

Manchester's SEND Inclusion Event

Response to questions and feedback

On 23rd June 2026 Manchester held an annual Local SEND Inclusion event at Friends Meeting House.

The Inclusion event was an opportunity to update families and practitioners on the SEND reforms and inform them of activity happening across the local area to improve inclusion for children and young people. The event was attended by Families, Parent/Carer groups, Parent Carer forum, the Department of Education and representatives across Health, Education, Social care.

We asked attendees:

1. What are your biggest concerns about the SEND reform plans?
2. How can Manchester respond to the concerns raised today around SEND Reforms?
3. What would a good Experts at Hand Model look like?

Following a review of all the feedback, the themes listed below were identified as being key to implementing the SEND reforms and Experts at Hand model in Manchester:

1. Accountability and Monitoring
2. Resources and Environment
3. Legal Frameworks & EHCP Protections
4. Post-16 and Transitions
5. Information and Support
6. Timelines
7. Outcomes and Impact
8. Health

Theme: Accountability and Monitoring

You said...

- What can parents use to hold schools and services to account?
- Yes, there is overall system accountability, but what ensures individual child accountability?
- My daughter who is 14 years old had an educational psychology report, speech and language and EHCP will be submitted at the end of school term, she hasn't attended school every day for a few months. What should school be doing as a minimum for my daughter, without asking them?
- Schools will be able to say they do not have the staff to provide the support
- Lack of accountability and trust that it will be needs led
- Accountability

- Monitoring of support needs and outcomes

Our response

We know families are worried about the possibility of SEND reforms meaning less accountability for individual children. We want to reassure you that Manchester's approach will continue to focus on the needs, experiences and outcomes of each child and young person.

Your child should not have to wait for an EHCP to receive support.

Schools are expected to:

- Have a whole school inclusive universal offer
- Identify needs as early as possible
- Put support in place when concerns are raised
- Make reasonable adjustments and provide support that is ordinarily available in school
- Work with you and your child to agree support and review whether it is helping
- Seek specialist advice when needed
- Monitor attendance, wellbeing and progress

Schools, the local authority and health services all have responsibilities towards children and young people with SEND.

Manchester's SEND Quality Assurance and Schools Quality Assurance Teams will regularly review how well schools and services are supporting children by looking at:

- Whether support is actually being delivered
- Whether children are making progress
- Attendance and inclusion
- Family feedback and experiences
- Whether outcomes in support plans and EHCPs are being achieved

A lack of staffing does not remove a school's responsibility to meet a child's needs.

Schools are expected to use available resources, make reasonable adjustments and access specialist support where needed. Manchester is also developing the new ["Experts at Hand"](#) approach, which will help schools access specialist advice and expertise more quickly.

Your voice matters! Manchester will continue to listen to children, young people and families through feedback, engagement events, the Parent Carer Forum and other

co-production groups. What families tell us will be used to challenge services and drive improvements.

We will work with schools, health services and other partners to make sure children and young people:

- Get the right support at the right time
- Feel included and able to attend and participate in education
- Have their needs understood and met
- Make progress towards outcomes that matter to them and their families

Our role is to provide support, challenge and oversight across the SEND system so that schools, the local authority and partner services remain accountable for improving the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

Theme: Resources and Environment

You said....

- Schools being single point of deciding the need provision and delivery. School complaints/school lottery
- These reforms will put extra pressure on staff and I worry that good quality teaching and support staff will leave
- Concern whether mainstream school staff are truly trained and aware of the inclusiveness for it to be easier for the parent that has additional needs children that attend mainstream schools
- How will mainstream schools cope with the level of responsibility
- By current standards, schools are lagging behind
- Too much pressure on school to identify needs and deliver provision causing relationship breakdown between education and families
- What will happen to TA support with this new Experts at Hand model?
- The TA support should not change. That support must still be there to support the child.
- Experts at Hand - Will we see more support around child and parent in secondary schools?
- Will schools increase SENCO teams? They will have a huge job.
- Mainstream environment is not suitable for some children - what happens then?
- Please can there be more summer holiday clubs for SEN children. We are full-time workers and our 12-year-old needs to have access for social and physical needs during a time we cannot provide this. Thank you.

Our response

Families told us they are worried about whether schools will have the skills, staff and resources to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND under the national reforms.

We want to reassure families that schools will not be expected to do this alone. The aim of the reforms is to bring specialist support closer to children and young people, helping schools access expert advice and support more quickly.

By building on existing services and partnerships, Manchester has been developing its Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO) since September 2025. The LISO provides schools and colleges with access to specialist advice, training, practical resources, and support from education, health and care professionals.

This support helps schools identify and meet children and young people's needs as early as possible and is already making a difference for many families.

We are continuing to build on and strengthen the support that is already available through LISO. As part of this, the Government's new Experts at Hand model will enhance the work already taking place in Manchester by giving schools quicker access to specialist expertise when they need it. [Experts at Hand](#) will help children and young people receive the right support sooner, reducing delays in accessing advice and specialist services.

Families also asked about Teaching Assistants (TAs). There are currently no proposals to remove the important role TAs play in supporting children and young people with SEND. TAs remain a valuable part of helping children access learning, develop independence and participate fully in school life.

We also recognise the vital role of SENCOs. Manchester is continuing to invest in training and support to strengthen SEND leadership and inclusive practice across schools.

We understand that mainstream education is not the right option for every child. Manchester remains committed to providing a range of support and provision, including mainstream schools, SEND units, specialist resource bases, special schools, alternative provision and post-16 pathways. Decisions should always be based on the individual needs of the child or young person.

We will continue to work with schools, families, health services and partner organisations to make sure children and young people with SEND receive the support they need, that families are listened to, and that outcomes remain at the heart of decision-making.

In response to a question around summer holidays clubs for SEND children, our [short breaks statement](#) provides information on this and also includes links to further information about childcare for working parents.

Theme: Legal Frameworks and EHCP Protections

You said...

- Are there any disadvantages to individual children if we reduce the number of EHCPs?
- I understand that EHCPs will be reducing, However I do not believe that schools can put the provisions that my child needs in place without one!
- That the legal framework for support will not be as stringent.
- Families feeling they will not have the support to challenge without an EHCP in place
- Reduction in legal rights
- No legal duty to deliver what is an ISP
- Without EHCPs the recommendations have no power as the legal document status is potentially removed
- What will happen when EHCPs are not used for every child that needs one - will that child be missed or not get the support they need?
- By minimising EHCPs individual needs will be diluted
- Legal standards will be taken away
- If no tribunal what happens?
- Tribunal rights taken away to name a setting when it goes to appeal
- Why less emphasis on EHCPs? It is a legal document and child rights
- EHCP is still a legal document and should be taken seriously and all the support must be given and followed
- Children with existing EHCPs are going to be affected when transitioning

Our response

Families have told us they are worried about what the national SEND reforms could mean for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), legal rights and access to support.

We want to reassure families that EHCPs remain legal documents and current legal rights have not changed. Children and young people with an EHCP are still entitled to the support set out in their plan, and schools, health services and local authorities must continue to meet their legal duties. The details of the reform are still being finalised and we are awaiting the response to the consultation. This being said, the

government have said there will be no changes to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) before at least September 2030.

The aim of the proposed reforms is not to reduce support for children. Instead, the Government's ambition is to make sure children can access help earlier, without always having to wait for an EHCP before support is put in place.

Families have asked whether children could be missed if fewer EHCPs are issued. In Manchester, our expectation is that support should be based on a child's needs, not on whether they have a particular document. Schools should identify needs early, put support in place quickly and review whether that support is making a difference.

We also understand concerns about legal protections and the ability to challenge decisions. Any future changes to the SEND system are still subject to national consultation and legislation. Manchester will continue to work closely with families and keep parents informed about any changes that may affect their rights.

Our priority is simple: No child should miss out on support because of SEND reforms!

Through Manchester's SEND Reform Plan and Education Strategy, we will continue to work with schools, health services and families to make sure children and young people:

- remain at the centre of decision-making
- receive the right support at the right time
- have their individual needs recognised and understood
- are included, listened to and supported to achieve their potential

In relation to transitions, the Experts at Hands guidance emphasises:

- Early identification
- Timely intervention
- Support based on need rather than diagnosis

This means children may receive help before difficulties escalate when moving between:

- Early years and school
- Primary and secondary school
- Secondary and post-16 education

By embedding specialists alongside mainstream staff, the intention is to reduce the gap that often occurs when children move between settings and different services. The model promotes collaboration across education, health and care professionals.

We will continue to listen to families and ensure that children's rights, outcomes and wellbeing remain at the heart of Manchester's approach to SEND.

Theme: Post-16 and Transition

You said....

- Students on targeted plus – what is their post-16 offer like? Its only 2 years.
- All children have the right to 5 days a week education, 3 days a week is not ethical and does not meet complex needs.
- Post-16 support - Children with existing EHCPs are going to be affected when transitioning, particularly Post-16, leaving children to access further education successfully
- What will college look like?
- Why are some post-16 students only getting 3 days a week when their complex needs suggest they need to be in 5 days a week like other pupils?

Our response

Families told us that they are worried about what support will look like after school, particularly around college, transitions and whether young people with complex needs will receive enough education and support. Currently, the details of the reform are still being finalised and we are awaiting the response to the consultation. The government have said there will be no changes to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) before at least September 2030.

In Manchester, our ambition is that every young person with SEND is supported to achieve their goals, develop independence and prepare successfully for adult life. This includes access to education, training, employment opportunities and support that meets their individual needs.

Statutory planning for adulthood starts from around age 14, and focuses on helping young people prepare for employment, independent living, good health, and participation in their community. In Manchester the aim is that planning for adulthood begins in the early years and young people and families should be involved in decisions about their future every step of the way.

Moving into post-16 education or training can feel different from school. While most children attend school for five days a week, post-16 programmes are not usually delivered over five full days and may often take place over three days a week, depending on the young person's needs, course and provider. This is normal and can be flexible.

Although the timetable may look different, young people with SEND should still have access to a meaningful and well-planned week that supports their learning, independence and preparation for adulthood. Alongside college or training, this could include activities such as work experience, supported internships, volunteering, employability skills, travel training, community activities, independent living skills, or health and wellbeing programmes. The focus is on helping young people develop the skills, confidence and experiences they need for their future goals.

Manchester is working to improve the post-16 SEND offer by:

- Increasing choice and opportunities across colleges, sixth forms, specialist provision and supported internships
- Strengthening transition planning between school and college
- Supporting young people into employment, training and independent adulthood
- Working with education, health and social care partners to improve outcomes
- Providing training and specialist support to education providers through Manchester's Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO).

We want every young person with SEND to have an ambitious, personalised pathway into adulthood, with the right support, the right opportunities and high aspirations for their future. We will continue to work with young people, families and partners to improve post-16 services and ensure that young people with SEND can thrive in education, employment and adult life.

Theme: Information and Support

You said.....

- Interesting conference but as a parent of a 14-year old ASD child, I have had to find information by myself and struggled. Why are SENCOs not forthcoming with support locally in the area you live in? I only found out about family hubs from a friend when I hit crisis 2 years ago.
- All the information on the website, as a professional I wasn't aware.
- How do I find out what support is available to me if I cannot care for my child?
- Why is no support given to families who have a diagnosis but perceived to not be in crisis?

Our response

Some families and practitioners told us that finding information about SEND support can sometimes be difficult, and that they are not always aware of the services, groups and support available until they reach a point of crisis. We recognise these concerns.

Manchester's vision is that families should be able to access clear, timely and accessible information about SEND support without having to search extensively or rely on word of mouth. [Manchester's Education Strategy](#) and [SEND Reform Plan](#) both highlight the importance of listening to families, improving communication and ensuring children, young people and their families can access help and support as early as possible.

[Manchester's Local Offer](#) is more than a website. It is our commitment to making information, advice, support and services easier to find and understand. The Local Offer brings together information about education, health, social care, community services, family support, short breaks, preparing for adulthood and support available in local neighbourhoods. Parents/Carers and Practitioners can sign up to the newsletter [here](#).

We also want schools to be confident in supporting families and signposting them to available services.

Through [Manchester's Local Inclusion Support Offer](#) (LISO), schools and practitioners can access training, specialist advice and support to strengthen inclusive practice and improve knowledge of local services available to children, young people and families. We deliver termly SENCO networks each year and provide updates to SENCOs regularly.

This means we are not only building support for children and young people, we are also helping professionals understand what is available locally and how families can access it.

Families asked what support is available if they are finding it difficult to care for their child or manage their own or family's circumstances. Manchester offers a range of support through [Help & Support Manchester](#), Family Hubs, Early Help services, [SEND Information Advice and Support Services](#) (SENDIASS), community groups and specialist services. Families do not need to wait until they reach crisis point before asking for support. The [Local Offer](#) can help families identify the services that may be available to them and how to access them.

We are committed to making information about SEND support easier to find, easier to understand and available earlier. By improving the Local Offer, strengthening professional training and continuing to work closely with families, we want parents, carers, children and young people to feel informed, supported and confident about where to go for help when they need it.

As ever, the feedback we receive from families and our partners is well received and will continue to shape how we improve information, advice and support across Manchester's SEND system. We will continue work with families, schools and services to make sure parents and carers know where to go for help, advice and support when they need it.

Theme: Outcomes and Impact

You said...

- Saying that exclusions are being reduced and that children are staying in mainstream is not always the best thing for the children and staff in the room
- Fewer EHCPs concerned that support is pushed downstream causing detrimental impact
- Too much focus on keeping children who are struggling in a mainstream environment for too long, in hopes that targets are met
- Too much pressure on school to identify needs and deliver provision causing relationship breakdown between education and families
- Attainment gaps might get bigger

Our response

We heard from families that they are worried some children may be expected to remain in mainstream education for too long, even when it is not meeting their needs. Families also raised concerns that support could be delayed, schools could be placed under too much pressure, and that this could affect outcomes for children and relationships between families and professionals.

Manchester agrees that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. While we are committed to inclusive education, inclusion is not simply about keeping children in mainstream settings. It is about ensuring every child receives the right support, in the right place, at the right time. For some children, this may be in a mainstream school with appropriate support. For others, a specialist setting, resource base, SEND unit or alternative provision may be more appropriate. Decisions should always be based on individual needs and outcomes.

Through Manchester's Experts at Hand Offer, schools can access training, specialist advice and support from education, health and care professionals to help them

identify and meet needs earlier. This is designed to build confidence and expertise within schools while ensuring they can access specialist input when required.

The Government's new Experts at Hand programme is intended to give schools faster access to specialist expertise and reduce delays in support. Manchester is using national reform funding to strengthen support around children, young people and families, helping schools access advice and guidance sooner rather than expecting them to manage increasingly complex needs alone.

We also recognise concerns about attainment and outcomes. Manchester's SEND & AP Inclusion Plan focuses on improving attendance, participation, progress and preparation for adulthood for all children and young people with SEND. Through our quality assurance work we will continue to monitor whether children are receiving support, making progress and achieving positive outcomes.

Inclusion is about meeting need, not meeting targets. Manchester will continue to work with families, schools, health services and partner organisations to ensure children and young people with SEND receive the support that is right for them. We are committed to strengthening early intervention, improving access to specialist expertise, maintaining a range of education options and ensuring that children's needs, wellbeing and outcomes remain at the centre of decision-making.

Theme: Timescales/timeliness

You said....

- Child is 10 years old – will she miss reform at primary and transition to secondary without the adequate support?
- Lack of early/timely intervention
- Delay in support for those who definitely need it
- Concern about waiting lists in health and impact on access to support
- Re-triaging assessments
- What happens to children who already have an EHCP? What happens when they transition from primary to secondary then secondary to college?
- Waiting times for experts at hand, what guarantee
- Concern about long waiting lists
- Feel like it's so hard to get answers for speech and language

Our response

Families told us they are worried about delays in getting support, long waiting lists for assessments, and what support will look like when children move from primary to secondary school or into college.

Manchester's approach is that children should receive support as soon as needs are identified and should not have to wait for a diagnosis, assessment or EHCP before help is put in place. Schools are expected to provide support through [Manchester's Graduated Response](#) and access advice from specialist services when needed.

Through Manchester's Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO) which becomes the government's new Experts at Hand offer from September 2026, schools will have greater access to specialist advice, training and support to help children get the right help sooner. These programmes are designed to reduce delays and strengthen support around children and families.

We also know families are concerned about waiting times for neurodevelopmental assessments. Manchester and Greater Manchester partners are working together to improve these pathways and ensure children can access support while waiting for assessments, rather than having to wait for a diagnosis before receiving help.

Families asked what happens to children who already have an EHCP. EHCPs remain legal documents and current rights have not changed. Children and young people with EHCPs will continue to receive support through key transition points, including moving to secondary school, college and adult services.

No child should miss out on support because they are waiting for an assessment, diagnosis or transition to a new setting.

We recognise that families often wait a long time for speech and language support and that this is a national issue. Speech and Language services within Greater Manchester are going through a period of transformation. All 10 local authorities within Greater Manchester are implementing [The Balanced System](#). In Manchester, through [ELKLAN](#) and the [SEND and AP Change Programme](#) we have been strengthening the speech and language support offer in Manchester for children and young people at home, in schools and in settings. Also, through Flying Start, (a targeted programme funded through Making Manchester Fairer and early intervention). The programme is supporting 42 primary schools and 35 early years settings in areas of higher disadvantage. Speech and language therapy and educational psychology staff are working with school staff to develop communication friendly environments and upskill staff in speech and language and social, emotional and mental health interventions. The programme is already showing impact with the [Good Level of Development measure](#) is increasing faster than in national and regional authorities.

There is also a continuum of support from Early Years in Manchester and to enhance this as part of the [Best Start in Life Strategy](#). Manchester will also be introducing Best Start in Life Practitioners into Family Hubs to strengthen SEND support at a neighbourhood level from September and we will be working closely with our health partners on the Social Communication Pathway and SaLT teams to pilot programme such as [Can-Do](#). The aim is to support children as early as possible whilst waiting for an assessment.

The following responses were provided by our health partner Manchester Foundation Trust.

Theme: Health

Question: What are the plans to increase capacity in the system to reduce waiting lists for diagnostic pathways?

Our Health Partner Response: GM Integrated Care Board (ICB) are aware of the issues with demand and capacity and have shared those issues with NHS England. For more capacity to be put into the system there will need to be commitment from government to provide more funding for this purpose. GM ICB have released some temporary funding to ensure all urgent cases can be seen in a timely way.

Question: Are 17–18-year-olds prioritised and is it guaranteed that they will be seen by the time they reach 18?

Our Health Partner Response: GM ICB have asked all local providers to identify anyone on the waiting list who will be turning 18 before April 2027. Those young people will be seen as a priority for assessment.

Question: Why are children waiting on a long waiting list to get a diagnosis?

Our Health Partner Response: Funding from central government has not increased in line with demand for assessments. Local services receive many more requests for assessments than they can provide so the waiting times have increased. The new ND Needs led offer is being put in place to ensure that families and young people can access services they might need whilst they are waiting. [Mcr ND needs-led offer](#).

Question: Waiting on the list for 3 years it is disappointing, especially when the symptoms are really overwhelming.

Our Health Partner Response: We recognise that being on a waiting list is frustrating but hope that moving to a needs led model will mean that families and young people can get what they need without a formal diagnosis. Hopefully, this

means that people can get the help they need when they need it, regardless of where they are on a waiting list

Question: How do parents refer in – referral process?

Our Health Partner Response: If you are considering requesting a referral for a neurodevelopmental assessment and your child is in school, a good starting point is to share your concerns with your child's SENCO. They can help make sure your child's needs are being met and school will need to fill out part of the referral information alongside parents.

If your child is not in school you can still make a referral, forms are available on the CAMHS website [Autism - CAMHS](#) and [ADHD - CAMHS](#). Currently, you would make one referral for an Autism assessment and one for an ADHD assessment but from September this will change and there will be one form and one assessment. The CAMHS website will be kept updated. If you have any questions about the referral process you can also go to the Local Offer Drop ins for advice.

Question: Can't make recommendations for education - Please elaborate what will inform EHCPs and in the future ISPs?

Our Health Partner Response: Child health will always contribute to EHCP plans when requested to do so. Health teams cannot make recommendations about schools or education generally but will always contribute to the EHCP process.

Question: Concern about waiting lists in health and impact on access to support

Our Health Partner Response: We recognise that being on a waiting list is frustrating but hope that moving to a needs led model will mean that families and young people can get what they need without a formal diagnosis. Hopefully, this means that people can get the help they need when they need it, regardless of where they are on a waiting list

Once we had understood the concerns attendees had around the SEND reforms, we took the opportunity to ask attendees 2 further questions which will help shape Manchester's SEND Reform plan over the next year.

Question 1: How can Manchester respond to the concerns raised today around the government's proposals for national SEND Reform?

You said...

- Acknowledge and take accountability
- There needs to be a legal framework

- Step by step plan with legal requirements
- Robust, clear policies that support everyone
- 1-2-1 multi-disciplinary meeting with parents, much like an EHCP review before a transition to the new reform plans
- Parents in strategic meetings
- More holistic support for the family
- Build confidence and trust with parents/carers
- Access to the right models - for the children and the parent
- Individualised learning for students
- Structural learning
- More diverse projects/offers that meet early support for autism/neurodiverse families and individuals work specialists
- More training
- More information, transparency, clear guidelines of what schools should be doing so they can challenge their schools
- Consult with partners, families and professionals, extend forums for good communication between services and families. Ensuring parents/Carers are fully informed
- Online surveys
- Better communication in health and SEND reforms
- Communication and transparency
- How can organisations access grants to develop offers to be commissioned/support
- More awareness for community/voluntary organisations. That could access grants to deliver services

and

Q3: What would a good Experts at Hand Model look like?

- Transparency and accountability
- Accountability and check ins to ensure the area of the model has provided the sufficient....and issues have been resolved
- Clear accessibility routes to them.
- For schools to have a guarantee of accessing them as needed. Some schools will need more.
- More teaching staff and staff support staff. Higher rates of pay for teaching and support staff
- SALT/OT/Physio should not be spread too thin. Already children have to wait too long to see school SALT then see them once a year and teaching staff are expected to implement strategies – which works when you have enough staff but usually schools don't.

- Life coaching/mentoring community services
- Careers Connect – Andrew Rudyard
- More provisions like Talbot house
- NESTA – navigators provide AP
- Occupational Therapy
- Communication skills
- Sufficient expertise and experts to be available to roll out the model
- Having the right professionals around the table to support needs lead for each education setting/establishment.
- Parent and carer participation
- Join up with DWP
- Legal Framework
- Mainstream schools should know where and how to get help/funding the need to help the child
- Make fully accessible Experts at Hand support that's meaningful and eyes need to be on the child if giving advice

Our commitment

Firstly, on behalf of the SEND Quality Assurance Team, we want to thank everyone who attended our SEND Inclusion Event and shared their views. Your feedback is helping shape Manchester's SEND Reform Plan and will continue to influence how we develop services over the coming years.

We heard that families want:

- Clear information about SEND reforms and what they mean locally
- Strong accountability and transparency
- More support for families, not just children and young people
- Better communication between services
- More opportunities for parents and carers to help shape decisions
- Easier access to specialist advice and support
- Greater investment in training and workforce development

We are committed to:

- Involving families in the design and delivery of SEND reforms
- Listening to feedback through events, surveys and co-production groups
- Providing regular updates through the Local Offer and family communications
- Improving access to information, advice and support
- Strengthening early help and support for children, young people and families

- Working closely with schools, health services and community organisations to improve outcomes

Families told us they want an Experts at Hand model that is:

- Easy to access and understand
- Responsive and timely
- Joined up across education, health and care services
- Focused on the individual child and family
- Transparent and accountable for delivering support
- Backed by sufficient specialist expertise and training

We agree that support should be practical, easy to access and focused on making a real difference to children's lives. Manchester will use family feedback to help shape the local development of the Experts at Hand programme.

We are committed to working alongside families throughout the reform journey, ensuring that children and young people remain at the centre of decision-making and that services are responsive, transparent and accountable. Together, we will continue building a more inclusive SEND system that improves outcomes for children, young people and their families.