



Joint Statement from The Disabled Children’s Partnership, Let Us Learn Too and SEND Sanctuary

Last summer, the Disabled Children’s Partnership published its Fight For Ordinary report, setting out our vision for SEND reform. The DCP has joined with parent groups Let Us Learn Too and SEND Sanctuary to reshare with the Government some of the key proposals and our red lines from Fight for Ordinary and to make clear we stand with parents.

Children and young people with SEND tell us¹ they want the same ordinary things as their peers: a nursery, school or college place where they are happy, belong and can achieve; the opportunity to make friends and take part in activities and clubs outside and after school; and the health and care support they need, when they need it.

The SEND system is in crisis and denying many children and young people these ordinary things. It must be reformed. However, reform must not come at the expense of children’s legal protections.

As the government prepares its forthcoming SEND White Paper, Let Us Learn Too, SEND Sanctuary and the Disabled Children’s Partnership are clear: reform must strengthen, support and safeguard children’s existing rights. Anything less will fail the very children it claims to help.

SEND reform must not:

- strip away legally enforceable plans for children who need them
- force children out of stable placements or disrupt essential support
- narrow the definition of special educational needs to restrict eligibility
- abolish the SEND Tribunal, a vital safeguard for families

¹ *This is My Life* – Disabled Children’s Partnership <https://disabledchildrenspartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/THIS-IS-MY-LIFE-REPORT.pdf>

- cut off support at 18 for young people who need longer to transition into adulthood
- expand ‘specialist’ provision in mainstream without recruiting and training more specialist allied health professionals and specialist teachers
- give more responsibility to mainstream early years, school and college staff to educate children with SEND without adequate training
- keep approaches in mainstream schools around behaviour and attendance that undermine efforts to be more inclusive

These protections are not optional. They are the foundation of trust, stability and accountability within the SEND system.

Essential Statutory Protection

At the same time, reform cannot succeed without confronting one of the central failures in the current system: SEN Support in schools **is not working**. Although it is intended to meet the needs of most children with SEND, chronic underfunding, inconsistent practice, limited training and the absence of enforceable rights mean too many children are left without help until their needs escalate into crisis.

Only 8% of parent carers say SEN Support fully meets their child’s needs². Many children experience prolonged absence, school avoidance or exclusion. Families are routinely forced to seek Education, Health and Care Plans — not by choice, but because it is the only way to secure support that should have been provided earlier.

This failure is systemic. The Education Select Committee has warned that inconsistent practice and the weak legal status of SEN Support lead to delayed identification, gaps in provision and an over-reliance on EHCPs. A system based on “best endeavours” rather than clear legal duties leaves children unprotected and families without meaningful redress.

If the government is serious about reducing pressure on the SEND system, **SEN Support provided by mainstream schools must be placed on a statutory footing**. This would clarify responsibilities, ensure early and effective support, and create real accountability when children’s needs are not met.

We are calling on the government to:

- provide a **legal guarantee of support** for every child who needs it;
- **strengthen** SEN Support in mainstream schools by giving it statutory force;
- ensure reform delivers earlier help, **not fewer rights**;

² Contact and IPSEA survey of 2,000 parents, 2025 - <https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/campaigns-and-research/contacts-3-asks-to-improve-englands-sen-system/contact-calls-for-sen-support-to-be-placed-on-a-stronger-legal-footing/>

- ensure nurseries, schools and colleges are set up for children with SEND, with the right training for staff and support from properly functioning multi-agency partnerships between the Local Authority and NHS; and
- makes sure there are **consequences** for nurseries, schools and colleges who fail to deliver on their duties.

Reform must mean stronger support, earlier intervention and enforceable rights. Anything less risks deepening the crisis and failing a generation of children.