

## **Question 1: How might the NCSE's goals be developed to ensure they reflect our work over the next four years?**

The National Parents Council (NPC) gathered feedback from parents on the NCSE Statement of Strategy 2027–2030 through a survey conducted between 27 April and 1 May 2026. A total of 52 responses were received.

### **Goal 1: Service Delivery**

Parents support the focus on service delivery but believe it must become more practical and specific. Families often struggle to access supports, are unclear about available services and experience long delays. Parents want clearer information on what supports are available, how they can be accessed and what timelines apply.

Parents also want genuine coordination between schools, families and services. Many called for therapies such as speech and language therapy and occupational therapy to be delivered within schools rather than relying on families to organise support outside school hours.

Consistency and accountability in schools were also major concerns. Parents reported that supports and training are introduced but not consistently applied in practice. One parent stated: “Supports such as Lámh are taught but not used day-to-day.” Another commented that strategies “mean little without it being broken into the small goals of how to get there.”

Parents want clear actions, measurable outcomes, better communication and adequate resourcing to ensure consistent support delivery.

### **Goal 2: Research, Policy and Practice**

Parents agree research and training are important, but many believe the main issue is inconsistent implementation of existing knowledge. Parents want greater focus on ensuring evidence-based approaches are applied consistently in schools.

Parents stressed that research and policy should include input from parents, teachers, SNAs and children with lived experience. Concerns were raised about outdated approaches and a lack of understanding of neurodivergent children.

Many parents felt current policies are too theoretical and disconnected from daily school experience. One parent said: “There is a clear gap between research, policy and what actually happens in schools.” Another stated: “The priority should not be more research or more training. It should be ensuring that what already exists is applied consistently.”

Parents want clearer implementation plans, regular review of practice, stronger accountability and greater involvement of families in shaping policy.

### **Goal 3: Staff Development, Support and Leadership**

Parents recognise the importance of staff wellbeing and training but want this goal linked more directly to outcomes for children.

A key concern was continuity and consistency for children with additional needs, who often rely heavily on familiar staff and routines. Frequent staff changes can negatively affect progress and wellbeing.

Parents also stressed that training should be practical, relevant and informed by lived experience. Some questioned who decides appropriate training and suggested input from parents, therapists and autistic people.

There were repeated calls for increased staffing and resources. One parent commented: “Special Needs Education needs to be acknowledged as a role well beyond the ‘normal’ duties and skills of mainstream teaching.”

Parents want stronger focus on staff retention, continuity of support, practical training and increased staffing levels.

### **Goal 4: Organisation Support and Development**

Parents see this goal as important but feel it is currently too broad and administrative. Communication, transparency and responsiveness were identified as key areas needing improvement.

Parents described the current system as difficult to navigate and unclear. Many do not fully understand the role of the NCSE or SENO system and often rely on other parents for information.

Concerns were also raised about transparency and fairness. Parents feel access to support can depend too heavily on how informed or persistent a parent is. One parent described the system as “all very cloak and dagger”.

Parents also want consultation and feedback to lead to visible improvements. One parent asked: “How will you actually get change to happen in the schools? ... Where are the checks?”

Parents want clearer communication systems, better guidance, more transparent decision-making and evidence that feedback is influencing practice.

## **Question 2: Are there core areas or key goals missing?**

Parents identified several important areas that they believe require stronger focus within the strategy.

One of the clearest themes was the need for better information, guidance and outreach for parents. Many parents said they do not fully understand what the NCSE does, what supports are available, or how to access them. Parents described feeling unsupported and left to navigate the system alone. One parent stated: *“Parents should be given a simple breakdown of who NCSE are and what they do before their children start school.”*

Parents also strongly highlighted the need for more integrated supports within schools. Many called for therapies such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and psychological supports to be delivered directly in schools rather than requiring families to coordinate services independently.

Another major theme was the need for more focus on life skills, independence and preparation for adulthood. Parents feel the current system places too much emphasis on academic achievement and not enough on communication, social development and future employment pathways.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing were also repeatedly identified as areas needing stronger attention. Parents called for better counselling supports in schools, emotional regulation supports, and greater recognition of the pressures children are facing.

Many parents also stressed the importance of meaningful inclusion. They highlighted concerns about children “falling through the cracks”, particularly children whose needs may not meet thresholds for specialist placements but who still struggle significantly in mainstream settings.

Transparency and fairness were also raised repeatedly. Parents described confusion around access to supports and frustration with systems that appear overly dependent on reports, wording and processes rather than children's actual needs.

Finally, parents called for stronger links between education and health services. Many feel services currently operate in isolation from one another, creating additional stress for families and reducing the effectiveness of support.

### **Question 3: Are there specific objectives and actions that should be reflected within these goals?**

Parents identified several practical actions that they believe should be included within the strategy.

A key priority is improving communication and information for families. Parents want clear guidance from the beginning of their child's education journey explaining what supports exist, how they can be accessed, and who families can contact for help.

Reducing waiting times for assessments and supports was another major priority. Parents highlighted the impact delays can have on children's development, wellbeing and school experience.

There were also strong calls for increased staffing and resources. Parents repeatedly mentioned the need for more SNAs, specialist teachers, therapists and smaller class sizes to ensure children receive appropriate support.

Another important action identified was improving coordination between education and health services. Parents want more joined-up working and greater integration of therapies within school settings.

Finally, parents want clearer systems for consultation and feedback. Families want to know how their input is being used and to see visible changes resulting from consultation processes.

### **Question 4: Any concluding comments**

The overall message from parents is that while they welcome the strategy and support its direction, confidence in the strategy depends entirely on implementation. Many parents have experience of policies that sound positive but do not lead to meaningful improvements in practice.

Parents consistently described a system that can feel difficult to navigate, inconsistent and heavily dependent on parents advocating persistently for support. This creates stress and leads to unequal experiences for families.

There is a strong desire for a system that is clear, transparent, fair and centred on the child's actual experience in school. Parents want supports to be delivered consistently, communication to improve, and services to work together more effectively.

Ultimately, parents want the success of the strategy to be measured not by how well it is written, but by whether children and families experience real improvements in daily life. One parent summarised this clearly: *"The strategy should be judged on what families actually experience day to day, not on how well it is written."*