

RISE at Just Say Conference: Strengthening the Approach to EHCPs for Parent Carers in Barking and Dagenham

Wednesday 4th March 2026, 11.30 – 1.00, Dagenham and Redbridge Football Club

Overview

As part of the RISE (Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence) Partnership, funded by the Department for Education (DfE), the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) was invited by leaders in Barking and Dagenham to deliver three focus groups, one for EHCP case officers, one for school leaders, and one for parent carers. The purpose of these was to gather attendees' feedback about strengthening approaches to EHCPs. In addition, RISE was invited by the Barking and Dagenham Parent Carer Forum to attend the Just Say Conference, to gather the views of a larger group of parent carers. In this session, we explored parent carers' perspectives on the challenges raised in previous focus groups and the areas for action decided in a stakeholder workshop.

EHCP Process

Do you agree with the challenges raised in focus groups about the EHC process in Barking and Dagenham?

There was general agreement with the issues raised in the previous focus group, with particular agreement around:

- Long delays in the process, which limit access to other services and education
- Inconsistency around annual reviews
- Poor communication from the EHC team
- Limited attendance from the EHC team at meetings
- Limited input from Health partners
- Issues around plans: support not implemented; plans not reflecting needs
- Workforce issues: high staff turnover, unmanageable workloads

What challenges have not been identified?

- Lack of transparency about delays and timelines creates uncertainty

- Lack of clarity on the process
- Vagueness in EHCPs – often goals are not SMART
- Lack of funding for schools, Speech and Language Therapy, and staff training
- Access to EPs is limited
- Inadequate mental health support in the area
- Lack of consideration of children and young people's changing needs
- Impact of staff turnover on families and children
- Lack of co-production
- Biases
- Parent's emails and requests for assessment being ignored
- Help for mediation process before going to appeal
- More accountability for schools, with funding relating to special educational needs and disabilities spent on pupils
- Focus on Early Years Foundation Stage without the sacrifice of support for Key Stage 2
- Convoluted paperwork that feels like a barrier to reduce applications
- Named schools in EHCPs not meeting the needs of children and young people
- The EHCP document

Areas for action

What would you like to see the EHC team do to improve in these areas?

Paperwork

- Database of children's needs to help parents map
- Less paperwork
- Less repetition
- Case officers reading reports of other professionals
- No copy and pasting
- Improved data protection
- Revised paperwork
- Clearer and more simple

- Regular updates
- Timely reviews

Accountability

- More accountability for mistakes, delays, and issues

Communication

- More voices from parents directly
- More proactive communication
- Reply to emails and answer phone calls
- Better communication with parents and schools
- Speech and language assessments every two months to highlight strategies needed for children with complex needs, like Escholalia

Resources and information for parent carers

- EHCP application session
- More information for parents about how plans work
- Information on the process
- More signposting for other services who refer children for needs assessments
- Resources for parents who do not speak English as first language
- More easy read resources
- Respite

Clarity of roles and responsibilities

- Case officers should introduce themselves to parent carers
- Updates when case officers change
- To be accountable for carrying out their roles and responsibilities