



SEND Accountability Board: Thematic Report of Parent Carer Feedback

Purpose and approach

This report brings together parent carer experiences shared through the SEND feedback Padlet. It is structured under the three requested headings: What's working; Not working; How could it be better?

The purpose is to identify recurring themes, highlight the impact on children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families, and identify areas requiring attention from the SEND Accountability Board and relevant workstreams.

The feedback covers education placements and transitions, Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), SEND transport, alternative provision, post-16 support, professional advice, communication, decision-making and co-production.

The report anonymises names and dates and focuses on the substance of the experiences reported. It distinguishes positive experiences from concerns raised by families. The feedback is qualitative and should not be treated as a representative measure of all families' experiences or as independent verification of individual allegations.

1. What's working

Although positive feedback was limited in comparison with the volume and detail of concerns, families identified examples of practice that made a meaningful difference.

1.1 Individual professionals who listen and seek solutions

- Families value professionals who listen to their concerns, explore solutions and avoid a rigid, process-led approach.
- One parent described the significant difference made by a professional who was willing to work with the family to find a solution.
- Where professionals demonstrate flexibility, understanding and a willingness to resolve difficulties, families feel better supported.

Thematic finding: Individual professional practice can improve a family's experience, even where wider systems and processes remain difficult to navigate.

1.2 Positive relationships with school staff

- Some families expressed gratitude for school staff and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) who provide support within the resources and facilities available to them.
- Parents recognised the efforts of staff working to support children in mainstream settings, including where the school environment may not fully meet their child's needs.
- Some children enjoy their lesson content, demonstrating that positive educational experiences exist even where access to learning remains inconsistent.

Thematic finding: Dedicated staff and positive relationships are valued. However, good individual practice should not be relied upon to compensate for gaps in resources, provision or wider system support.

1.3 The value of provision that reflects individual needs



Families' accounts indicate that children benefit when their needs are understood and when support is responsive to their circumstances. The positive experiences reported reinforce the importance of listening to families, involving professionals who know the child and maintaining continuity.

What this means for the Board: Identify and understand the practices that families value, establish why they work, and consider how they can be embedded consistently across services rather than depending on individual professionals.

2. Not working

The feedback identifies concerns across several interconnected areas. The recurring theme is a gap between the support children and young people need, the processes intended to secure that support, and families' experiences of obtaining and maintaining it.

2.1 EHCP processes, communication and casework continuity

Families described:

- Delayed or unanswered emails and difficulty contacting the relevant teams.
- Frequent changes in caseworkers and a lack of continuity in communication and decision-making.
- Annual reviews that families report have not taken place or have not been finalised in a timely way.
- Agreed actions not being followed through.
- Limited transparency about decision-making panels, the evidence considered and the reasons for decisions.
- Families having to repeatedly chase professionals to establish whether actions have been completed.

These experiences leave families uncertain about what is happening, who is responsible and when their child's needs will be addressed.

Impact on children and families

Delays and poor communication can prolong uncertainty, undermine trust and leave children without clarity about the support they should receive. Families report significant stress and describe having to escalate matters to secure responses or accountability.

The feedback also indicates that parents may feel compelled to become the main coordinators of their child's provision, despite this not being their professional responsibility.

2.2 Delays in securing suitable education and specialist placements

Families reported difficulties obtaining suitable school places, particularly where children cannot access mainstream education successfully and specialist capacity is limited.

Concerns include:

- Prolonged waits for suitable placements.
- Children being offered education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) packages that families report do not meet their child's preferences or needs.
- A lack of suitable local specialist options, resulting in the prospect of children travelling outside their area.
- Children whose needs are not considered adequately met in mainstream settings but who cannot access specialist provision.



- Difficulties securing support for children without an EHCP, including those undergoing assessment or awaiting diagnostic clarification.

Families also raised concerns about children being expected to move settings without adequate consideration of their individual circumstances, travel needs and the impact on family life.

Impact on children and young people

A lack of suitable provision can affect access to education, learning, social participation, emotional wellbeing and progress towards independence. Where provision is not appropriate or consistent, the consequences may extend beyond education into health, family relationships and parental employment.

Key issue: The feedback suggests that placement availability, EHCP processes and transport cannot be considered in isolation. Delays or gaps in one area can undermine the effectiveness of support in others.

2.3 Phase transfers and transitions between settings

Parents expressed particular concern about transition arrangements, including transfers from primary to secondary education and changes in provision as young people approach adulthood. Reported issues include:

- Changes to transition processes being communicated too late or through channels that may not reach all relevant families.
- Requests for schools to collate placement preferences at short notice rather than obtaining this information directly from families.
- Limited visibility of available settings and their ability to meet individual needs.
- Difficulty obtaining information and advice to help families make informed choices.
- Uncertainty about how preferences, professional advice and individual circumstances are considered.
- Concern about transitions where there are very few suitable local placements.

Families also questioned the transparency of how information about children is shared with potential settings and whether families are adequately informed about these processes.

Impact: Poorly managed transitions can create avoidable anxiety and uncertainty at a critical stage of a child's education. They can also increase the risk of unsuitable placements, disrupted provision and additional pressure on families.

2.4 SEND transport: consistency, safety and reliability

Transport featured prominently in the negative feedback.

Families described:

- Frequent changes of drivers, passenger assistants and vehicles.
- Unreliable arrival times and transport not being available when expected, including at the beginning of a school term.
- Difficulties contacting the transport team when arrangements fail.
- Concerns about staff engagement, communication and understanding of children's needs.
- Questions about vehicle suitability, booster seats, cleanliness and the safe management of environmental or sensory risks.
- Uncertainty about arrangements for children who require emergency medication.



- Refusals of transport or difficulties accessing transport appeals, including reports of incorrect paperwork or decision-makers lacking relevant information.
- Concerns about late transport applications where delays in finalising an EHCP or agreeing provision have affected a family's ability to apply within the usual timeframe.

Families also raised concerns about the financial contribution required for transport where the service is experienced as unreliable.

Impact on children and young people

For children who rely on predictable routines, familiar adults and carefully managed sensory environments, frequent changes can cause distress and undermine their sense of safety.

Transport failures can also affect attendance, punctuality and access to education.

Where emergency medication may be needed, families require clear assurance that appropriate arrangements have been considered and that staff understand their responsibilities.

Key issue: Transport is an integral part of access to education, not simply a logistical service. Reliability, continuity, safeguarding and individual needs must be considered together.

2.5 Implementation of professional advice and EHCP provision

Families reported concerns that professional recommendations are not always translated into support in practice.

Examples include:

- Recommendations made at the beginning of the school year not being implemented or only being discussed at a later annual review.
- Parents having to identify and challenge gaps in provision themselves.
- Reports containing evidence of a child's needs without a clear pathway to securing recognition and appropriate support.
- Concerns that professional evidence is not always fully considered during decision-making.
- Difficulties tracking how identified needs, supporting evidence and specified provision relate to one another within EHCP documents.

Some families also questioned whether decisions adequately reflect the evidence from professionals who know the child.

Impact: An assessment or report has limited practical value if its findings do not inform decisions and appropriate provision. The distinction between provision being agreed, provision being arranged and provision actually being delivered is important.

2.6 Post-16 provision and preparation for adulthood

Families of older young people reported concerns about transport, college access and reductions in educational hours.

The feedback includes reports of:

- Transport being refused despite having been available previously.
- Difficulties resolving transport appeals and obtaining updates.
- Significant reductions in college hours being proposed or implemented despite families believing that their young person's needs have not changed.
- Uncertainty about the evidence and consultation informing decisions about educational provision.
- Insufficient coordination between education, transport and other relevant services.



These concerns raise questions about continuity of support as young people move towards adulthood.

Impact: Inadequate or disrupted provision can affect qualifications, independence, social participation and progress towards employment or other adult outcomes. Decisions should be informed by the young person's individual needs, wishes and aspirations, alongside relevant evidence and applicable legal duties.

2.7 EOTAS arrangements and direct payments

Families raised concerns about the administration and reliability of EOTAS arrangements, including reports of delayed payments and difficulties obtaining clear information.

The feedback describes:

- Families and providers experiencing delays in payments.
- Families reporting that tutors or other providers were not paid when expected.
- The potential loss of tutors, personal assistants or other provision where payments are delayed.
- Uncertainty about how direct payments are administered and monitored.
- Concerns about the availability of information on the scale and status of payment arrangements.
- Reported inconsistencies in the information families receive about what may be agreed or funded.

These are reported experiences and require validation against the Council's records.

Impact: Delays in administering agreed arrangements can destabilise provision and place financial pressure on families. Where provision depends on tutors or other providers being paid, administrative failures can have direct consequences for a child's access to education.

2.8 Transparency, accountability and confidence in decision-making

Families questioned the transparency of some decisions, particularly where they could not obtain clear explanations of the evidence considered, the reasons for a decision or the route for challenging it.

Specific concerns include:

- Limited visibility of panel processes and decision records.
- Inconsistent explanations of what may or may not be agreed.
- Difficulties obtaining policies or written confirmation of decisions.
- Concerns about the consideration of parental preferences and professional evidence.
- A perception among some families that decisions are driven by financial considerations rather than the child's individual circumstances.

The last point is a reported perception, not an established finding about the motivation behind individual decisions.

Thematic finding: Decisions are more likely to command confidence when they are evidence-based, properly recorded, clearly explained and accompanied by accessible routes for review or challenge.

2.9 Co-production, communication and relationships with families



The feedback indicates that some families do not consistently experience themselves as equal partners in decisions about their children.

Concerns include:

- Communication that families experience as inflexible or dismissive.
- Insufficient involvement of families in decisions that affect their child's education and support.
- A perceived lack of opportunities to influence individual arrangements.
- The need for staff to develop skills in conflict resolution, difficult conversations and co-production.
- Families feeling that they must escalate concerns before receiving a meaningful response.

Impact: Where families feel excluded or unheard, trust deteriorates and disagreements can become harder to resolve. This can divert time and resources away from securing effective provision for children and young people.

3. How could it be better?

The following improvement areas translate the feedback into actions for the SEND Accountability Board, with an emphasis on measurable change rather than activity alone.

3.1 Improve communication, casework continuity and accountability

Recommended actions

- Establish and publish clear service standards for acknowledging, responding to and resolving enquiries.
- Monitor overdue correspondence, outstanding actions and repeat contacts, with escalation arrangements where standards are not met.
- Give families a named contact or clearly identified team responsible for their case, with effective handovers when staff change.
- Ensure families receive written updates explaining progress, outstanding actions, responsibility and expected next steps.
- Review recurring reasons for families needing to escalate concerns.

Suggested measures of impact

- Percentage of enquiries answered within the published service standard.
- Number and age of overdue cases and outstanding actions.
- Frequency of repeat contacts and escalations.
- Parent carer feedback on communication, continuity and confidence in obtaining help.

3.2 Strengthen EHCP quality, timeliness and delivery of provision

Recommended actions

- Review compliance with statutory EHCP assessment, issue and annual review requirements.



- Identify overdue reviews and plans, with particular attention to phase transfers and children whose provision is at risk of disruption.
- Introduce or strengthen monitoring of whether specified provision is arranged and delivered, not simply recorded in a plan.
- Ensure professional advice is considered and that decisions about provision are evidence-based and clearly documented.
- Make EHCPs clear, specific and measurable, with an understandable relationship between identified needs, supporting evidence and provision.
- Explain decisions to families in accessible language and provide appropriate information about review and appeal routes.

Suggested measures of impact

- Timeliness of assessments, EHCP issue and annual reviews.
- Percentage of plans requiring correction or amendment following quality assurance.
- Evidence of delivery of specified provision.
- Number of children awaiting agreed provision and the duration of any gaps.
- Parent carer feedback on EHCP clarity and whether provision meets identified needs.

3.3 Address shortages of suitable placements and improve transitions

Recommended actions

- Develop a clear picture of specialist placement capacity, demand, waiting times and unmet need across localities and age groups and develop sufficiency accordingly.
- Review children receiving EOTAS or other interim arrangements to establish whether provision is suitable, effective and consistent with their individual needs.
- Communicate phase-transfer arrangements early, directly and accessibly to families.
- Provide families with clear information about available settings, the placement process and how their preferences are considered.
- Review cases where delays in agreeing provision have contributed to difficulties securing transport or arranging a transition.
- Include the views, wishes and aspirations of children and young people in transition planning, using appropriate communication and participation support.

Suggested measures of impact

- Number of children awaiting suitable placements and length of wait.
- Number of children without suitable or effective education arrangements.
- Timeliness and completion of phase-transfer processes.
- Parent carer and young person feedback on transition planning.
- Evidence of improved access to suitable local provision where appropriate.

3.4 Improve SEND transport reliability, safety and continuity

Recommended actions

- Review transport complaints, missed journeys, late arrivals and changes in drivers, vehicles and passenger assistants.
- Establish how continuity is prioritised for children whose needs make predictability particularly important.
- Ensure staff understand safeguarding, communication, disability-related needs and the safe use of relevant equipment.



- Review arrangements for children requiring emergency medication, including how individual needs, staff training, clinical advice and applicable guidance are considered.
- Improve communication when transport is delayed, cancelled or changed.
- Review transport appeal arrangements to ensure decisions are informed by the correct information and that families receive clear outcomes.
- Consider how applications affected by delays in finalising EHCPs or agreeing provision are handled fairly and transparently.

Suggested measures of impact

- Percentage of journeys delivered on time and without cancellation.
- Frequency of changes to drivers, vehicles and passenger assistants.
- Number and nature of transport complaints and safeguarding concerns.
- Timeliness of transport decisions and appeals.
- Evidence that individual transport and emergency medication arrangements have been reviewed where required.
- Family feedback on safety, reliability and communication.

3.5 Ensure professional advice informs decisions and provision

Recommended actions

- Establish a clear process for recording professional recommendations, the decisions taken in response and the implementation of agreed provision.
- Involve professionals with relevant expertise in decisions concerning their area of responsibility.
- Ensure that disagreements with professional advice are supported by a clear rationale and appropriate evidence.
- Provide families with access to relevant reports and explanations of how evidence has informed decisions.
- Audit a sample of EHCPs and associated records to assess whether identified needs and recommendations are reflected in specified provision and delivery arrangements.

Suggested measures of impact

- Percentage of sampled cases showing a clear link between identified needs, professional advice, provision and implementation.
- Number of outstanding recommendations and the time taken to resolve them.
- Evidence that relevant professional advice is considered and recorded.
- Parent carer feedback on whether their child's needs and supporting evidence are accurately reflected.

3.6 Improve EOTAS and direct payment administration

Recommended actions

- Co-produce a coherent policy
- Review payment processes, outstanding payments, processing times and the reasons for delays.
- Establish clear communication and escalation routes for families and providers where payments are overdue.
- Assess whether administrative arrangements are disrupting agreed educational provision.



- Improve the availability of accurate information about payment arrangements, responsibilities and expected timescales.
- Ensure that proposed changes to provision or funding are clearly communicated, supported by individualised reasoning and subject to the appropriate processes.

Suggested measures of impact

- Number and value of overdue payments, where applicable.
- Average time taken to process payments and resolve payment queries.
- Number of reported instances where provision has been interrupted because of payment delays.
- Time taken to resolve payment-related complaints.
- Family and provider feedback on the reliability of arrangements.

3.7 Strengthen post-16 planning and preparation for adulthood

Recommended actions

- Review cases involving reductions in educational hours, changes to provision or loss of transport to understand whether decisions are supported by individual needs assessments and appropriate evidence.
- Ensure young people are meaningfully involved in decisions affecting their education and transition to adulthood.
- Improve coordination between education, health, social care and transport where their responsibilities intersect.
- Ensure transition planning considers qualifications, independence, employment aspirations, social participation and the support needed to achieve these outcomes.
- Review whether arrangements are in place in time to prevent avoidable gaps in education or support.

Suggested measures of impact

- Timeliness of transition planning and annual reviews.
- Number of young people experiencing gaps in education or agreed support.
- Evidence of young person participation in decisions.
- Feedback from young people and families on continuity, choice and progress towards their aspirations.

3.8 Embed meaningful co-production and improve decision transparency

Recommended actions

- Provide staff development in co-production, accessible communication, conflict resolution and difficult conversations.
- Ensure families and young people are involved early enough to influence decisions, rather than only being informed after decisions have been made.
- Publish accessible explanations of relevant processes, decision-making arrangements, responsibilities and routes for challenge.
- Ensure panel decisions are properly recorded, including the evidence considered, rationale, actions and responsible parties, subject to appropriate confidentiality and data protection requirements.



- Use parent carer and young person feedback to identify systemic issues and agree improvement actions through existing governance and workstream arrangements.
- Report back to families on what changed as a result of their feedback and explain where recommendations could not be adopted.

Suggested measures of impact

- Evidence of changes to policy, practice or service delivery resulting from family and young person input.
- Percentage of agreed improvement actions completed.
- Parent carer and young person feedback on whether they were listened to and able to influence decisions.
- Quality and accessibility of published information.
- Evidence that feedback is being used to prevent recurring problems, rather than simply being collected.

Recommended focus for the SEND Accountability Board

The feedback suggests five priorities for initial scrutiny.

Priority	Key question for the Board
EHCPs and provision	Are plans and reviews completed on time, and is the provision specified actually being delivered?
Suitable education	How many children are waiting for appropriate placements or receiving arrangements that do not meet their needs?
SEND transport	Are journeys safe, reliable and responsive to individual needs, and are concerns resolved promptly?
Communication and accountability	Can families obtain timely answers, understand decisions and identify who is responsible for action?
EOTAS and post-16 support	Are administrative delays, placement limitations or changes in provision disrupting access to education and progress towards adulthood?

Conclusion

The feedback presents a mixed picture. Some families recognise dedicated professionals and positive school support, but the wider accounts raise significant concerns about consistency, timeliness, suitable provision, transport, transparency and accountability.

A central theme is that the existence of a process, plan or agreed package does not in itself demonstrate that a child or young person is receiving effective support. The Board should therefore consider not only whether arrangements exist, but whether they are timely, suitable, implemented and achieving the intended outcomes.

The next step should be to ask the relevant services to validate the recurring concerns against operational data, identify the underlying causes and agree proportionate improvement actions with named leads and timescales. Subsequent reporting should demonstrate what has changed for children, young people and families, including whether problems have reduced and whether families can see the difference.



Northamptonshire Parent Carer Voices

This would provide a clearer line of sight between lived experience, service accountability and measurable improvement.