



See Every Need Workshop Report

2026 Report on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Provision

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

14 January 2026



INTRODUCTION

The SEND crisis is deeply felt and routinely experienced by so many in Southend West and Leigh. Whether it be the dedicated support and teaching staff who work alongside SEND children in their education settings, the charities and support services providing invaluable support and advice to SEND families, or the inspirational parents and carers who strive day in and day out to ensure their children have equal access to education and opportunities, everyone knows the system is broken and feels as if it is geared against those who need it most.

See Every Need has already seen some great successes, with a brilliant roundtable last year followed by a hugely productive meeting with the Minister responsible for reforming this system, and most recently this workshop designed to look at some key areas that we and the Government have identified need real and lasting change.

First, we need to build back Sure Start's legacy with a renewed focus on early intervention. Early child and family support needs to be in every community, with easy access to speech and language, social and emotional development, and neurodiversity support.

Second, we have to put the right expertise into every area, working across education and healthcare to ensure easy access to educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists – to turn the system on its head, from parents having to fight for basic support to one that wraps the right support around children who need it in their areas.

We also have to ensure young people can access education close to their home, alongside peers, rather than travelling long distances away from loved ones and their local community – whether that be excellent special schools, properly resourced mainstream schools, or great alternative provision.

The support and assistance provided to young people with SEND, and their families, should be effective and up to date, rooted in regular training and adaptability that means no child is left behind or forgotten. The services that provide that support and assistance can no longer operate in isolation from one another, and instead must work together to deliver better outcomes and experiences for young people and their families.

The See Every Need workshop was all about making sure we get the answers to the right questions from the right people – parents, professionals, and advocates. There is so much that needs to be done, and it needs to be done right, and I want to thank everyone who has been involved for taking the time to be a part of this important work that I know will help bring the change that is so desperately needed for our young people and their loved ones.





I

Early

When discussing the importance of early intervention and identification with attendees of the See Every Need workshop, it became readily apparent that, first and foremost, a number of factors had to be acknowledged and understood.

Firstly, “early” identification and support is not a catch-all term, and indeed for some young people with SEND, the earliest signs to be picked up on do not present until secondary school age; thusly, it is crucial that these young people are supported alongside their families just as effectively as those who are identified at an earlier age.

Secondly, there is a real need for greater education and awareness amongst the general population as well as health workers that have the first touchpoints in a young person’s life and development – namely, health visitors, GPs, nurses, and midwives. One significant point raised during the workshop is that parents are encouraged to raise any “differences” in their child as they develop, however many SEND parents themselves share similar profiles and traits to their children and therefore may not necessarily be able to identify something “atypical” about their child’s behaviour or needs.

Thirdly, attendees across the workshop agreed that early intervention, and by extension SEND reform more widely, can only be successful when partnered with meaningful education reform. At present, teachers and support staff are restricted by layers of red tape and bureaucracy that make reasonable adjustments unlikely or entirely unobtainable for young people. The school system, although variable between each individual school, is nonetheless too rigid in its enforcement of rules and expectations, with little to no flexibility to better accommodate young people with SEND needs (as well as their peers who do not have SEND). Whilst attendees agreed that rules are necessary in schools, there needed to be a return to the common-sense approach of reasonable adjustments to better encompass children and young people of varying needs.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, contributors made it clear that there needed to be confidence in a renewed SEND system and in its capacity to effectively undertake early intervention. This confidence could only come from a clear and efficient accountability structure, which would enable parents and carers, as well as other stakeholders, to raise failings or points of concern with the knowledge that this will be investigated, and any appropriate consequences would then follow.





What could reform in this area look like?

As has been mentioned in the first See Every Need report from September 2025, there is a role for the Government's new Best Start Centres in this area, and we in Southend are eagerly awaiting the setting up of our first in the near future.

Indeed, with the commitment that each Best Start Centre will have a SEND specialist and specific services available to consult with, attendees commented on how this could be hugely beneficial for families at an early stage. This benefit could be further amplified by ensuring the SEND workers are able to collaborate and share information with external services and stakeholders, such as school nurses, support assistants, SENCOs, and alternative provision settings so that these services can not only flow throughout a young person's education journey, but also be applicable to those who are diagnosed or identified after they have started school.

Additionally, parents, charities, healthcare representatives, and advocates alike all agreed that it was equally important that the specialists within Best Start Centres do not become a "one stop shop" for any and all questions or issues on this subject, and instead SEND awareness and understanding would need to be embedded across all staff for appropriate advice and support.

As previously referenced to, there is a huge need for better education and awareness that needs to be running seamlessly through all services – not just Best Start Centres. Not only does this increase the likelihood of early identification and intervention but also heightens the power of the parents' voices in any future discussions as they would be better equipped to identify SEND and neurodiversity.

Alongside better training and education for professionals and parents and carers alike, attendees also agreed that there needed to be simpler and faster routes to obtaining support for young people without the need for a diagnosis or an EHCP. Indeed, some assessments and diagnoses can only be undertaken after a child reaches a certain age, but that does not stop them struggling within an education setting in the meantime. Therefore, with a renewed focus and new flexibility for reasonable adjustments, this would mean better provision for a larger catchment of children.

Attendees shared that the most logical system of early support would be that support and investigation into how best to support a child both at school and at home would start as soon as a concern has been raised to a healthcare professional or a teacher. Alongside the added flexibility of reasonable adjustments, a reformed teacher and school staff training programme, underpinned by the mission statement "every teacher a SEND teacher" as included in the previous See Every Need report, would ensure better practice regardless of the level of need or the adjustment required.





Local

This brings the report neatly to the topic of local provision, which is crucial for young people and their families for many reasons. However, at present a number of barriers are preventing the ability for children and young people with differing SEND needs from accessing local and appropriate education settings.

As previously mentioned, the rigidity of the current schooling environment (namely within mainstream schools) whilst variable between schools is still generally obstructive for the ability of many neurodivergent pupils to focus, feel safe, and learn effectively. According to attendees at the See Every Need workshop, this is broadly due to harsh and inflexible disciplinary policies, uniform policies, and classroom policies alike.

Another important factor that must be considered when addressing the aim of making local school offers more inclusive is the current inaccessibility of certain buildings. SEND children may well have physical or sensory impairments that make older school buildings more difficult for them to learn within; whether that be due to auditory dysregulation catalysed by larger rooms making voices and other sounds more resonant and pronounced, or the fact that lifts and alternative access routes are either rare or non-existent in some buildings. This can be further exacerbated by the enormous cost of installing these adaptations which can put schools in difficult positions.

Contributors also raised concerns around the curriculum and the need for it to be more inclusive to allow for young people to thrive in areas of their interest, whilst still forming the necessary skills that school provides and requires them to have by the time they leave. The upcoming curriculum review is therefore anticipated with great interest. Attendees noted that better curriculum flexibility, with a variety of academic and non-academic offers, was the most preferred way to include as many children and young people in formal education as possible.

All attendees agreed that local special schools should continue to play a vital role for those young people who need them, but inclusion and funding needed to be improved markedly across mainstream schools. Whilst resourcing those special schools with the technology, equipment, training, and other necessary expenditure is crucial to supporting their pupils, some attendees felt that this had come at the expense of mainstream pupils with SEND who were not being as well supported in their classrooms.





What could reform in this area look like?

When discussing both physical space and the skills that staff needed, attendees suggested a few ways in which mainstream settings could be made more inclusive. One suggestion was the introduction of a “flexi-school” option available for all mainstream pupils, wherein they could focus less on academic aspects of the curriculum and instead prioritise practical and skills-based education alongside the basics of the broader curriculum.

This flexibility could also extend to the ways in which rules within the classroom and the school environment are enforced and applied. For example, some primary schools have been observed to be much more flexible on uniform adjustments than secondary schools, which means that children with sensory need may thrive within a flexible and adaptable primary setting, but struggle immensely after the transition to secondary due to a new and unfamiliar rigidity. This equally applies to things like movement breaks, specific equipment, and accessibility.

Resultantly, attendees posited that local provision would be improved if there was greater consistency in a varied and flexible culture between education settings, which would not only reduce the anxiety SEND parents and carers feel as their children move from primary to secondary, but also allow young people to continue to develop at their own pace without the extra pressures of unnecessary inflexibility. By sharing this culture, and by extension the information about each child’s specific needs and reasonable adjustments, local schools and colleges can work together to better support young people as they grow and learn rather than having children and their families start at the beginning upon each transition.

Whilst respondents were interested in the concept of “SEND Hubs” as suggested by the Sutton Trust, they also shared concerns due to a potential unintended risk of segregation. Rather than allowing for SEND pupils to integrate and develop their social, emotional, and education skills, some were concerned that the Hubs could instead end up as a “fenced off” space separate from their peers in the main classroom. Consequently, See Every Need respondents concluded that SEND Hubs could prove to be valuable for pupils, families, and school staff alike providing they are resourced properly and staffed by specialists, with a focus on integration and “topping-up” mainstream lessons, rather than replacing them.

Further comments were raised about the specific practices and adaptations a school could undertake to make their environment more inclusive and supportive of children and young people with varying degrees of SEND need, and these will be covered in more detail under the Fair section of the report.



III

Fair

When discussing resourcing and meeting need, especially without the necessity for parents and carers to fight for lengthy periods of time for support, it was readily apparent that none of the attendees believed the current system was fair.

A truly fair SEND system not only provides support and assistance to children with SEND routinely without delays and obstruction, but also allows for flexibility and reduces parental anxiety through regular communication, consultation, adaptation, and transparency. Attendees shared a number of suggestions for how the system could be made fairer, and it is only right that these suggestions are included in full in this report in order to help inform the White Paper.

What could reform in this area look like?

When discussing what support schools should routinely offer, respondents made a salient point that, whilst a lot of the conversations around SEND reform have been about tangible and practical changes in policy and practice, one of the most important things that needs to evolve is the culture and attitude towards SEND and young people with SEND at school. This culture must be underpinned with tolerance, respect, and emotional, trauma, and neurodiverse intelligence. This should not be incumbent on each individual school to embed and define, but instead centrally provided and directed as standard across all schools.

Some respondents suggested that, at a minimum, each school should be able to provide: a fully trained SENCO with protected time; sensory-friendly spaces and equipment, regular compulsory training for all members of staff (not just teachers and support staff); reasonable adjustments on all matters of the school day depending on the child's needs and context; clear communication protocols and methods for parents, with a named contact and standard service level agreements; each SEND pupil to have a named staff member who can act as an advocate, advisor, and trusted adult during school hours; SEMH support; trained OT support; safe spaces for dysregulated children and young people.

One particularly interesting suggestion that was supported by other workshop attendees is the standardisation of some local best practice – in this instance, a “check-out” system for SEND pupils at the end of each school day. In practice, this means that the young person's trusted staff member would have a regular touchpoint towards the end of the day for a small amount of time to discuss the school day and any aspects of the lessons or playtime that had concerned or overwhelmed them, ranging from homework and classwork to friendship or home





issues. Not only would this ensure schools are better informed about a young person's evolving need, but it would also encourage that young person to identify school and that protected time at the end of each day as a safe space. The benefits of this include the fact that this encourages social and emotional development for young people with SEND across their time at school, and that it ensures pupils do not take all of their worries and anxieties and stored-up energy home with them afterwards.

When discussing how to ensure parents are better informed, it was suggested that the "check-out" system apply to parents and carers also, allowing for a regular meeting (perhaps at the end of each month or half term) with the specific staff member to discuss their young person's development, concerns, attainment, and anything else that may be of relevance.

Attendees also made it clear that the current system appears to penalise parents and carers who fight the hardest for their children, by treating them as "an inconvenience rather than partners". A reformed and fairer SEND system acknowledges that, in most instances, parents know their children best and can provide great advice and support in helping manage their needs within that education setting. Alongside regular check-ins, suggestions of a nationally overseen online portal or app that schools, healthcare professionals, and parents can all access to communicate, share updates, and store records, also sought to improve communication. By standardising both the expectations around communication as well as the practical support offer and culture, this reduces some of the worst excesses of the postcode lottery that currently exists.

Alongside this, respondents suggested that better accountability structures to a central singular oversight body alongside ringfenced SEND funding per new local unitary authority would assist in bridging the postcode lottery gaps currently being felt in the country.

A final suggestion from the attendees that related to the topic of fairness relates to EHCPs. At present, the system of obtaining an EHCP, and indeed for many even the implementation of one once it is secured, is an illogical and obstructive medium. For many pupils, an EHCP in its current form would be the only way in which they can access the support they need; for others, it was the only way for parents and carers to ensure their child accessed the simple, common-sense reasonable adjustments that would help them access learning. Attendees suggested that each child presenting with SEND traits or requiring some form of additional support should have a "Pupil Profile" which outlines their likes and dislikes, preferred method of communication, the necessary reasonable adjustments required, and other information. If necessary, this could then form a basis for a legal document akin to an EHCP that formalises funding or a blueprint for support, but would *not* be the only route in getting support in the first instance. This would ensure that *all* pupils that need support are able to access it.





IV

Effective

When a young person access support, it needs to be ensured that that support is effectively administered by staff in any education setting. Attendees agreed with the assertion that all reforms of the SEND system must be grounded in evidence and ensures that all education settings are best equipped to both identify best practice and implement it to provide excellent long-term outcomes for pupils.

Attendees also agreed that there is currently a huge variation in the effectiveness of support in schools, from the types of equipment and practical assistance to the level of awareness and understanding of SEND needs. This has resulted in a form of localised postcode lotteries where one SEND pupil will have had a vastly different experience to a sibling with SEND who attends a different school. Consequently, there was widespread agreement amongst all respondents that there needed to be a standardisation across all schools in the UK, described by one attendee as a “minimum gold standard”, in order to address this. This was just one of many strong ideas presented that would make the SEND system more effective for all involved.

What could reform look like in this area?

All attendees believed it to be common sense to ensure that there was mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD), but made it clear that this should apply to *all* members of staff within a school; rather than a narrow focus on teachers and classroom assistants, this should also apply to caretakers, lunchtime staff, after school club providers, reception staff, and any others who would interact with young people as part of their role. Not only would this ensure better uniformity of understanding across the faculty, but it would also help improve the overall culture and accessibility for young people when interacting with adults. Indeed, attendees noted that because SEND as a whole is incredibly vast, the first priority of CPD must be to ensure that the compassion and respect is embedded across all staff members as a baseline.

Further to this point, attendees suggested that CPD training should be provided regularly, if not termly, to ensure regular touchpoints with arising needs across pupils of all ages. Whilst it was acknowledged that there will always be a level of uniqueness in some needs that may require ad hoc training at any given point, attendees agreed that training needs to ensure that all staff members have a level of understanding on ASD and autism, ADHD, visual and auditory impairments, SEMH, and physical disabilities as a minimum.





School staff, more specifically those who work in the classroom environment, should also be able to identify and understand co-occurrence, hypermobility, and anxiety in children who may not have previously been identified with SEND or other needs in order to inform discussions about school-based support more quickly without the need for a formal diagnosis or EHCP.

The topic of Special Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) in schools was one that captured a lot of interest amongst See Every Need respondents. Many felt that the SENCO role had become a way for some to step into Senior Leadership roles, or had become diluted due to being an added responsibility for full-time teachers, therefore harming the effectiveness of a SENCO at school. There was also concern that all matters relating to SEND and pupils with additional needs had been compartmentalised to become solely a SENCO's responsibility. This can lead, as aptly put by a respondent, to SENCOs being "stretched impossibly thin".

Therefore, attendees agreed that the SENCO role needed to be a full-time protected role, sitting within each school's SLT, requiring mandatory SENCO qualifications and specialist training in order to take the post. SENCOs would also benefit from administrative support to assist with paperwork and other practicalities, enabling a heightened focus on supporting pupils and greater SEND advocacy and assistance across the school. It was also agreed that SENCOs should not be a "one stop shop" in agreeing help or providing support, and that school staff should be empowered to be able to make decisions on the ground to ensure a child is supported; this empowerment would be provided by that improved mandatory CPD and better communication with parents and carers and SENCOs.

When discussing the types of evidence that should be used by schools, local authorities, and other stakeholders when deciding on the best SEND support, See Every Need attendees were clear that there were particularly integral areas that had to be drawn from; these were parents' and carers' voices, observation in specific environments, advice and medical reports from external professionals, and if applicable the contributions of the young person themselves.

A particularly insightful comment was made by one attendee on this topic, who stated that SEND is "everybody's business" and that as soon as there is a recognition of a difference or a need it should be met compassionately and effectively. At its core, that is what the effectivity of a reformed SEND system should be measured on – how efficient is it at identifying need, and how well can it meet that need appropriately, effectively, and in a timely manner.





V

Shared

One of the biggest frustrations for SEND families when attempting to source support for their child is the lack of cohesion between different services involved, such as health and education. There was also concern that a lot of local and national operations in this space were undertaken with more focus on corporate and financial risk than on how best to benefit the community at large. All attendees were in agreement that education, health, and care services should work in partnership with local authorities, families, teachers, experts, and advocates to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all children and young people. They also agreed that the third sector is hugely important for so many families and needed to have a more formalised role within a reformed SEND system.

In order to do this effectively, it is crucial that the responsibility, access to important information, and culture of openness and understanding is shared across all of these services. See Every Need respondents were keen to provide suggestions and critiques of how services could be better joined-up to assist young people of all ages and varying needs.

What could reform look like in this area?

Put simply, good join-up across services means avoiding the current reality that parents and carers are having to repeat themselves to a churn of new faces in each area of their child's lives; whether that be new teachers, GPs, paediatricians, etc. Attendees commented about how specialist roles operating in isolation has resulted in that sole individual becoming a single point of absence or a single point of advocacy, leaving families and young people in precarious positions. With the current system of pathways and assessments organised and commissioned in silo, too many children and young people with SEND are falling through the gaps and being lost in the system – leaving stretched and overwhelmed parents to fight and train themselves to be experts.

Respondents stated that services should be encouraged to be curious about a young person's development and needs, and should take ownership of their place within the SEND system by actively seeking out the "other cogs" and dialoguing with them. This would equally apply to internal dialogue, between different medical professionals, local authority officers, teachers, and schools. By embedding this as standard practice, not only would this smoothen the accessibility to different services for young people and their families, as well as ease any transition between schools, but it would also simplify the coordination of a record of that young person's need and SEND history for services, parents and carers, and schools to access when they need.





CONCLUSION

Before I ended the workshop session, I tasked attendees to tell me the single biggest change they would like to see. Whilst I knew that this was a difficult ask, everyone gave fantastic and insightful answers that I wanted to ensure was included in this report.

In no particular order, the biggest changes Southend West and Leigh residents want are:

- An education, SEND, social care, and healthcare reform happening together in partnership with one another
- Clear accountability frameworks and mechanisms for when things go wrong, including lines of redress for families
- A cultural shift, moving the focus from professionals and organisational issues to children and families
- Each child's needs being met where they are most comfortable, not forcing them to compromise where it is easiest for local services
- Support being needs-led rather than diagnosis-led
- A distinction between medical need and non-medical need informing different models and offers for SEND children
- Strengthened legal protections for children of all SEND needs, including undiagnosed, providing flexibility and reasonable adjustments
- A minimum gold standard for training that evolves and remains applicable to children as they develop, and as new information becomes available
- Services that have to communicate and work together, with accountability if they do not do so effectively
- Easy access to independent advocacy from the start, rather than once things have gone wrong

It is clear that lots needs to be covered by meaningful SEND reform, and it must not happen in isolation from changes and improvements in other related areas.

This is a huge undertaking in public policy reform, and I commend the Government not only for showing the initiative and willingness to grasp the challenges head-on and make the change that is so desperately needed, but also for including as many local voices as possible. The Government is right to acknowledge that parents, carers, teachers, healthcare professionals, charities, and advocates are the voices that needed to be at the very centre of the discussion and at the heart of policymaking.

I would once again like to thank all the fantastic local constituents of Southend West and Leigh for taking part in See Every Need and making it as successful as it has been. I know that the contributions that have been made through this campaign has had a direct impact into the policy process and will continue to inform and guide SEND reform as it progresses.

See Every Need will continue to advocate for change and support parents and carers in Southend West and Leigh, and I look forward to engaging further on bringing forward the lasting and meaningful reform that has been needed for far too long.

