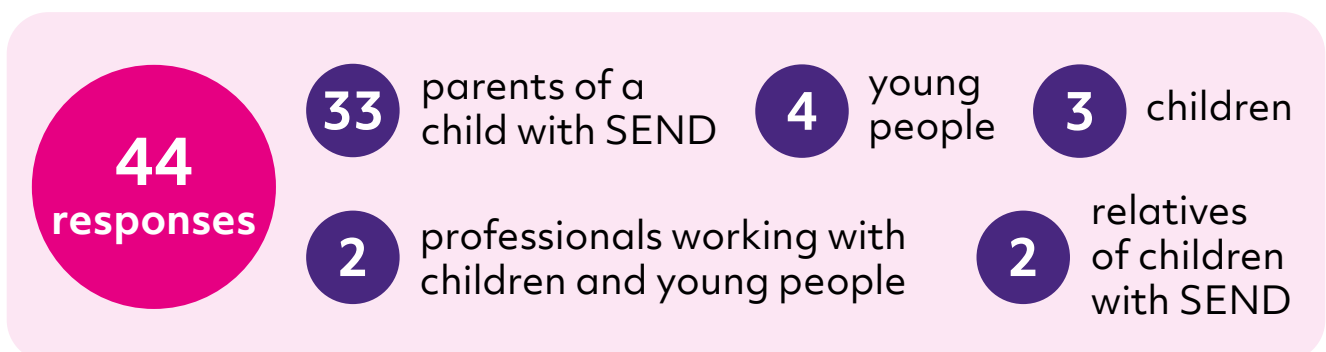


SEND Reform: Summary of engagement with parents, professionals, and young people

In February 2026, the Government announced its proposals to reform Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) services. The proposals are wide-ranging, with a greater focus on early-intervention and inclusion; a promise of funding and investment; and the introduction of Individual Support Plans (ISPs) and Specialist Provision Packages.

These reforms are expected to be introduced gradually, with a promise that there will be no changes to existing plans or provision until at least September 2029. The plans were open for public consultation until 18th May 2026.

In response to the announcement, Barnwood Trust was keen to hear from parents, carers, and disabled children and young people about their hopes for the proposed reforms, and their potential impact if they were to become law. We received:



We are grateful to everyone who shared our survey to help more parents, children and young people have their voices heard.

As well as the report, these responses have helped Barnwood to shape its own formal response to the Government. You can read our position statement [here](#).

Hopes for SEND reforms

Hopes for the SEND reforms varied and were mainly driven by worry, anger and a sense that the current system has failed. Ultimately, respondents hoped for a significantly improved SEND system that was easier to navigate, better resourced, and more responsive to individual needs.

These improvements, it was hoped would include:

Earlier and faster access to support:

early identification, early intervention, and an end to the delays that have become often linked with the current system.

“ I hope my child gets the support they need early, without families having to battle for every bit of help. ”

“ The current process [is] very confusing and complex...very lengthy...I am hoping the reform will streamline and simplify. ”

More funding, resources and specialist capacity:

enough funding to achieve the aims of the reforms, more trained staff such as teaching assistants to support pupils, and better access to specialists such as Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Educational Psychologists.

“ Early access to specialist support as a right. ”

“ I hope that school get a more realistic funding to support the social and emotional needs of their students. I hope that it provides training to all levels of staff to ensure that every child gets early intervention...I am hoping that advanced professional support will shorten the wait times for diagnosis, and get children and their families sooner support to prevent school avoidance, rather than trying to unravel the intense anxiety after the fact. ”

Better training and understanding in schools:

all staff should have stronger knowledge and awareness of SEND, there should be improved understanding of neurodiversity, mental health, and behaviour, and mainstream schools should be better equipped to support needs.

“ Schools [should] be experts in ND [neurodivergent conditions] and understand the impact of the [school] environment. ”

“ For this to be successful, teachers in mainstream settings must be properly equipped. This means not only high-quality training in supporting children with SEND and trauma, but also the time, resources and staffing capacity to put that training into practice. Without this, expectations placed on schools risk becoming unrealistic and unsustainable. ”

Child-centred support tailored to each child:

there was a strong emphasis on tailored approaches, not “one-size fits all”. A recognition that needs vary and change over time and so the support must too, and the importance for many of having consistent, specialist provision.

“ Support that reflects the individual child, not a standardised package that assumes needs are predictable. ”

“ Support... has to be consistent, specialist-led and clearly defined. ”

Less conflict and better partnerships with families:

desire to end the “battle” for support, a need for clearer communication and guidance, and greater collaboration between families and services.

“ I just want my child to get the right support without me having to fight every step of the way. ”

“ It should be a system that works for families, not against them. ”

Appropriate provision enabling children to participate fully:

inclusive education was supported as long as it was sufficiently resourced, the need for adequate support, and acknowledgement of the need for a range of provision, including specialist settings.

“ The barrier is not the ability to learn, but the conditions in which learning takes place. ”

“ I hope the reforms genuinely improve access to education for children with Special Educational Needs, particularly those with complex needs. This should include consistent, high-quality support across all settings, faster access to the right provision and better support for communication, independence, and life skills. ”

It is also important to note that some respondents had no hope for the reforms:

desire to end the “battle” for support, a need for clearer communication and guidance, and greater collaboration between families and services.

“ I do not see it fixing the problem. I see it just putting a sticky plaster over and making it look pretty. ”

“ I have no hope the reforms will achieve anything but save some money in the short term for the Government. ”

“ I really don't hold any hope that the reforms will achieve any kind of equity in the system. I think the reforms are unambitious and do not address the structural deficits at the heart at the system. ”

Impact of the reforms

Whilst there was a lot of hope about the reforms, respondents were overwhelmingly worried about what might happen if the reforms go ahead in their current form.

Common fears included:

Reduced support and worsening outcomes for children:

many believe the reforms could lead to less support – particularly for children with complex needs or needs that are harder to see. Several respondents commented that they believed the reforms would worsen mental health, lead to more exclusion, and reduce life chances for their children.

“ Children like mine won't get the support they greatly need. This will then affect their mental health and lives. ”

“ The children who need the most support may end up receiving even less. ”

Loss of legal protections, accountability, and parental voice:

there were strong concerns about how the reforms would weaken Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) protection and Tribunal rights and a fear that families would lose routes to challenge decisions and secure provision.

“ Loss of legal rights, increase in system power and parental blame. Devastation for parent-carers. Lack of accountability. Poorly considered packages of support. ”

“ If legal protections like EHCPs are weakened or removed, support may become inconsistent between schools, [my child's] needs may become inconsistent between schools, [their] needs may be misunderstood or not prioritised and [they] may struggle to access learning safely and effectively. ”

Pressure on mainstream schools where the system doesn't have enough staff/resources:

there was widespread concern that schools are already overstretched and may be unable to meet increased demand. Respondents also told us that they worry whether the inclusion promised will be properly resourced.

“Mainstream schools overwhelmed with SEN children and unable to provide a decent education.”

“ Schools are not having sufficient funding to be able to meet the individual needs of SEND children. They are not coping as it is, and this will put more schools under a lot of pressure.”

“ Mainstream schools are already facing significant challenges in meeting the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Chronic understaffing means that even where there is willingness, there simply isn't the capacity to deliver meaningful, consistent support. These reforms do not appear to address that fundamental issue.”

Less personalised support and greater inequality:

There was a lot of concern about the proposals to introduce more standardised packages of support and how these would fail to properly reflect individual's needs. Respondents feared this could lead to more children falling through the gaps – especially children with higher support needs, neurodivergent conditions, and those from marginalised groups.

“ Packages are too broad to reflect needs of an individual with a disability with multiple different features.”

“ Children like mine won't get the support they greatly need...Children with autism and ADHD need early intervention and support...I don't want my children being told their needs aren't great enough for help, when they struggle every single day.”

Uncertainty and a lack of confidence in the system:

Confidence and trust in the system has been weakened through years of fighting for support that children are entitled to. Many families expressed anxiety, confusion and low confidence in these reforms, a lack of faith that they would make a difference in a meaningful way and expressed a wish for services to be designed with families.

“ I’m worried my help might change and I won’t know what is happening. I need things to stay safe and calm. ”

“ I find the current process very confusing and complex. It’s very lengthy...I am hoping the reform will streamline and simplify these. If not, I hope it does not make it any more difficult than it currently is. ”

Other thoughts

Respondents were given the opportunity to share any other thoughts they had about the proposed reforms. Many used the space to further comment on the points they raised whilst others used it to urge the Government to listen better to families. Responses included:

A call to genuinely listen to parents and young people

“ I really don’t hold any hope that the reforms will achieve any kind of equity in the system. I think the reforms are unambitious and do not address the structural deficits at the heart at the system. ”

Families’ exhaustion and overwhelm

“ I am already exhausted and overwhelmed and need guided one to one help. ”

Need for changes across the entire system, not just structural reform

“ Reform is not only structural – it is cultural. ”

Legal protections must be retained

“ If the Government believes that their strategy is the way forward then why not leave disabled children’s legal rights as the safety net... taking them away whilst a new system is brought in is like playing roulette with the most vulnerable in society. ”

Concern about motivations and under-funding

“ It feels like a budget conscious decision that SEND children and young people are not as important or valued in society and to provide ‘them’ with support is doing ‘them’ a favour that ‘they’ should be grateful for. ”

Importance of early and consistent support

“ Early support is critical...the impact is not temporary, it carries through into adulthood. ”

Lack of trust and concern about consultation and implementation

“ Many families currently feel that key decisions may already have been predetermined. ”

Thank you to everyone who took part in our engagement around this important issue. If you would like to talk to a member of the team about this, please email **Dan Jacques, Social Change Manager** (dan.jacques@barnwoodtrust.org) or call **01242 539935**.