

Stockton Parents Urge Secondary Schools to Support SEND Pupils

August 5, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



[Download IPFS](#)

Parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Stockton are expressing deep concern over the lack of secondary schools willing to host new support units, leaving many families fearful for their children's futures.

Emma Zenaj, co-chair of Stockton's Parent Carer Forum, addressed the local council's children and young people select committee, outlining widespread anxiety among families.

“They’re scared about their children’s futures and the limited options available,” she said.

The local authority has created 155 new SEND school places and is investing £730,000 annually into additional resource provision (ARP) and SEN units, set to launch in September. However, while primary schools have largely supported the changes, uptake among secondary schools has been minimal, resulting in what Zenaj described as a “significant gap”.

Parents generally support the ARP model, particularly in primary education, where it has been seen to offer a more inclusive environment. But concerns remain about the transition into secondary school. In a recent consultation, 89% of parents said their child’s needs could not be met in mainstream secondary settings, particularly for those with communication, emotional, or mental health challenges.

“Parents want their children to thrive, not just survive,” Zenaj said. “They want smaller, supportive settings where pupils can learn in a way that works for them.” One parent added: “We need more secondary schools to step up rather than let our children down.”

The forum highlighted how the lack of suitable placements has led some families to turn to home education, with an increasing number reporting success despite the challenges.

Councillor Carol Clark, chair of the committee, acknowledged the issue: “We haven’t allowed schools the money or resources to support these young people. Reading parents’ comments, it’s heartbreaking; they’re terrified.”

Elisha Dyball, strategic lead for SEND at Stockton Council, confirmed that while approximately 60 secondary places exist, more action is needed to balance provision. “The key is ensuring children are in the right place. Over the next 12 to 18 months, our plan is to implement more ARPs and improve mainstream support.”

The council says its goal is to create a consistent, equitable system for all SEND students across Stockton.