



The Secretary of State for Education
The Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

7th May 2026

Dear Bridget and Georgia,

Feedback from Rushcliffe on the Schools White Paper

I am writing to share the views of Rushcliffe residents following a dedicated SEND drop-in session held on Wednesday 6th May. The discussion brought together three different groups of parents, carers and education professionals – and while there was a general willingness to engage constructively with the government’s proposed reforms, there were a number of consistent concerns which mean that, among the constituents I met, mistrust and fear have *grown* rather than *diminished* since the Schools White Paper was published. Given this feedback builds on the extensive report that I shared with you in advance of the Schools White Paper being published (and I am pleased that a lot of the baseline recommendations have been reflected in policy proposals), I hope that you will consider these items carefully as the consultation feedback is being reviewed and policy is being updated.

Some of the attendees that I met on 6th May said that elements of the proposed reforms are positive. The concept of earlier intervention supported by access to specialist expertise was described as “good in theory”, and the ambition to improve and standardise support before SEND children’s needs escalate – particularly in areas such as speech and language – was widely welcomed. It was recognised that direct support for children with SEND will theoretically be increasing through wider access to ISPs. Digitisation was also generally supported, as was the initial commitment to dual tracking the as-is and to-be systems.

However, there was a strong sense that after 15 years of underinvestment, the system is currently far from being able to deliver this vision *in practice*. Resourcing and capacity within mainstream schools were regularly identified as a key issue. Experienced practitioners noted that access to specialist input has declined



significantly over the past decade, and questioned how the workforce, capacity and infrastructure required to deliver these reforms at scale would realistically be built by 2030 (only 3.5 years away as I write this). Among parents, there was concern that increasing responsibility on schools “already going above and beyond” – without a clear, corresponding increase in expertise, staffing stability and specialist support – risks placing unsustainable pressure on the system. While the extra money from the government was noted and welcomed, it was suggested that the build-back effort from “the Gove era” was already considerable. Several attendees noted that many schools are already operating beyond capacity and may, therefore, struggle to define and deliver more complex provision as intended. More clarity must, therefore, be provided about what planned interventions and support for an individual school and an individual SEND hub will look and feel like, including theoretical capital and revenue allocations, in order to build confidence. What will this mean in practice for teachers and families operating a school in 2030?

Another concern raised repeatedly by parents and carers was the potential weakening or “dilution” of the legal backstop for families. Parents were clear that, while they are often exhausted by the need to challenge decisions, the right to do so – particularly through the tribunal system – remains essential while any changes are being implemented. As one foster parent said, “I am worried that I am going to lose my right to fight after 2030”. There was a strong view, almost universal, that the current legislative framework is not the core issue – rather, it is inconsistent and often inadequate implementation. Many felt that removing any tribunal rights significantly undermines confidence in the reform process. The parental voice, especially where there is a divergence between school, professional and home experiences, was seen as critical and in need of continued protection. I would urge the government to commit to maintaining the current “seriously important” tribunal system and its underpinning legal framework as a backstop, despite its flaws, to maintain / restore parent and carer confidence in the direction of travel.

Concerns about current and future accountability were equally prominent. Participants described serious failings in the current system including delays, unlawful activities and a lack of meaningful review or implementation of existing EHCPs. There were calls for a “radical shake-up” of local authority accountability, alongside stronger enforcement mechanisms, to ensure statutory duties are met. While some attendees acknowledged that the system is not working as it should, including one parent who described her treatment by Nottinghamshire County Council as “absolutely disgraceful”, they emphasised the importance of retaining clear routes to challenge decisions and hold institutions to account *throughout the process*. As one parent said, “I always want to know I have a route to challenge



decision-makers”. Without this, given a lot of schools don’t make reasonable adjustments for SEND children today, there is little confidence that reforms will deliver for families, especially if ISPs can only be challenged through MAT complaints processes (which I know, from personal experience, are often long, drawn-out affairs that rarely provide positive outcomes for complainants). It needs to be made clearer how families can challenge responsible stakeholders throughout the process, with accessible escalation points defined at all stages – although we all hope that these won’t be needed in large volumes as reforms take shape.

There was also a fear that accountability pressures on schools – particularly through inspection frameworks – could inadvertently incentivise schools to “manage out” pupils with higher needs. One campaigner said that with schools now being run as businesses as a result of academisation, parents cannot rely on MATs to always think in the best interests of individual children, so the Department for Education must put in appropriate safeguards and not assume that empowering schools, rather than local authorities, is the answer. Linked to this, it was also made clear that the current culture of Ofsted, and its approach to measuring school performance, must significantly change as part of a shift towards better inclusion. While it was noted and welcomed that Ofsted will play a role in holding schools to account on their inclusive offer, it is not yet clear how appropriate adjustments will be made within the inspection framework for the requirement to facilitate and resource quality SEND provision within mainstream settings. SEND will play a larger part in Ofsted inspections as the Schools White Paper is implemented – is Ofsted, and are parents reviewing schools’ performances, really prepared for this? Expectations need to shift at all levels to avoid a backlash.

There were also several specific points raised about gaps in the current School White Paper where future provision isn’t clear yet. For example:

- Participants expressed uncertainty about how the entitlement for different levels of support will be defined and delivered, particularly for children with complex or multiple needs. Some parents said that without this information, it made answering the consultation more difficult
- Questions were raised about how transitions between levels of support would operate in practice, and what safeguards would exist if provision fails at these points. There was a strong call for a clear and responsive safety net, enabling concerns to be escalated quickly when provision is not working



- More information was requested about the meaningful support being offered to children *already* outside the school system, and those who – in reality – are likely to remain outside core systems beyond 2030
- Building on this, there were several questions about the future role and flexibility of alternative provision, virtual school and EOTAS services. For some children, even with SEND hubs in place, these are likely to remain the best – or, in some cases, only – viable form of education. They should not be treated as short-term / specialist options but valued in their own right
- More information was requested on how physical health conditions and disabilities will be accommodated within a revised system

Participants stressed that any new model must ensure that specialist settings and alternative pathways are not diminished, and that provision is tailored to the full range of needs rather than forcing children into broader but limited categories.

Finally, attendees flagged some concerns about the implementation of reform. These concerns included:

- Achieving the right balance between conducting essential assessments and overtesting during early years, to achieve the target outcome of earlier intervention
- The continued absence of a clear definition of inclusion
- Insufficient recognition of the long-term impact of the pandemic on children's needs throughout the Schools White Paper. This hasn't just impacted SEND children but the system as a whole, and some of the changes required link back to this
- A lack of clarity on how the proposed SEND reforms will align with ongoing work to improve mental health services

There was also a perception among those present that reforms are being developed in a top-down manner, without sufficient engagement with those directly affected.

Several parents made the case for more small special schools on individual sites with expertise focused on these locations, rather than (or alongside) hubs integrated with mainstream schools. This was deemed particularly important for academically-able SEND children who cannot cope in mainstream settings and are unlikely to succeed being near similar settings given historic experiences with school settings.



James Naish MP
Member of Parliament for Rushcliffe
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

In summary, while there is some cautious support for the ambition behind the proposed reforms, this is contingent on maintaining strong legal protections, significantly improving accountability and ensuring that the system is properly resourced. All three aspects need clearer definition, with worked examples and case studies where possible, to build confidence. Without these elements, trust in the direction of travel will remain low to non-existent among those they are intended to support, and this will ultimately make implementation more difficult.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further to ensure that the voices of Rushcliffe families are reflected in the development of policy.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Naish'.

James Naish MP
Member of Parliament for Rushcliffe