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Bexley Voice Consultation on SEND Reform White Paper Summary

April 2026

Parents are deeply sceptical that the proposed SEND reforms will work in practice. While principles such as early intervention, inclusion and layered support are welcomed in theory, the lack of clarity, evidence, funding, accountability and enforceability has seriously undermined confidence. Many parents believe the proposals risk repeating historic failures, particularly for children with complex, rare or highly individualised needs.

1. Inclusion in Mainstream Schools

The proposal that most children with SEND will be educated in local, inclusive mainstream schools raised significant concern about how suitability will be determined in practice.

Parents stressed that, while increased staff training is welcome, there is insufficient clarity about:

- The depth, duration and frequency of training
- Who will deliver and quality-assure training
- Whether training will move beyond generic SEND awareness
- How staff competence will be assessed and monitored
- How training will address the huge variability of need within diagnostic labels
- How staff will attend training without reducing provision for pupils

There is strong concern that:

- Training may be used as evidence that need can be met, without demonstrating that it actually *is* being met in practice
- The school environment itself is often the barrier to learning for some children
- For some children, no amount of reasonable adjustment makes a mainstream setting suitable

Parents highlighted:

- Significant emotional harm for children, including masking, burnout and anxiety
- Particular challenges in secondary schools, where inclusion often breaks down
- A strong belief that some children cannot thrive in mainstream, even with support

These concerns have direct implications for:

- Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) under Section 61 of the Children and Families Act 2014
- Children whose unmet SEN is wrongly framed as an “attendance problem”, leading to enforcement rather than suitable alternative provision

Parents called for:

- Smaller class sizes
- More appropriately trained staff
- Ring-fenced, audited SEND funding
- More SENCOs, with seniority, protected time and real budgetary influence
- National, mandatory, high-quality SEND training for all staff

There is also concern about the future availability and funding of independent specialist schools, including whether:

- These placements will remain accessible
- Tribunal powers to name them will be reduced
- Children whose needs cannot be met in mainstream or maintained special schools will have meaningful alternatives

Overall, there is deep distrust that schools and local authorities will be held accountable when inclusion fails.

2. Layered Support and Individual Support Plans (ISPs)

Parents expressed widespread concern that the proposed layered support model lacks clarity and risks delaying recognition that school-based provision is not appropriate for some children.

There is insufficient information about:

- Who determines which layer of support a child is placed in
- Whether criteria will be published and transparent
- Whether parents will have a right of appeal at each stage
- How the system will prevent children being forced into pre-set packages that do not meet their needs

Parents stressed that if appeals focus only on choosing between predefined packages, rather than identifying a child's individual needs, this would significantly weaken families' ability to challenge decisions.

Concerns were also raised about:

- Teacher workload and burnout
- Large class sizes and impact on children without SEND
- Workforce shortages, including trained teachers and teaching assistants

Strong emphasis was placed on the need for:

- Person-centred planning, not a "one size fits all" approach
- Clear timescales for assessments and interventions
- Regular, meaningful reviews
- Specialist services (e.g. SALT, Educational Psychology, mental health support) to be available within schools

Parents fear that inadequate or delayed support will lead to:

- Bullying
- Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)
- School refusal
- Exclusions
- Poor long-term outcomes, including NEET status

Children with rare, complex or highly individualised needs, including many who require EOTAS, are seen as being particularly disadvantaged by the proposals.

3. EHCPs and Transition to a New System (Post-2029)

There is major anxiety about proposals that could remove or weaken the legal protections of EHCPs.

Parents repeatedly questioned:

- Who will decide support levels and specialist provision
- How provision will be enforced without legal backing
- How parents will challenge decisions

Key concerns include:

- Reduction of support when stepping down from EHCPs
- Inconsistent decisions between local authorities
- Whether private assessments will continue to be recognised

Parents made strong calls for:

- A national, transparent needs assessment framework
- Equal provision regardless of postcode
- Parents and children to remain central to decisions, including school naming and placement logistics

4. Accountability for Children With and Without EHCPs

Accountability mechanisms were viewed as unclear, weak and insufficiently independent.

Parents strongly oppose:

- Removing tribunal powers to name placements
- Any reduction in the legal enforceability of ISPs or EHCPs

Decision-making panels must be:

- Independent
- Free from conflicts of interest
- Informed by those who know the child, but not by those being challenged

Parents also raised concerns that the proposals do not clearly explain how local authorities will be held accountable when they fail to deliver EHCP provision.

Clarification is needed on:

- How EHCP compliance will be monitored
 - What remedies will be available when provision is not delivered
 - Whether independent oversight or complaints mechanisms will be introduced
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5. Parents as Partners

Parents welcome the principle of partnership but reported that power remains heavily unbalanced in current practice.

In particular:

- Parental evidence about a child's inability to access school (especially for EOTAS) is frequently disputed
- Families are often forced into lengthy and stressful tribunal processes

Without strengthened rights, transparency and enforceable duties, parents fear that "partnership" will remain aspirational rather than operational.

Key requests include:

- A SEND advocate or key worker in every school
- A single point of access for families
- Transparent decision-making with recorded parent and child input
- Independent oversight of funding, mediation and dispute resolution
- A shared digital system linking schools, health services, local authorities, parents and young people

Parents fear that poor implementation could further damage relationships and increase exclusions.

6. Post-16 Transition

Parents expressed serious concern that the proposals are over-focused on school-age children, with insufficient detail on post-16 transition.

This is already an area of significant failure for many young people with SEND.

Parents stressed that reforms must ensure:

- Support does not reduce or disappear at transition points

- Young people with complex needs, EOTAS packages or limited access to mainstream colleges are not excluded from education, training or suitable alternatives
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Core Themes Across the Consultation

1. Lack of clarity about how reforms would operate day-to-day
2. Insufficient funding and workforce capacity
3. Weak accountability and enforcement mechanisms
4. Serious concern about dilution of legal protections
5. Low parental confidence and trust in the system