

SEN Survey Parents England

Legal references on this page apply to England.

SEN Survey Parents October 2015 (England)

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Executive Summary

In October 2015 I ran an online survey to find out more about the views and experiences of home educating families where children had special needs and disabilities which attracted 169 responses. There were hundreds of quotes I could have picked to sum up what parents of home educated children with special needs told me but I have gone with these two:

"Ultimately I feel very let down both by central and local government. The effect that me not being able to work has on our family's prospects is heartbreaking"

"one of the reasons for choosing home ed is that I just don't want my child to see me fighting all the time"

I expected most children would have a statement, but in fact this only applied in a third of cases. The majority of parents who home educate a child with special needs aren't familiar with [the more formal SEN process](#) because their children don't have a statement or EHCP. Therefore any contact is with the home education department rather than the SEN department.

Relatively few children had [new-style Education Health and Care Plans](#), and parents were dubious about whether their children would succeed in getting Plans when the statements were transferred. Parents didn't have much idea about when - or how - their child's statement might be transferred to an EHCP, and they anticipated the local authority might suddenly spring something on them.

Parents guessed that things might be carried over when the statement was being transferred (rather than starting from scratch), and felt the council would not miss the opportunity to take things away.

Hardly any parents thought the EHCP would involve any new provision. Most parents experienced the process as 'them against us'. Although parents hoped the new Plans would be better, there was widespread cynicism and pessimism. Professionals have been telling parents not to expect anything.

Although this may not have been their original intention, over a third of respondents had been home educating for more than 2 years. Three quarters of children had previously attended mainstream school.

Over two-thirds said that the child being **"unhappy"** was a factor in their decision to home educate although the word "unhappy" doesn't begin to convey the strength of feeling. Almost half the parents said their child had become too anxious to attend school and over a third said their child had been bullied. Parents also reported being pressured to send children in because of the effect on the school's absence figures.

Parents said that the effect of problems at school could be devastating, school had become impossible and there was no choice except to home educate. One parent had been completely unable to get an EHCP and therefore the child remained out of school being home educated even though both the family and the LA were trying to find a suitable school.

Moreover, it isn't necessarily binary with EITHER either school OR home education; some parents described more complicated scenarios. In some cases home education was perceived a stopgap, but even where a child had returned to school, parents didn't necessarily expect it to last. Home education - or school - may be what happens while parents consider their next move.

Where the child had a statement it wasn't easy [to deregister, even from mainstream](#), although sometimes the authorities just wanted the child off the books and out of the way. Parents who had not yet taken their child out were not optimistic, but felt it helped considerably to know the law, and it was also a bonus if they didn't have to rush.

Parents found that SEN departments didn't really understand home education, and that families were either policed or ignored or sometimes both. Parents felt they were not treated as equal partners. While a statement remains in force the local authority has a legal duty to review it annually but some statements had not been properly reviewed or updated for years while the child was home educated.

2 out of 3 parents said their child didn't get any of the support set out in the statement once they were home educated. In some cases this meant that access to health therapies was withdrawn immediately the child was no longer on a school roll, with parents being deemed to have opted out. Parents who said their child did get some support while they were

home educated generally wanted to qualify this by explaining that this was because they provided or paid for it themselves.

Contact with the SEN department is often stressful. Parents tend to resent the intrusion and in many cases trust has broken down. Parents felt that when a child had a statement or Plan it gave professionals more chance to have a say in home education. This definitely puts parents off applying for an EHCP.

Asked whether they saw any benefit in their child having a statement or Plan many parents were dismissive. Nevertheless, most wanted to hang on to a statement or Plan for insurance. Parents also valued statements because they can serve as a passport to important benefits or support elsewhere. 9 out of 10 parents also thought it would NOT be straightforward to get a Plan later if they let a statement go now.

At [a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Home Education](#) in March 2016 Stuart Miller, the Deputy Director for SEN and Disability at the Department for Education was quite clear that home education cannot be grounds for ceasing, and that the council should only cease (or not make in the first place) if the child wouldn't need the level of support in school/college, ie where if the child needed to go to school they would need the plan.

A third of parents felt their children wouldn't be able to cope with school or college. Some of the comments were very wistful. Some respondents were hugely relieved that home education was working, since there was really no alternative. For other families it was a case of not ruling anything out. Some parents were very pessimistic that an appropriate place could ever be arranged.

Parents mentioned college as a possibility because it was perceived to be more flexible, and there was some feedback from those who had tried college already. Three quarters of parents thought their child would not be able to manage in any education setting without an EHCP. Parents also reflected that a statement hadn't helped much in the past. Parents felt things needed to be in place right from the start. Some parents weren't entirely sure about the need for Plans and tended to think it would depend on the attitude of the people involved.

Local Authorities

I asked at the end of the questionnaire if people would like to share the name of their council. This is NOT an exhaustive list (ie parents also talked about councils which they were not happy to name) but in alphabetical order these were the councils specified: Barnet, Cambridgeshire, East Sussex, Essex, Gateshead, Hampshire, Harrow, Hertfordshire, Hounslow, Isle of Wight, Kent, Kingston Upon Thames, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lewisham, Lincolnshire, Medway, Milton Keynes, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, North Somerset, Southwark, Portsmouth, Redcar and Cleveland, Sheffield, Shropshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Stockton, Stoke on Trent, Suffolk, Surrey, Swindon, Tameside, Walsall, Warwickshire, West Sussex, Wirral, Wokingham, Worcestershire

Q1 Percentage with statement/EHCP/neither

The survey was aimed at home educating parents of children with special needs and I suppose I expected most children would have a statement, but in fact this only applied in a third of cases (*"couldn't face the whole statementing process at a time when I and my son had been broken by the school system and this was partly the reason he was removed"*).

It was noticeable that **relatively few children had [new-style Education Health and Care Plans](#)**. A handful were currently going through the assessment phase, or transferring from a statement (although this may have speeded up a little now) but **parents were dubious about transfers necessarily resulting in Plans**.

Parents said: *"we've been going through EHCP drafts for the past 8 months" "the LA is using information from many years ago in order to get EHCPs completed within the time frame" "going for an EHCP just seems a total waste of time and money" "the proposed plan was so inadequate we decided to home educate instead" "school refused to refer for assesment then the LA refused to accept a private diagnosis" "currently waiting for information from health specialists to start the EHCP process" "CAMHS refused to see my child without a referral."*

Q1. Which best describes your child

- They have a statement of SEN = 34.1%
- They have an Education Health and Care Plan = 4.9%
- They don't have a statement or an EHCP = 47.0%
- They are going through the assessment process for a new EHCP = 4.9%
- They are in the middle of transfer from statement to EHCP = 6.1%
- Other = 6.7%

Q2 Previously in school?

Most children had spent some time in school before being home educated and I also heard from parents whose children were on a school roll at the time of the survey. **Although this may not have been their original plan, over a third of respondents had been home educating for more than 2 years. Moreover, it isn't necessarily binary with EITHER**

either school OR otherwise; some parents described more complicated scenarios ("currently unofficially home educating again" "home educating whilst court case is resolved" "home educated for months at a time" "son hasn't attended school regularly for nearly 2 years".)

Taking the child out for home education solved a problem for schools ("he couldn't cope in school and they couldn't manage") **In some cases home education was perceived a stopgap, but even where a child had returned to school, parents didn't necessarily expect it to last.**

Q2. Which best describes your situation [school/home educated]

- Child has never been to school = 8.6%
- Home educating for 2+ years = 36.2%
- Home educating for less than 2 years = 36.8%
- Home educated in the past = 11.7%
- Considering home education = 7.4%
- Other = 8.0%

Q3 Type of school attended in past

Three quarters of children had previously attended mainstream school. Parents described various scenarios where there was a disagreement with the council about the right school or where school had never really worked. Comments included: "couldn't get the LA to agree to a place at a special school, hence now home educating" "pulled him out of mainstream due to massive problems and now home educating while going through process to move to special school" "used to attend mainstream 3 days a week and special school 2 days" "has been on roll at special and mainstream, always part time home and part time school, then full time home" "home educating because lost tribunal for school we wanted".

Q3. Which best describes your situation [type of school]

- Child previously on roll at a special school = 10.7%
- Child previously on roll at a mainstream school = 74.8%
- Child has never been to school = 8.2%
- Other = 6.3%

Q4 Reasons for home educating

I designed this question so that parents could tick more than one box, and many did so. **Over two-thirds said that the child being "unhappy" was a factor in their decision to home educate although the word "unhappy" doesn't begin to convey the strength of feeling. Half of the parents said their child was too anxious to go to school, and more than a third also mentioned bullying.** Parents said that school refused to accept there were any issues while for their part schools were telling parents that they 'cared too much'. Parents also reported **being pressured to send children in** because of the effect on the school's absence figures.

Parents reported that the effect of problems at school could be devastating ("appalling mood after school and didn't want to leave the house at the weekend" "became mentally unwell and planned how to kill himself" "bored senseless and became disruptive and aggressive" "bullied physically by other pupils and suffered emotional harm from support staff" "held it together then huge meltdowns at home" "school said I was wasting my money and my child would grow out of challenges because they had seen it all before"

One parent had been completely unable to get an EHCP and therefore the child remained out of school being home educated even though both the family and the LA were trying to find a suitable school. ("I have a son with SEN but no statement/EHCP even though I have an ed psych report that states he should apply for one. CAMHS won't diagnose ASD/ADHD if there is not a school report, once you are home educating a child with SEN with no statement/EHCP it is almost impossible to get them back into the school system, all the schools refuse him saying they can't meet his special needs. Fair Access are trying to find a place but it's very difficult.")

Parents reached the conclusion that school had become impossible ("school just wouldn't provide quiet area" "constantly had to fight battles I had already fought" "expected to get on a normal bus with a change in our city centre just to get to school" "no support at school" "school ignored what tribunal said about 1 to 1 support" "child being constantly sent home from school" "spent more time being excluded than actually in school" "too poorly to make a full day in school" "took 3 people to get him dressed and then had to be carried down the path to school" "wandering out of school without being supervised" "when we read the statement it was about our child fitting the system rather than the system fitting him".

Parents felt they had no choice except to home educate; comments included: numerous disagreements with the LA about suitable school place" "schools refused to take him" "looked at 18 secondary schools" "council didn't provide alternative education" "home education was the only viable option we were happy with" "one of the reasons for choosing home ed is that I just don't want my child to see me fighting all the time".

Q4. If you have taken a child out of school to home educate them which of the following factors applied

- You liked what you heard about home education = 27.0%
- Child not making progress at school = 37.8%
- Child unhappy at school = 68.2%
- Child too anxious to attend school = 48.6%
- Child being bullied 37.2%
- Child being excluded (temporarily or permanently) = 14.9%
- No suitable school in area = 12.8%
- Disagreement over allocated school place = 6.1%
- Someone suggested/recommended home education = 14.2%
- Other = 20.3%

Q5 and 6 Taking child out of school (deregistering)

The majority of children in the survey didn't have a statement. Where children did have a statement, a quarter of respondents said it **wasn't straightforward to deregister, even from mainstream**. Sometimes the problem was with the council, and parents said they were *"bullied and threatened with court"*. At other times the problem lay with school (*"head teacher made repeated referrals to social services claiming we were disabling our child and school was the only way of keeping him safe"* *"head tried to tell me that I needed to have my house inspected by Ofsted before I would be allowed to home educate"*)

Some parents had a very easy time taking their child out and suspected this was because **the authorities just wanted the child off the books and out of the way** (*"I think they were hoping we would just leave"* *"LA seemed relieved to not have to deal with me anymore"* *"they never bothered asking what I was doing"* *"nobody was interested"*).

Parents who had not yet taken their child out were not optimistic, saying they were *"expecting either being ignored or being policed by the people who've already failed my child"* or *expecting nothing but grief*. Looking back, one parent commented *"lots of online scare stories from home ed forums about local authorities made me anxious but not borne out by experience."*

Parents felt it **helped considerably to know the law, and it was also a bonus if they didn't have to rush** and could make thorough preparations (*"I was in the fortunate position of being able to plan because though special School provision was hopeless it wasn't dangerous"* *"LA had been ignoring us but absenteeism data gets attention"* *"I made sure I knew all the information and laws surrounding my decision before I decided to home educate"* *"our LA is a bit rubbish and so completely overwhelmed by the EHCP transfers so never really got round to investigating what we were doing"*).

Q5. Was it straightforward taking your child with a statement/Education Health Care Plan out of school to home educate?

- Yes = 29.2%
- No = 11.0%
- Not applicable = 59.7%

Q6. Did you know what to expect from the council when you started to home educate a child with a statement/Education Health Care Plan?

- Yes = 21.1%
- No = 28.3%
- Not applicable = 50.7%

Q7 Local authority system for home educated children with statement/EHCP

The survey was directed at parents of children with SEN, but once again it must be remembered that most of these children don't have a statement or an EHCP, therefore **the majority of parents aren't familiar with the more formal SEN process**

Parents found that SEN departments didn't really understand home education, and that families were either policed or ignored or sometimes both (*"For the LA it's a financially cheap option and therefore they just let families get on with it and ignore them pretty much"* *"the process for SEN support in schools is embarrassingly poor and is a terrible experience for child and parent yet when you then move to home education the professionals all tell you the best place for your child is school where they quite clearly failed the children in the first place it's a frustrating experience all round"* *"given up expecting anyone involved in traditional educational systems to understand someone who didn't quite fit"* *"my request for extra help and referrals fell on deaf ears"* *"his statement has not been reviewed in the three years we have been home educating"* *"the more home schooled children the more money they save"* *"the statements lady didn't seem sure what to do with the review"* *"they are appalling"* *"they don't have a clue. It appears they put you in a deal with later box never to be dealt with. Then forgotten"* *"we are generally left to get on with it"* *"we have had to do their job"* *"you get no support and even less now we home educate".)*

Q7. Do you feel that your local authority has a good system for dealing with home educators where children have a statement/EHCP

- Yes = 6.1%

- No = 39.5%
- Don't know = 54.4%

Q8 Statement being amended

The statement will not necessarily be amended when a child comes out of school. **Some statements had not been properly reviewed or updated for years while the child was home educated.** Where a statement has not been amended for a long time, there are various ways this could affect [the transfer to an EHCP](#). Comments included: "going through EHCP transfer which is proving to be hard work with specialist school refusing to detail specifics of planned provision to meet needs" "review is overdue" "statement ceased without review or informing us" "statement ceased when child left school" "statement stopped as they stated she no longer required it" "statement last amended 8 years ago" "the council based the EHCP on out of date reports."

Q8. When was your child's statement last amended? (Or how long ago is the date on the front page of your child's statement?)

- Less than a year ago = 15.5%
- Between 1 and 2 years ago = 14.9%
- Between 2 and 5 years ago = 9.5%
- Other = 7.4%
- Not applicable = 52.7%

Contact with council SEN department

Half of respondents had no experience of the council's special needs department because their children don't have a statement or [EHCP](#). Parents tend not to be hopeful ("I feel very nervous to contact them as I feel they may judge my home ed provision ahead of looking to help me").

Contact with the SEN department is often stressful. In some cases parents are looking for support, especially where they feel they have been pushed into home educating ("I want them to help but they say they can't" "seems we don't exist anymore" "the moment we removed our child from mainstream school they pulled the plug on all provision" "we're arguing that this is not elective. We don't believe we had a choice in our decision" "can't get any practical information or help from my councils SEN department" "short staffed with no real follow up" "asked for an Ed Psych assessment and got a long letter telling us why we should avoid going down that route" "felt very lonely and all alone.") One parent said "we are trying to transfer to EHCP and get a new school place and they are working totally against us"

Some parents resent the intrusion ("given we received nothing I felt cheated that we had to report what we were doing to an inspector" "I'd rather they stayed away and left me to it") or have negotiated their own compromise ("I just send in an annual report")

In some cases trust has broken down. One parent said of the council "they will never write down anything that can be argued, preferring to phone." However, another parent commented that *making an effort to build positive relationships really does help* and I was also asked "**why is 'very good' not an option here?** They have been very helpful. The difficulty has been with the finance department rather than the SEN team. They have not had to set up regular payments for an education budget before."

Q9. Which best describes your experience as a home educator with the council SEN department?

- It's fine = 12.7%
- The people are nice but the forms they have to use aren't home-ed friendly at all = 1.4%
- I find it stressful = 19.7%
- No experience yet = 47.9%
- Other = 19.7%

Contact with council home education department

The majority of home educated children with special needs in my survey didn't have a statement. Therefore any contact would be with the home education department rather than the SEN department. Opinions were very mixed. Comments included: "because was not costing the LA a penny they left us alone" "I'm not going to inform the LEA in the hope that it takes a while to filter through from the school - I don't need more hassle" "they email once a year to ask for a report" "I keep getting told I chose it" "I don't know which department it is, I send in a yearly report" "we have as little contact as possible" "we have had her name passed to social work by the council because they were worried about her health because she wasn't in school" "he [home education advisor] has visited us once" "the LA kept blaming me for poor parenting"

Q10. Do you have contact with the council's home education department?

- Yes = 54.2%
- We never hear from anyone at the council = 23.9%

- Not applicable = 12.0%

Getting support in statement

More than half of the children with special needs in the survey didn't have a statement. Of those who did have a statement, **2 out of 3 parents said their child didn't get any of the support set out in the statement once they were home educated** (*"his statement was basically written to get him a special school place and as it's not been updated there are no specified therapies"*).

In some cases this meant that access to health therapies was withdrawn immediately the child was no longer on a school roll, with parents being deemed to have opted out.

Parents were also saying children hadn't necessarily had the therapies set out in the statement while they were in school either (*"I am convinced that the withdrawal of SLT provision is due entirely to financial constraints in my area, we have had to approach a private therapist to deliver the therapy that was withdrawn some months ago"* *"SALT is NHS provision, very recently split from LA to provide separate services"* *"they said she would have speech therapy once a year but when she was 11/12 she would be too old for it"*)

Parents who said their child did get some support while they were home educated generally wanted to qualify this by explaining that it was because they provided or paid for it themselves (*"we fund speech and language therapy and occupational therapy ourselves"* *"we pay for all the support he needs at the moment but we're hoping for more from the EHCP"*), or that they had had to take on the council (*"we only got it after we complained"* *"we get support only because the judge told them to"* *"I took them to tribunal to get more support"* *"we only got support after years of battling"*).

There were notable exceptions to the general rule of no support from the council. One parent said *"the support is provided through sixth form college and also a part-time placement at specialist autism college"* while another - unique among respondents to the survey - said *"we have a personal budget for education and receive monthly payments and use this to meet her needs as detailed in the EHCP."*

Q11. Does your child get any of the support detailed in the statement

- Yes = 13.9%
- No = 28.5%
- Not applicable = 57.7%

Q12 Annual review

While a statement remains in force the local authority has [a legal duty to review it annually](#) but this doesn't always seem to happen when children are home educated. (One parent said *"I had to ask for annual review and push for it to be done"*) When I asked parents how they felt about the annual review, a third said the statement hadn't been reviewed since they started home educating. Parents often felt that the reviews were of no benefit to the child (*"it certainly does not feel like they are there to help"* *"an absolute farce"* *"a pointless exercise, it doesn't change anything now we home educate and it doesn't help with anything"*)

Parents felt they were not treated as equal partners (*"they are far more zealous about checking our provision than they were about checking what the school was doing"* *"LA gives parents very little notice"* *"I have to remind them that the statement only applies to state schools and I don't have to follow it"* *"we were sent letters as though we were a school"*) or that they had to do someone else's job (*"I was told to rewrite the statement myself and send it to the SEN team"*)

There was not 100% negativity; one parent said *"we looked back at disability issues which were causing problems and ahead to what he'd need in the future to support them, it was a useful opportunity"*

Q12. Which best describes your experience of the annual statement review?

- It's a good chance to review what has happened during the year and to look ahead = 4.4%
- It feels like a box-ticking exercise = 17.0%
- It feels like an inspection of our home education = 8.9%
- The statement hasn't been reviewed since we started home educating = 17.8%
- Other = 8.9%
- Not applicable = 50.4%

When will statement transfer to EHCP

Over half of the children with SEN didn't have a statement. Where the child did have a statement, **fewer than a third of parents had any clear idea of [when](#) it might be [transferred to an EHCP](#)** (*"no idea if they are even maintaining his statement"*). There was a view that **not everyone would get an EHCP** (*"you are likely to lose anything that costs money"*) One parent reported that they were *"in transition now and appealing against forced changes"* while another said *"they didn't follow [the correct process](#) causing info to be missed from draft plan"*. Contrariwise, where parents actually wanted

to cease the statement they expected to be over-ridden ("about to begin [the process](#) against our wishes - every year we request the statement be ceased")

Parents thought the local authority [might spring something on them](#); in general, communication was not good ("the LA will give you very little notice and present you with a draft EHCP for review and return, they don't really care" "only had 'pro forma' letter" "requested transfer but no response") There were various comments about the council being late ("should have had decision by now but other parents reporting delays" "updates from the LA keep changing the date" "transfer meeting was a year ago - still awaiting draft copy" "told last year it would be September 2015 but not heard anything" "next week they are starting transfer but only because I was taking them to tribunal") One parent said they'd "been told that home educated children will be at the end of the process as its not necessary to do them before then."

Q13. If your child currently has a statement do you have any idea when they will transfer to a new Education Health and Care Plan?

- Yes = 14.1%
- No = 14.8%
- Not really = 14.8%
- Not applicable = 56.3%

EHCP transfer: what to expect

Most parents didn't have much idea how the council intended to [transfer their child's statement to an Education Health and Care Plan](#). To promote my survey I used established home education SEN peer support networks and knowledge communities where members have every opportunity to ask questions and learn from others, and yet parents were still in the dark, suggesting that 1/ there was nowhere parents could go and look things up; 2/ councils were not explaining (or not explaining effectively); 3/ most families hadn't experienced any changes yet (so others weren't able to benefit from their experience) and 4/ where families HAD been through new processes, their experience couldn't be generalised, either because of their particular family circumstances which wouldn't apply in other cases, or because what happened in one local authority wasn't going to be a reliable indicator of what might happen in another.

Insofar as parents were prepared to make a guess, they thought things might be carried over when the statement was being reviewed anyway, and in some cases this is indeed what happened ("had annual review and transfer review at same time, not enough time to go through everything" "they put pressure on us to agree their pre-written plan at the meeting as it was presented to us").

Parents also guessed that the council would not miss the opportunity to take things away ("hearing from other parents that the process is being made difficult and provision is being removed in the process" "I doubt they will bother to convert the statement, it was set up when he was 3 so they would have to start from scratch and that would cost money" "they will try and change support to take away as much as possible and not quantify anything")

Hardly any parents thought it would involve something new ("I think they'll put it off as long as possible and spend as little as possible" "it's supposed to be family focused putting child at centre of decision making and extends beyond education to include health and social care. I'm not hopeful that the single process and form works well across all sectors" "they will do whatever is easiest for them, no needs assessment will be carried out without us insisting and the legal timeframe will be ignored".

Most parents experienced the process as 'them against us': "the LA drag their feet and blame parents" "they don't really know what they are doing" "they have no idea what they are doing and are very behind" "they say it will make no difference to a statement???" "I don't think they have a clue" "any questions I ask about how it works for my home educated child are met with a big don't know" "it's going to be a nightmare" "the EHCP is delayed by me because they want to sign it off with no input from health and no support even though the draft approved it and then the money people in the council withdrew the draft and changed it to no support not realising that I had seen the draft"

Some parents felt home education might make a difference to the transfer ("we don't know if they would consider an EHCP especially as it is likely all children will remain home educated") or felt a Plan would be meaningless ("I literally have no clue, they say it will cover her until she's 25 but to be honest - if they don't give us items to help her learn I just don't see the point")

On the positive side, one parent reported they were "working through our family conversation with an Independent Supporter"

Q14. How do you think the EHCP transfer process works in your authority?

- I think they will want to do it all at the statement review meeting and convert the statement into a new Plan soon after = 11.7%
- They'll need to look at a lot of other areas now so I imagine it could take quite a while = 6.7%
- I don't really know what to expect = 41.7%
- Other = 42.5%

Hope EHCPs will be better

The majority of home educated children with SEN didn't have a statement, but where children did have a statement, **most parents said they hoped the new Plans would be better** ("hopefully more detailed description of what support offers" "I would like them to pay for my son's dyslexic support and some independence training" "we want [a personal budget](#)") **although there was widespread cynicism and pessimism** ("I think I will be lucky to hang on to what we have got" "as always I am hoping for less costly support but more parental control ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!" "I'm in the dark and think it's just another useless form but I could be wrong" "I found no one at the council willing to offer anything much in the way of support or to even acknowledge problems that were clear to everybody else, and I expect even less in the future due to the current climate of service cuts")

Professionals have been managing parents' expectations ("I have been told we will not get anything" "they've already told me I'm on my own" "our daughter's SLT therapist informed us that she didn't believe our daughter would qualify for a EHCP") One parent already had a backup strategy ("I never hope for anything from them, the legal route is the only way to deal with them")

There were comments to the effect that **everyone was getting less, not just home educators** ("being used in my council as a blatant cost cutting exercise" "I think the whole thing is a paperwork exercise and will make little difference to the support children in schools and home ed will get" "there should be funding for provision for elective home education in whatever form that takes to meet needs and outcomes, but the LA do not view that way, I suspect largely from having huge amounts of money slashed from budgets")

Some respondents had **no idea about the changes** ("I literally haven't a clue" "never heard of it till now.. we got no support with her statement of SEN so I doubt she will now (btw this is the first time I have realised that being statemented meant having a SEN)")

There was heartening news with one parent reporting "in my son's case we are receiving considerable support in sixth form college"

Q15. Are you hoping for more support with an EHCP than with a statement?

- Yes = 32.8%
- No = 12.0%
- Not applicable = 40.0%
- Other = 15.2%

How did children get the EHCP

At the time of the survey in October 2015 **only a very few home educated children had EHCPs**. Of those who did, the most common route was for [the EHCP to have been converted from a statement](#).

Q16. If your child now has an Education Health and Care Plan was this...

- Converted from a non-statutory EHCP in a Pathfinder authority after the law changed in September 2014 = 1.7%
- A new EHCP from scratch (not converted from a statement) = 3.3%
- From an existing statement converted at a transfer review = 5.0%
- Not applicable = 90.1%

Benefit in having EHCP while home educating

Asked whether they saw any benefit in their child having a statement or Plan many parents were dismissive ("I have heard from many that it's a waste of time and can even invite more headaches" "pretty pointless" "it's useless, it was useless in school and has absolutely no value when home educating, it's just a potential stick to be hit with" "just to keep tabs on us basically")

Nevertheless, parents definitely felt they wanted to hang on to a statement or Plan for insurance ("when the time comes he won't be left out as a vulnerable adult" "it is then set for the future" "I do believe the EHCP is a positive document, it acts as an insurance policy in case the child might need an urgent school place at some point in the future" "I believe an EHCP would limit how much my son is sidelined and written off" "it leaves the door open for further education" "it means if ever they have to go back to mainstream the transition will be less stressful")

Statement or Plans might not be of direct use to home educators but **they have value because they can serve as a passport to important benefits or support elsewhere** ("it helps to have listed legally things they struggle with to support any benefits they receive" "it's helpful for the renewal of DLA" "some leisure services require child to have a plan" "in the future when it comes to [taking exams](#), he might be allowed extra time etc" "I fought too hard to get it in the first place").

Home education may be what happens while parents consider their next move ("there is a specialist autism school near me but not sure how to get considered without a statement" "we don't plan to home educate for long, it was only an option to us when relationship with both school and LA broke down and our child's self esteem was rock bottom")

Where parents have taken children out of school they are usually deemed to have opted out ("the LA can say it's your

choice so that's an excuse to provide no support"). However, some parents were still hoping for "additional funding for things like BSL which school can't provide" "help that currently I cannot access due to lack of funds". Parents said "it needs to come with support to make home education viable in the long term, my child has high care needs and school isn't the right place for him, he has made great progress at home and I need support to continue" "it could provide access to specialised resources/support" "it would be beneficial if there was some kind of external support as well i.e if we could access speech and language therapy or occupational therapy as part of the statement. Also if there was some kind of financial help in order to best meet the child's needs."

There was a positive story "we have a personal education budget for use in home education, needs are now being met where school could not, we maintain contact with SEN department, all the involved parties have fed in to one joined up process."

Q17. Do you see any benefit in your child having a statement/EHCP when they are home educated?

- Yes = 27.4%
- No = 17.7%
- Not right now but they might need it later = 34.7%
- Not applicable = 16.9%
- Other = 6.5%

Disadvantage to having statement/EHCP while home educating

Parents felt that when a child had a statement or Plan it gave professionals more chance to have a say in home education ("loads of bureaucracy, loads of 'justification' to LA, ongoing stress" "more checks" "more hassle from the LA" "being hassled and inspected" "it takes a lot of my time for no benefit, my child got so distressed at last years meeting that we will not attend this years" "council staff assume they have rights which they do not" "it's another layer of bureaucracy to deal with, and more professionals who think they know the law but don't" "it's too goal oriented for autonomous home edders" "you have to toe the line more with the LA's ridiculous and sometimes unlawful requests for fear of jeopardising future support through the EHCP")

This perception definitely puts parents off applying for an EHCP ("I'd be concerned at forced involvement by the LA and them not agreeing to home education if an EHCP ever put LAs in charge of having to agree to any educational provision" "the LA is possibly using reviews as 'inspection' of education" "there are more people involved and if you want to keep a low profile then that doesn't work" "I don't KNOW this but I feel vulnerable opening us up to any assessment process" "I guess the annual review is still the LA's way of monitoring even if you don't have annual visits via their home education team" "I haven't pursued one as apart from helping gain evidence for special exam arrangements (years away at present) I doubt they would have anything but interference and extra stress to offer" "it could mean the LA are more insistent on meeting the child in the home due to an annual review" "the LA could assume they have a say in child's education even if they don't think they have an obligation to provide the support described.")

A different perspective was provided by the parent who had a personal budget who said "paperwork is a disadvantage, but we would not expect to be given a budget for our child's education without this, accountability is important.

Q18. Are there any disadvantages in your child having a statement/EHCP when they are home educated?

- Yes = 26.4%
- No = 30.6%
- Not applicable = 43.0%

How easy think to get new EHCP later

If statements and Plans are of little benefit while a child is home educated, and bring lots of problems, the strength of feeling about keeping them ticking over as insurance could well be related to perceptions of how difficult it might be to get a Plan later ("I am guessing it would be as difficult as when first trying to get a statement, if not more difficult" "the process of getting a statement was an exhausting battle that took years first time round, why would this be better" "you have to fight just to get an assessment" "I had to go to tribunal 3 times to get what we have now, it would be beyond my resources to repeat the process" "I think it would be an incredibly difficult process" "I would imagine they would want to go right back to the start, which would be a pain" "it is hard enough to get it transferred as it is and impossible to get support" "it is proving to be a nightmare now, I don't imagine it getting any easier" "like everything you would have to fight for it" "most probably not as they could say I coped on my own.")

9 out of 10 parents thought it would NOT be straightforward ("the LA would be keen to put all barriers in the way - they would not want to assess and that would be the first hurdle to overcome" "we have been led to believe by the LA that it would be easy to get a new EHCP later but I am not convinced, so I want to keep what we have" "my child has had a statement for the last 5 years and the LA has consistently tried to remove support and last year tried to get rid of the statement completely. With new reforms schools don't want to pay the first 6k of provision so they turn a blind eye to any SEN issues"). One parent did feel that they would probably manage it in the end "for us maybe it would just take a bit longer but he'd get one due to severe needs, those with less severe needs I think would really struggle if they gave it up now"

As one parent put it *"general opinion seems to suggest that it's quite difficult to get an EHCP assessment anyway and I would think that as home educators even more difficult without school's input to illustrate SEN."* As an aside, one local authority SEN professional outside the survey told me in a matter-of-fact way last year **"they'll only give them EHCPs in our area if they are going to a special school"**

Q19. If the statement/EHCP was ceased now do you think it would be straightforward to get an EHCP later?

- Yes = 4.0%
- No = 45.6%
- Not thought about it = 8.8%
- Not applicable = 41.6%

Wanting statement/EHCP ceased

The majority of parents didn't want the statement ceased (*"my child still has additional needs in order to access his education, this hasn't changed"*), even though they greatly disliked how it currently worked for their family. Where they did want it ceased it was because *"it would mean less dealings with the LA"*. Parents also said it had never been much use in the past (*"having a statement never really helped or made a difference"* *"the statement gave access to provision/support which was never really forthcoming"*). However, others said *"it's the only thing that forced my LEA to support my child"* or *"although it's not needed at the moment I feel I need to keep it in case he ever returns to school/college"* *"in the long term school may be considered again at some point and therefore the EHCP will be needed"* *"we are looking a special needs college for him post 16 - it would be impossible for him to attend without an EHC plan"*

Q20. Given a choice would you want the statement/EHCP to be ceased?

- Yes = 9.1%
- No = 42.1%
- Not thought about it = 2.5%
- It's complicated = 8.3%
- Not applicable = 40.5%

Local authority suggesting cease statement/not making EHCP

One of the reasons why I asked whether the council had suggested ceasing the statement or not going forward with a Plan was because I know a couple of families where the council has really pushed for this. Responses to the survey suggest that **it may not be related to an assessment of the child's needs** (*"they asked what I wanted and after discussing it they suggested we kept it"* *"yes they suggested we could opt out"* *"statement ceased without review or informing us"* *"statement ceased when child left school"* *"statement stopped as they stated she no longer required it"*). There was also some confusion as to whether the statement was still in force (*"they haven't suggested ceasing it but then I don't know if they maintain it or not??"*.)

At this stage it seems relatively rare for the council to suggest ceasing the statement, however several parents felt it would be taken away if they actually wanted anything from it (*"we want the statement to help get an appropriate school placement in future so I suspect they will want to cease it"* *"according to the previous school my child had made lots of progress and did not require all support in the statement and professionals working for the LA watered down my child's needs, from that information LA wanted to stop support"*)

It is worth noting that under the previous system for special needs, a statement would be ceased at 16 if the young person was not attending school, and the alternative LDA was only applicable for college, whereas under the new system EHCPs go up to age 19 (or even 25 in some cases) and apply to education and training across the board. One parent in the survey said *"they have ceased it as she didn't go to the college specified"*. However, at age 16 a home educated young person may not be ready to apply to college but this is no reason for refusing to transfer the statement to an EHC Plan.

At a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Home Education in March 2016 Stuart Miller, the Deputy Director for SEN and Disability at the Department for Education was quite clear that home education cannot be grounds for ceasing, and that the council should only cease (or not make in the first place) if the child wouldn't need the level of support in school/college, ie if the child needed to go to school they would need the plan. ([Reference](#))

Q21. Did your council ever suggest ceasing the statement/halting the Education Health and Care Plan process and if so what reason did they give?

- Yes = 0.8%
- No = 35.5%
- Not applicable = 53.2%

School or college at some point

A third of parents felt their children wouldn't be able to cope with school or college ("she is wanting to go to college in the future but I can't see her coping personally" "he wants to go back to school in yr 7" "if they want to and the place is there"). **Some of the comments were very wistful** ("I would like him to but not sure how it will pan out" "I would love him to be able to return to the system for A levels but that is some time away" "I would love in an ideal world for us to continue [flexi schooling](#), school will be far too rigid and overpowering for her" "I would really love my son to go to college but as he is struggling at school I can't see how he would cope at college" "I'd like there to be provision in future" "I'd love for my child to access further education at some point such as college for an apprenticeship, but they will never return to school")

Some respondents were hugely relieved that home education was working, since there was really no alternative ("after home education, school just doesn't compare, the children are happy well adjusted and mix with a whole range of ages which in my opinion is more life realistic, never would I send my children to school again" "seeing the progress my son has made at home..." "my son doesn't fit into mainstream and doesn't cope with other children with special needs, he is thriving at home" "they couldn't provide the support or out anything in place in nearly two years so I don't see how they could ever offer him a better solution than home education plus he'd have to go through the whole SEN support plan/EHCP process again which is ridiculously long" "it's a funding/contractual minefield, we've considered 15 options, only 2 were feasible and 1 fell through" "school left my child severely phobic and traumatised" "I don't believe she would want to go into a college - certainly not a school - she finds it too difficult to learn in classes")

For other families it was a case of not ruling anything out, perhaps best summed up by the parent who commented "who knows! I never once ever imagined that we would be home educating - things change". ("We are giving school a go again and at the end of this academic year we will decide if its working or not" "hoping to flexi school to reduce anxiety" "we're hoping he will attend secondary school but happy to home educate him if that's what he wants" "I keep an open mind about the future" "now back in school with a statement" "we are going to see how it goes" "we have no plans to return to school at present but we would facilitate it if our daughter wanted it" "we just want him to have an education" "will never be full time always part home part college/6th form etc" "we intend to home educate during the primary years, with the possibility of school at secondary" "I might think about some sort of 6th form - to give him opportunity to meet other young adults with similar issues" "if he wanted to do a course or study something we would do everything possible to make it happen" "due to money issues there will be a lot more online learning which might suit him better than a busy institution")

Some parents were very pessimistic that an appropriate place could ever be arranged ("I don't think the LA will ever fund a suitable place" "I feel a special school would be the right place" "I have asked and asked for him to go to a specialist school but they won't unless I put him into the oversubscribed special school to fail then they will consider it" "my son would need a LOT of support" "there is a complete void when it comes to SEN school placements for academically able children" "will never be full time always part home part college/6th form etc")

A number of parents mentioned college as a possibility ("college might work better than school because it is more flexible" ("there would need to be appropriate part time college place in area of interest" "I am fairly sure that school cannot ever be right for my child but I can imagine that college may possibly be appropriate at some point" "we applied for statement then EHCP specifically with college in mind" "I hope that in time he will be able to go to college and we are working towards that may go to college later")we are thinking of college part-time at 14 to do a couple of gcse's or similar" "we may consider college when our son is 16 but a mainstream senior school would be a nightmare" "we will probably look at colleges for A Levels" "will possibly think about college if the support is there")

Some had tried college already ("our daughter is attending [a 14-16 course at college](#) now" "college was difficult at first and I provided support myself (travelling to and from college with her when needed)" "we have just started at a college and they are reviewing to make sure the right support is there but until the assessment review in a few weeks..." **SOMETIMES NEGATIVE** "my son decided he wanted to try college, they were scathing of home ed children, his background has been described as 'unusual'" "we tried college, there was supposed to be support but it failed to materialise, his health failed and he was asked to leave the course due to sickness absence")

Q22. Which best describes how you feel about your child going into school/college at some point?

- We have somewhere in mind and we are working to put the right support in place = 23.8%
- I can't see how they would be able to cope = 33.6%
- We will stick with home education = 27.0%
- Other = 26.2%

Managing in school or college without an EHCP

Three quarters of parents thought their child would not be able to manage in an education setting without an EHCP ("definitely no way, her difficulties and the support she needs to enable her to overcome them would not be put in place without an EHCP" "without the EHCP there is minimal support and parents haven't a leg to stand on")

However, **parents also reflected that a statement hadn't helped much in the past** ("if her previous school is anything to go by then a statement wouldn't make a difference to her learning as it didn't do anything then" "he would need a statement/EHCP to detail support and needs to be provided, but we would still probably have to fight for the provision") or felt that any institutional setting had its limitations ("a school could not provide for my child even with an EHCP, only

home education works')

Parents felt things needed to be in place right from the start ("he would need a high level of support in place before day one otherwise it would be a highly damaging event") although in specific situations parents felt support need not necessarily flow from an EHCP ("my son is a High Needs student and his support is expensive, it's possible that the college/s could have made request to the LA for that funding to be made available *without* the EHCP in place")

Some parents weren't entirely sure and tended to think it would depend on the attitude of the people involved ("I think this is something that he may need to support him" "I don't know what help and support is available with an EHCP but it's something we will look into nearer the time" "I think it really really does depend on the setting" "it might be possible at college" "so much would depend on the attitude of the teaching staff and overall ethos, if staff were understanding and flexible...")

There were good and bad experiences of college without an EHCP ([managing without an EHCP] "yes, happening now" "college are obstructive about supporting an EHCP application, I believe with support his life would be far less stressful")

Q23. Do you think your child could manage in school/college/6th form without an Education Health and Care Plan?

- Yes = 5.0%
- No = 72.7%
- Not thought about it = 11.6%
- Other = 12.4%

Parents currently considering home education

This was the only question in my survey aimed at parents with no first hand experience of home education already, as opposed to already home educating or having home educated in the past. Therefore it was answered by relatively few parents (85% checked 'not applicable') and there were hardly any comments. It was constructed so that parents could check more than one box.

The main considerations for parents of children with special needs who were thinking about home education but hadn't actually taken the final plunge were: **children being unhappy at school; children refusing to go to school because of anxiety; no suitable school in the local area; and children not making progress at school.**

Q24. If your child has a statement or an Education Health and Care Plan and you are currently considering home educating which of the following factors apply?

- You like what you have heard about home education = 2.6%
- Child not making progress at school = 6.0%
- Child unhappy at school = 8.5%
- Child being bullied = 2.6%
- Child being excluded for behaviour = 2.6%
- Child refusing to go to school because of anxiety = 8.5%
- No suitable school in area = 6.8%
- Disagreement over allocated school place = 1.7%
- Someone has suggested home education = 0.0%
- Not applicable = 84.6%
- Other = 2.6%

Been to tribunal

For whatever reason, **most parents don't take their case to tribunal** ("I was going to go to tribunal after the refusal to assess, but then they did agree although it still isn't done"). Of those who do go to tribunal, some say it's the only thing that works, including where it never actually reaches the tribunal ("specialist placement agreed out of court the day before the tribunal hearing"), while others say they might 'win' at tribunal but still not get the support ("been to tribunal 3 times all successful, but the judge pointed out last time they have no power to enforce so gave green light to school to ignore it".)

As with using the formal complaints system, **having been to tribunal once, parents are more likely to do it again; there are also parents seriously considering it now for the first time** ("not yet but fully expecting to have to go to tribunal" "not yet, but have a tribunal booked".)

Q25. Have you ever been to tribunal for SEN provision?

- Yes = 17.4%
- No = 82.6%

Q26. Are you happy for anything you have said in this questionnaire to be quoted in a write-up of this survey (with any identifying details removed)?

- Yes = 93.4%
- No = 6.6%

Q27. The default for this questionnaire is that your local authority is not identified. However if you would like to share the name of your council please enter it in the box below. The box can also be used for any additional comments.

Useful Links

[Home education SEN statistics](#)
[My Home Education and SEN Website](#)
[New SEN Code Practice Home Education](#)
[Transfer Statement to EHCP \(timescales\)](#)
[Deregistration \(taking a child out of school\)](#)
[EHCP, What Goes Where](#)
[Tribunal, Complaints, Ombudsman](#)
[Flexischooling](#)
[14-16 College \(home education\)](#)
[HE-Special online support network](#)
[Home Ed and SEN online support network](#)
[Home Education Personal Budgets Direct Payments](#)

Link Reference

This article is <http://edyourself.org/articles/SENsurvey.php>. The following links to other websites are contained in the article, displayed as citations to aid you in printing the document.

1. download page as pdf <http://edyourself.org/SENsurvey2016.pdf>
2. the more formal SEN process <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/>
3. new-style Education Health and Care Plans <http://edyourself.org/articles/EHCPlayout.php>
4. to deregister, even from mainstream <http://edyourself.org/articles/deregistration.php>
5. a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Home Education
<http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php#mar2016>
6. new-style Education Health and Care Plans <http://edyourself.org/articles/EHCPlayout.php>
7. deregister, even from mainstream <http://edyourself.org/articles/deregistration.php>
8. know the law <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/>
9. the more formal SEN process <http://edyourself.org/articles/EHCPlayout.php>
10. the transfer to an EHCP <http://edyourself.org/articles/EHCPlayout.php>
11. EHCP <http://edyourself.org/articles/EHCPlayout.php>
12. a legal duty to review it annually <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/annreview.php>
13. the process <http://edyourself.org/articles/newcode.php#statguide>
14. a personal budget <http://edyourself.org/articles/SENDPs.php>
15. taking exams <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
16. Reference <http://edyourself.org/homeeducationappgnotesmarch2016.pdf>
17. flexi schooling <http://edyourself.org/articles/flexischooling.php>
18. a 14-16 course at college <http://edyourself.org/articles/14-16collegeFAQ.php>
19. take their case to tribunal <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/appealscomplaints.php>
20. Home education SEN statistics <http://edyourself.org/articles/2013foissenandlocationehe.php>
21. My Home Education and SEN Website <http://www.ehe-sen.org.uk/>
22. New SEN Code Practice Home Education <http://edyourself.org/articles/newcode.php>
23. Deregistration <http://edyourself.org/articles/deregistration.php>
24. EHCP, What Goes Where <http://edyourself.org/articles/EHCPlayout.php>
25. Tribunal, Complaints, Ombudsman <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/appealscomplaints.php>
26. Flexischooling <http://edyourself.org/articles/flexischooling.php>
27. 14-16 College <http://edyourself.org/articles/14-16collegeFAQ.php>
28. HE-Special <http://www.he-special.org.uk/>
29. Home Education Personal Budgets Direct Payments <http://edyourself.org/articles/SENDPs.php>