

Yorkshire & Humber Response to the Schools White Paper Consultation 2026

Introduction

This document sets out the Yorkshire & Humber Youth SEND Alliance's, (YSENDA is supported by Youth Work Unit Yorkshire and Humber) response to the "Every Child Achieving and Thriving" Schools White Paper. The document brings together evidence which the YSENDA gathered from the very children, Young People, families and workers that these proposed changes will affect.

The response draws on a range of engagement and consultations held over April to May 2026. This includes two regional online consultation sessions held by the Yorkshire & Humber Youth SEND Alliance, local youth group discussions, insight from those who were involved in shaping the initial proposals and ongoing alliance meetings. In order to make the proposals accessible and understandable to a diverse group of Young People with a range of needs, the contents of the white paper was transformed into a Young Person's version specifically for the region and the core ideas of the proposals broken down in a presentation to Young People. This ensured that Young People and supporting adults alike were able to share their views in ways that were accessible, supportive and most importantly, grounded in lived experience.

This submission focuses on the areas of the proposals which Young People and practitioners identified as most significant to their daily experience of education, including but not limited to participation and voice, inclusion and safeguarding and adequacy of funding. It is intended to sit alongside other consultation responses, evidencing the ways these proposals are experienced and understood by those most affected by them.

Who we are

This response is submitted by the Yorkshire and Humber Youth Work Unit which supports the infrastructure of youth work and Young People's voice and participation across the region. The Unit works with local authorities and voluntary and community sector (VCSE) partners, as well as directly with Young People, many of whom are likely to be affected by the changes proposed by the Schools White Paper. Working with Young People, we support meaningful influence on local, regional and national levels.

The evidence contained within this response has been gathered through a number of consultations conducted by the SEND Alliance, Flying High and many other groups on a local and regional level, facilitated collaboratively by workers and Young People alike. This includes SEND-specific forums and other mixed representation from other groups, as well as input from workers and parents.

Our approach is based on the Lundy Model of Participation, allowing Young People to engage with complex policy proposals in supportive and accessible ways, at their own pace, and through trusted long-term relationships rather than one-off consultation events. With this model in mind, we have come to Young People in spaces where they feel comfortable to contribute to our response to the White Paper.

How this evidence was gathered

Over 100 children and Young People from across the Yorkshire and Humber region contributed to this consultation response, supported by youth workers, regional networks, participation groups and alliance members across Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley, Calderdale, North Yorkshire and York.

This engagement was delivered through youth work-led activity across the region, including online consultation sessions held on 16th and 27th April by the SEND Alliance, consultation with the SENDing Voices group in Sheffield, sessions held by Calderdale Council, and contributions from youth forums in Wakefield, York and Bradford.

To support understanding and meaningful participation, the content of the Schools White Paper proposals was translated into formats accessible to the relevant groups, many of whom had a wide range of needs. Wherever possible, consultations were youth-led and used a range of multimedia and discussion-based approaches to enable Young People to explore the implications of the proposed changes and share their views.

We would like to recognise and thank the youth workers and wider youth sector across Yorkshire and Humber for supporting children and Young People to engage with the consultation under challenging timescales and with limited accessible national resources. We also want to thank every young person who attended sessions, shared their experiences and ensured their voices were heard within this regional response.

Across all sessions, Young People shared clear and consistent messages about the importance of protecting their rights, improving access to support, reducing waiting times, tackling stigma, and ensuring their voices are genuinely included in decisions that affect their lives.

This consultation activity reflects the rights of children and Young People under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, alongside duties set out within the Children and Families Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice and Equality Act 2010, all of which emphasise participation, inclusion and co-production with children, Young People and families.

Young People were clear that SEND reforms must strengthen support and accountability, not reduce protections, and that decision-makers must listen directly to lived experience when shaping future policy and services.

Participation & Voice (Q1 - Q2)

In the course of our consultation with Young People, the groups we engaged consistently raised concerns about whether they were able to meaningfully participate, particularly where information was difficult to understand, inconsistent, or inaccessible in its original format. Young People reported feeling confused and frustrated by the limited opportunity for meaningful inclusion within government consultation processes.

Particularly, the Young People we spoke to were unclear on the very concept of a White Paper and said that existing resources provided by the government did not clearly explain what the proposals meant in practice, or what would change in their everyday experience of education. This was reflected in consultation findings from Leeds, where the majority of participants reported having little to no prior knowledge of the White Paper before taking part in sessions, highlighting a significant barrier to informed participation.

Furthermore, Young People described contradictions in information received across different engagement spaces; namely, that information from the Department for Education and the Children's Commissioner differed, creating mistrust in the process. These inconsistencies reduced confidence in the consultation and left Young People uncertain about which information could be trusted, limiting their ability to engage meaningfully with the proposals.

Young People were also often left unclear on the purpose of the consultation and reported a disconnect between what they contributed and how it would affect decision-making in Westminster. There was a strong perception that decisions had already been made, with one young person stating: "We're being asked questions, but it doesn't feel like it will change anything." Others felt that the consultation was asking leading questions which only sought positive responses, creating hesitation around openly critiquing the proposals.

Some Young People also reported that consultation spaces did not always feel safe for expressing concerns or negative feedback, which further limited confidence in providing responses that were honest and reflective of lived experience.

While efforts to present information in more accessible formats were welcomed, Young People highlighted a lack of balance in the materials provided to support engagement. In some cases, information had been overly simplified, which did not adequately respect Young People's knowledge, experience, or capacity to engage with complex issues. Young People felt that their capability and insight were underestimated, reducing confidence that their contributions would be taken as seriously as those of professionals and other stakeholders.

A repeated and consistent concern raised by Young People related to how the proposals would work in practice, particularly focusing on how systems or support would operate and what would change for them on a daily basis. In other words, how would these changes affect how they were supported across the education system. It is exactly this lack of clarity that made it difficult for Young People to feel confident in contributing fully, as many felt that they did not yet fully understand the proposals, even with the work that Young People did to make information accessible to them.

Returning to the tight timeframe we were given in which to consult with Young People, some of those we spoke to highlighted that expressing their views in the moment was difficult and, given time, they may have had more to contribute if given time to reflect on what the proposals meant. This strongly supports the suggestion that there is a need for more flexible and ongoing ways of capturing Young People's voices.

SEND Support, thresholds, and risk of loss of protection (Q3 - Q6)

Young People were particularly concerned about how the proposed tiered system would affect their access to the support that best meets their individual needs. The introduction of a tiered system would create different levels of support based on perceived need; however, Young People and workers alike recognised that this risks creating a ranking or hierarchy among their peers in relation to the level of support provided.

Evidence gathered from the consultation done with Young People in Leeds reinforced this concern. Young People expressed that while there are benefits to consistency across schools, there were fears that a structured, standardised system of "layers of support", as one young person put it, fail to recognise individual differences.

Particularly, Young People said that peers with the same condition may be treated in the same way, without further consideration of themselves as an individual or the possibility of receiving tailored support for their specific needs and experiences. This highlights the tension between standardisation and individualisation. Support must remain responsive and personalised, a key element of previous systems of support.

It was also felt that those who are neurodivergent, including Young People with conditions such as Dyspraxia, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, would be more susceptible to masking behaviours. This may result in the need for support being identified too late, or alternatively, Young People being allocated the wrong level of support, as their needs are not immediately visible or may not present in expected ways.

This was strongly reflected within feedback from consultations, where Young People and supporting adults said they were concerned that assessment of need is often based on observed behaviour within school settings. Indeed, one participant highlighted that a young person may "mask really well within the school... but then goes home and struggles massively",

raising questions about the scope and setting of an assessment of needs. This reinforces concerns that reliance on visible presentation risks overlooking hidden or fluctuating needs, particularly where Young People are actively masking or coping in ways that obscure their difficulties.

Young People were concerned that there is a strong possibility that their peers, particularly those who do not meet the thresholds for the levels of support set out in the White Paper, may fall off the radar entirely. There was a clear concern that Young People could be seen as not requiring support due to the way their needs present, or in some cases, do not present at all. This was identified as particularly concerning for those who are neurodivergent or living with invisible disabilities.

Consultation findings from Leeds, Whitby and wider further highlighted worry about where thresholds for support would land in practice, and the decision making process for who qualifies for additional support. Young People questioned what would happen in circumstances where a school determines that a young person does not meet the criteria for support, despite ongoing needs; a particular concern for those with neurodivergence.

This created a clear fear that Young People might fall between levels of support, resulting in inconsistent or absent support. It was recognised that Young People who do not meet formal thresholds can “fall through the gap”, often referred to by Young People as the “SENbetweeners”. There was concern that introducing a hierarchy of support levels would further exacerbate this issue.

It is often the case that those who fall within this group feel most vulnerable to the possibility of having no support whatsoever. As such, this could result in increased distress and a growing distrust of the system among Young People. In the longer term, this may also lead to reduced educational outcomes for Young People who are capable of achieving more with appropriate support in place.

Young People also raised broader concerns about the potential loss of existing support and protections within the system. Across consultations, there were consistent indications that changes to how support is accessed could reduce access to specialist provision or limit existing entitlements, particularly for those not identified as having the most complex needs. This contributes to an overall perception that the proposed system may remove safeguards without guaranteeing consistent or equivalent alternatives.

Young People were also concerned that support would become increasingly triggered by disruptive or visible behaviour. In essence, there was a strong perception that need may be identified primarily through behaviour, rather than through an understanding of underlying need, distress, or wellbeing. Young People were clear that behaviour does not equate to need, and that there are often less visible indicators that should be considered when assessing support requirements.

Conversely, it was particularly concerning to participants that the White Paper appeared to suggest that student behaviour was a contributing factor to staff leaving the education workforce. While there may be a recognised link between behaviour and staff stress, Young People felt that this framing does not adequately take into account that behaviours are often expressions of unmet need, rather than simply being problematic or disruptive in nature.

ISPs, EHCPs and Legal Protection (Q15 - Q16, Q23 - Q25)

A major element of the proposals in the White Paper centres on changes to the format of support plans for Young People with SEND. These changes have direct implications for Young People's rights, their ability to shape the support they receive, and the level of protection associated with it.

Significant concerns were raised by Young People and those supporting them about the proposed shift away from the widespread use of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), towards a system in which they are reserved only for those with the most complex needs. For many Young People and their families, EHCPs have been a form of support that is notoriously difficult to access, often requiring lengthy and complex processes. Despite this, there was a strong perception that these plans are not only a mechanism for accessing support, but a legal safeguard that ensures needs are recognised and responded to consistently.

Young People and those supporting them questioned whether individuals who have already secured an EHCP under the current system would be able to retain them, or whether existing entitlements may be reduced or replaced under the proposed changes. In particular, there were concerns that limiting EHCPs to only the most complex needs could result in some Young People losing access to structured, legally protected and enforceable support, without a clear equivalent alternative in place. This uncertainty contributed to wider concerns about fairness, consistency, and whether the new system would adequately safeguard the support currently in place for Young People with SEND.

These concerns were particularly pronounced when considered alongside issues of thresholds for access to support, where Young People had already expressed fears about falling through gaps in provision or being placed within a hierarchy of need.

Looking at the transition from the current system to the proposed one, Young People raised particular concern about the move from EHCPs to Individual Support Plans (ISPs), particularly in relation to how these plans would operate in practice, including issues surrounding responsibility, ownership and implementation.

While some Young People recognised potential benefits to ISPs, particularly their capacity to provide more personalised support and to be more easily accessible in a digital format for schools, Young

People and their families, these benefits were consistently viewed alongside concerns about how such plans would work in reality.

In particular, Young People questioned whether ISPs would be applied consistently across different staff and settings. As one young person noted, “if you’ve got a teacher that knows you, they’re going to follow it... but... a substitute... they don’t know your requirements.” This raised concerns that support could vary depending on individual staff members, rather than being applied consistently according to need.

Additionally, Young People raised concerns about a lack of clarity around how ISPs would function in practice, including who would be responsible for them, who would have control over them, and how decisions about support would be made. This lack of clarity made it difficult for Young People to develop confidence in a system that, at this stage, does not appear to be fully defined.

This uncertainty contributed to reduced trust in the proposed changes, particularly where there was little clarity about how plans would operate in reality. As one young person put it, “it’s less set in stone... more of a ‘this can change’ and it’s a bit too flexible.”

A key concern raised by Young People was the effectiveness of ISPs in comparison to EHCPs, particularly in relation to their lack of legal enforceability. Unlike EHCPs, which provide a clear and legally protected framework for support, ISPs may not carry the same level of obligation, potentially weakening mechanisms for accountability.

This concern was further reinforced by the proposed shift in responsibility for support plans from local authorities to individual schools. Young People highlighted that this may lead to increased variation between settings, with the quality and reliability of support becoming more dependent on individual schools, their capacity, and their understanding of need.

In addition, Young People raised concerns about the extent to which decisions around support may rely on staff interpretation, rather than being guided by clearly defined and enforceable standards. This was seen as particularly concerning for Young People who are neurodivergent and may mask their needs, increasing the risk that support is not identified or delivered appropriately.

Taken together, these concerns suggest that while ISPs may offer a more flexible and accessible approach, this flexibility may come at the cost of consistency, accountability, and the reliability of support in practice.

Young People were also concerned about the lack of voice and involvement they would have in shaping their Individual Support Plans. EHCP processes currently provide at least some opportunity for Young People to contribute to discussions about their support, even if this is limited in many

cases. However, current proposals appear to suggest that this may not be the case within the ISP system, which was of significant concern to the Young People we consulted.

In particular, concerns were raised regarding the initial development of a young person's support plan, where it is understood that decisions may be made without fully reflecting their views or, crucially, their lived experience. As one participant highlighted, "it's not like an EHCP where they've got a legal requirement to actually listen". This reinforced perceptions that Young People may have a less consistent or meaningful role within the proposed system.

If, as Young People suspect, plans are increasingly shaped by professional interpretation rather than through a collaborative process, there is a risk that decisions are based on how a young person presents, rather than what they themselves express. This may result in an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of need, and consequently the provision of inappropriate or insufficient support.

This concern is particularly relevant for Young People who are neurodivergent and may mask their needs within educational settings, meaning that professionals may be acting on incomplete information or limited perspectives.

It may be particularly pronounced for some groups, including neurodivergent girls, who are more likely to mask their needs and therefore risk having their support requirements underestimated.

This also raises questions about alignment with recognised participation frameworks, such as the Lundy Model, which emphasise the importance of ensuring that Young People's views are not only heard, but acted upon.

While there are wider concerns about implementation, Young People also raised specific concerns about how ISPs would function on a day-to-day basis. In particular, there were worries around privacy, as it was not clear to those we spoke to who would have access to their support plans, with one young person noting that "you don't know who's able to actually see that."

Young People also raised concerns about data security, suggesting that the digital nature of ISPs could leave them vulnerable to being accessed or altered, particularly if systems were not adequately protected.

Further concerns were raised regarding the transfer of plans between educational settings, such as from primary to secondary school or into further education. Young People worried that a lack of continuity could lead to disruption in support when moving between institutions.

In addition, Young People repeated concerns about consistency in how plans would be applied across different classes and settings, highlighting the potential for communication breakdowns and a fragmented experience of support. This was seen as particularly likely where staff change, or where teachers are unfamiliar with a young person's individual needs.

There were also repeated concerns that plans may be informed primarily by observed behaviour. This is particularly problematic when considering that many neurodivergent students mask in educational settings and only feel comfortable expressing their needs outside of school.

Taken together, these practical uncertainties further reduced confidence in how ISPs would operate effectively in practice.

While much of the feedback raised concerns about the proposed changes, Young People also recognised some of the potential benefits of Individual Support Plans. In particular, Young People felt that ISPs could result in more personalised and flexible support, as well as being more accessible to Young People, families and schools. This increased transparency was seen as particularly positive for both Young People and those who support them.

Some Young People also recognised the potential for ISPs to allow earlier identification of needs and more responsive adjustments to support, particularly where circumstances may change. However, these perceived benefits were more often than not outweighed by the uncertainty associated with the introduction of a completely new system, particularly where limited detail has been provided.

As outlined throughout this section, this uncertainty contributed to reduced confidence in the proposed changes, which Young People felt would only be eased through clear and effective implementation. As a result, while aspects of ISPs were viewed as positive in principle, there was a clear and consistent view that without greater clarity, accountability and meaningful involvement of Young People, these potential benefits are unlikely to be realised consistently.

Training & Workforce (Q12)

While changes to workforce training and staff development were received positively in principle by Young People, particularly in recognising the need for greater understanding of SEND across educational settings, concerns were raised about how this training would be implemented in practice.

Young People also questioned whether it would be delivered widely enough to address existing gaps in knowledge and support.

Young People supported the idea of wider and more comprehensive training for a broad range of school staff and appreciated that the Government recognises the need for a wider rollout of SEND training beyond teachers and teaching assistants. As one student put it during the course of our consultation, “there’s a lot of people that work in schools that don’t know anything about autism.” While a specific example, it clearly illustrates the perceived need for such training.

However, Young People raised concerns about the scope, content and regularity of this training, which currently remains unclear. It is only with this level of detail that Young People with SEND feel able to make a fair judgement on the effectiveness of these proposals. There were particular concerns around the quality of training and who would be responsible for delivering it.

Many of the Young People we spoke to also expressed that training should be shaped by Young People themselves, drawing on lived experience. This was seen as a way to ensure that training is relevant and reflective of real needs, and to support more meaningful engagement in line with the principles outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Increased training was widely recognised as a positive step; however, Young People felt that it would not, on its own, be sufficient to meet the wide and varied needs of children and Young People with SEND — the very group that this training is intended to support.

Training alone cannot replace specialist knowledge, or the importance of listening to and acting upon lived experience, alongside the expertise developed by professionals outside of educational settings. This is particularly relevant in cases where needs are complex, or where invisible disabilities are present and require more targeted support.

While Young People acknowledged that this is where approaches such as “Experts at Hand” and different levels of support may play a role, there remained concern that these would not replace the need for a more robust and consistently delivered training offer — particularly one shaped by Young People themselves.

Concerns were also raised that improvements in staff knowledge may not necessarily translate into consistent or effective changes in practice. Some Young People suggested that whether support is adapted to their needs often depends on individual staff members, particularly those who know them well.

As a result, there was a clear perception that training must be delivered alongside appropriate specialist support and informed by lived experience in order to result in meaningful improvements in outcomes for Young People with SEND.

SENCO Role, Capacity and Accountability (Q14)

In addition to concerns about training, Young People and supporting adults were also concerned about the capacity of SENCOs to meet the demands of an expanding role within the proposed system. SENCOs were widely recognised as having a vital and central role in coordinating support; however, concerns were raised about the increasing demands on their time and workload under the new system, adding further pressure to a role that already carries significant responsibilities.

In particular, concerns were raised about whether SENCOs would have sufficient time and resources to effectively oversee support plans while maintaining consistency in provision for Young People. There is also increasing pressure to coordinate support across a large number of staff members, which may further impact the effectiveness of the role.

Without appropriate capacity, there is a risk that the effectiveness of the SENCO role may be limited, regardless of how well the system is designed. From the perspective of SENCOs themselves, this may also have an adverse impact on their own wellbeing, highlighting the importance of considering staff sustainability alongside the quality of support provided to Young People.

Alongside increased workload and lack of capacity, those we consulted also questioned the clarity of the SENCO role within the proposed system, particularly in relation to responsibility and accountability. While SENCOs remain central to coordinating support, without clearly defined responsibilities and sufficient authority, consistency across different staff and settings may be difficult to achieve.

Those we consulted were clear that responsibility for supporting children and Young People with SEND should not rest entirely with the SENCO. Rather, it should be shared across the whole school community. Without clear accountability structures and strong leadership support, there is a risk that the effectiveness of the SENCO role may be limited, and that inconsistency in provision may persist.

Transitions and Continuity of Support (Q17)

Transitions are already a stressful experience for many Young People with SEND, particularly those who are neurodivergent. However, Young People and those supporting them raised concerns that the effectiveness of transitions may be negatively affected by the proposed system. This was seen as being especially relevant in the initial phase, where Young People may also be navigating changes from the current EHCP system to the proposed arrangements.

Transitions were recognised as key moments where support can either be strengthened or disrupted, making effective systems essential to ensure continuity of provision. The impact of moving

from primary to secondary school, or from secondary education into further education, may be particularly significant where there is a risk of disruption or delay to support.

This highlights the importance of clear and well-defined processes to ensure that the needs of Young People with SEND continue to be recognised and met throughout these changes.

Young People highlighted potential issues surrounding continuity of support between different schools and colleges. In particular, there were concerns that support plans may not transfer or translate effectively between settings, or that information about a young person's needs may not remain consistent when communicated to new staff.

This raised the possibility that support could be disrupted or reset without sufficient context when entering a new setting, requiring Young People to re-explain their needs or wait for new assessments to take place. For many, this creates anxiety that progress made in one setting could be lost in the next, particularly where systems for sharing information are unclear or inconsistently applied.

This risk may be further increased where support plans are held at a school level rather than by a local authority, raising additional questions about continuity across settings. Furthermore, repeatedly explaining their needs to new staff was described as tiring and emotionally draining for some Young People, particularly those who are neurodivergent.

The issues discussed above highlight the impact that ineffective transition processes can have on Young People with SEND. This ranges from a lack of academic progress to a reduction in confidence in the system and their own abilities, wellbeing and engagement with education.

A smoothly managed transition at key points in a young person's education can reduce the likelihood of disruption that leads to anxiety, reduced trust in systems, and a sense of instability during what is already a significant period of change.

As a result, there was a clear view that transitions must be carefully managed and supported through consistent communication — not only between staff and educational settings, but with the young person themselves — as well as clear processes and shared responsibility across settings.

Without this, there is a risk that existing gaps in provision may be widened rather than addressed, ultimately undermining the intended impact of the proposed changes.

Inclusion Bases (Q18 - Q19)

Experiences of Inclusion Bases were not, however, consistently positive. Young People highlighted that how these spaces are used in practice does not always result in positive outcomes. In particular, the quality and purpose of Inclusion Bases were seen to vary significantly between schools, leading to inconsistent experiences for Young People with SEND.

Young People described risks including the possibility that such spaces could be used as a way of managing behaviour or removing students from mainstream classrooms, often creating an experience that feels more like isolation — or even punishment — than inclusion. Some Young People had experienced Inclusion Bases being used in this way, rather than providing meaningful, targeted support.

There were also concerns that time spent in these bases could take Young People away from their peers, reducing their sense of belonging within the wider school community. Where this occurs, these spaces risk fulfilling the opposite purpose to that which they were intended to serve.

There was also a perception that, without clear guidance and consistent standards across the education system, the effectiveness of Inclusion Bases depends largely on how individual schools choose to implement them, rather than being driven by the needs of Young People themselves.

Inclusion Bases were seen to have the potential to support Young People with SEND within mainstream settings; however, there was a clear view that their effectiveness depends very much on how they are put into practice. Without consistency, much like the rest of the changes in the White Paper, there is a risk that these spaces may not fulfil their intended purpose.

In order to achieve this, they require clear purpose, initial support, and appropriate oversight. Inclusion Bases should be used, as those we spoke to suggested, in a way that best supports the needs of Young People themselves, rather than being shaped primarily by organisational convenience.

When implemented effectively and under careful oversight, these spaces have the potential to support inclusion; however, without clear planning and guidance, they risk reinforcing the very barriers they were intended to address.

Experts at Hand (Q20)

Young People and those supporting them also expressed their views on the proposed “Experts at Hand” offer, which aims to provide more immediate access to specialist support within mainstream

settings. In principle, this was seen as a positive development, particularly in helping to address delays in accessing external services, many of which have long waiting lists.

These changes were seen as having the potential to ensure that requests for support can be acted upon more quickly when needs are identified. The ability to access specialist input within an educational setting may also reduce the need for lengthy and often stressful referral processes, which can, in some cases, result in needs escalating before support is put in place.

Instead, this approach could allow for more timely and targeted support to be implemented for children and Young People with SEND.

While Young People and those supporting them saw potential benefits in the idea of “Experts at Hand”, they also raised concerns about how the offer of timely specialist support would be delivered in practice. In particular, questions were raised about whether there would be sufficient capacity within specialist services to meet the likely high demand once this support was in place.

Furthermore, there was uncertainty about whether the level of support provided would be sufficient to make a meaningful difference for those it was intended to help. Unless adequately resourced, access to support may remain limited and still involve waiting times, given the demand on services that is likely to occur.

This raises concerns that the intended advantages of quicker access may not be realised consistently across different settings. As a result, proposals that were viewed as positive in principle may not be fully realised without sufficient investment, clarity of delivery, and a commitment to ensuring that access to specialist support is both equitable and responsive to the needs of Young People with SEND.

Funding (Q30 - Q31)

Young People and their supporting adults raised questions regarding the funding for many of the proposed changes. They had concerns as to whether the funding would be adequate enough to sustain the particular measures which the government set out and whether such funding would be fairly distributed among schools. While increased funding is indeed needed to support improvements in practice, there were significant concerns about whether there would be sufficient investment to meet the needs of all children and Young People with SEND.

A pertinent example is the government’s Inclusive Mainstream Fund, which allocates £1.6 billion over three years, working out at a mere £14,000 per school per year for a standard primary school and £48,000 per school per year for a secondary school. Young People and those supporting them highlighted that, for many schools, this is less than the salary of a single

teaching assistant, raising concerns about whether this investment is sufficient to deliver meaningful improvements in daily inclusion measures and support for SEND.

Additionally, the £1.8 billion allocated to implementing the Experts at Hand initiative would be given to local authorities and integrated care boards, rather than the schools themselves. It stands to reason that if schools are to effect real, lasting positive change, they should have more control over the funding for these measures. While the money would be used to centrally commission services under the Experts at Hand scheme, this results in a separated system where some change is under the control of the school and some under the control of the local authority. Instead, schools will individually be allocated a certain number of “days of specialist time”, which may not always meet the level of need or demand.

This was especially relevant for larger schools, where the demand for support is likely to be greater, yet funding may be allocated at the same level as smaller schools. How funding would be shared out between schools was not made clear, raising questions about consistency and equity in access to support.

Young People emphasised that the success of the measures largely depends on how funding and resources are allocated, managed, and targeted—ideally to those schools with the greatest need. If funding is not sufficient or distributed fairly, the resulting outcomes could actually widen existing inequalities in support, or at the very least, allow them to persist. There was a clear call for further clarity on a range of issues, including funding arrangements, robust accountability, and ensuring that every school is equipped to deliver high-quality, inclusive provision.

Local Partnerships and Collaboration (Q32 - Q36)

Young People and supporting adults held varied views on the role of local partnerships and collaboration between services within the proposed system. Effective joint working between educational settings, local authorities and other bodies key to the welfare and achievement of Young People with SEND was seen as essential to ensuring consistent and coordinated support.

Consultation participants recognised that stronger collaboration could improve the way support is planned and delivered. This would ensure that relevant information is shared where appropriate and that services work together to meet the needs of the young person in a more holistic way.

However, alongside the potential benefits, there are also risks which Young People highlighted as equally important to consider. In particular, there were concerns that partnerships and collaboration may not work effectively without clear lines of communication.

Young People highlighted the challenges that can arise when multiple services are required to work together. Where inconsistencies in communication occur between partners, this often results in inconsistency in the support provided. These inconsistencies can have adverse effects on a young person’s progress and wellbeing.

In addition, Young People expressed that a lack of clearly defined responsibilities between services is likely to result in confusion around who is accountable for delivering support, and when it should be provided. In turn, this may lead to slower responses to emerging issues and a tendency for responsibility to be passed between different stakeholders.

As a result, there was a clear view that well-defined roles are essential to effective collaboration, alongside consistent communication and strong coordination between services, in order to ensure that support for Young People with SEND is both timely and effective.

Fairness, Information and Complaints (Q37 - Q38)

Young People and supporting adults raised concerns about fairness within the proposed system, particularly in relation to access to information, advice, and the ability to challenge decisions. Ensuring equitable outcomes was seen as dependent on Young People and their families feeling supported, listened to, informed, and able to navigate what is already a complex system.

There was a general consensus that clear and accessible information and guidance were essential to improving understanding of what support is available among Young People and their families. In addition, decision-making processes should be clearly outlined, which is particularly important in creating a system that is transparent and fair for all those accessing support.

Final Reflections and Additional Contributions (Q39)

Overall, Young People and those supporting them recognised that many of the proposed changes have the potential to improve support for children and Young People with SEND. However, there was a consistent view that the success of these proposals will depend heavily on how they are implemented in practice, particularly in ensuring clarity, consistency, accountability and sufficient resourcing across the system.

The views set out in this response reflect the experiences and perspectives shared throughout the consultation process, highlighting the importance of meaningful engagement with Young People in shaping a system that is fair, inclusive and responsive to their needs. There is a clear expectation that these reforms should result in more consistent and equitable support, without increasing the burden on Young People or those supporting them.

We would also like to thank the Young People and supporting adults who contributed their time and insight to this consultation, as well as organisations including the SEND Alliance, SENDing Voices

and WHISH, alongside other contributing groups. Their input has been essential in ensuring that this response reflects real, lived experiences of the SEND system.