



Essex Family Forum ECHNA Survey Feb-May'25

Introduction

This report outlines feedback from parents regarding the ongoing issues within SEND services. ECC have implemented several new procedures this year including:

- increased EPs, increasing efficiencies (as per letter dated 4th June'24)
- the new centralised SEND Operations phoneline (from Dec'24)
- new approach to keeping parents informed in weeks 12, 16, 20, 25 and 30
- backdating funding to schools to 20 week date to ensure support in place as soon as possible

There were 147 parent carer responses from Feb to May'25. The concerns raised still highlight systemic failures, lack of transparency, excessive delays, and emotional strain placed on families advocating for their children's needs.

Key Concerns Identified by Families

1. Delays in EHCP Assessments and Approvals

- Long waiting times for Educational Psychologists (EPs), exceeding legal timeframes.
- EHCP applications repeatedly delayed or refused, forcing parents into complaints, appeals and tribunals.
- No interim educational support while waiting for assessments.

2. Poor Communication and Transparency

- Parent carer feedback on the new central phone line is very mixed, some parents having to phone many times to get through
- Parents left uninformed about waitlist positions and expected assessment dates.
- Key workers frequently change, with families left unaware.



- Council responses slow, often requiring multiple follow-ups before action is taken.
- Families were not being communicated with proactively even in transition phases.

3. Lack of Support While Waiting for SEND Provision

- No temporary accommodations provided for children struggling in mainstream education.
- Parents forced to self-fund independent assessments due to local authority delays.
- Schools and councils failing to collaborate on practical solutions for affected families.
- The most helpful sources of support have been other families, a handful of compassionate professionals, and legal guidance.

4. Emotional and Mental Health Impact on Families

- Parents experiencing extreme stress due to delays and lack of progress.
- Children missing out on education, impacting long-term development and well-being.
- SEND system prioritising administrative processes over children's actual needs.

5. Legal Compliance and Accountability Failures

- SEND operations failing to meet statutory deadlines without consequences.
- Refusals to assess leading to prolonged legal battles, placing financial strain on families.
- Councils blaming external factors (e.g., COVID-19) despite years having passed.

Conclusion

The feedback from parents highlights significant failings in the SEND EHCNA process, resulting in stress, financial burden, and disruption to children's education. Addressing



these concerns is crucial to creating a system that prioritises children's needs, follows legal frameworks, and improves trust between parents and the local authority. Immediate changes are necessary to ensure the SEND process functions effectively and fairly for all families.

Next Steps

- **Phone Line Quality** – We'll ask ECC to continue monitoring how well the new phone line is working, making sure parents can easily get through.
- **Clear Communication** – ECC should set clear timelines for responses and updates, so families know what to expect.
- **Reducing Delays** – There must be a plan to clear the backlog of EHCP assessments as quickly as possible.
- **Ongoing Feedback** – We'll keep this survey open to track whether things are actually improving for families.