SAVE OUR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

Press release
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Children's legal rights under threat, say 100 SEND campaigners, academics and public figures in open letter

A stark warning that the educational rights of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England are under threat has been issued by a new national campaign, Save Our Children's Rights (SOCR).

The campaign says upcoming plans to reform the SEND system could strip disabled children and young people of vital, hard-won, legal protections, leaving hundreds of thousands without the support they need to progress, or even to access education altogether. Set against a backdrop of much-criticised plans to cut benefits for disabled people, the concerns amplify worries that the government is targeting its most vulnerable citizens to save money.

In an open letter published by The Guardian, more than 100 signatories have expressed alarm that recent government comments show it is seriously considering removing rights to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) from children attending mainstream schools, a move that would slash statutory support from hundreds of thousands of pupils.

SOCR is a collaboration of parent-led groups, non-profits/charities, professional associations, academics specialising in disabilities, and celebrities/public figures. Our goal is narrow: to convince ministers not to include **any** reduction of EHCP rights in the upcoming Schools White Paper. We believe that if sufficient funding and meaningful accountability were put in place, and current moves to improve inclusion are given time to work, then EHCP applications would naturally fall as children have their needs met from a school's own resources.

The SOCR[1] campaign is led by SEND organisations including IPSEA, Special Needs Jungle, SOS!SEN, and the publication Learning Disability Today. It's backed by parent groups and non-profits/charities[2], academics[3], and high-profile public figures[4], including Chris Packham, Baroness Jane Campbell; actress Jane Asher, who is President of the National

[1] See the SOCR organising members here
[2] See the parent group and non profit/charity list here
[3] See the list of academics here
[4] See the list of public figures here

Autistic Society; the broadcaster and SEND parent Carrie Grant, and actors/disability campaigners Sally Phillips and Cherylee Houston, among many others.
Almost 110,000 people have already signed a parliamentary petition[5] against the prospective plans, triggering a debate to be scheduled in the House of Commons on the issue.

Why are EHCPs important in mainstream schools?

EHCPs are bespoke, legally enforceable documents that set out the additional provision required to meet a child or young person's education, health and care needs, over and above that to which every child is entitled.

85% of children with SEND are educated in mainstream settings. Most of them do not have an EHCP, but for the 270,000 children who do, a plan enables them to stay at their local state school. The alternative is a more expensive specialist setting or no school at all, the latter being something growing numbers of children are now experiencing because of a lack of appropriate provision.

As these new education reforms loom, comments and briefings from government advisers suggest the right to an EHCP is to be removed from these children attending mainstream schools. Instead of tackling the real problems in the SEND system, such as the need for proper funding and accountability, campaigners fear the Government is listening only to local authorities, who want EHCPs drastically reduced, or removed altogether, to relieve them of duties they often find costly and troublesome.

Without statutory support, underpinned by necessary extra resources for schools, it's extremely unlikely ministers will achieve their aim of more children with SEND thriving, or even surviving, in mainstream education. A reduction or complete snatching-away of EHCPs in mainstream schools wouldn't mean that children's needs magically vanish. It would, instead, increase applications for already-overcrowded special schools or mean that even greater numbers would be forced out of school altogether.

A campaign spokesperson said, *"It's important to understand that anyone's child can have, or acquire, additional needs. For more than 40 years, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities have had a statutory right to an education that meets their needs. Whatever the SEND system's problems, the answer is not to remove the rights of children and young people. Families cannot afford to lose these precious legal protections to EHCPs or any of their existing rights."*

[5] https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/711021

Notes to editors:

1. EHCPs in mainstream schools can fund anything a child needs to help them access learning. Typically, this includes teaching assistant support, assistive technology, speech and language therapy and other services not readily available in these settings. They can also fund access to short breaks and occupational therapy. Because of chronic underfunding in schools and a failure to uplift schools' SEND budgets since before the 2014 SEND reforms, schools no longer have sufficient funding to support children with SEND. As the schools' general SEND budget isn't ringfenced, it is often used for other non-SEND needs.
2. Find an article about the latest SEND figures, click here: https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/19-5-pupils-send-england-dont-believe-hype-most-still-educated-mainstream-schools/ and new EHCP figures here: https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/ehcps-2025-show-22-rise-pupils-educated-elsewhere-schools-la-hall-shame/
3. Research by Special Needs Jungle in 2023 found most EHCPs are applied for by schools, not parents. https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/ehc-needs-assessments-2023-asking-snj-foi-data-not-parents/
4. Briefings from inside the government and on-the-record pronouncements from Department for Education advisers have clearly pointed to a drastic restriction of SEND rights. In May, the DfE strategic SEND adviser Dame Christine Lenehan said she and her DfE colleagues were "in the middle of" a conversation about narrowing EHCPs, so they no longer applied to children in mainstream schools: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ehcp-shake-up-considered-as-part-of-send-reforms-adviser-confirms/
5. On June 16th, in answer to questions in the House of Commons, the Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson did not rule out this change, a position echoed repeatedly by her colleagues: https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/bridget-phillipson-does-not-rule-out-restricting-ehcps-special-schools-send-reform
6. See also: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/may/24/children-with-special-needs-in-england-may-lose-legal-right-to-school-support
7. It's worth noting that the 2014 reforms that created EHCPs cost more than £600 million and took two years to plan and pass as section 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/600-million-send-reforms-disabled-children-have-had-poor-value-for-money/

Save Our Children's Rights Organising Group

- IPSEA, SEND legal advice charity
- Special Needs Jungle Ltd, parent-led SEND website
- SEND Rights Alliance, parent group

- John Harris, journalist and SEND parent
- Learning Disability Today, disability magazine
- SOS!SEN, SEND legal support
- SEND National Crisis, parent group
- Child Autism UK, charity

Celebrities/notable disability campaigner signatories

- Carrie Grant, broadcaster, campaigner, SEND parent
- Chris Packham, Naturalist and neurodiversity campaigner
- Christine McGuiness, broadcaster, campaigner and SEND parent
- Jane Asher, President, National Autistic Society
- Cherylee Houston actor, campaigner
- Baroness Campbell of Surbiton, Crossbench peer, disability rights campaigner
- Dame Stephanie Shirley CH, autism philanthropist, businesswoman
- Sally Phillips, actor, campaigner
- David Mitchell, novelist, SEND parent
- Melissa Simmonds, autistic campaigner, SEND parent
- Peter Stefanovic, Lawyer & CEO Campaign for Social Justice
- Baroness Sheila Hollins, Peer, SEND parent
- Dr Anna Kennedy OBE, SEND parent, campaigner
- Dr Tony Lloyd, former CEO ADHD Foundation
- Dr Virginia Bovell OBE, writer, founder of Treehouse school
- Frances Akinde/InclusionHT, author, former headteacher, SEND parent
- Hayley Newman, SEND Blogger/author
- Ian Birrell, journalist, campaigner
- Jim Blair, campaigner, Learning Disability advisor to WHO
- Paula McGowan OBE, campaigner
- Professor Sara Ryan, campaigner
- Professor Tom Shakespeare, The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, campaigner/author
- Baroness Rosa Monckton, campaigner, parent
- Steph Curtis, SEND blogger, author
- Stephen Unwin, parent, playwright, campaigner
- Saba Salman, disability journalist, campaigner
- Scarlet Page, photographer, SEND parent

Organisational /parent group Signatories

- Afasic
- Amaze
- Ambitious about Autism
- Autism Action
- BiLD

- Brainwave
- Campaign for Disability Justice, Inclusion Barnet
- Connect Parent Support
- Contact
- Disability Rebellion
- Disability Rights UK
- Disabled Children's Partnership
- Down's Syndrome Association
- DS Achieve
- Educational Freedom
- Ehlers Danlos Society
- Extraordinary Links
- INFACT
- International Coaltion Against Restraint and Seclusion (ICARS)
- Kids
- Learning Disability England
- Mencap
- NASS National Association of Special Schools
- National Autistic Society
- NDCS
- Nurturing Affective Care
- PDA Society
- Phoenix Education Consultancy
- PRUSAP
- Reaching Families
- Restraint Reduction Network
- Reverse Rett
- RUILS
- SeeAbility
- SENDAGENDA
- Sense
- SNAAP (Special Needs Advisory and Activities Project)
- Speech and Language UK
- TCES
- Ups and Downs Southwest
- Vocal Advocacy
- Voluntary Organisations Disability Group
- Whizz Kids
- BCP Alliance for Children and Schools
- BCP EHCP Support
- Bristol SEND Justice
- DSPCC (Devon SEND Parents and Carers for Change)
- FACSA

- Hackney SEND
- Housing Inclusion Hackney
- Isle of Wight SEN Support
- North Worcestershire Autism Parents Support Group
- SEND Action
- Supporting SEND Parent Carers Kent
- The National Organisation for FASD

Academics in the disability field signatories

- Sir Simon Baron-Cohen, Autism Research Centre, University of Cambridge
- Professor Katherine Runswick-Cole, Chair in Education, The University of Sheffield
- Dr Damian Milton, Senior Lecturer in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, University of Kent
- Dr Mine Conkbayir MBE, Early childhood neuroscientist, author
- Dr Emma Ashworth, Associate Professor in Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Liverpool John Moores University
- Prof Elizabeth Pellicano, Professor of Autism Research, UCL
- Prof Luke Clements, Cerebra Professor of Law and Social Justice at the School of Law, Leeds University
- Dr Kieron Smith, Author and SEND parent'
- Dr Louise Platt, Faculty of Business and Law, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Dr Lucy Series, Associate Professor in Social Care Law and Policy, University of Bristol
- Dr Seamus Byrne, Reader in Law, Manchester Law School
- Dr Sophie Boyron, Associate Professor in Law, University of Birmingham
- Prof Angela Hassiotis, Professor of Psychiatry of Intellectual Disability, UCL
- Prof Lucy Bray, Professor of Child Health Literacy, Edge Hill University
- Professor Amel Alghrani, School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool
- Professor David Abbott
- Beth Tarleton M.Phil, Senior Lecturer in the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol
- Rachel Ryan, Senior Lecturer and Online Widening Participation Lead at The University of Law