

# SEND Reform – Putting Children and Young People First

## LEEDS PCF, Consultation Response, May 2026

### Overview of Leeds PCF and SEND Reform Consultation Engagement

As a PCF, we have hosted two online sessions for Leeds parents and carers specifically to discuss the Schools White Paper and SEND Reform Consultation. This is alongside a Padlet (online message board) to provide our families with the consultation documents and to gather the views of our parents and carers.

We are also drawing on our collective experience as a parent carer forum and all the engagement we have had with local parents and carers over the course of the last few years via:

- School SEND coffee mornings
- PCF hosted workshops
- PCF hosted coffee mornings and afternoon teas
- Local Offer drop-in events

We currently have 664 registered members.

This is alongside our strategic work with Leeds City Council representatives for Education and Social Care, and health colleagues, including the Designated Clinical Officer for Leeds Integrated Care Board (ICB), wider ICB colleagues, and lead colleagues from Leeds Community Healthcare (LCH).

In relation to the consultation, we have attended Community of Practice sessions with the NNPCF and contributed to the regional response from the Yorkshire & Humber PCFs. Three members of our steering group also attended the Leeds SEND Engagement event on 14 May. Key concerns and issues are reflected in the overview and Executive Summary below, combined with a summary of our Padlet responses.

To make the consultation accessible to our members, we focused our Padlet and online sessions on key themes. These briefly highlighted what is proposed and provided simple pointers to prompt responses.

**Leeds parents and carers support the aim of earlier help, better inclusion and less need to fight for support, but their feedback is that the reforms remain too vague and risk shifting responsibility onto mainstream schools without the funding, workforce, specialist input and legal safeguards needed to make them work. Across all themes, families are asking for clear accountability, enforceable support, protection of specialist expertise and rights, safer and more suitable provision, and much stronger attention to post-16 pathways, life skills, mental health and long-term outcomes for children and young people with SEND.**

## Leeds PCF Response – Executive Summary

### **1. Big picture: what should change/what must not be lost?**

Parents and carers broadly support the ambition to improve inclusion and earlier support, but they see the proposals as too vague and worry that the vision is not matched by practical delivery. Key concerns are insufficient funding, workforce capacity, long waits for support, loss of specialist expertise, uncertainty about new plans and post-16 support, and whether reforms will genuinely improve outcomes and future life chances.

### **2. Support in mainstream schools**

Parents and carers see some value in national consistency and clearer inclusion expectations, but overall remain unconvinced that mainstream support will improve without major investment and wider system change. Main concerns focus on underfunding, pressure on staff, inflexible school rules and curriculum, repeated academic failure damaging confidence and mental health, bullying and safety in mainstream settings, and possible knock-on effects on exclusions, home education and unsuitable placements.

### **3. Access to specialists and services**

While easier access to specialist services is welcomed in principle, families doubt whether schools will have enough funding or capacity to secure meaningful support. There is also concern about how children will qualify for different levels of provision, whether specialist provision packages and inclusion bases are evidence-based and flexible enough to reflect mixed needs, and whether support such as Experts at Hand will be sustainable beyond initial funding.

### **4. Plans for individual children (ISPs and EHCPs)**

Parents and carers are open to Individual Support Plans in principle, but have significant concerns about thresholds, who decides support, whether provision will be enforceable, and what legal redress remains if support is not delivered. They also question how ISPs will work alongside EHCPs, EOTAS, digital privacy, transitions and school moves, whether tribunal powers and placement rights are being weakened, and whether schools will have the staffing and expertise to manage the added administrative and review burden.

### **5. Accountability**

Views on accountability are cautious and centre not only on funding transparency but on who is accountable for day-to-day support, review and updating of ISPs, and what happens when schools do not comply. Respondents want clarity on whether funding is genuinely new and ringfenced, whether complaints and redress processes will have real force and timelines, and whether reforms will be genuinely co-produced and consulted on in an accessible way.

### **6. General comments**

General comments from parents and carers highlight serious gaps in post-16 and post-19 provision, concern that reforms remain too focused on mainstream attainment and GCSE pathways rather than life skills, vocational options and preparation for adulthood, and that attendance expectations do not reflect SEND and medical realities. Additional concerns include weak health representation, uncertainty over how mental health fits within SEND, insufficient recognition of literacy and numeracy difficulties such as dyslexia and dyscalculia, and a lack of clarity about support for children already failed or traumatised by the current system.

## Leeds PCF Padlet Responses

### 1. Big picture: what should change/what must not be lost?

- **What's the best intention you can see in the reforms?**
- **What is your biggest fear?**
- **What is the one non-negotiable you want protected?**
- Agree with the intention, but what does this actually mean for staff in schools. Need to be mindful that we don't see a mass exodus of staff being asked to do more without extra resource.
- Experts at Hand sounds great on paper but are they going to be available. Are the LAs going to be able to afford to pay for it. Will they look at workforce planning, does it mean more SLTs/OTs what does it mean?
- Concern that what is being said at strategic level is not what is happening on the ground, how will they make sure how this happens? It is just a vision. Not saying how it will be done. It doesn't seem that different to what good schools and communities of schools are already providing. It seems like pie in the sky.
- The most important thing is to reduce the wait times for everything. Tribunals shouldn't take so long. It's most damaging to be waiting with no support.
- It's very vague and not specific in how it's going to help. Not sure if just shifting more children into mainstream is the best plan, some will still need smaller class sizes.
- The non-negotiable is that education provision has to come from motivated SEND-specialised professionals suited to our children and young people. Sadly, that seems a pipedream at present.
- Biggest fear? No long-term thinking helping to set up the chance of a meaningful, rewarding life that society recognises. This as per employment statistics.
- New funding – will this be ringfenced?
- Individual Support Plan ISP – is this an alternative version of the Individual Health Care Plan IHCP that some local authorities have?
- If deferrer starting school for 1 year, will I lose my child's EHCP if they are not in "class 3" yet?
- EHCPs lasted up until 25 years of age the 'new' EHCP only up until 16 yrs – what further support will be in place 16 to 25 yrs?
- Feel there is a need for more specialist training & Teaching Assistants than qualified teachers.
- Is schools going to provide Wrap Around Support i.e. breakfast clubs for children with SEND? Not enough support available currently.

**2. Support in mainstream schools - What the proposals say: The government wants more children's needs met earlier and better in mainstream schools, with clearer expectations on inclusion, trained staff and extra funding to support this.**

- **Do you feel reassured or concerned with these proposals?**
- **What aspects reassure you and why?**
- **What aspects concern you and why?**
- Consistent format and National Inclusion Standards could help and make it easier, but question is whether it can be personable then.
- The fact that we haven't got it right already, makes me wonder what difference this is really going to be able to make.
- There's still not enough money, that's the bottom line.
- Don't want to demotivate the workforce. Most staff want to do a good job. Want to ensure they are given a pot of money to think up what they think is best for their school community.
- They need to look at mainstream rules and make sure e.g. that uniform is flexible. The way the whole education system is run is not flexible enough and doesn't lead to anyone being able to achieve well, only the few who are really academic.
- Curriculum needs to be looked at as well. Why do we push maths and English so much when they are not going to be capable of achieving it and could do other qualifications that they could achieve and they could go into work areas in.
- How many times do YP have to fail at the GCSE levels which destroys their confidence and mental health. Why can they not do functional skills instead? It means that YP drop out of college.
- I want a successful overhaul of SEND provision and wish organisers well. Sadly, I am not reassured as what little detail there is seems insufficient, more so compared to the scale of the problems and the time and commitment this needs.
- Will there be an impact for more homeschooling because not performing the schools performance indicators if kept in mainstream and less specialists referrals/places.
- Will this impact on exclusion policy?

**3. Access to specialists and services – What the proposals say: Schools would get easier access to specialists (like speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and other professionals) without families having to fight for statutory processes first.**

- **Do you feel reassured or concerned with these proposals?**
- **What aspects reassure you and why?**
- **What aspects concern you and why?**

- Experience says the individual school budget allocations will not go far for procuring good SEND services, as listed above. Also, legal requirements need to be enforced - some at present are in place but the families still don't get what they're entitled to.
- Will there be a description or criteria set on how children qualify to be part of each tier? e.g. linked to condition too. Although some children may never receive a full diagnosis because it may just not be available - genetic conditions?

**4. Plans for individual children (ISPs and EHCPs) - What the proposals say: Every child with additional needs would have an Individual Support Plan (ISP) setting out day-to-day support. EHCPs would remain for children with the most complex needs, alongside clearer thresholds and more digital systems.**

- **What do you think about the proposed changes to plans?**
- **Does anything worry you about changes to EHCPs or new types of plans?**
- **Do you think this will work in practice?**
- Do agree with ISPs in principle, but what will happen for parents who still want an EHCP? Who will decide? Will it be appeal process, will it be LA to review.
- What will the threshold be?
- Rather than more teachers we feel there should be more TAs & pastoral support/wrap around e.g. breakfast clubs etc.
- Will there be reforms to GCSEs? why push children to achieve maths and english - they need to be doing more vocational qualifications to achieve their best in the future.
- Some Primary Schools probably doing this well already as more nurturing, however high schools/academies more academic.
- Will those already in the "system" for an EHCP before Sept 2029 but no approved be honoured?

**5. Accountability - What the proposals say: There will be clearer accountability across schools, local authorities and health, stronger complaints processes, continued access to tribunals, and more scrutiny where support isn't working.**

- **Do you feel that accountability will be strengthened under the proposals? Please explain why/why not?**
- **What do you fear might become harder?**
- **What protections need to be written in so families don't lose rights in practice?**
- Is it genuinely new funding or recycled from elsewhere?
- New funding – will this be ringfenced to certain schools and/or provision dependant on local need/LA or specified by the Government?

## **6. General comments on any aspects of the consultation**

### **Post-16/post-19 provision**

- What does post-16/post-19 and provision up to age 25 look like under these reforms? Currently post-16 they can only side-step once, they have to keep progressing, so they cannot necessarily remain in education until they are 25
- If the system is gearing everyone up so they can do GCSEs and be in mainstream then it won't work. It's about making them happy to be in mainstream, not necessarily about attainment because some with their level of needs won't be able to achieve that.
- Are life skills and working skills being provided for as part of the reforms? Should they be looking at more post-16 provision. Want them to be able to work in catering, cleaning or in a shop so they can work.
- Important to build on what SEND CYP can do, rather than the demoralising experience of continually failing exams

### **Attendance issues**

- Some examples where long-term medical issues and SEND issues we are setting children up to fail with the extremely high attendance targets.
- Schools can be quite threatening with targets for getting children into school. Even when they are witnessing meltdowns and it doesn't help and it makes things worse.
- Schools are judged on attendance and its published in local media for schools.
- There are parents who know how to navigate the system, and know that an EHCP isn't a golden ticket, many parents waiting for an EHCP think that its going to be a solution.
- Parents and carers want someone to help them to look at options.