

Education Select Committee

Agilisys Submission to the Inquiry on Solving the SEND Crisis

February 2025

In collaboration with:



Datnexa

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Challenges in the EHCP Process

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The UK's SEND system is under growing pressure due to a sharp increase in demand for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), while funding and resources have not kept pace. This has led to significant delays, administrative backlogs, and an increase in tribunal cases, with families facing a slow and often adversarial process.

Agilisys has been working closely with local authorities, SEND professionals, and legal experts to understand these challenges and develop AI-driven solutions that streamline EHCP processes. Our AI-powered tool, EHCP Plus, built in collaboration with Outcomes Matter Consulting and Datnexa helps councils reduce administrative burdens, accelerate plan drafting, and improve report accuracy, saving an average of five hours per EHCP.

We urge the Education Committee to consider AI's role in alleviating pressure on SEND services, improving the EHCP experience for families, and ensuring timely support for children.

Introduction

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system is currently under immense strain, with rising demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) leading to significant delays and backlogs. Local authorities are facing mounting pressure to process EHCP applications within the statutory 20-week timeframe, yet many families experience delays that extend well beyond this limit. Schools, caseworkers, and councils are grappling with resource constraints, administrative inefficiencies, and a growing number of tribunal appeals from families who feel the system is failing them.

A recent report by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) highlighted that since **2015**, there has been a **140%** increase in demand for EHCPs, while funding has only increased by **58%**, failing to keep pace with demand. In **2023**, only half of EHCPs were issued within the statutory 20-week period, leading to delays in support for children. The report also noted that families often face a 'chaotic and adversarial' system, with tribunal cases rising; notably, **98%** of tribunal cases in **2023** were found partly or wholly in favour of parents and carers.

At Agilisys, we have been investigating the EHCP crisis for the past several years, working closely with councils to understand the underlying challenges. Our extensive collaboration with SEND caseworkers, local authorities, and external SEND providers has provided us with a deep knowledge base of the EHCP process, its administrative burdens, and the inefficiencies causing delays. Through this close integration, we have developed a clear picture of how **Generative AI** can provide a solution tailored to these systemic issues.

We are not merely observers of the challenges within the SEND space; we are deeply embedded in working alongside local authorities to drive tangible improvements.

Our expertise in the space is built on extensive engagement with councils, SEND professionals, and key external organisations that provide support for SEND children. **We have worked closely with SEND Caseworkers local authority legal and digital teams**, and tribunal experts to ensure that our AI-driven solutions align with the real-world needs of those delivering and receiving EHCPs. Our goal is to leverage Generative AI to empower local authorities with technology that enhances efficiency, improves report accuracy, and ensures that every child receives the support they need in a timely manner.

Our commitment to the SEND space extends beyond technology development - we actively collaborate with SEND professionals to refine our solutions, ensuring that they are not just innovative but also practical and impactful.

We have invested significant resources into understanding the nuanced challenges within SEND services, and this has allowed us to create AI solutions that address the specific pain points experienced by local authorities. By combining cutting-edge technology with our deep SEND expertise, we aim to bridge the gap between policy objectives and on-the-ground delivery, making SEND services more responsive, efficient, and equitable.

The Scope of Our Written Evidence

In response to the Education Committee's call for evidence, our submission will focus on improving the delivery, quality, and consistency of EHCPs as a crucial component of the broader SEND reform. While systemic change is necessary to create a more inclusive and effective SEND system, our expertise allows us to specifically address how AI can transform EHCP processes. Our evidence will demonstrate how AI can streamline the EHCP process, reduce administrative burdens for staff, enhance report accuracy, and ultimately ensure that SEND children are given the very best start in life.

We recognise that improving the EHCP process is just one part of the wider reform required to enhance SEND provision, and we are committed to supporting local authorities in this journey. The application of Generative AI within SEND services is not just about efficiency; it is about creating a system where children and families receive the support they need without unnecessary delays, disputes, or inconsistencies. By focusing on these critical improvements, our written evidence will provide practical, data-driven insights into how technology can support local authorities in delivering high-quality EHCPs as part of a wider, much-needed transformation of the SEND landscape.



The Role of AI in Government and the SEND System

The UK government has recognised the transformative potential of artificial intelligence in improving public services. As part of the AI Action Plan introduced by Sir Keir Starmer, there is a strong emphasis on ensuring that government departments leverage AI to enhance efficiency and service delivery. This includes streamlining administrative processes, reducing workload pressures, and improving citizen engagement - all of which are directly applicable to the SEND system.

Generative AI presents a unique opportunity to alleviate some of the bottlenecks in the EHCP process by automating report generation, reducing manual administrative tasks, and ensuring consistency in documentation. By incorporating AI-driven solutions into SEND services, local authorities can significantly cut waiting times, personalise EHCP reports, and provide a smoother experience for families navigating the system.



How Can Waiting Times for EHC Plans Be Improved?

Reducing the waiting times for EHC Plans requires a fundamental shift in how they are created, processed, and managed. A significant contributor to delays is the administrative burden placed on SEND caseworkers, who must manually compile extensive reports, synthesise information from multiple sources, and ensure compliance with statutory requirements. This often results in bottlenecks, especially when councils face staffing shortages and rely on costly agency workers to meet demand.

One of the most effective ways to accelerate the EHCP process is by streamlining the creation of these plans. EHCP Plus dramatically reduces the time required to draft EHCPs by automating report generation, pulling in structured and relevant information from professional assessments, and ensuring that documentation meets statutory standards from the outset. By significantly cutting down on the manual effort involved, caseworkers can process more EHCPs in less time, reducing the overall backlog.

Additionally, EHCP Plus eliminates the need for councils to rely on temporary agency staff by equipping in-house teams with the technology to work more efficiently. This not only enhances workforce stability but also ensures that EHCPs are handled consistently by professionals familiar with local policies and family needs.

Creating a collaborative EHCP process

A key challenge within the current EHCP framework is the complexity of interactions between families and local authorities, which require better coordination and management. Delays, inconsistencies, and limited resources contribute to tensions, often resulting in appeals and tribunals that are costly for all parties involved. EHCP Plus, fosters a more collaborative and transparent process by:



Standardising Decision-Making:

By ensuring consistency in EHCP assessments, our AI reduces the perception of arbitrary decision-making, giving parents confidence in the fairness of the process.

Providing Justifications with Citations

Our citation feature ensures that recommendations and decisions are backed by the concrete evidence provided in the professional input reports. This builds trust among families and minimises disputes.



Conclusion

The SEND crisis requires urgent intervention, and AI presents an immediate, scalable, and effective solution to many of the longstanding challenges within the EHCP system. At Agilisys, we are committed to supporting local authorities in creating a more efficient, transparent, and child-centred EHCP process. EHCP Plus offers a tangible way to reduce waiting times, minimise adversarial interactions, and ensure that every child receives the timely and appropriate support they need.

We urge the Education Committee to recognise the transformative potential of AI in tackling the SEND crisis and to support efforts to integrate AI-powered tools across local authorities. By investing in innovative technologies, we can alleviate pressures on caseworkers, improve experiences for families, and, most importantly, enhance outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further information, demonstrate our solution, or engage in discussions on how AI can contribute to the stability and sustainability of the SEND system. Thank you for considering our evidence.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Mindenhall

Chief Executive Officer

Agilisys

