

## Summary

We sent out a survey to the APPG on Autism mailing list, asking for their thoughts on the proposed reforms to the SEND system.

59% of responses were from autistic people, with the same percentage being parents or carers of children and young people in education. 88% of respondents were aware of the proposals before the survey was sent out.

The response to the proposals was mixed – **53% did not generally agree** with the proposals, **29% were unsure**, whilst **18% generally agreed**.

## State of the Current SEND system

The word the respondents most used to describe the current SEND system was **inadequate**. Other words included: **broken, ineffective, hit and miss, abusive, life damaging, failing, problematic, and a disaster**

Respondents highlighted the biggest barriers to autistic children accessing the support they need in school. This included: a reliance on diagnosis; a lack of financial resource; a lack of mandatory training; zero tolerance policies; large class sizes; lack of reasonable adjustments; poor sensory environments; recruitment crisis in education; and reliance on TAs.

## Thoughts on SEND Proposals

On the proposals, respondents stated they felt most positively about. Whilst some respondents stated that there were no positives, others highlighted:

- The focus on needs-led early intervention
- Supporting more autistic children in mainstream education
- More funding
- Recognition of the current issues
- Training
- Inclusivity being inspected through Ofsted

Respondents said they were most concerned about:

- The erosion of rights, including restrictions on EHCP eligibility
- Pressure on inclusion in mainstream
- Lack of accountability and right to appeal in relation to ISPs
- A lack of focus on alternative options, including home-schooling
- Vagueness and clarity around the reforms, including undefined criteria of 'most complex'
- Lack of focus on children in the justice system, ethnicity, and other barriers
- The available talent pool for the Experts at Hand programme
- Capacity of schools to use funding to support autistic pupils
- Underestimation of how much funding is needed

- The proposals completely misunderstanding what autistic children need
- Children who have been forced out of education resulting in a lack of confidence to return

### **What Respondents Wanted MPs to Know**

Respondents were asked what they would like MPs to know about the proposals. This included:

- There is a critical shortage of Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists to fulfil the Experts and Hand proposal
- The time taken to navigate support packages might mean an autistic child's needs will escalate
- MPs must talk to their constituents and parents about the proposals
- The proposals do not address geographical, regional, and economic barriers
- Decisions are too often made without the participation of children and parents
- MPs should visit services, including independent specialist schools
- Clear guidance will be needed for reforms to work
- Concerns that the reforms will make things worse and government has not listened to autistic people and parents
- There might be negative impacts on mental health if a child is in a school that is not right for them
- The reforms don't go far enough

### **Questions for the Government**

We asked respondents what questions they would like to ask this Government. This included:

- Why does the home education system appear to be neglected in the proposals?
- How do the proposals in the White Paper align with DHSC in relation to the clinical and professional skills required to meet the demands of the reforms?
- Why is there a lack of discussion on how the mental health system is failing autistic children in the reforms?
- Has the Government looked at other models, including online schooling?
- How can parents and students be confident that needs will be fairly assessed and children will receive the support they need?
- What kind of training will be developed and how far will this go?
- Will the Government ensure us that it will listen to the views during the consultation, and make changes accordingly?
- How does the Government intend to hold schools to account if they fail to provide appropriate support?
- How will the Government ensure schools are monitored so they are not sharing one child's support hours with other children?
- Will the Government provide further details on SPPs and what the evidence base is for these?
- How will reforms avoid reproducing the same issues and how will the Government be held accountable if outcomes worsen?