



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

27th May 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Concerns over the SEND White Paper and removal of parental rights to appeal

I am writing on behalf of a number of parents in my Mid Sussex constituency who have shared serious concerns regarding proposals within the SEND White Paper. In particular, families are deeply worried about how these changes may affect their children's access to appropriate provision and their ability to challenge decisions made about their care and education.

The right of appeal to an independent tribunal represents a vital safeguard within the SEND system. It serves as an essential check on local authority decision-making and helps ensure that children receive the support they need, in line with professional recommendations. Any reduction in these rights risks undermining confidence in the system and may leave families without effective recourse.

I have included below a selection of perspectives shared with me by families. These illustrate the significant anxiety and uncertainty that these proposals are creating for some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

AB16261:

*"When Local Authorities deliberately refuse to comply with the law it is left to individual parents to enforce it through protracted and expensive legal battles, and these cases are treated as isolated incidents rather than a system issue which needs addressing despite the fact that for many years running over 98% of SEND tribunals have been won by parents, evidencing very clearly the deliberate and **systemic** law breaking by Local Authorities."*

AB15941:

"I don't believe the SEND system itself is the problem. The law is already clear, and if it were followed, children like mine would not be missing education. The issue is that local

ALISON BENNETT MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR MID SUSSEX

authorities routinely break the law, and there is no meaningful accountability when they do. That is why so many families end up in lengthy appeals, not because the system is unclear, but because the law is ignored until a tribunal forces compliance.

This is why I am so concerned about any proposal that reduces or restricts appeal rights. For many families, the tribunal is the only mechanism that ensures the law is actually followed. Weakening that safeguard would leave children with no remedy at all."

AB16057:

"[I]f the White Paper goes through as is - removing my child's rights to appeal to an independent tribunal should the decision go against their interests - my position, workload, health and stress levels would be even worse as will every parent-carers' affected by the changes. And more critically, our children's chances at achieving to the best of their abilities in a system that is legally bound to prioritise their right to research and question decisions about their educational, health, care, and crucially how and where those needs can be best supported - will also be forfeit."

AB16994:

"If there is absolute confidence that the new measures will work, why are the legal safeguards being removed? They are in place now for when things go wrong. It is particularly concerning the LA loses 98% of tribunals, which has eroded parents' trust. Therefore, to remove the legal safety net is replacing parental autonomy with state control, which fails 98% of the time.

Children with SEND have a wide range of individual needs, that cannot always be accommodated within a pre-determined framework. This seems to be a case of children being fitted into systems rather than systems being designed around children's particular needs."

I have also heard from representatives from local SEND support organisations and parent carer forums, who expressed the following concerns with me:

"Legally enforceable protections for children and young people can't be replaced by reassurances that schools will provide what they need. If provision for every child in a mainstream setting improves – as everyone hopes that it will – then these protections will simply remain as a backstop, and the number of EHC plans, requests for special school places and appeals to the Tribunal is likely to fall naturally.

Having a strong focus on accountability and inspection of the system to ensure it is working as intended would help."

As these testimonies demonstrate, there is significant concern among families about the potential impact of these reforms on children's educational provision and long-term outcomes. It is essential that these changes do not leave young people worse off, and that families retain the necessary tools to advocate effectively on their behalf.

I would be grateful if you could give due consideration to the perspectives shared above and provide a response outlining how the Government intends to ensure that families remain at the heart of SEND reform. In particular, reassurance is sought that the right to challenge decisions will be preserved and that robust safeguards will remain in place.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for taking the time to consider the views of these families.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alison Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Alison" and the surname "Bennett" clearly legible. There is a small horizontal line under the first name.

Alison Bennett MP

Member of Parliament for Mid Sussex