more negatively.

There were also concerns around families being left to navigate fragmented information, especially with the introduction of Best Start Family Hubs providing a new outlet and area of support, but also a new stakeholder to engage with and hold information. As such, focus on fluidity, information sharing, clarity and transparency is crucial to making sure that new and helpful partnerships do not catalyse any blockages in the new reformed SEND system.

See Every Need respondents concurred that all early years settings must have routes of advocacy embedded within them. There were also comments made about broadening understanding of different existing rights that many are unaware they are entitled to; such as carers’ entitlements under the Carers Act.





Transitions to Post-16 Education, Employment and Adulthood

Post-16 opportunities, pathways, and support has often been overlooked when discussing SEND overall, as a lot of the focus has been on how primary and secondary school-aged children access education. However, the See Every Need initiative also explored this area in equal importance as pre-16 support.

Amongst See Every Need attendees, there was strong consensus that the current system over-prioritises GCSEs and A-levels and that success measures do not reflect wellbeing or real-world outcomes.

In order to address this for future SEND cohorts approaching the end of their schooling journey, participants suggested that transition planning should begin at least one year before leaving school with coordination across education, training and employment. Importantly, it was noted that there should be a clear continuity of therapeutic and specialist support post-16.

A particularly notable comment raised about how best to assist post-16 young people is by having services, education, health and employment, ask the question: "What makes you feel good, and how can the system support that?" Whether this be through signposting to further education opportunities, skills-based apprenticeships, or alternative pathways, young people's voices need to be central to their post-16 futures, and local services should be empowered and resourced to both listen and take action. As such, post-16 transitions should build agency, independence, and meaningful futures rather than just qualifications.

Experts at Hand and Multi-Agency Capacity

While the Experts at Hand concept introduced by the Schools White Paper was broadly welcomed, scepticism remained strong unless:

- Workforce capacity is genuinely expanded
- Commissioning, funding and accountability are explicit
- The service does not rely on already overstretched NHS or LA teams

See Every Need participants also stressed that SEND reform must work alongside health and social care, and not instead be education-led with optional health input. It was also emphasised that co-occurring and medical needs (such as, but not limited to, epilepsy, diabetes, EDS, mental health) must be fully recognised and support provided for.

Leadership, Monitoring and System Learning

There was strong support for:

- Targeted consultation with headteachers
- Sharing consultation aims in advance
- Ongoing monitoring and adaptation once reforms are implemented





See Every Need contributors were clear that flexibility and adaptability was key to making sure that SEND reform became embedded and long-term. Whilst understandably no reform will be perfect from the outset, the new systems must be designed to learn and adapt, not defensively hold course if shortcomings become apparent.

It is important to stress that everyone who has contributed across all See Every Need sessions have been keen to be a part of reforming and, in many ways, fixing the SEND system, but they have been given promises before that has not borne fruit. Trust in the new system will therefore be earned through delivery quality, not policy intent.

Discussion of systems, partnerships and transitions revealed a shared local concern that reforms must reduce reliance on exceptional individuals and parental resilience, and instead be grounded in coherent, well-resourced system design. Contributors stressed that early years collaboration, post-16 transitions and employment pathways require the same level of strategic focus as school-age provision, particularly for young people aged 16–25 who are too often overlooked.

While the Experts at Hand offer and greater multi-agency integration are welcomed in principle, confidence in these proposals depends on genuine workforce expansion, clear commissioning arrangements and shared accountability across education, health and social care.

Above all, there is a strong expectation that reform will remain adaptive and responsive, with ongoing monitoring and learning built in, so that delivery can evolve in response to lived experience rather than becoming fixed around imperfect initial designs.





CONCLUSION

See Every Need has been about working together with everyone who wants to get involved in order to better inform and contribute to the reform process for SEND. The evidence gathered through this work is clear, consistent, and compelling. Across all three sections we looked at for this Discussion Forum, the voices from Southend West and Leigh all concurred that whilst there was certainly much to be positive about with the Schools White Paper, meaningful SEND reform will only succeed if the quality of the implementation is strong and takes root.

Families and professionals alike support a move towards earlier intervention, stronger mainstream capability, and greater consistency of service. However, we cannot ignore the deep concern that without enforceable rights, clear accountability, sufficient workforce capacity and genuine flexibility, reforms risk reproducing the very inequities they seek to address, particularly for those in what was dubbed the “forgotten middle,” for young people transitioning into adulthood, and for families without the time, confidence or resources to challenge decisions.

The strongest message from See Every Need contributors is not a demand for perfection, but for realistic and measurable improvements.

We all know that local services are already stretched. For many years, our schools have been absorbing increasing responsibility without corresponding authority or funding. Voluntary and community organisations, whilst absolutely brilliant in their work, are filling gaps that have become structural rather than exceptional circumstances. SEND reform must therefore reduce these burdens, not shift them, by building capacity and protecting stability for children and families throughout transition periods.

All of our See Every Need attendees and contributors know that this is a huge opportunity for the SEND system as a whole, and also a significant inflection point. Done well, these reforms offer an opportunity to build a SEND system that is fairer, more sustainable, and more humane, which measures success not solely by placement or attainment, but by belonging, wellbeing, and long-term opportunity. The voices of my constituents captured here do not ask for special treatment but instead ask for a system that works as intended, for everyone.

I urge that the insights contained in this report are taken fully into account as reforms progress, and that continued dialogue with families, practitioners and local leaders remains central to delivering meaningful change.

I would like to extend a huge thanks to the Department for Education for engaging so impactfully with us here in Southend West and Leigh and across the country. The regular opportunities to shape the policy process has proved invaluable to my constituents and me personally, and I am grateful to the Minister and Secretary of State for all their hard work.

Finally, a massive thank you to all my See Every Need contributors for their efforts and engagement.

David Burton-Sampson MP
Member of Parliament for Southend West and Leigh

