



SEN Parent Support Group
Navigating The SEND Process
For Better Outcomes, TOGETHER!

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SEND REFORM UPDATE: THE WHITE PAPER 23.02.2026

On the following pages you will find:

- What Is Being Proposed in Plain Language
- Duration and Transition Timeline
- Comparison With Current Rights
- New Hoops Families May Be Expected to Face
- Key Questions Parents May Ask Now
- Critical Questions That Remain Unanswered
- Summary: What Parents Need to Know Now
- Next Steps for SEND Parent Support Group

What is being proposed in plain language

New school support plan (ISP)

- Every child with SEND (not just those with an EHCP) will have a legal right to an Individual Support Plan (ISP). That “legal right” has yet to be spelled out!
- The ISP must set out your child’s needs, the support they’ll get, and how school will review it. How is this different to an IEP?
- These will run together throughout transition which concerns me as the focus is then put on schools and not LA accountability.
- Schools will have to use a **national menu of proven interventions** (e.g. small-group teaching, speech and language work) and personalise it for your child. My concern here is that the cap will be made to fit and exclude the bespoke provision and enforceability as detailed currently within an EHCP

EHCPs stay – but for more complex needs

- EHCPs are not being scrapped – Yet?
- They will be kept for children whose needs cannot routinely be met in mainstream, even with an ISP and extra support. How will this be managed, reviewed and monitored? The additional funding equates to about 1 TA per school in the 52 LA’s that England have. How is that criteria met? Again, the devil is in the detail, and in time I will present this to group as delivered to us mere mortals.
- EHCPs will be built around new “**Specialist Provision Packages**” – national templates for what support should look like for certain types/levels of need. Again, my concern here is that no two children are the same, neither are their combination of needs
- Children with EHCPs will also have an **ISP** showing how the package is delivered day-to-day in school.



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More support in mainstream schools

- *Albeit the HEADLINES of investment stand strong, underneath they equate to very little per school.*
- New funding so schools can run small-group interventions, language support and other SEND programmes. Again, how will that be accountable as this is not budgeted for in the small amount they actually get? The devil will still be in the detail!
- A new “Experts at Hand” service so schools can call in specialists (EPs, SaLT, OT, specialist teachers) even if a child doesn’t have an EHCP. This is great, BUT this was available to us already – so, again, we will question when the finer detail comes out and within our consultation response - how the budget will move this forward?
- Over time, every secondary school is expected to have an inclusion base for extra support and small-group work. “Expected”

New rules for complaints and accountability

- If there’s a dispute about getting an ISP or what’s in it, the school’s complaints panel must include an independent SEND expert. Sadly, complaints according to our SEND Reform inhouse questionnaire: Members never actually achieved provision via complaints! This will be of particular interest when we respond.
- The SEND Tribunal will still exist as a legal backstop for key decisions (assessment for a specialist package, which package, which school). Again, the criteria for ISP and intervention needs detailing so that a clear path for accountability and recourse can be determined. Our question within our response will be for them to define at what point this can happen?

Independent special schools

- They’ll be brought into a new regulatory regime and expected to deliver the support set out in the national Specialist Provision Packages, at a “fair and reasonable” cost. It will be interesting to see how Specialist Provision Packages are defined and I cannot wait to see the detail here.

How long will this take – duration and transition

This is not an overnight change. It’s a **10-year mission** with key staging points:

- **Now to late 2020s:**

Consultation, drafting of Specialist Provision Packages, building up funding streams and “Experts at Hand”.



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ISPs start to become the **standard** for all children with SEND.

- **By 2029:**

Any child who has a special school place in 2029 can keep it until they finish education if they want to (first part of the “triple lock”). The triple lock is simply the government’s three-part promise about who keeps what support during the transition from EHCPs to ISPs

- **From 2030 onwards:**

Children in mainstream with EHCPs who the system thinks are “best supported” via an ISP will only start to transition as they move between phases (e.g. primary to secondary).

Before any move, an **ISP must already be in place**, so there is no gap in support. This is quite a positive in terms of Primary Schools not leaving SEND to Y7 transition. Feedback and from personal experience primary schools deny / ignore SEN in favour of high school picking it up - this is a mini plus!

In short:

- ***No child currently in Year 3 or older will be forced off an EHCP onto an ISP before the end of secondary school if they don't want to.***
- ***The full new system (ISPs + Packages + Experts at Hand) is meant to be built before large-scale transitions happen.***

What this means compared to current rights

Right now:

- *Only children with an EHCP have a **legally enforceable plan**.*
- *SEN Support is often **inconsistent** and **not legally robust**.*
- *Access to specialists (EP, SaLT, OT) usually depends on **LA gatekeeping** and/or an EHCP.*
- *Complaints about SEN Support sit mostly within the school's own process, with no SEND expert guaranteed.*

Under the proposals:

- Every child with SEND gets a legal right to an ISP.



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- SEN Support becomes **structured and accountable**, not optional. Accountability is yet to be defined.
- Schools can access specialists via Experts at Hand, even without an EHCP. (SaLT/OT)
- EHCPs remain for **more complex needs**, but their content is standardised via national Specialist Provision Packages. We of course eagerly await the details of SPP's.
- Complaints about ISPs must involve an "independent SEND expert", and Tribunal remains for key decisions.

Gain: Earlier, legally-backed support for many more children.

Risk: EHCPs may become harder to get, because the system will say "you can be met via an ISP + Experts at Hand".

NEW HOOPS FAMILIES MAY BE EXPECTED TO JUMP THROUGH

These are the likely "new hoops" hidden in the design:

- **Proving the ISP isn't enough**

Before agreeing to assess for a Specialist Provision Package/EHCP, LAs and schools may expect a clear track record of ISP support, reviews, and evidence that it's not sufficient.

- **Navigating a dual-document system**

For children with EHCPs, parents will need to keep an eye on **both** the EHCP (Package) **and** the ISP, and make sure they match in reality.

- **Challenging "you don't need an EHCP" decisions**

With more money and specialists in mainstream, some LAs may argue that **fewer children need EHCPs**, and push hard for ISP-only support.

- **Understanding national Packages**

Parents will need to understand what's inside the relevant **Specialist Provision Package** to know if their child is actually getting everything they're entitled to.



KEY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

Q: Are EHCPs being scrapped?

A: No. EHCPs stay, but are reserved for children whose needs cannot routinely be met in mainstream, even with an ISP and extra support.

Q: Will my child lose their special school place?

A: If your child has a special school place in 2029, they can keep it until they finish education if they want to.

Q: Will my child be forced off their EHCP onto an ISP?

A: Not immediately. For children in mainstream, transitions from EHCP to ISP start from 2030, and only at natural phase changes. No child currently in Year 3 or older will be forced to move before the end of secondary if they don't want to.

Q: What new rights does my child get?

A: A legal right to an ISP (school support plan) for every child with SEND, plus stronger complaints routes and continued access to Tribunal for key decisions.

Q: What should I be watching for?

- Whether your child's school creates and maintains a proper ISP.
- Whether the ISP is actually delivered and reviewed.
- Whether, when needs are clearly beyond what an ISP can deliver, the school/LA still agree to assess for a Specialist Provision Package/EHCP.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE WATCHING FOR – QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERS?

1. Define the "legal right"

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

The White Paper states that ISPs will become a legal entitlement.

It does not:

- define the legal wording
- specify the statutory duty
- explain enforcement
- explain what happens if a school refuses
- define timelines or review cycles



2. How Is the ISP different to an IEP?

Does the White Paper answer this? PARTIALLY, BUT NOT ENOUGH

It says ISPs must:

- record needs
- record provision
- record review arrangements
- use a national menu of interventions

But it **does not**:

- define minimum standards
- define required frequency of reviews
- define who signs it off
- define what happens if school does not deliver it

3. What is the accountability for Schools and LA's?

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

The White Paper shifts responsibility to schools, but:

- does not define LA oversight
- does not define LA duties to monitor ISPs
- does not define consequences for failure

This is a major gap.

4. How can the DoFE Assure us that this is not a “make the cap fit” scenario?

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

The White Paper introduces:

- national intervention menus
- national Specialist Provision Packages

But it does not explain:



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- how bespoke provision will be protected
- how exceptions will be made
- how individualisation will be enforced

This is a significant risk and remains unanswered.

5. How will this be managed, reviewed and monitored?

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

There is no detail on:

- who decides a child “cannot be met in mainstream”
- what evidence is required
- how often this is reviewed
- who monitors the decision
- what the criteria are

This is one of the biggest unanswered questions.

6. How is that criteria met? (re: funding + EHCP thresholds)

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

The White Paper:

- gives headline funding
- gives national aspirations

But it does not:

- define EHCP threshold criteria
- define ISP sufficiency criteria
- define how funding is allocated per child
- define how schools prove they’ve exhausted ISP support

This remains completely unclear.

7. “No two children are the same... how will Packages work?”

Does the White Paper answer this? PARTIALLY



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It says:

- Packages will be national
- Packages will be co-designed with experts and parents
- Packages will define what support looks like

But it does not:

- explain how individual differences will be accommodated
- explain how to request deviations
- explain how bespoke provision will be protected

So, the concern remains valid.

8. How will small budgets deliver this?

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

It gives:

- total national funding
- examples of interventions

But it does not:

- break down per-school allocations
- explain how schools will afford specialists
- explain how staffing will be increased
- explain how sustainability will be monitored

This is a major gap

9. Experts at Hand was already available... how will this be different?

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

It describes the service but:

- does not explain how it differs from current traded services
- does not explain how it will be staffed
- does not explain how demand will be managed
- does not explain how rationing will be prevented



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10. Complaints never actually achieved provision... how will this be different?

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

It says:

- a SEND expert will sit on complaints panels

But it does not:

- define the expert's powers
- define enforcement
- define consequences for non-compliance
- define timelines

11. Criteria for ISP and intervention needs to be definitive so recourse is clear.

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

There is no criteria published for:

- ISP eligibility
- ISP content
- ISP review
- ISP escalation
- ISP to EHCP transition

This is one of the biggest missing pieces.

12. Specialist Provision Packages are yet to be delivered and analysed.

Does the White Paper answer this? YES but only by saying they're coming later!

It confirms:

- Packages will be drafted later this year
- They will be consulted on
- They will be national

But no detail exists yet.



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13. Primary schools ignore SEN and leave it to secondary... is this fixed?

Does the White Paper answer this? PARTIALLY

It says:

- ISPs must be in place before phase transfer
- Experts at Hand will support early identification

But it does not:

- define enforcement
- define consequences for primary schools that fail to identify needs
- define monitoring

14. Will this actually improve accountability?

Does the White Paper answer this? NO

It promises:

- joint accountability
- improved complaints
- Tribunal retained

But it does not:

- define new LA duties
- define new school duties
- define monitoring mechanisms
- define sanctions

Accountability remains **the weakest part** of the entire reform and as SEND Parents you will already know that this is the area that needed the most strengthening.

All of these questions remain **completely unanswered** and will depend on – and this is the scary part:

- future legislation
- future statutory guidance
- the Specialist Provision Packages
- the ISP legal framework



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- the consultation process

The End (for now)

