SEND Reform Discussion Report

A summary for parents and carers
SEND Hub, Eric Manns Rotherham | 20 October 2026

Purpose of the discussion

Parents and service leads began a shared journey of partnership, exploring how family voice can shape Rotherham's SEND Reform offer. SEND means special educational needs and disabilities.

Rotherham Parent Forum Ltd (RPFL) team and families were joined by the Council's Transformation Lead and SEND Lead, and the Designated Clinical Officer, representing health. The session explored national changes, local plans and partnership with families.

Why change is needed and what is proposed

The current SEND system is not needs-led, and inclusion is inconsistent across the country. It often depends on diagnosis rather than identifying need early; accountability through an EHCP is often the only course of action a parent has when needs are not met, resulting in lengthy, bureaucratic processes that do not put the child or young person at the centre and do not deliver good outcomes for anyone. Consultation results show that everyone agrees that the system needs to change; however, for families ,across 150 local areas, through the national network of parent carer forums, there are conditions to the change that must be adhered to in a new system.



Families nationally report late help, inconsistent support, complicated processes and feeling they must fight for help. Reform aims to provide earlier, clearer support, more inclusive mainstream education and specialist expertise closer to children and young people.

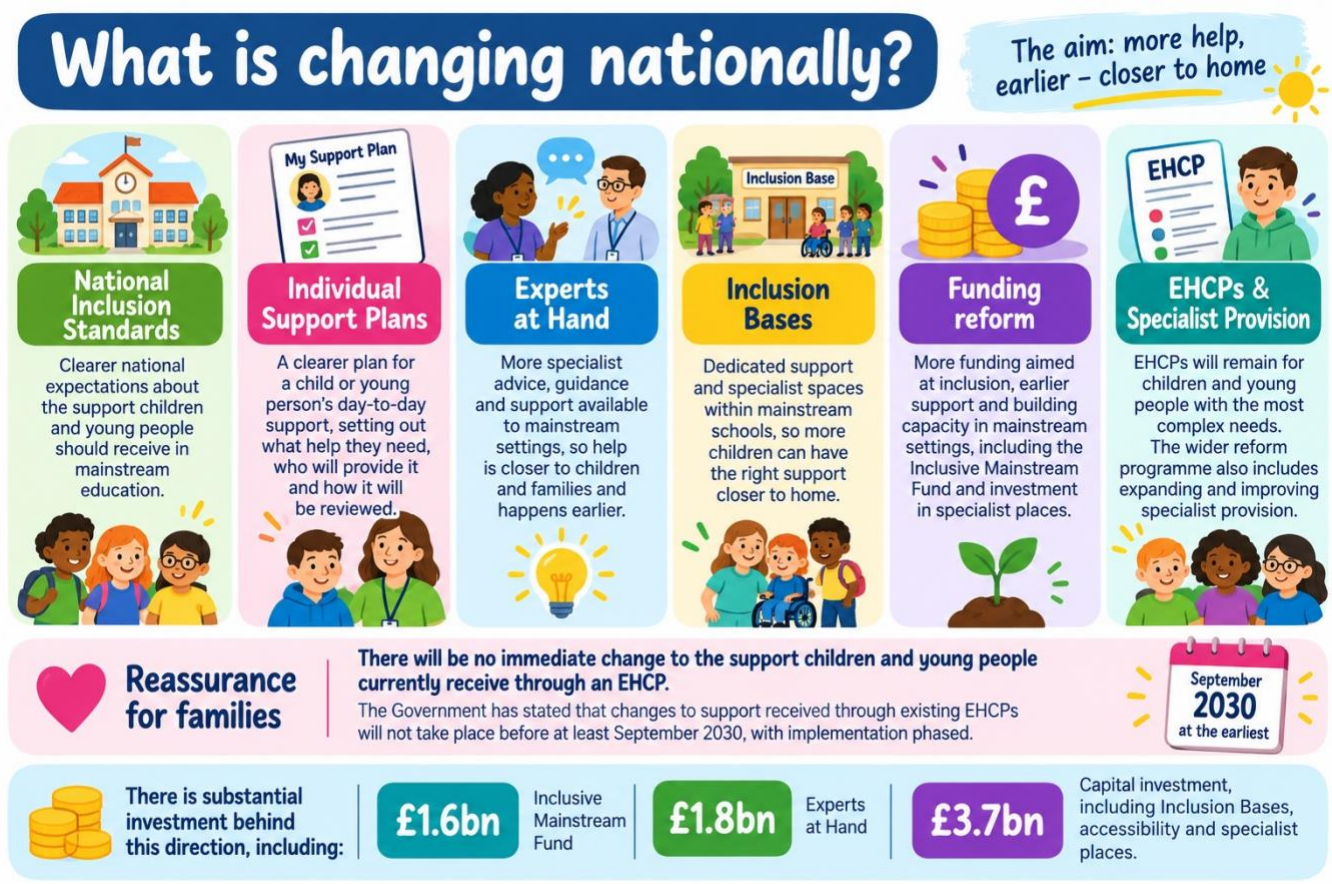
What is the National Direction?

The aim is to make support earlier, clearer and more consistent.

To: Identify needs earlier, support children and young people sooner, make mainstream more inclusive, bring specialist support closer and make responsibility and accountability clearer.

The RPFL presentation introduced the 6 areas of national change proposed through local area SEND reform plans: National inclusion standards, individual support plans, Experts at Hand, Inclusion bases, funding changes and

continued specialist provision. These developments are not all in place yet; the government has set out a 3-year programme, accompanied by guidance.



Existing SEND rights and legal duties continue until new law takes effect. Changes to support through existing education, health and care plans (EHCPs) will not happen before September 2030 at the earliest, with a phased introduction and in partnership with families.

What Partners told us about building the Rotherham Plan covering Early years, Primary, Secondary and Post-16 mainstream education

Rotherham's approved Local Area Reform Plan covers 2026–2029, and includes ;

- Experts at Hand - specialist advice and guidance to mainstream settings
- Inclusion bases - Inclusion support bases and Specialist inclusion bases
- Clearer routes to help - National standards and individual support plans
- Quality assurance Framework - Data, School improvement team, and Parent experience in equal measure.

Every Rotherham school, including Multi Academy Trust's, (MAT's) now has a linked Specialist Inclusion (SIT) teacher.

Further information on all of this will be facilitated by RPFL

SEND reform delivery Milestones – Year 1

Experts at Hand (EAH) Programme

Recruit and deploy multi-disciplinary workforce.

Launch the first EAH delivery model in priority localities.

Publish operating standards and access arrangements.

Achieve coverage across at least 60% of settings by the end of the year.

Improve access to therapy support and early intervention

Inclusion Bases

Secure and develop first-wave inclusion base sites.

Open the first inclusion bases.

Establish quality assurance arrangements for bases.

Quality and Monitoring

Implement new data systems and reporting arrangements.

Complete DfE baseline returns.

Develop automated SEND dashboards

Create a single view of performance across education, health and care.

Introduce benchmarking and monitoring reports for governance boards

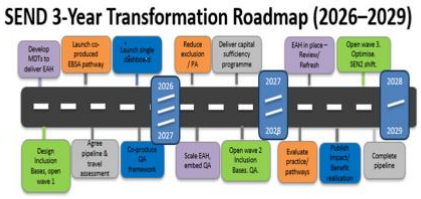
Practice and Pathways

Embed the co-produced Threshold of Need across schools.

Launch and implement key pathways (including EBSA, Emotional based school avoidance pathways).

Roll out quality assurance and school improvement activity.

Reduce variation in inclusive practice across schools and trusts.



What parents and carers told us:

Families wanted honest communication, accurate records and clearer answers. They raised concerns about incidents not always being recorded or shared, communication as equal partners not embedded across all schools, being passed between services, help for children struggling to attend school and access to suitable learning environments. They asked whether inclusion bases would help children feel part of school life and where the child/young person voice is in developing all of this; when inclusion bases (specific ASD resource provision) isn't working, what is the plan? Where to escalate if communication has broken down with school, and how the co-produced threshold of need documents will cross-reference with new Inclusion policies?
A request for further discussion of these concerns with partners was raised , this will be facilitated by RPFL.

What good support would look like

Discussions from A tabletop exercise on **What good Support looks like** included:

- Belonging: children feel welcomed, understood and included in learning and friendships.
- Everyday adjustments: classroom layouts, language, rewards and routines reflect different needs. (Parents questioned pen licenses and removing breaks or fidget aids as consequences).

- Access across the school day: breakfast and after-school clubs have suitable staffing and support, and dyslexia support is consistently available.
- Specialist help: autism and neurodiversity specialists help schools review and improve practice.
- Suitable learning: smaller environments where needed, an appropriate curriculum including GCSEs, and meaningful relationships with peers.
- Trustworthy information: schools record experiences accurately, share concerns openly and explain who families can contact.
- Earlier help: children struggling to attend school receive support, including while waiting for services or new provision.
- Truths verified – to build trusting partnership. Language is important
- Evaluating training, how it's utilised and what changes are made as a result to benefit children young people and families
- Services working in partnership together – LA, schools, health, social care.
- Communication – School responds promptly, parent has point of contact.
- Communication – lead person to aid rapid or timely reponse
- Communication is respectful, parents invited to conversations
- Regular, scheduled reviews, minutes sent to parents beforehand with clear timescales and what to try now and next
- Clear actions from review with honesty about pressures communicated if not happened.
- EHCP or plan followed with evidence of this through outcomes
- Partners, keyworkers given time to work in partnership with school
- Positive behaviour outcomes for CYP at home and school as a result
- Robust and good transition plan, particularly primary to secondary
- Accessing education - Inclusion bases support all abilities, not just aimed at below expected
- If not in inclusion base as academically able , needs are still being met in mainstream classrooms.
- Needs led not diagnosis led

How do we know it is working?

Happy child/young person, regulated at home, happy to go to school, parents feel informed, informed action plans , evidence of partnership working with families

National Direction to local opportunity in Rotherham

Quality Assurance Framework

Measuring what difference children and families are experiencing in real time to shape Rotherham's offer.

Rotherham's SEND reform work gives us an opportunity to work together on:

Inclusion – What does genuine inclusive education look like?

Earlier support – How do we respond before difficulties escalate?

Specialist Expertise – How do we bring expertise closer to children, young people and settings?

Local capacity – How do we meet more needs well within Rotherham?

Partnership – How do Education, Health, care, settings and families work as one system?



What this could mean for Rotherham

Five themes will help families and partners explore what needs to improve:

Theme	Question for local discussion
Inclusion and belonging	How will children feel welcomed, included and supported?
Earlier support	How can families get help before difficulties reach crisis?
Specialist expertise	How can specialist help be easier to access?
Local capacity	How can more children's needs be met well within Rotherham?
Partnership and accountability	How will services work together, and who is responsible when support is not working?

Family voice shaping the offer

Parents bring essential knowledge about what works in everyday life. This session began a partnership conversation and gathered questions and practical ideas. Meaningful co-production means families help identify priorities, develop ideas, test arrangements and review their impact throughout the changes.

RPFL's approach is: Listen → Understand → Evidence → Influence → Co-produce → Feedback. Experiences are brought together, shared themes go to decision-makers and families hear back about the response: "You said…" → "We influenced…" → "This changed…"

How will we know things are improving

The Quality Assurance Framework — the way partners will check whether the model works — should include children's and families' experiences. Together, we need to ask whether help comes earlier, if schools are more

inclusive, specialist support is accessible, responsibility is clear and families experience is that things are getting better.

The closing discussion explored using family stories and journeys to show change, and how to avoid schools becoming gatekeepers of support through monitoring and equal partnership. Trust will grow when families can see how their contributions influence decisions.

Please consider sharing your voice and experience, Local learning can also influence regional and national discussions through Yorkshire and Humber parent carer forums and the National Network of Parent Carer Forums as the National standards for inclusion and future legislation is considered.

Proposed next steps

This was an opening step towards working together. Dates for further discussions will be agreed.

RPFL will facilitate polls, surveys, and focused, targeted discussions with partners**,** and engage as many families as possible across the borough.

1. Agree themed discussions from families with service leads, linked to the five local themes.
2. Include children, young people and families who face barriers to attending meetings, using conversations, short surveys and activities as well.
3. Agree measures of progress, possible dashboard combining service information with family experiences.
4. Report back regularly on updates and opportunities to co produce the Rotherham SEND offer.



Appendix – Provided by Head of SEND, RMBC.

Understanding SEND Reform

I'm worried about what I have read online. Should I be concerned?	It is completely understandable to feel concerned. There is currently a great deal of discussion about potential reform and not everything shared online is accurate or reflects current law. Where possible, families should rely on information from official sources and continue to focus on the support their child receives now
Is my child's EHCP being removed?	No. EHCPs remain part of the SEND system and continue to provide legal protection for children and young people with identified needs.
Will children lose support?	Children's needs remain the starting point for decision making. Support continues to be based on individual need rather than broad national discussions.
Will all children have to attend mainstream schools?	No. Children require different types of provision, and a range of educational placements continues to exist.
Will parents still have a voice?	Yes. Parents remain central to decision making and continue to be involved in discussions about support, reviews and future planning.
Why is reform being discussed?	Most people agree that improvements are needed. The objective is to create a system that is easier to navigate, more consistent and provides support as early as possible.

What should I focus on as a parent?	The most important thing is to continue focusing on: • Your child's strengths • Their needs • Their wellbeing • Their progress • Their aspirations for the future
There are some legitimate concerns they should keep a close eye on	
1. Loss of Individual Entitlements	"Will my child still have a legally enforceable right to the support they need?"
Reduced Access to Specialist Placements	The key concern is not inclusion itself, but whether children with the most complex needs can still access specialist environments when they genuinely require them.
3. National Standardisation Could Reduce Flexibility	However, parents might worry that: • Individual circumstances receive less consideration. • Support packages become linked to predefined bands or categories. • Unique needs get squeezed into standard frameworks.
4. Longer Transitions and Uncertainty	Whenever major system reform occurs there is a risk of: • Delays in decision making. • Confusion between old and new systems. • Different interpretations across schools, health services and local authorities. Parents with children approaching key transitions (starting school, moving to secondary school, post-16 provision) may feel particularly anxious about continuity of support.

5. Funding Pressures	Even where reforms are well intentioned, parents may be concerned that financial sustainability becomes the dominant factor in decision-making.
6. Health and Therapy Provision	Parents may worry that reforms focused on education do not sufficiently address shortages in health services, which are often the biggest barrier to successful inclusion.
7. Post-16 and Preparation for Adulthood	There is concern that a stronger focus on outcomes and independence could sometimes lead to support being reduced before a young person is genuinely ready.

What Parents Probably Shouldn't Worry About

There is also a lot of misinformation circulating on social media.

At present there is no confirmed proposal that would:

- Abolish SEND support.
- Remove all EHCPs overnight.
- Force every child into mainstream school.
- End parental rights of appeal completely.
- Remove legal protections under the Equality Act.

Any significant changes would require legislation and consultation.

I support reforms that make support quicker, more consistent and easier to access.

However, I want reassurance that children with the greatest level of need will continue to have legally enforceable rights to the provision and placements they require.

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