



CONSULTATION REPORT:  
EARLY YEARS EDUCATION IN  
KENT – SUPPORTING SETTINGS  
TO EMBED INCLUSIVE  
PRACTICE



Children's Commissioning  
Inclusion

## **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of the report is to summarise the findings of a public consultation which follows a wider review into the provision of early years education and childcare across Kent, the services and support available to the providers, as well as the support and services available to children and families. The report will present findings of the consultation including an in-depth analysis of responses.

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## Executive Summary

Most responses were received from professionals working in an educational setting, as the key changes mean that how they access and receive support would change. There was representation from all stakeholder groups with a wide range of professional roles who responded and there was geographic representation from all districts across the county across all stakeholder groups.

There was low attendance at the virtual forums, however we are confident that an extensive amount of pre-consultation activities meant that attendance at a virtual forum was unnecessary for many who had had opportunity ask questions and express their views on the proposals.

Respondents welcomed most of the key changes and in particular the proposed change in having a named key person allocated to a setting known as the 'link worker model'. As the support from a SENIF practitioner is highly valued, respondents also welcomed the prospect of SENIF practitioners having a defined targeted role.

Most concerns around the above key changes were due to respondents wanting more detail about how the proposals would be operationally implemented and a large number of responses were concerned about the current workforce having enough capacity to implement the changes effectively and successfully.

Many respondents welcomed the recognition that the proposal provides in acknowledging the skills and professionalism of nursery settings and childminders in supporting children with SEND.

While there is broad agreement to all the proposed changes the proposed change to the Specialist Nursery Intervention model generated higher levels of disagreement. An analysis of comments submitted suggest a level of misunderstanding of the proposal or confusion around the change. Many responses were also illustrative of the lack of inclusive culture which is an issue highlighted as part of the early years review where people have stated that some children with SEND cannot be educated in a mainstream setting.

Comments made by respondents to the consultation suggest that they recognise how, under these proposals, the graduated approach could be improved and implemented, and that if universal practices were strengthened and more outreach support was delivered in settings, the change could impact children's lives significantly to ensure they receive intervention for their needs early and experience less demand for specialist support.

The council believes that every child deserves a high-quality education in their early years. The benefits of such an education can be seen throughout early childhood itself and into the outcomes achieved throughout their time in education and beyond. A high-quality early education is particularly beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

In Kent, early education and childcare is delivered by a range of providers, including three local authority-maintained nurseries, one local-authority maintained nursery school, state funded mainstream schools and academies with nursery units and Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) nurseries and childminders who operate as private businesses.

Kent has an ambition for more children with SEND to be educated in mainstream settings and schools as outlined in the Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education (CATIE). It also has a commitment to reach a balanced budget as outlined in the Safety Valve; and a commitment to improve the quality of support provided to children with SEND in Kent through the Accelerated Progress Plan (APP).

### 1.1 Early Years Review

A comprehensive review of early years education in Kent has been completed. Feedback from stakeholders consistently highlighted several challenges that the early years sector faces in relation to:

- the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on children's learning and development, particularly on speech and language and physical development.
- the rise in numbers of young children with developmental delays.
- the increasing level and complexity of need of children in early years settings.
- challenges related to staff recruitment and retention that significantly affects the capacity in early years settings.
- inconsistencies in availability of professional support for early years settings.
- variable culture of inclusive practice within early years settings that can result in children with SEND being unable to find local childcare places.

Specific feedback from parent/carer surveys identified that whilst they are satisfied with the level of care and communication provided by early years settings, the main challenges facing early years provision in Kent include:

- Cost of living
- Cost of childcare
- Support for working parents
- SEND discrimination
- Waiting times for additional support/ funding after referral
- Staff training

Many settings voiced their concerns over their ability to remain sustainable. Several individuals interviewed described a sector "on its knees" and staff as being "burnt out".

Additional themes identified were:

- Lack of inclusive culture
- A disjointed system
- Too much bureaucracy

The findings from the early years review identified five key recommendations and proposals for six key changes for how things could be done differently. These were presented to stakeholder during the pre-consultation engagement phase and form the basis of the public consultation,

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## 2 Part Two – The consultation process

### 2.1 Informal pre-consultation process

As part of the early years review referenced in Section 1.3, and to inform the final proposals for a model of support for early years providers, we engaged with:

- Parents through focus groups facilitated by Kent Parents and Carers Together (Kent PACT), parent interviews and surveys.
- Early years education providers through the Kent Early Years and Childcare Provider Association, Early Years and Childcare Briefing and Networking Sessions, the Early Years and Out of School Collaborations, Childminder focus groups, Early Years Countywide SENCO forums and surveys.
- Professionals providing support to early years providers, specifically The Education People's (TEP) Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS), KCC SENIF and Portage teams, Special School Headteachers responsible for the delivery of the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS) and / or Specialist Nursery Intervention and the managers and members of staff delivering these services.

The focus was on sharing the preferred options for a future model with the services currently delivering support to settings and with settings themselves to further identify benefits and risks. The following stakeholders were engaged as part of this process before the formal consultation:

- Early Years and Childcare service.
- SEN Inclusion Fund practitioners, monitoring officers, leads and manager.
- Portage practitioner.
- STLS teachers, including district leads and early years teachers.
- Specialist Nursery Intervention managers or leads.
- SLA holding Special School Headteachers of STLS and SN.,
- Providers of early years and childcare through the EYCS Network and briefing sessions.

Parents were also engaged and provided feedback on how things could change to support better outcomes for children in early years with SEND.

### 2.2 Formal consultation process

An eight-week public consultation period took place between 11 March and 5 May 2024. This timeframe recognised the extensive amount of pre-engagement activities that had already taken place to support the development of the model and the school Easter Holidays occurring within the consultation period.

To promote the public consultation, the following activity was undertaken:

- stakeholder organisations and partners were sent emails containing the details of how to engage in the consultation. This included: Specialist Teaching and Learning service, Health visiting via Public Health commissioning and early years settings and childminders through the Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) within The Education People (TEP).
- an electronic poster that could be displayed in any setting or family hub centre was sent to early years settings and posted on social media to promote the consultation.
- 6,614 people already registered with 'Let's Talk Kent' were invited to participate under the filtered topics of 'children and families' and 'school and education'.
- organic social media posts from KCC corporate accounts across X, Facebook, Instagram and Linked In were published. These social media posts were seen by 29,179 people at least once, with the posts being displayed on someone's screen 216,927 times. The posts generated 422 clicks through to the consultation webpage.
- social media posts were shared by partners such as Kent PACT and reposted via Children's centres/Family Hubs on a local level.
- the consultation was promoted through Newsletter features such as SEND Parent newsletter, Kent resident newsletter, Kent County Council (KCC) Children Young People and Education (CYPE) internal staff newsletter and the Kelsi e-bulletin.
- media releases and website publications referencing the consultation were published.
- all partners and stakeholders were encouraged to promote the consultation to their networks of parents and families.
- promoted to towns and parish councils through the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) newsletter.
- attendance at Provider Briefing and Network sessions.

Around week five of the consultation, response rates were starting to plateau, and additional promotional activity was undertaken. This included:

- Sending a reminder communication to providers through the EYCS network
- Published paid for targeted social media posts from KCC corporate accounts across X, Facebook, Instagram and Linked In.
- Sending a reminder communication through Kent PACT
- Following up with all partners and stakeholders to promote the consultation to their networks of parents and families.

The sponsored social media posts were seen by 44,948 people at least once, with the posts being displayed on someone's screen 140,783 times. The posts generated 993 clicks through to the consultation webpage.

Within a week of undertaking additional promotional activities, response rates to the consultation increased by 23%.

### 2.2.1 Virtual Forums and E-mails



As part of the consultation process, there were five virtual forums held for providers and four virtual forums held for parents/carers. A registration process was required through the consultation page for those wishing to attend the forums. Once registered, an individual e-mail was sent with the meeting link.

The virtual forum involved a presentation providing an overview of the consultation with most of the meeting providing an opportunity for attendees to ask any clarifying questions and provide comments on the proposals. Attendees were also encouraged to complete the online questionnaire as a formal response.

48 people registered to the virtual forum for providers and there was 52% attendance rate. 10 people registered to the virtual forum for parents/carers but there was only 10% attendance rate.

2 people sent an e-mail to share their feedback, this included an email from a professional responsible for working in an early years educational setting and an email from a professional responsible for providing support to educational settings with children aged 0-5.

### 3 Part Three – The Findings

Findings were analysed by KCC Children’s Commissioning team. A ‘You Said, We Did’ document has been developed which highlights the main changes made to the proposals.

#### 3.1 Description – Who responded?

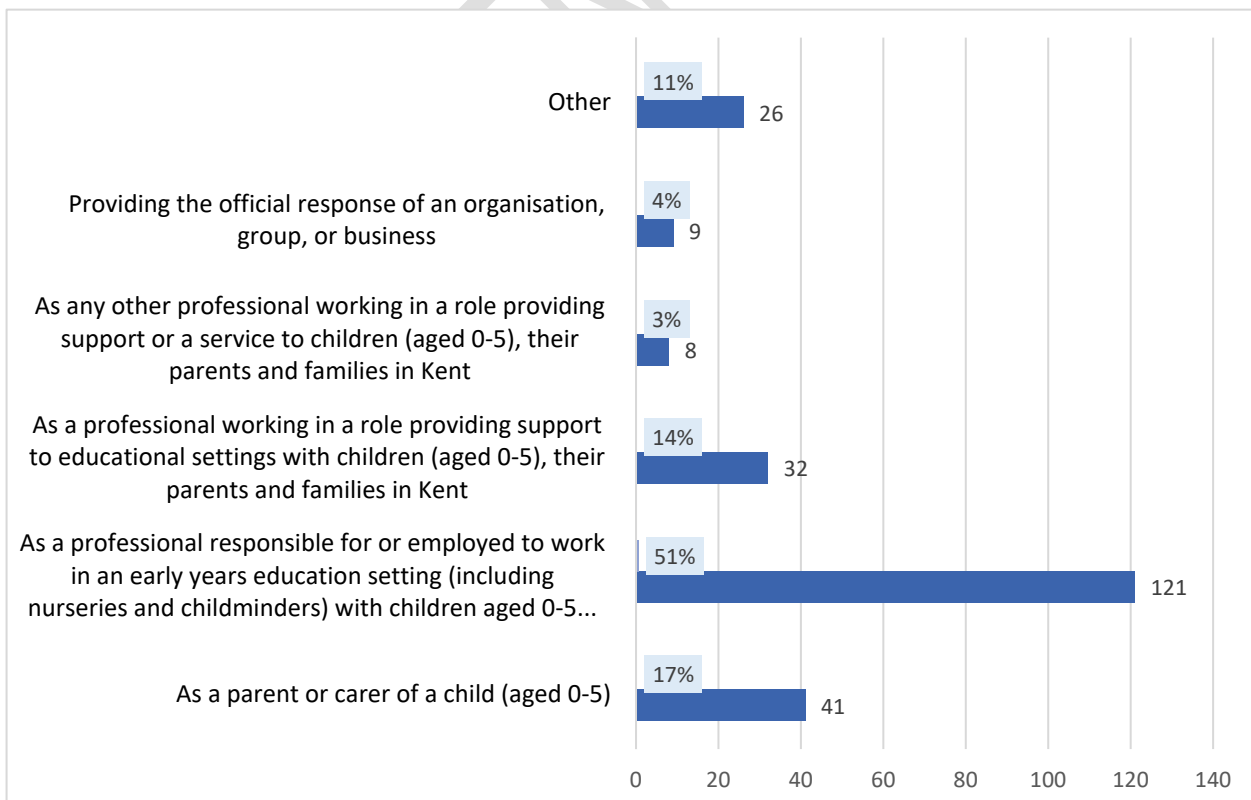
The formal consultation generated 237 responses, all of which were received by completion of the online questionnaire at [www.kent.gov.uk/earlyyearseducation](http://www.kent.gov.uk/earlyyearseducation). There were no postal responses received.

There were 3,388 visits to the consultation page with 1,699 participants interacting with the page (such as downloading a document or clicking on links), and the consultation document generated 1,147 downloads/views.

Participation in the consultation was self-selecting and is not an indicative sample of the whole Kent population.

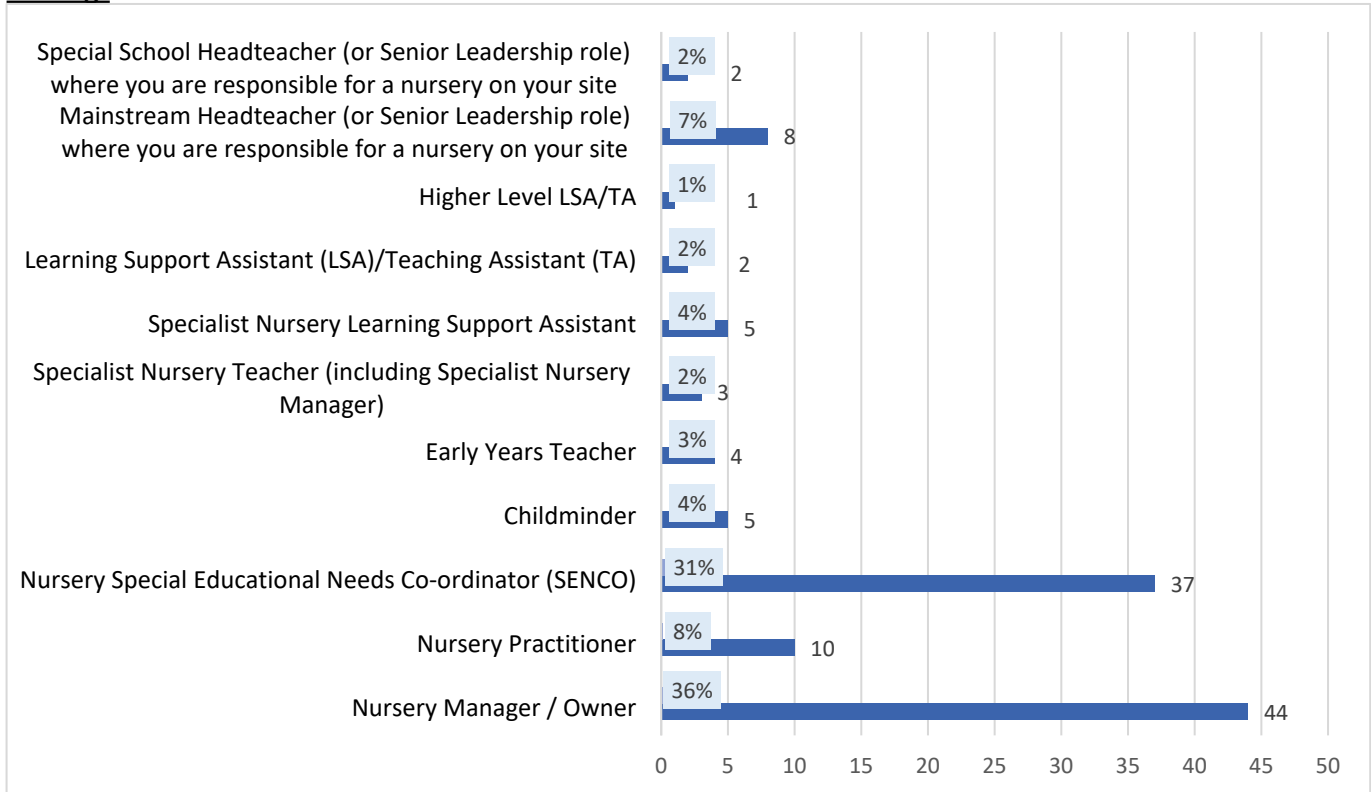
Of those who responded to the consultation and gave the requested identifying information, 89% of individuals responded as part of a specific named stakeholder group with 11% responding as ‘other’. Respondents were also asked to identify the role most relevant to them, and where a description of their role identified them as being part of a named stakeholder group, their response was counted within that group. The majority of respondents (51%) responded as a professional responsible for or employed to work in an early years education setting.

Chart 1: Response rates from the identified stakeholder groups.



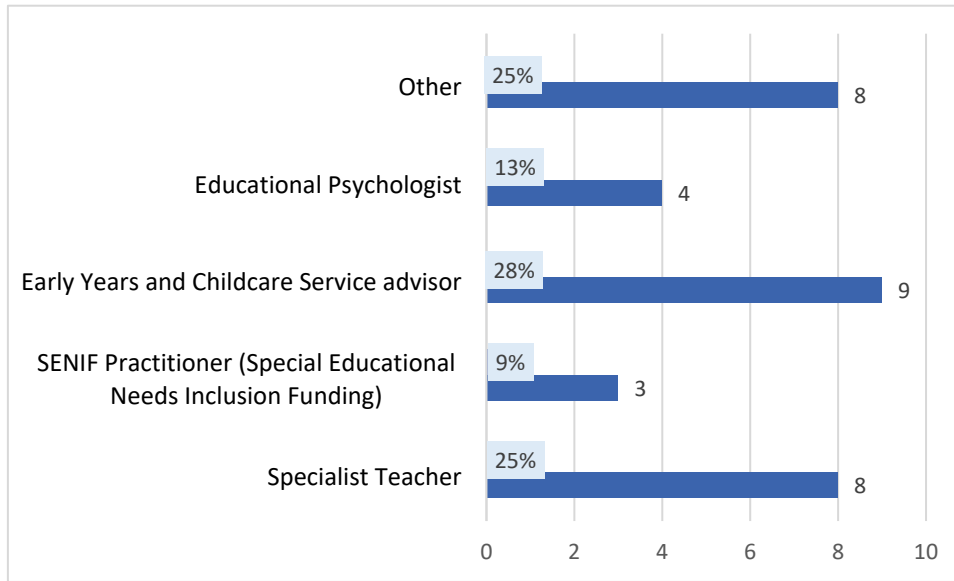
In relation to the individuals who responded as professional responsible for or employed to work in an early years education setting (including nurseries and childminders), most respondents were nursery managers or owners, or SENCOs as illustrated below:

**Chart 2: Response rates from different roles employed to work in an early years education setting:**



14% of respondents to the consultation identified as a professional working in a role providing support to educational settings with children (aged 0-5), their parents and families in Kent. Of these, most identified their role as an Early Years and Childcare Service advisor (28%), Specialist Teacher (25%) and 'other' (25%). In the 'other' category, respondents specified roles which included: Wellbeing trainer and counsellor, Autism trainer, Governors, and other educational roles such as safeguarding.

Chart 3: Response rates from different roles providing support to early years education settings



Responses to the consultation were received from every district in Kent.

Chart 4: Geographic distribution of respondents (excluding parents):

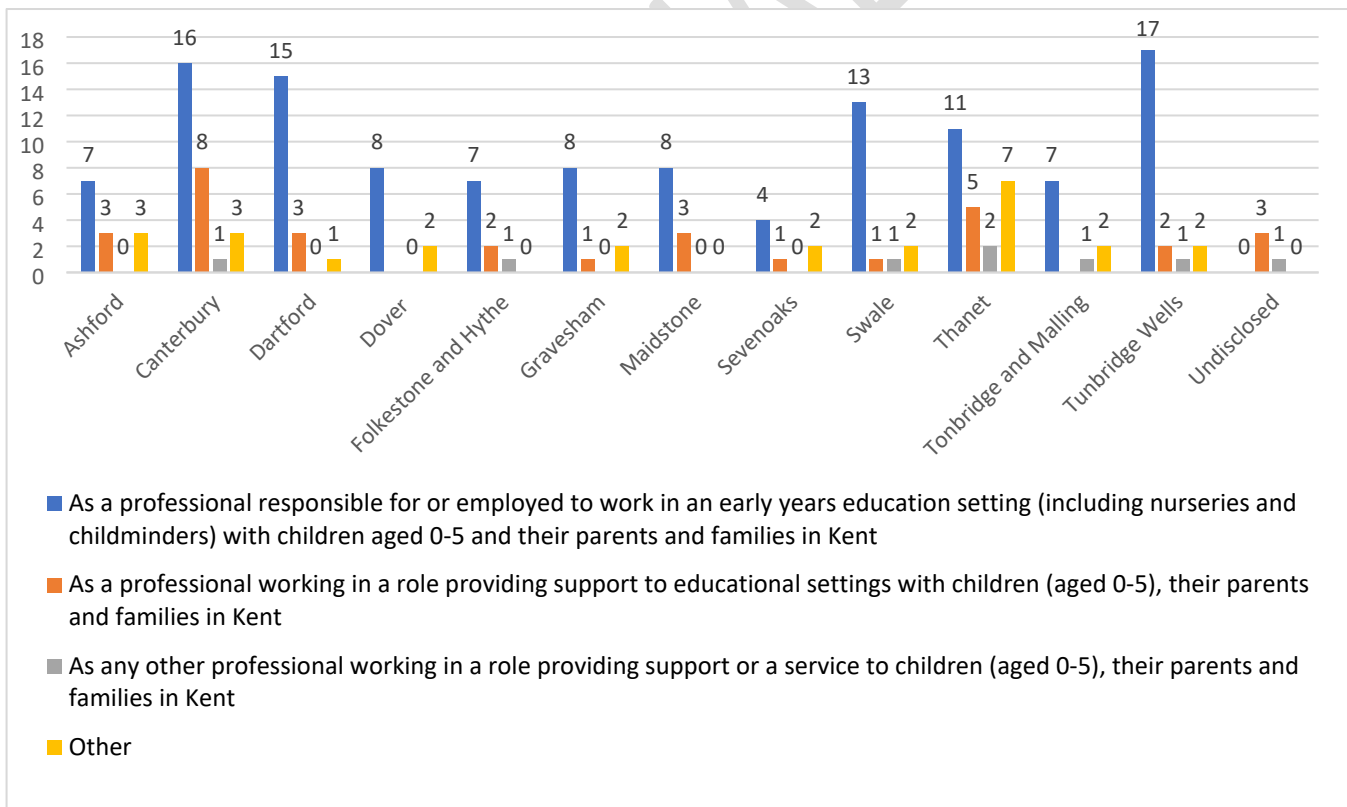
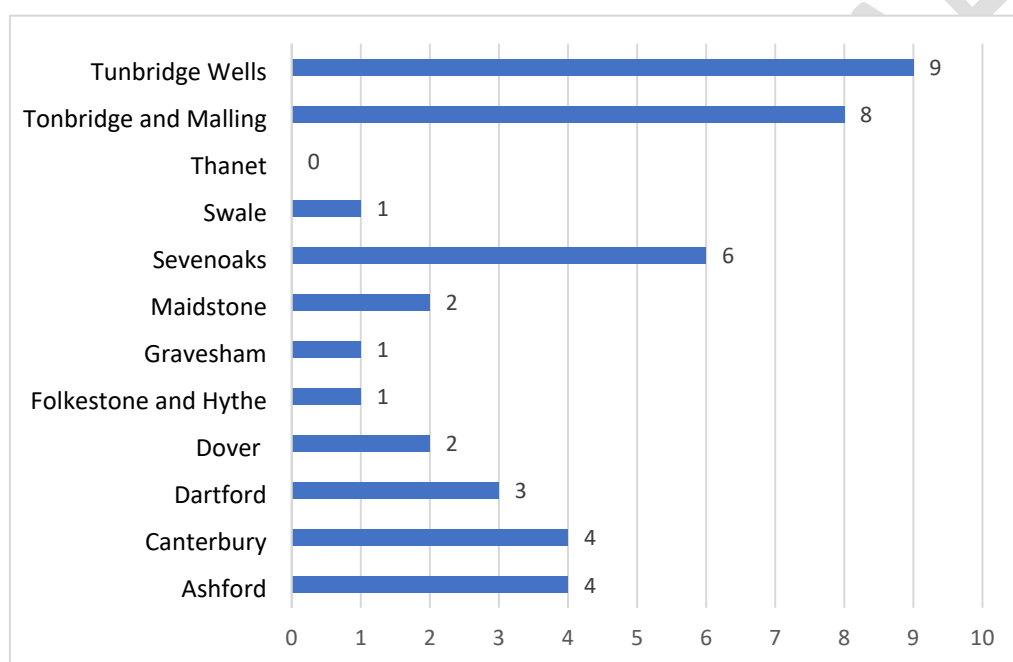


Chart 4 (above) illustrates the geographic distribution of responses from each stakeholder group (excluding parents) in relation to where they identified themselves as being based.

From this it can be seen that the highest number of responses came from Canterbury, Dartford, Swale, Thanet and Tunbridge Wells, with each of those areas having higher response rates from professionals responsible for or employed to work in an early years education setting.

Of the 17% of individuals responding as a parent or carer of a child aged 0-5, 65% responded as having a child with SEND. 45% of these respondents live in West Kent, with the most responses received from parents/carers residing in Tunbridge Wells (22%) and Tonbridge and Malling (20%). No parents/carers responded from Thanet.

Chart 5: A spread of where respondents live of those who responded as a parent or carer:

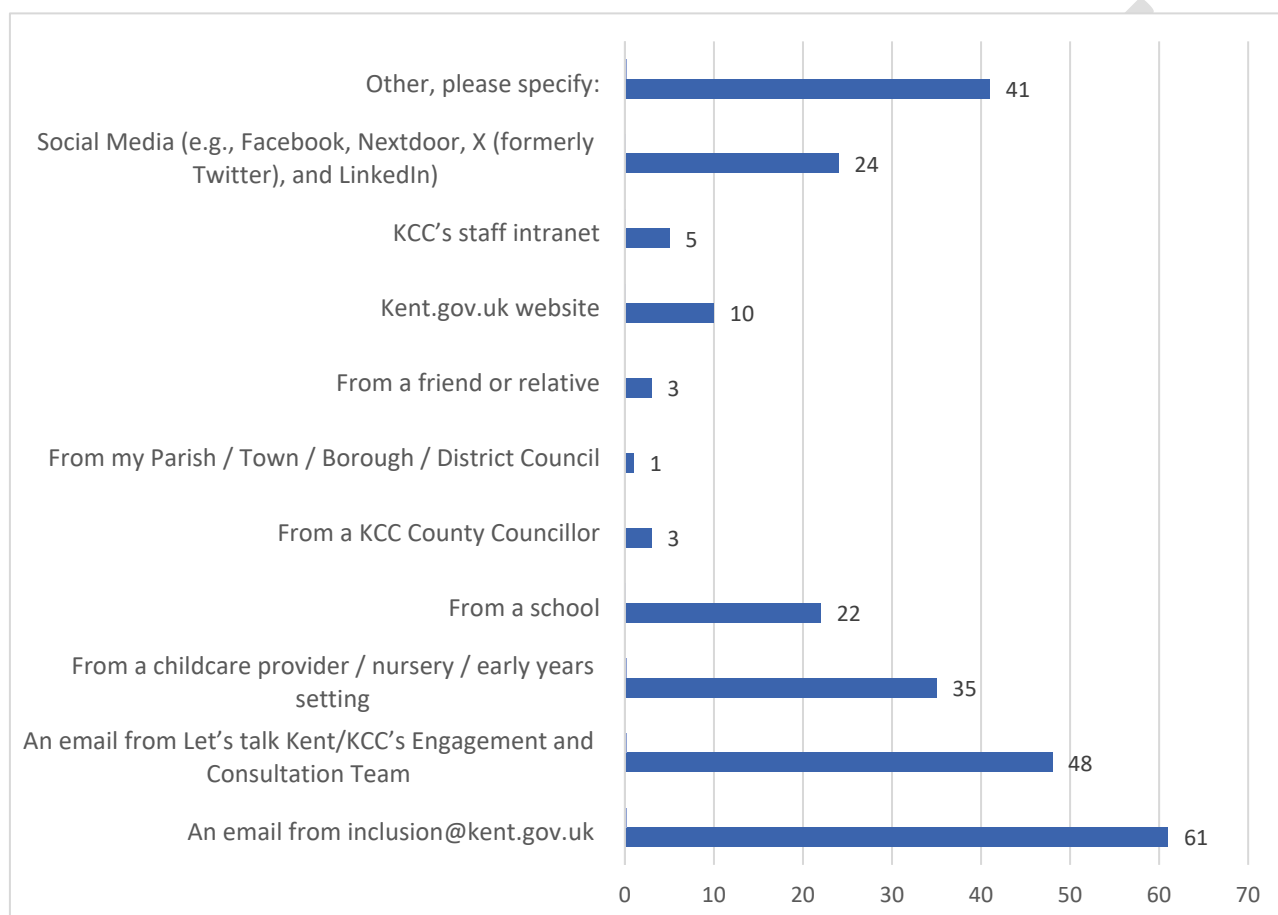


Further breakdown of respondents:

- 9 individuals responded as any other professional working in a role providing support or a service to children (aged 0-5). These roles included Special School governor and speech and language therapists.
- 9 official responses on behalf of an organisation, group or business were received. These were from Arc Pathway, Bright Sparks Pre-school, The Wyvern School, Goldfinch Nursery, Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) Equality & Inclusion Team, Hextable Village Preschool, The Education People's Kent Childminding Team and Priory Fields School. One responded on behalf of a pre-school setting, however did not disclose the organisation.
- 29 individuals responded as other, which included school governors, grandparents, former educators and former childcare providers, however 3 of the respondents were re-profiled to a specific stakeholder group closest to the role they specified. This included one respondent who was re-profiled as a parent/carers and two respondents who were re-profiled as a professional working in an early years educational setting.

While the majority of people found out about the consultation via a message sent out on behalf of [inclusion@kent.gov.uk](mailto:inclusion@kent.gov.uk) from The Education People (TEP) Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) (24%), a large proportion also learned of the consultation via an email from Let's talk Kent / KCC's engagement and consultation team (19%). Some respondents also selected more than one option to indicate where they heard about the consultation.

**Chart 6: Breakdown of how people heard about the consultation:**



**Additional information provided.**

51% of respondents chose to provide additional information about themselves. This included:

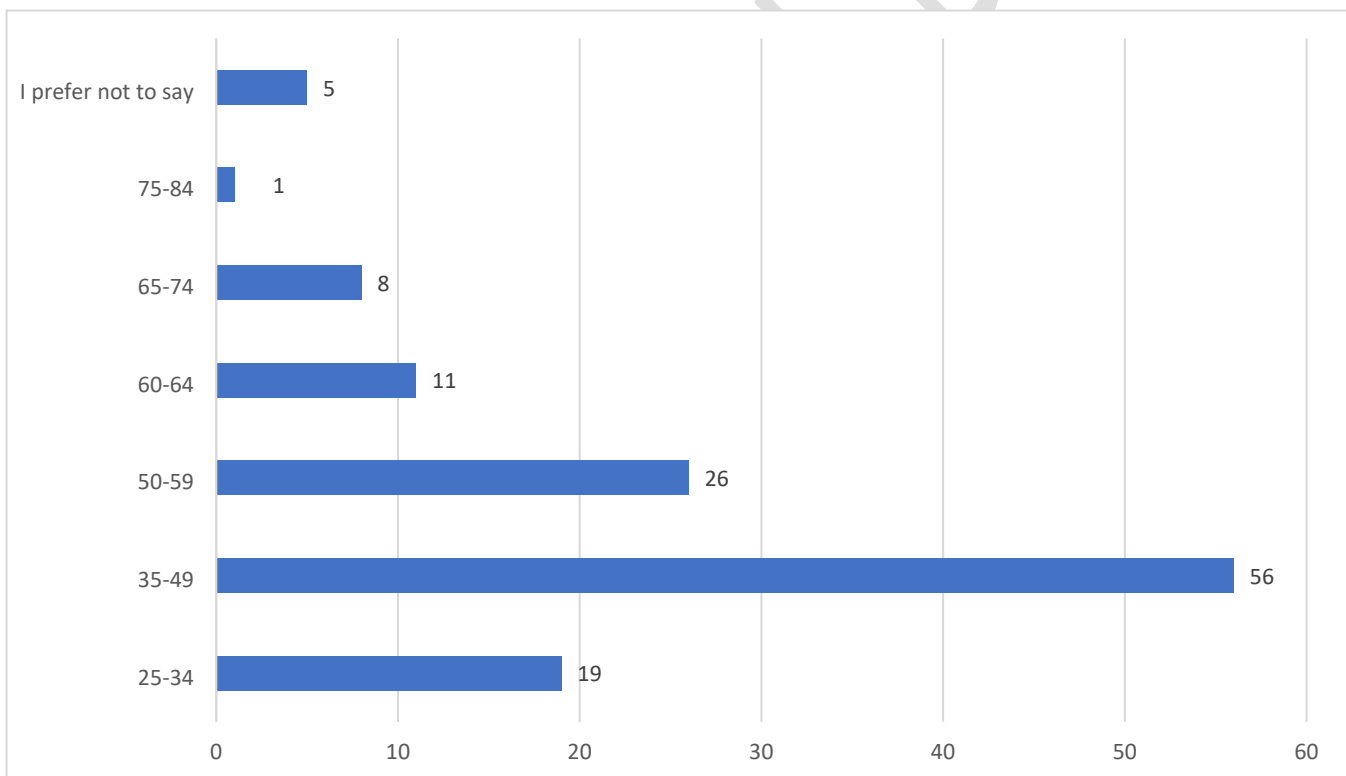
- 95% were females and 5% were males. There is a much higher response rate from females which reflects the predominance of females in the workforce. However, in relation to the responses, there is no significant difference to note.
- 43% people identified as belonging to a particular religion or belief, with:
  - 94% being Christian and
  - 2% being Sikh.
- 9% responded as having a disability,
  - 6% as having a longstanding illness or health condition,
  - 4% people described themselves as having a physical impairment,
  - 2% as having a learning disability,
  - 2% as having a mental health condition, and
  - 2% people as 'other'.

- 22% people described themselves as a carer.
- In terms of ethnicity:
  - 89% people described themselves as White English,
  - 4% as other where ethnic group was not specified,
  - 2% as Black or Black British African,
  - 1% person as White Scottish,
  - 1% person as White Welsh,
  - 1% person as Black or Black British Caribbean,
  - 1% person as Asian or Asian British Indian and
  - 1% person as Mixed White and Asian.

Of the individuals who provided this information, there are no significant differences related to how respondents from particular groups responded to the consultation in comparison to others.

In relation to age, most respondents who provided this information 44% were within the 35 – 49-year age bracket.

Chart 7: A spread of ages who responded to the consultation:



### 3.2 Early years review key recommendations

The early years review identified five key recommendations. For each recommendation the following question was asked: *'If the proposed model for support in early years is implemented in Kent, to what extent do you agree or disagree that these key recommendations will be addressed?'*

Table 1: Summary of the responses across all the recommendations.

	Key Recommendation	Strongly or tend to agree	Strongly or tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
1.	The Early Years education system needs a shift in culture towards one of greater inclusion and achievement for all children and specifically for those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)	78%	14%	8%
2.	Improved leadership is needed with clear lines of responsibility and accountability as the Early Years education system is disjointed due to services being delivered across multiple partners (KCC, KCC commissioned partners, and Health)	86%	7%	7%
3.	Any future model of Early Years education must place children and their families at the centre i.e. a child and family-centred approach.	92%	3%	5%
4.	There is a need for greater alignment of Early Years services with more resources working directly with children, families and in settings with early education practitioners.	89%	5%	6%
5.	Improved communications are needed, with a single, reliable source of information available to families and professionals.	92%	4%	4%



Overall, there was broad agreement that the key recommendations will be addressed if the proposed model for support in early years is implemented in Kent. Cumulatively, there was 87% agreement (strongly or tended to agree) compared to only 7% disagreement (strongly or tended to) that the recommendations would be addressed.

Out of the 87% in overall agreement, 52% responded as a professional responsible for or employed to work in an early years education setting (including nurseries and childminders) with children aged 0-5 and their parents and families in Kent.

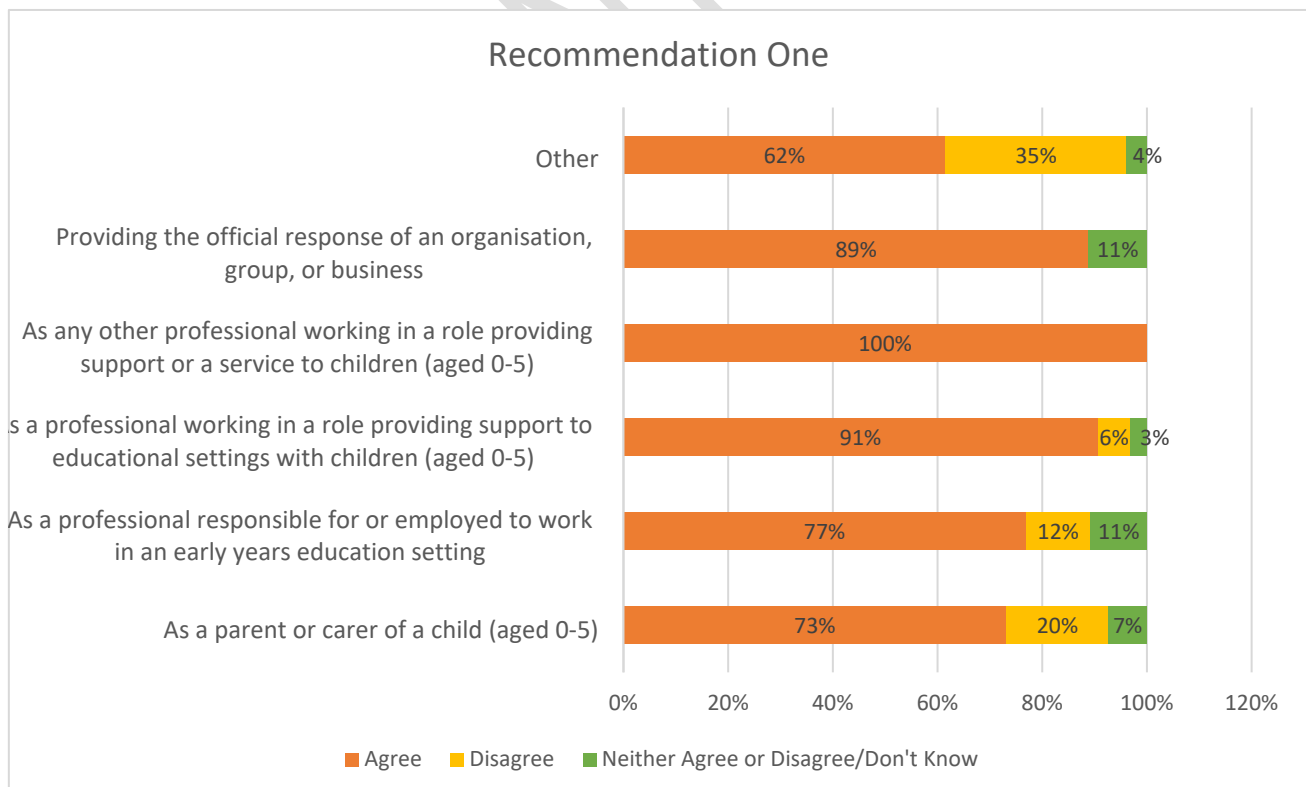
Of the 7% who tended to or strongly disagree, 34% responded as a parent or carer whilst 32% responded as a professional responsible for or employed to work in an early years education setting (including nurseries and childminders) with children aged 0-5 and their parents and families in Kent.

A more detailed analysis of responses to each recommendation is below.

**Recommendation One - The early years education system needs a shift in culture towards one of greater of inclusion and achievement for all children and specifically for those with SEND.**

237 individuals submitted a response to this question, the following charts illustrate how different stakeholders responded and the geographic split.

Chart 8: How different stakeholders responded to Recommendation One:



Recommendation one generated more disagreement in comparison to other recommendations. Chart 8 shows that a higher proportion of respondents in the ‘other’ stakeholder group and a higher proportion of parents/carers disagreed with this recommendation. The review recognised that good inclusive practice does exist in Kent, but that it is not consistent across the county. Therefore, this level of disagreement may be a reflective of individual respondents’ personal experience of inclusive practice in early years settings.

Looking at the different roles specified in the ‘other’ stakeholder group, this included school governors, education professionals and SEN professionals.

Chart 9: Geographic distribution of respondents to Recommendation One (based on where professionals are based merged with where parents/carers live):

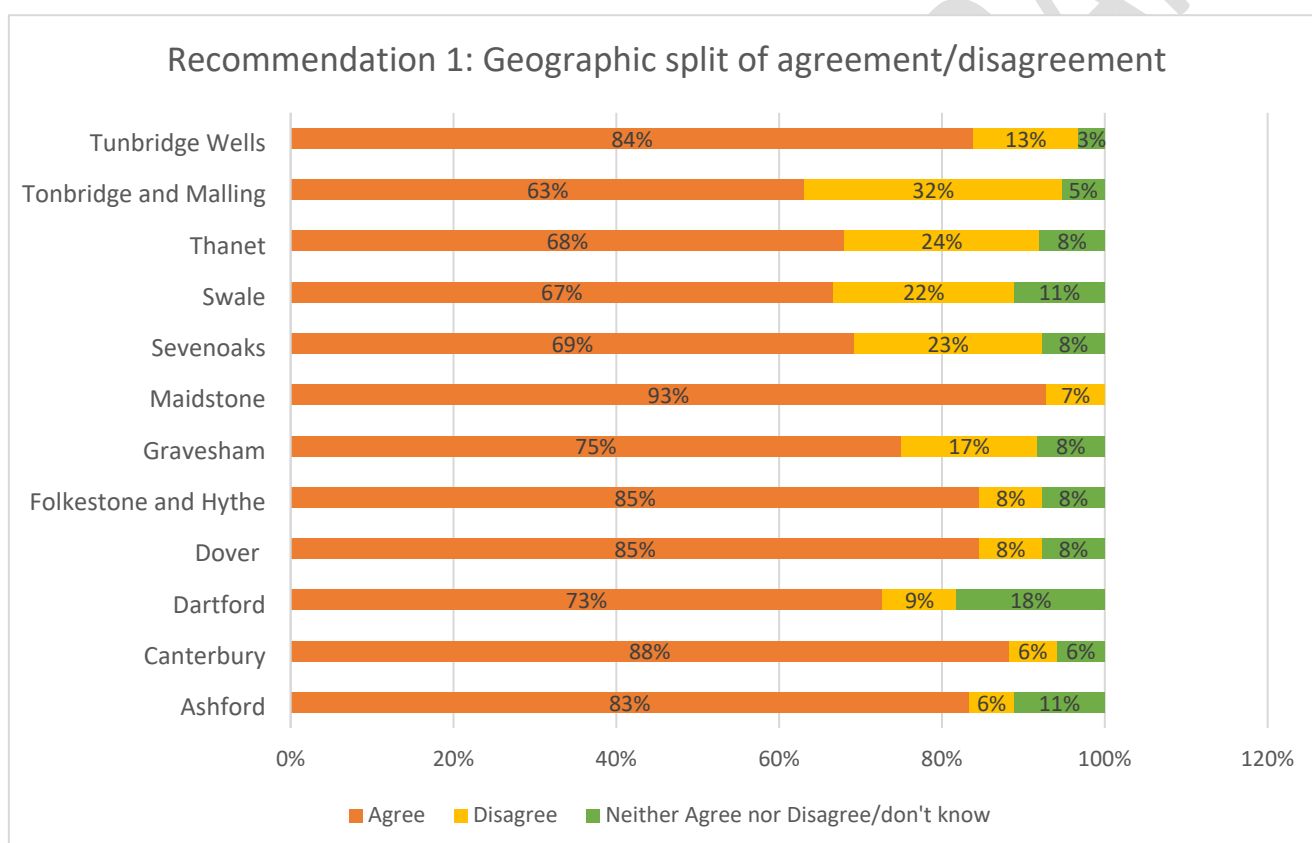
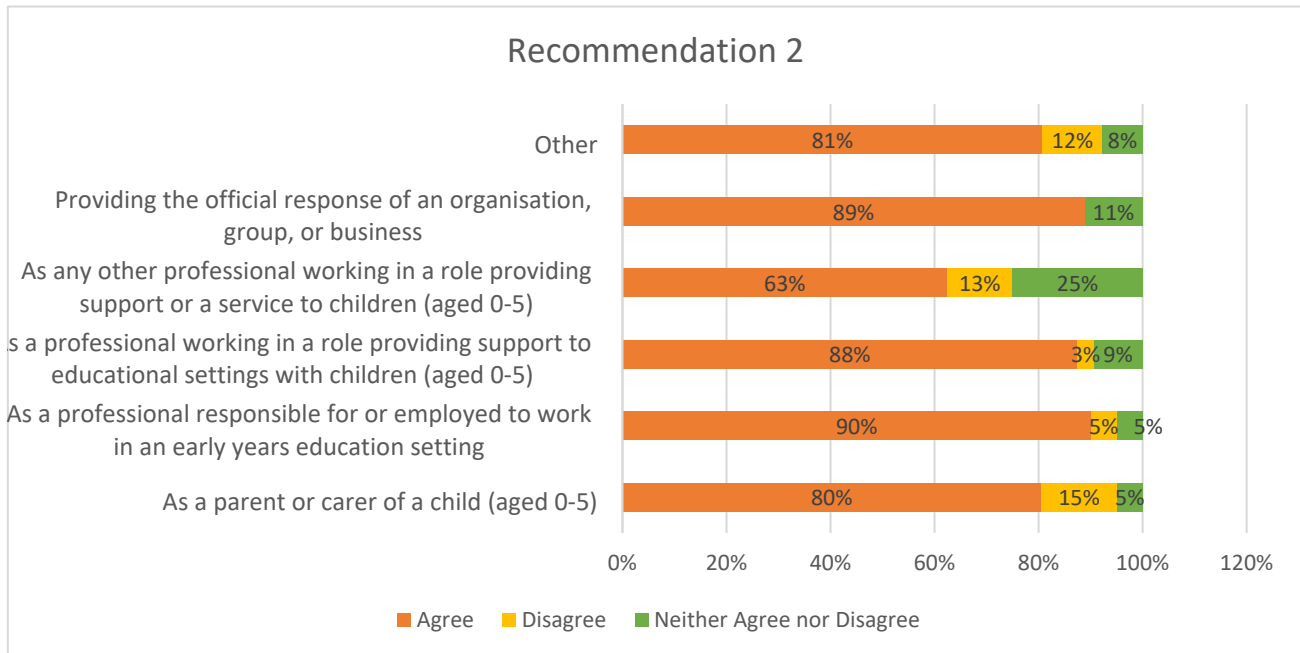


Chart 9 above shows that there is more uncertainty in Dartford respondents and higher levels of disagreement in Tonbridge and Malling respondents.

**Recommendation Two: Improved leadership is needed with clear lines of responsibility and accountability as the early years education system is disjointed due to services being delivered across multiple partners (KCC, KCC commissioned partners, and Health).**

237 individuals submitted a response to this question, the following charts illustrate how different stakeholders responded and the geographic split.

**Chart 10: How different stakeholders responded to Recommendation Two:**



**Chart 11: Geographic distribution of respondents to Recommendation Two (based on where professionals are based merged with where parents/carers live):**

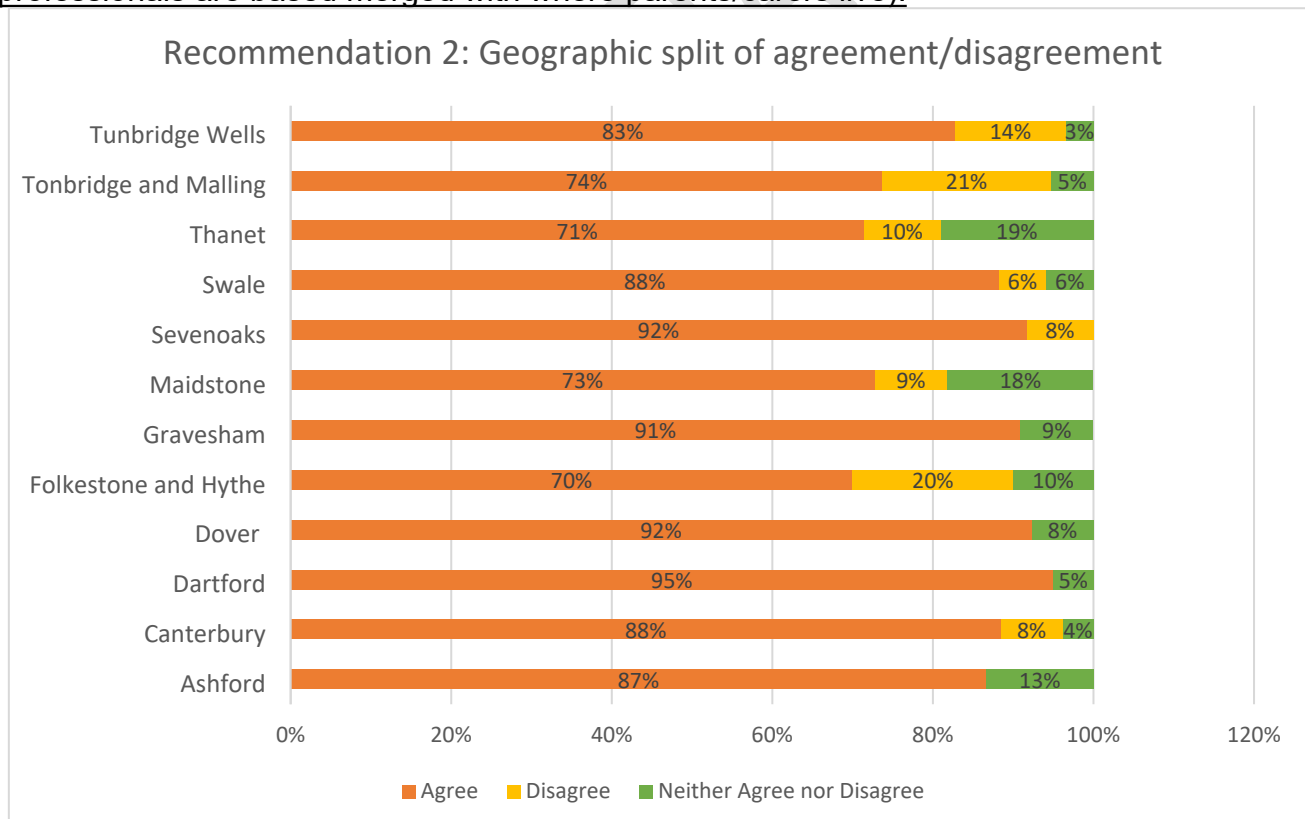
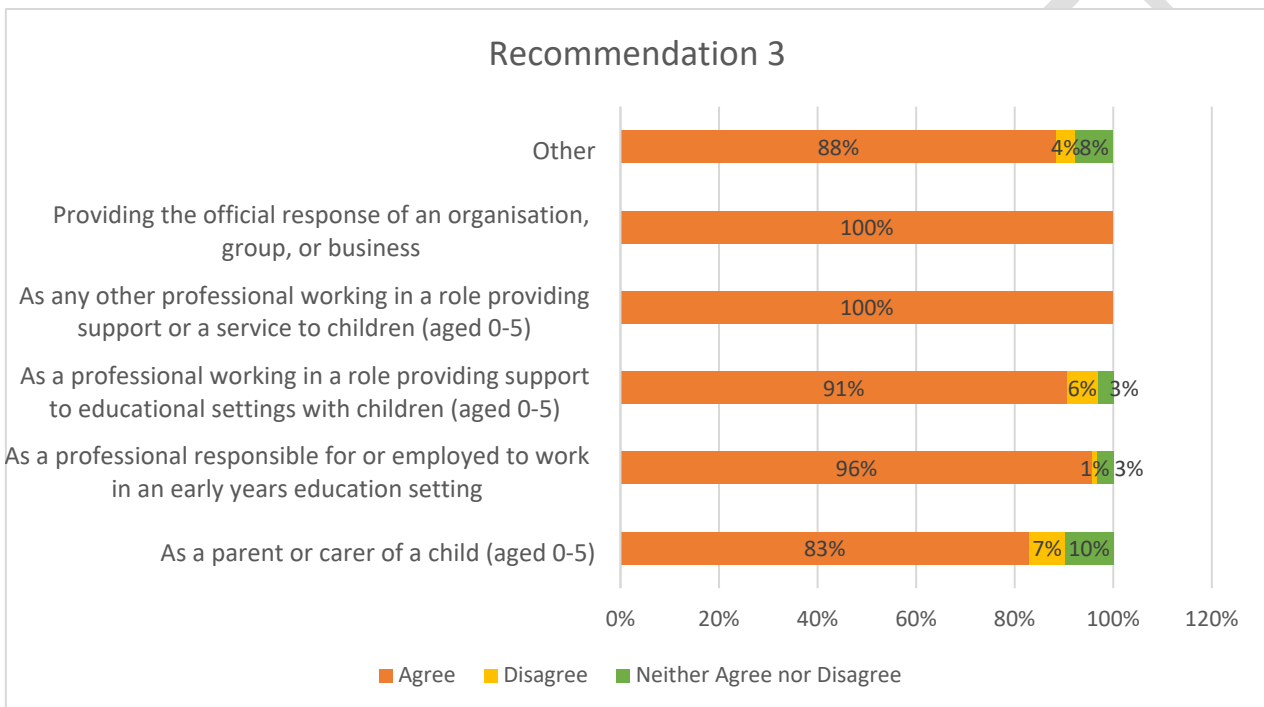


Chart 10 above shows there are higher levels of disagreement in parents/carers. Chart 11 above shows that there are higher levels of disagreement in Folkestone and Hythe and Tonbridge and Malling.

**Recommendation Three: Any future model of early years education must place children and their families at the centre i.e. a child and family-centred approach.**

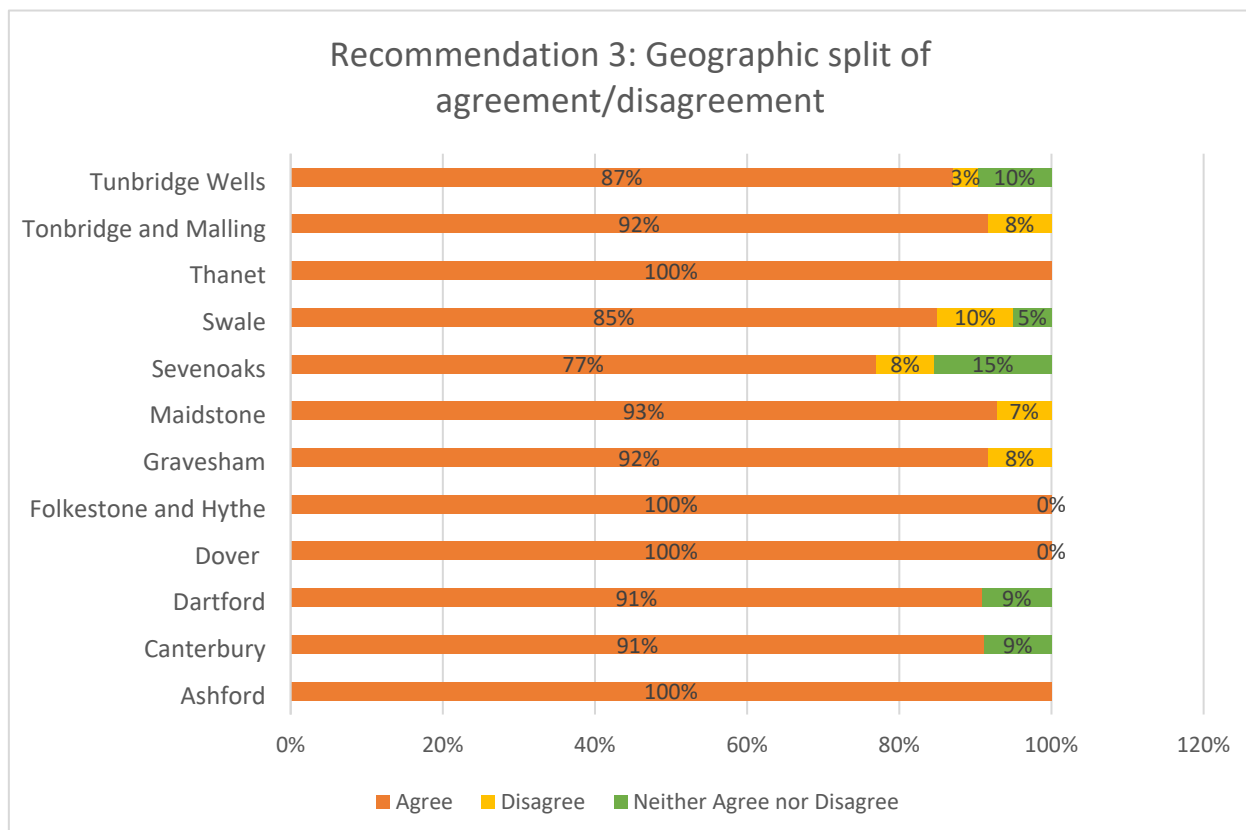
237 individuals submitted a response to this question, the following charts illustrate how different stakeholders responded and the geographic split.

Chart 12: How different stakeholders responded to Recommendation Three



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**Chart 13: Geographic distribution of respondents to Recommendation Three (based on where professionals are based merged with where parents/carers live):**



Although recommendation three garnered the highest levels of agreement in comparison to the other recommendations, it is interesting to note that the lowest levels of agreement and the highest levels of uncertainty were from parents/carers, as shown in Chart 12. Although the number is small, Chart 13 shows that the highest level of disagreement are from Gravesham, Swale and Tonbridge and Malling.

**Recommendation Four: There is a need for greater alignment of early years services with more resources working directly with children, families and in settings with early education practitioners.**

237 individuals submitted a response to this question, the following charts illustrate how different stakeholders responded and the geographic split.

Chart 14: A breakdown of how different stakeholders responded to Recommendation Four

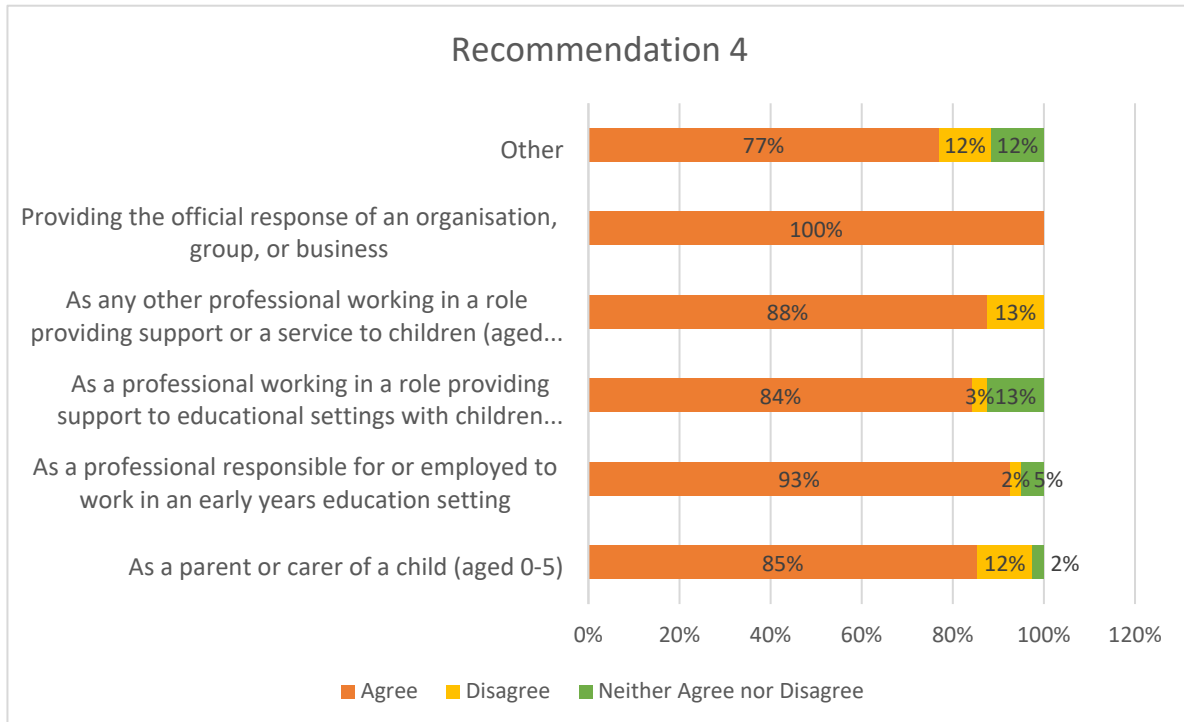


Chart 15: Geographic distribution of respondents to Recommendation Four (based on where professionals are based merged with where parents/carers live):

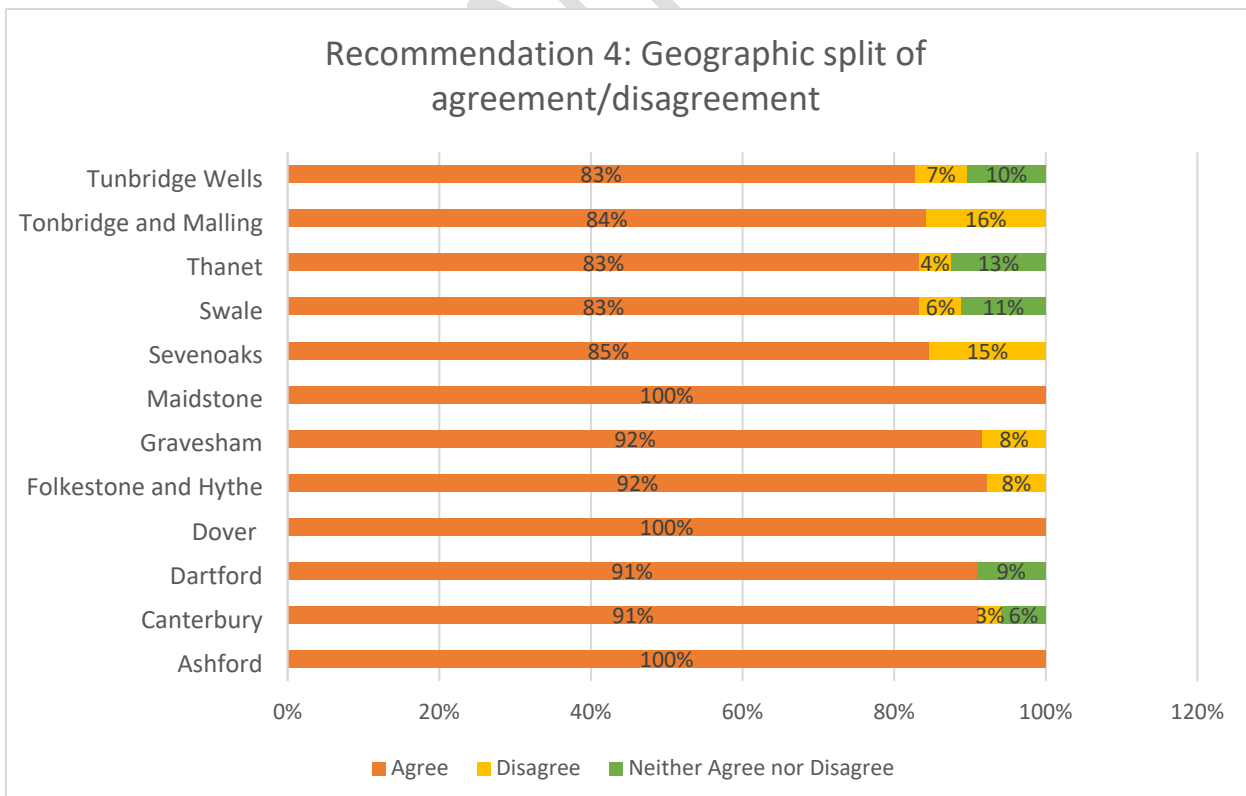


Chart 14 shows that the lowest levels of agreement for this recommendation is from those responding as any other professional providing support to children aged 0-5. Chart 15 shows the districts with no disagreement are Ashford, Dartford, Dover and Maidstone.

**Recommendation Five: Improved communications are needed, with a single, reliable source of information available to families and professionals.**

237 individuals submitted a response to this question, the following charts illustrate how different stakeholders responded and the geographic split.

Chart 16: A breakdown of how different stakeholders responded to Recommendation Five:

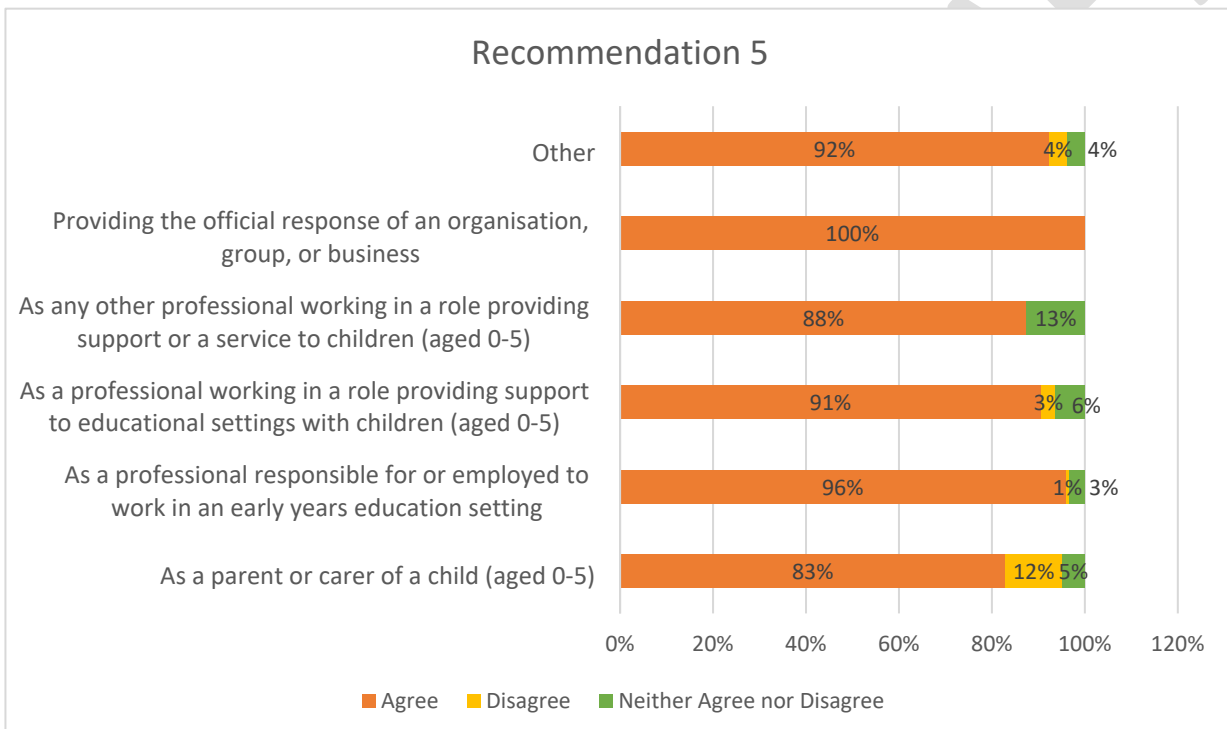
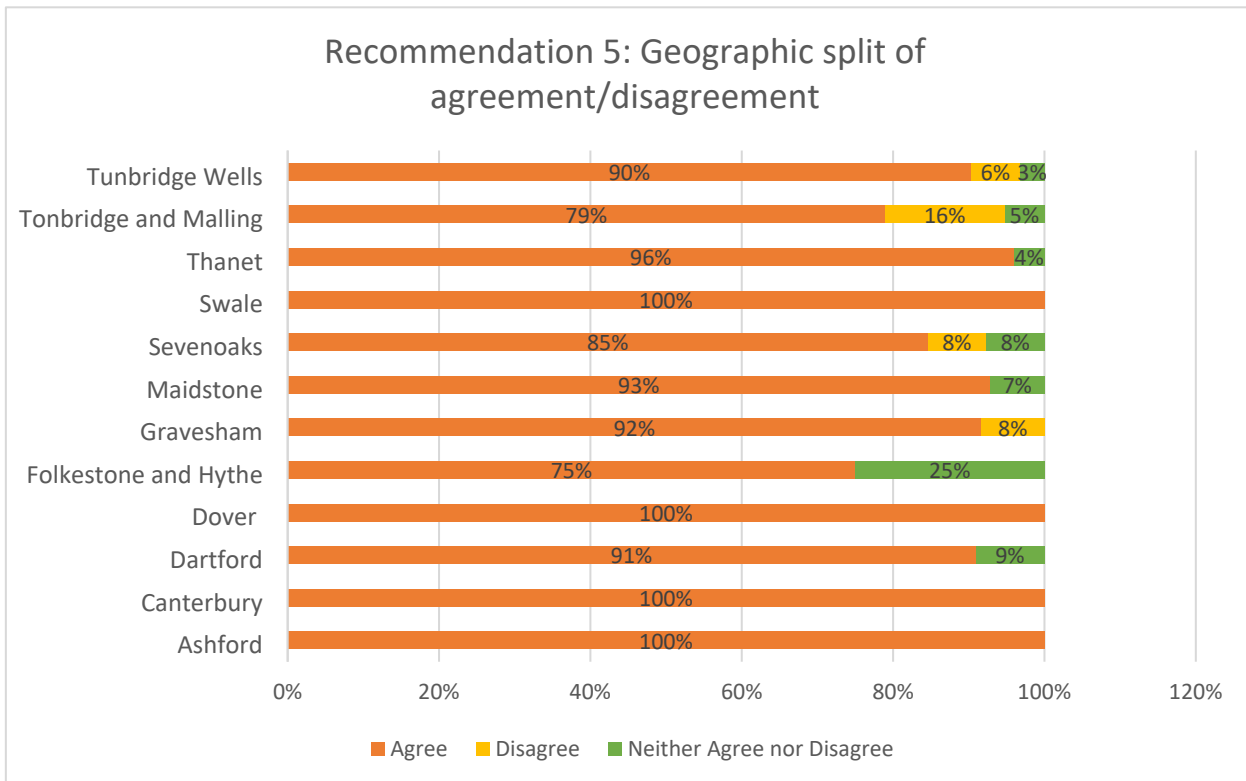


Chart 17: Geographic distribution of respondents to Recommendation Five (based on where professionals are based merged with where parents/carers live):



This recommendation also generated the highest level of agreement in comparison to other recommendations. As with recommendation three, the lowest level of agreement was from parents/carers as shown in Chart 16. As shown in Chart 17, the only districts with disagreement are Gravesham, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells.

Although there is broad agreement that the five recommendations will be addressed through the proposed changes, the proportion of parents and carers amongst those disagreeing, may reflect the current challenges for the local authority around parental confidence in SEND services.



### 3.3 Key Changes

The consultation asked respondents about the key changes in the proposals.

Table 2: Summary of the responses across all the key changes.

	<b>Key Change</b>	<b>Strongly or tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly or tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>
1.	Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) will move to a Link Worker model, providing universal support and removing the need for settings to self-refer to the service.	80%	15%	5%
2.	SENIF Practitioners to focus more on delivering targeted support within settings for individual children.	70%	20%	10%
3.	Specialist Teachers from the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service will continue working in settings with individual children and groups of children identified as having similar needs. They will no longer be required to provide evidence of level of need as part of the SENIF process.	77%	15%	8%
4.	Specialist Nursery Intervention will continue to work with individual children but will provide support directly to children in their mainstream settings without the need for the child to attend a special school setting, as is (predominantly) the current model.	47%	43%	10%
5.	The process to apply for SENIF will change and move away from settings being reliant on additional evidence provided by professionals.	77%	6%	17%
6.	The model proposes a core offer of training available to settings and childminders that will be designed with input from settings themselves.	89%	8%	3%

### 3.3.1 Key Change One

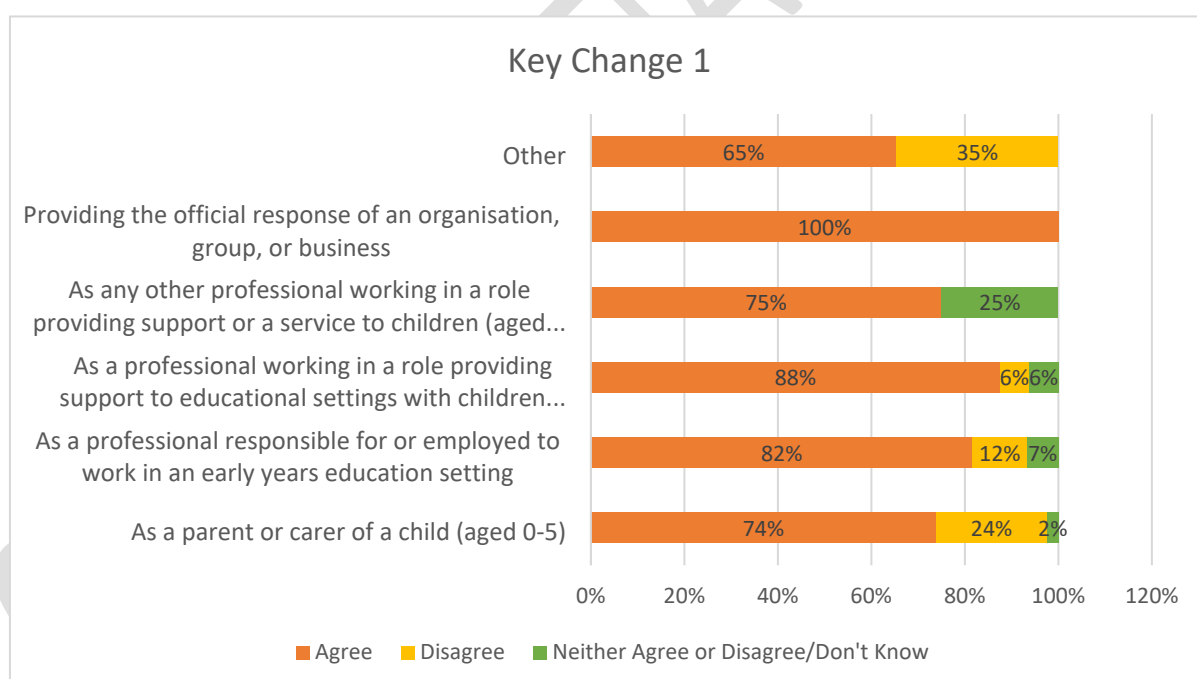
Currently, if an early years setting thinks they may have a child with additional needs or they require additional SEND support from the local authority they make a referral to the Early Years and Childcare Service (EYCS) for a discussion or visit about the child. The advice given may result in additional specialist support if needed.

In the proposed model, EYCS will continue to help providers to ensure that strong universal practices are embedded within settings supporting early identification of need in vulnerable groups. The service as a whole will move to a Link Worker model removing the need for settings to self-refer to the service for support. Settings will have an allocated person (i.e. a Link Worker) who visits them regularly to provide support, advice and guidance. This person will be available over the phone or email to help with matters that arise between visits and will be a primary point of contact to access EYCS support.

The following question was asked: *‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?’*

237 responded to this question - 80% of respondents strongly and tended to agree with this key change, 15% strongly and tended to disagree, whilst 5% neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

Chart 18: Illustration of how the stakeholder groups responded to Key Change 1:



From the above, it is evident that there is agreement overall across and within each stakeholder group. The highest level of disagreement was from stakeholders who responded as 'other'.

A free text box was also provided to allow individuals to comment in more detail. 144 respondents submitted a comment. When analysing the responses from those that agreed with this proposal, several key themes were:

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
Reduction of bureaucracy in the system	10
Strong relationship built with a key person who will be familiar with the setting and it's children	4
Addresses issues with current practice	3
Supports early intervention for children with additional needs	3

These are some of the comments supporting the change from professionals in settings:

*“Provision of link worker should reduce the amount of paperwork etc required to be provided by the setting, removing duplication which is required to multiple services.”*

*“I feel this would be more efficient and enable us to work closer with other professionals for the children and could cut down on waiting times.”*

*“The current process is quite lengthy and drawn out, regular access to a ‘link worker’ could potentially reduce that process and get children / families the support they need in a more timely fashion”*

*I feel this will proposal in Early Years settings will provide us with more regular, consistent support.”*

*This has the potential to be much more effective and less time-consuming in terms of making an initial referral. Having a named Link Worker that can be more readily contacted will result in saving time (again) and closer working relationships.”*

Feedback from parents/carers who agreed with the change:

*“It is important that any interventions given are evidence based and not just generic parenting advice, as each SEND presentation is unique, formulation is needed not box ticking and allocation of resources and support should be done depending on individual case need...”*

*“Early years settings needs in terms of supporting SEN fluctuate and any system needs to be able to adapt and respond quickly to change in demand for support. Hopefully this new model helps with that”*

*“It’s positive to remove the self referral approach and have a central point of contact.”*

*“Having communication more centralised would be good, however the link workers must have the same guideline otherwise there will be disparity between settings.”*

Although there was broad agreement for this key change, there were also some concerns from respondents who noted that there was a lack of operational detail to further inform what the proposed change would mean in practical terms, such as how many link workers there would be working across the districts and how many settings each link worker would work with as part

of their remit. Respondents also wanted to know how many visits would be carried out by a link worker. These are summarised below:

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
Realistic and manageable allocation of settings per link worker is needed which also takes into account the needs of the local area.	23
Capacity issues in settings may be challenging to allow time for link worker visits, ensure there is good coordination with settings.	14
Ensure there is consistent quality assurance in place for the support being provided to settings.	7
Clear leadership and oversight of the link worker's remit is needed.	3
Scope to develop relationships with families so they are more informed about the support being provided.	3

Comments from those who neither agree nor disagree suggested more information was needed before they could decide whether they agree with the change.

The general concern of those disagreeing was related to the capacity of the teams delivering this support and whether there would be enough link workers to meet the demand. This concern was echoed in virtual forums held for providers and is addressed in the You Said, We Did document.

### 3.3.2 Key Change Two

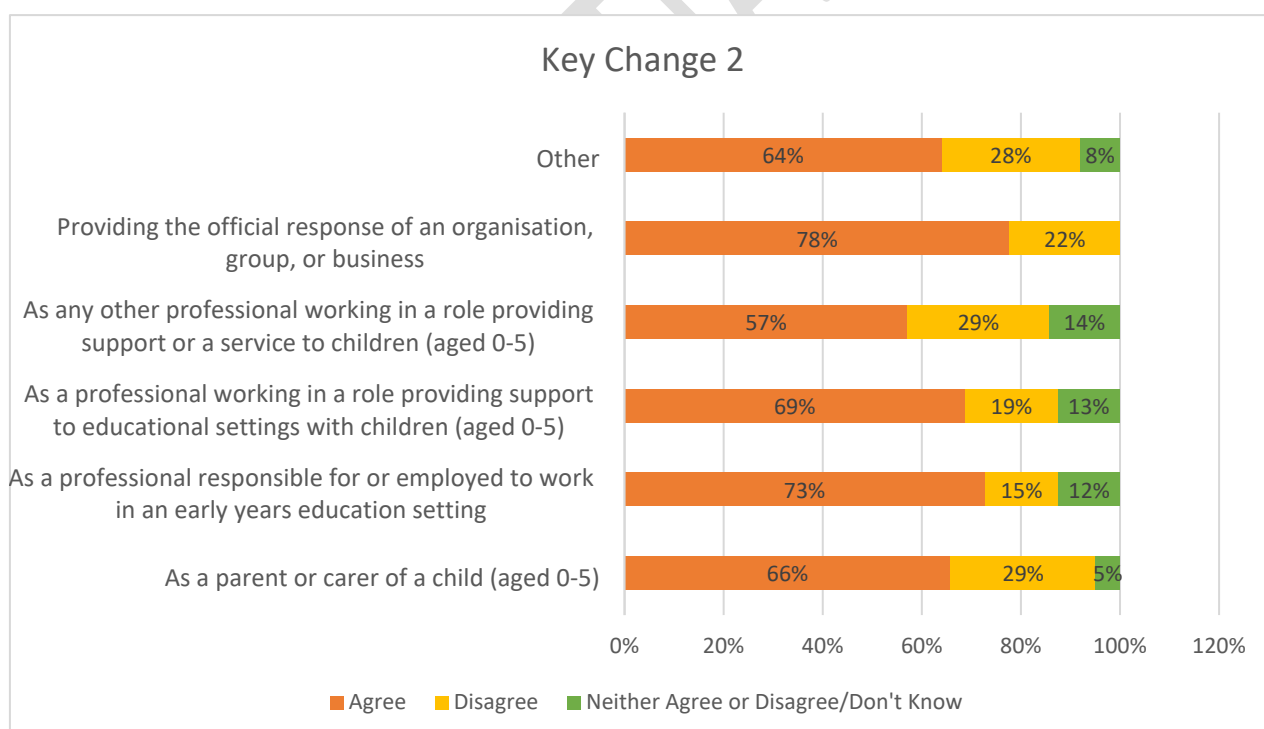
Under the current model, there are currently blurred lines in which service provides targeted support. Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) Practitioners work alongside the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS) to implement and model practical strategies within settings that STLS have identified to support individual children. Referrals are made by the setting through Local Inclusion Forum Team (LIFT) meetings.

In the proposal, SENIF Practitioners would focus on delivering targeted support for individual children within their mainstream setting. Where there is more than one child presenting similar needs, targeted support can also be undertaken with groups of children. Referrals for this service would be made directly by EYCS Link Worker, removing the need for a formal referral by the setting to the SENIF Practitioner service.

The following question was asked: *‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?’*

235 individuals responded to this question, with 70% of respondents strongly or tended to agree with this key change, 20% strongly and tended to disagree, whilst 10% neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

**Chart 19: Illustration of how the stakeholder groups responded to Key Change 2:**



From the above, it is evident that there is agreement overall within all stakeholder groups.

In the free text box provided for further comment, 128 respondents submitted a comment. Common themes from those that supported the proposal were:

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
Reduction of bureaucracy in the system	15
A simpler referral route for support	14
Upskilling of staff in settings	6
Reduction of duplication	4

Comments from professionals supporting the change included:

*“Will make the whole process smoother and easier to navigate, especially with group support.”*

*“Hopefully that will allow for a more tailored level of support as often the SENIF support can be similar for each of the children accessing the support.”*

*“It sometimes seems a waste that are only able to support one child, so this is positive as long as their paperwork burden does not increase! Anything that reduces the referral paperwork for settings is a bonus!”*

*“The SENIF practitioner is a great source of knowledge so being present in the setting will be a huge benefit to the staff as they will be able to learn from them as they can role model a range of interventions and strategies to the staff.”*

Regarding respondents that disagreed, the overall concern related to the number of SENIF practitioners available to support settings and some were apprehensive about losing individual support for children. A response to these concerns is provided in the You Said, We Did document.

Comments from those who disagreed with the proposed change included:

*“Reduction of paperwork / barriers is a good thing. However some children may lose out by not getting 1-1 support and being put in a group. All SEN children are different and need individual tailored support...”*

*“The SENIF practitioners from my perspective have supported children with the most complex needs really well. The modelling of practice has worked well and I would be concerned about losing this support...”*

*“You cannot group together child with such a wide range of needs. Child deserve and need to be dealt with individually.”*

*“Early years practitioners tend to feel more confident and have more experience in meeting the needs of children who need targeted support. However, where children need a more personalised approach, bespoke modelling of strategies is invaluable.”*

During the virtual forums, questions were also raised about the number of SENIF practitioners required to implement this change. Some settings voiced how valued the role is and felt that

the teams were already stretched. Some feedback also applauded the proposed change as recognising the significance of the support a SENIF practitioner can provide.

Other key feedback is highlighted below:

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
Continue with the effective and good practice currently being carried out by practitioners.	5
Joint training would be beneficial so the levels of support and the remit of different teams offering the support is really clear	4
Building and maintaining a strong relationship with other partners such as the child’s key worker is essential.	3

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### 3.3.3 Key Change Three

In the current model, Specialist Teaching and Learning Services (STLS) support settings through training, clinics, Local Inclusion Forum Teams (LIFTs) meetings and visits to provide support and advice. In the current model, advice can be accessed through clinics, LIFT or a visit.

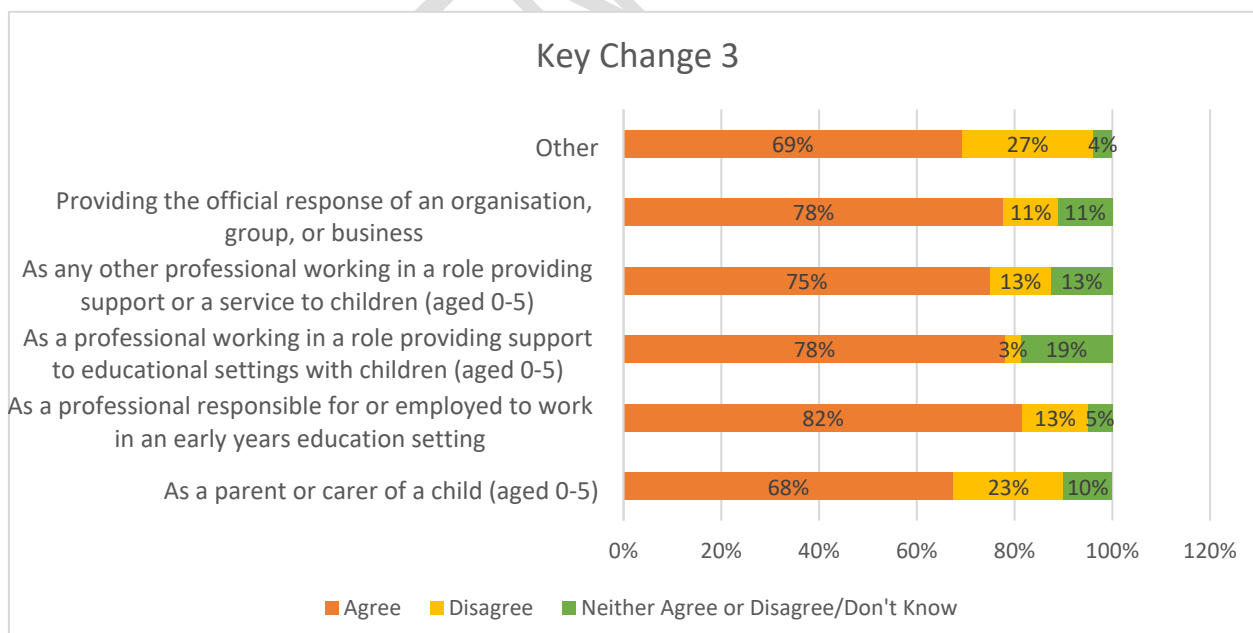
For a setting to access SENIF for a child the child must be open to STLS. This means that STLS must have that child open on their case list, even if an individual visit has not yet been implemented or targets set. In most districts, this requires attendance at LIFT. Ideally, the SENIF application will include a written Record of Visit from a specialist teacher to support this application, and whilst it is preferable that this is provided with the SENIF application, it can be done after the funding has been agreed.

In the proposal, Specialist Teachers from the STLS will continue working in settings with individual children and groups of children identified as having similar needs. They will still provide support and advice to settings, and support transition to Reception Year, will no longer be required to provide additional evidence via the record of visit as part of the SENIF process.

In regard to this proposal, the following question was asked: *‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?’*

235 individuals responded to this question - 77% of respondents strongly or tended to agree with this key change, 15% strongly or tended to disagree, whilst 8% neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

**Chart 20: Illustration of how the stakeholder groups responded to Key Change 3:**



The above illustrates overall agreement, both within and across stakeholder groups.

106 respondents submitted a comment. Comments from respondents indicated a recognition that this is a smaller scale change, that the purpose is to recognise the professionalism of the



early years workforce, reduce the amount of paperwork that is carried out by Specialist Teachers and therefore increase their capacity to provide support to more children.

Feedback provided in the free text box from respondents supporting this change. included:

*“Its good to see a proposal in the reduction of paperwork and recognising the skills and experience of early years and childcare providers. There are a high number of competent managers and practitioners could focus on meeting the needs of children more, if paperwork was reduced.”*

*“This is a positive change as many children that require additional funding need it sooner than they are currently accessing it.”*

*“This proposed model takes away the barriers for settings to access funding, without the need of an ROV from the Specialist Teacher. This should free up some capacity for Specialist Teachers and make the focus on supporting children in settings and modelling strategies/interventions to staff rather than being on the paper evidence so settings can get SENIF.”*

Additional feedback is summarised below.

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
In the absence of STLS providing Records of Visits, we need to ensure that there is still a robust tool/mechanism established to evidence a child’s needs, especially in relation to statutory assessment requirements.	10
Evaluate the purpose of LIFT and explore how this forum can be utilised more effectively and consistently across the county which aligns with the proposed changes. In what’s currently working well, settings value the peer support, advice and networking in the forums. However, feedback has also called for alleviation of some of the barriers currently in place for childminders in accessing LIFT.	6
Explore ways to strengthen multi-agency working, especially in relation to children with more complex needs.	4

### 3.3.4 Key Change Four

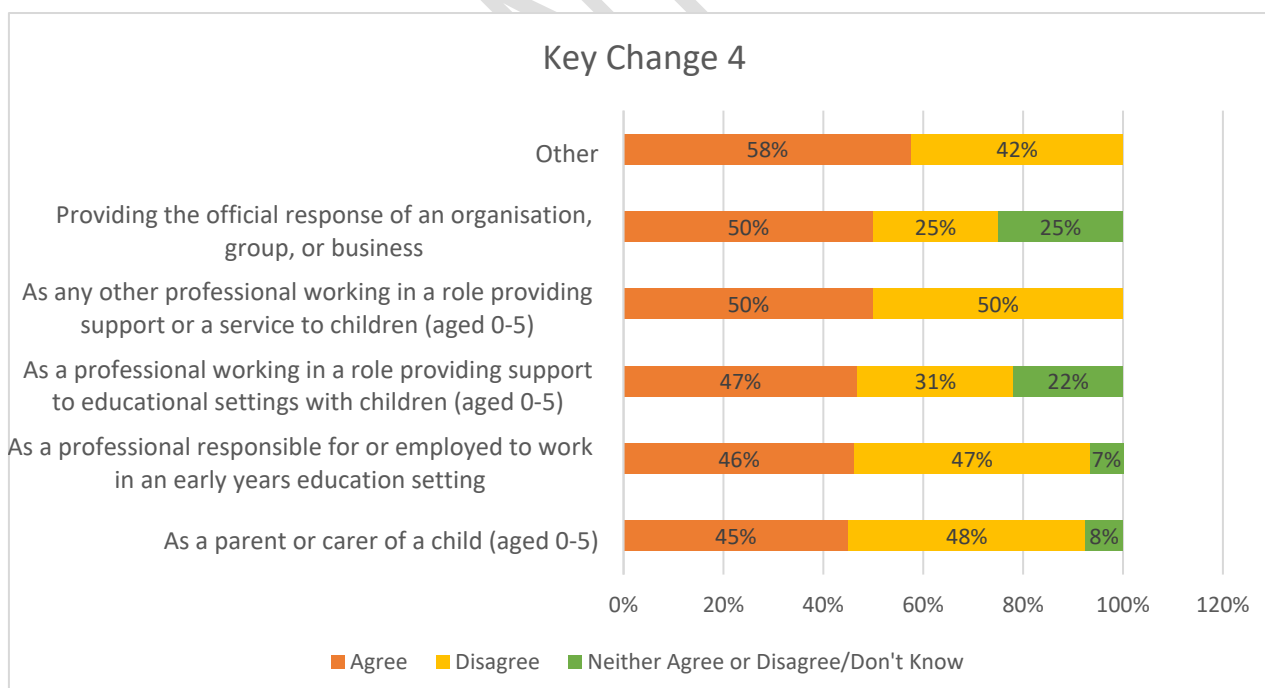
Under the current model, a child may be offered a Specialist Nursery Intervention which is delivered by one of ten Special Schools and one mainstream school in Kent. The intervention lasts for a two-term period per child and children attend the specialist nursery setting each week for up to 9 hours as well as their mainstream setting.

In the proposed model, Specialist Nursery Intervention will continue to work with individual children but will provide support directly to children in their mainstream settings without the need for the child to attend a special school setting, as is (predominantly) the current model. This will support children to develop skills within their mainstream setting and build staff confidence within that setting to support them. Specialist nursery places will still be available for children to go to who need specialist support for a prolonged time, but the process for agreeing these placements will change and will be determined by a multi-agency team who work with and understand the needs of the child.

The following question was asked: *‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?’*

Regarding this proposal, 235 individuals responded to this question - 47% of respondents strongly or tended to agree while 43% strongly or tended to disagree and 10% neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

**Chart 21: Illustration of how the stakeholder groups responded to Key Change 4:**

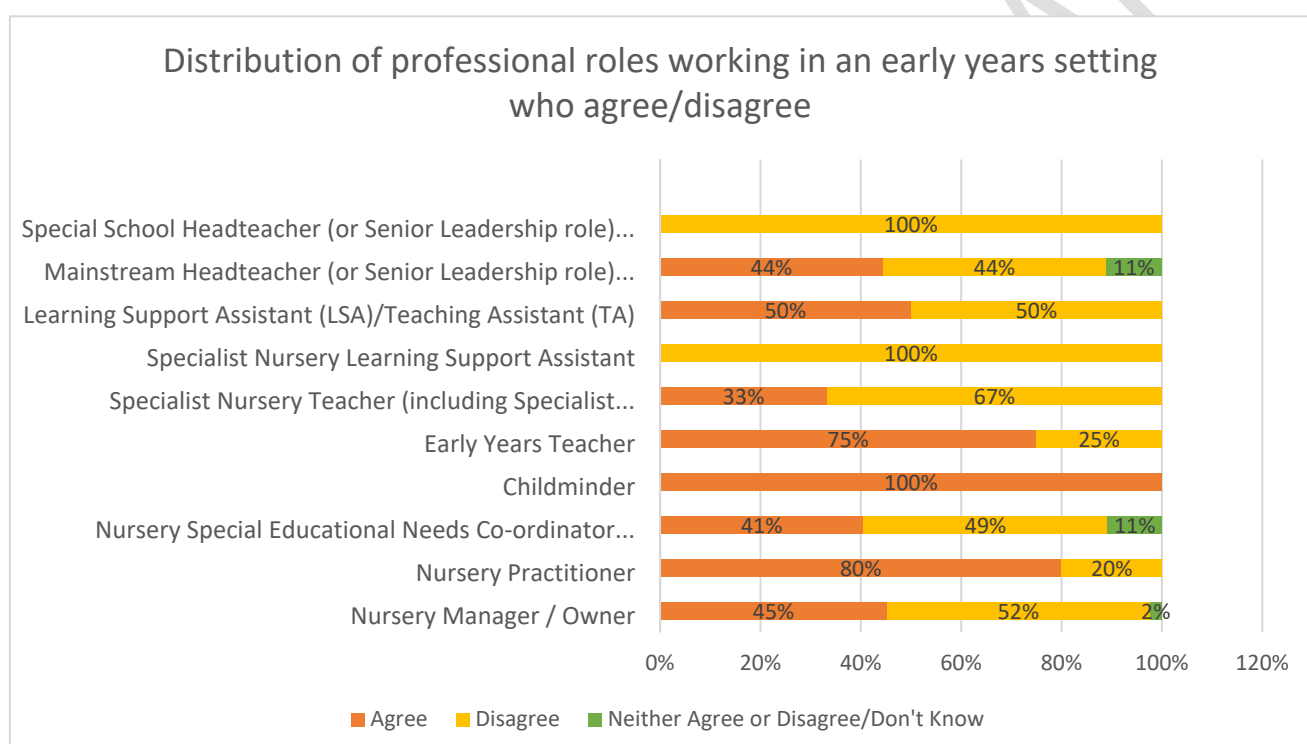


The above chart illustrates that the agreement level is overall replicated within each stakeholder group with those responding on behalf of an organisation/group and those responding as a professional providing support to educational settings showing more disagreement and

uncertainty. As this key change has generated higher levels of disagreement than any other key change, further analysis has been undertaken to understand more about the responses submitted.

In relation to the professionals responsible for or employed to work in an early years education setting, Chart 22 below illustrates that rates of disagreement are slightly higher amongst Nursery SENCOs and Managers/Owners, as well as Specialist Nursery Intervention staff. Whilst there is more agreement amongst Nursery practitioners and no childminders disagree.

Chart 22: Breakdown of the responses from different roles within the professionals responsible for or employed to work in an early years education setting stakeholder group and a chart indicating the number of responses received from each of these roles.

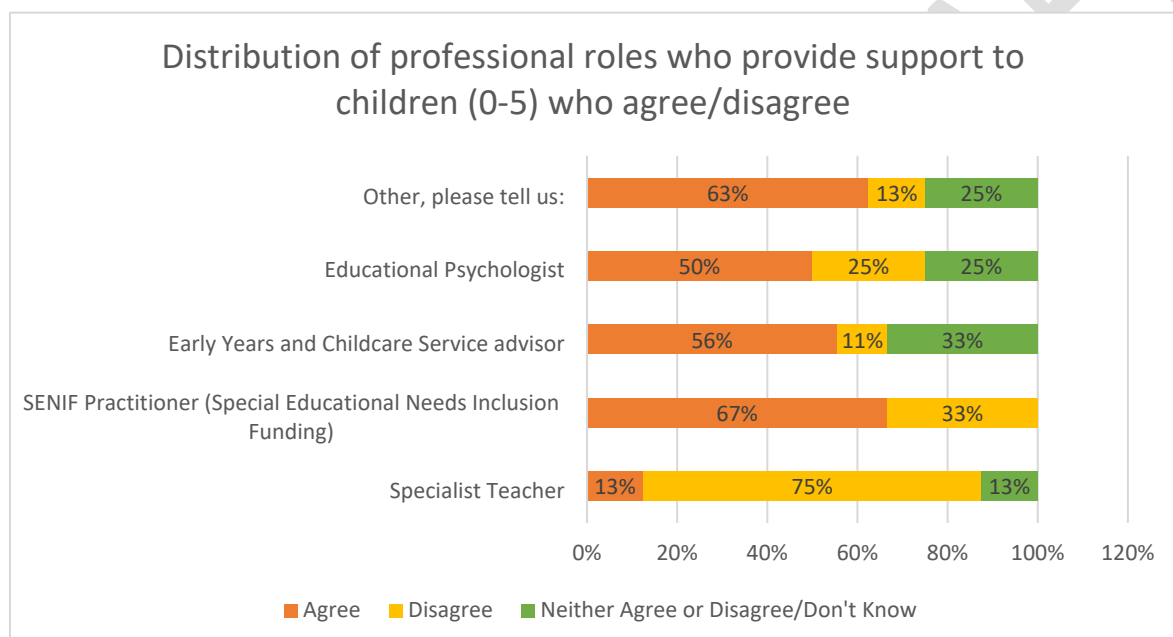


Type of respondent	Number of respondents
Nursery Manager / Owner	42
Nursery Practitioner	10
Nursery Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)	37
Childminder	5
Early Years Teacher	4
Specialist Nursery Teacher (including Specialist Nursery Manager)	3
Specialist Nursery Learning Support Assistant	5
Learning Support Assistant (LSA)/Teaching Assistant (TA)	2
Mainstream Headteacher (or Senior Leadership role) where you are responsible for a nursery on your site	9
Special School Headteacher (or Senior Leadership role) where you are responsible for a nursery on your site	2

From this the highest rate of agreement came from childminders, where 100% of five childminders responding agreed with the proposal and nursery practitioners, where 80% of the 10 who responded agreed.

This is in comparison to the highest rate of disagreement that was received from special schools headteacher responsible for a nursery on their site (100% of 2 responses) and specialist nursery learning support assistants (100% of 5 responses).

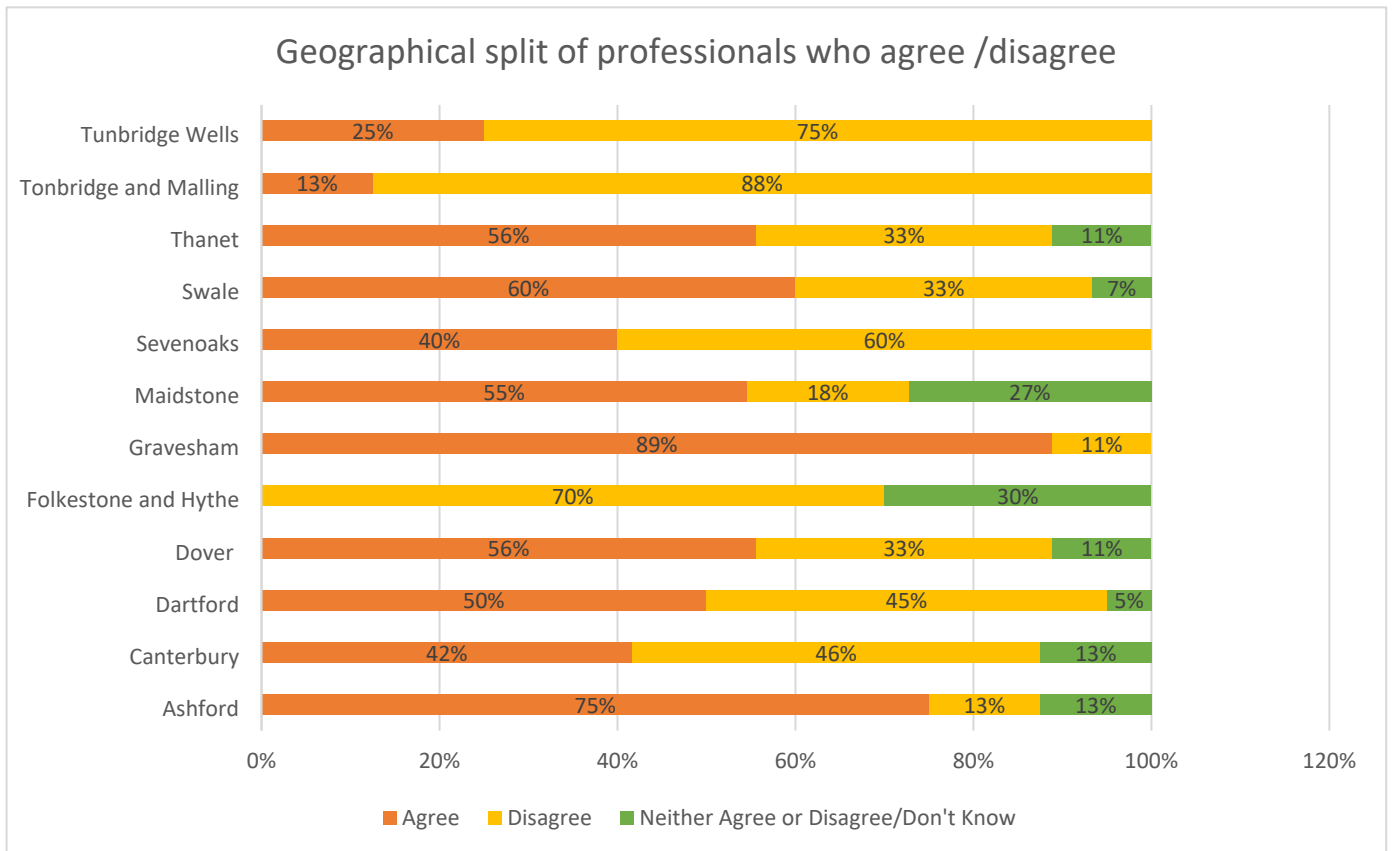
Chart 23: Breakdown of the responses from different roles within the professionals working in a role providing support or a service to children (aged 0-5) stakeholder group and a chart indicating the number of responses received from each of these roles.



Type of respondent	Number of respondents
Specialist Teacher	8
SENIF Practitioner (Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding)	3
Early Years and Childcare Service advisor	9
Educational Psychologist	4
Other, please tell us:	8

Chart 23 above illustrates a split between different professional roles providing support to children (0-5) who agree/disagree with the proposed change. However, more specialist teachers disagree with the change.

**Chart 24: Illustrates the geographical split from the professionals provided information about where they are based.**



**Chart 25: Geographic split of how parents/carers responded to this proposal:**

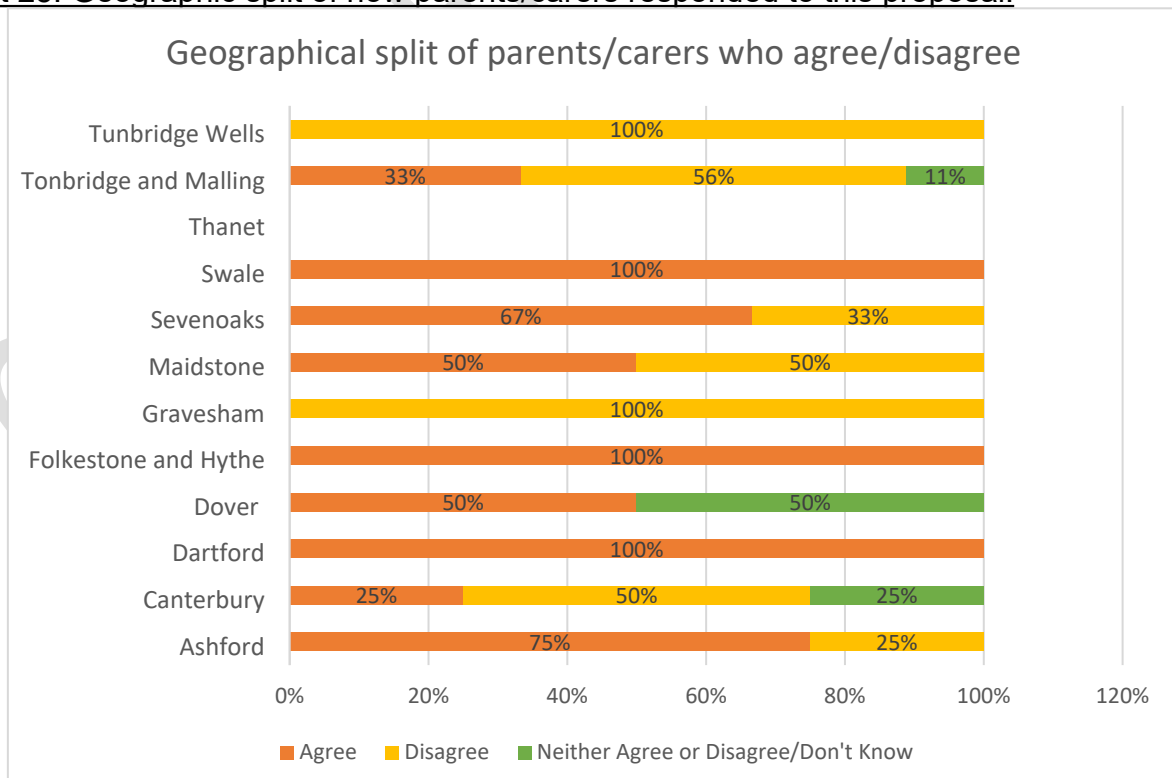


Chart 24 illustrates that while there are higher levels of agreement amongst professionals based in Ashford, Dover, Gravesham, Maidstone, Swale and Thanet, there are lower levels of agreement amongst professionals based in Folkestone and Hythe, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells.

From the parents/carers who agree/disagree, there is almost an even split of 18 who agree and 19 who disagree. One did not respond and three responded neither agree or disagree, however one of their comments stated:

*“To have time in different settings can be more disruptive than helpful”*

Chart 25 above shows that no parents/carers agree with the proposed change in Tunbridge Wells and Gravesham no parents/carers disagree with the change in Dartford, Dover, Folkstone and Hythe and Swale. 89% of the above parents responded that their child has SEND.

Feedback from those in support of this proposal focused on the benefits of having the early years workforce upskilled in supporting children with additional needs. Professionals also recognised that the change would mean less a less disruptive transition for children and support will be available much sooner. 145 respondents submitted a comment and some of the comments included:

*“If the support for children with high level of needs it provided promptly and in an ongoing manner then I can see this working and I believe this could help with placements in specialist school provision for the children who need it as specialist staff can see how they are in a mainstream setting with the specialist support which is what would potentially be provided at school and get the places for more appropriate children.”*

*“Excellent news for settings who will benefit from seeing best practice interventions delivered to children by specialist teachers over an extended period of time.”*

*“I think early years staff will benefit from seeing highly trained staff from the specialist settings on the ground which can in turn be used for future children without the need for referral.”*

*“It is so difficult to get this level of support hopefully it would mean that more children could have access to the knowledge of experienced practitioners and support could be more easily cascaded throughout the workforce.”*

The main themes arising from respondents who disagreed are:

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
Feedback also indicated that there was some misinterpretation of the proposed changed being perceived as specialist settings were being ‘closed’, even though the proposals clearly outlined that the change would mean a predominantly outreach model but the specialist setting will exist for children who need it for a prolonged time.	31

Some professionals felt that the specialist environment is what can help support the child in reaching their full potential and raised that this cannot be replicated in a busy mainstream classroom.	25
Many comments also stated that children with SEND cannot be educated in a mainstream setting, which is indicative of the wider issues which arose within the early years review around inclusive culture.	20
Capacity: in the mainstream settings if there is the expectation of more children attending a mainstream setting with additional needs and capacity within the specialist nursery intervention to cover the outreach within their locality.	16
Clarity needed over the criteria in which children have to meet which determines whether they attend the specialist setting for a prolonged period of time.	7
Clearer outline of how the role of STLS will differ from the outreach provided by specialist nursery intervention.	5

Some comments reflecting these concerns are:

*“I think this is basically taking away specialist places for the children who absolutely cannot cope in a mainstream setting. You cannot expect the setting to make an additional classroom, or lower its ratios, or make more money for more staff.”*

*“Specialist nursery intervention allows for a child to access a completely different environment, which is in most cases much more appropriate for them. It allows specialist staff to work with the child for a period and understand their needs more fully, in an environment in which they can reach their potential.”*

*“My concern is that with SNI support taking place in a mainstream setting it will be more challenging to provide the quality and level of support that was available at the SNI location. This is taking into account the resources that the mainstream setting may or may not have, the nature of the environment which may be busier and noisier which may mean the child is less able to engage in the intervention.”*

*“Supporting children with high complex needs is nigh on impossible in a mainstream setting without adequate resources. There is currently not the staff nor funding available to effectively implement accommodating children with these needs. Having a stranger come into the setting for a short visit will be detrimental unless the support attend the entirety of a session, that being said settings would be left alone after the block of visits leaving them in a very difficult situation.”*

From some of the feedback, there were also many questions around how the model will work in practical terms and it is recognised that districts have varying factors that can impact the demand within a locality.

When considering the additional analysis undertaken in relation to this proposal, there is a geographical concentration of higher levels of disagreement in specific districts, with the

highest number of respondents who disagree with this proposed change coming from the Tunbridge Wells district.

While there is disagreement in other districts, these are more reflective of the overall trend in relation to this proposal of a roughly equal split between agree and disagree responses.

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### 3.3.5 Key Change Five

In the current model, application for SENIF is accessed through, what settings have described as, a time-consuming process requiring evidence from multiple services to demonstrate increasing levels needs.

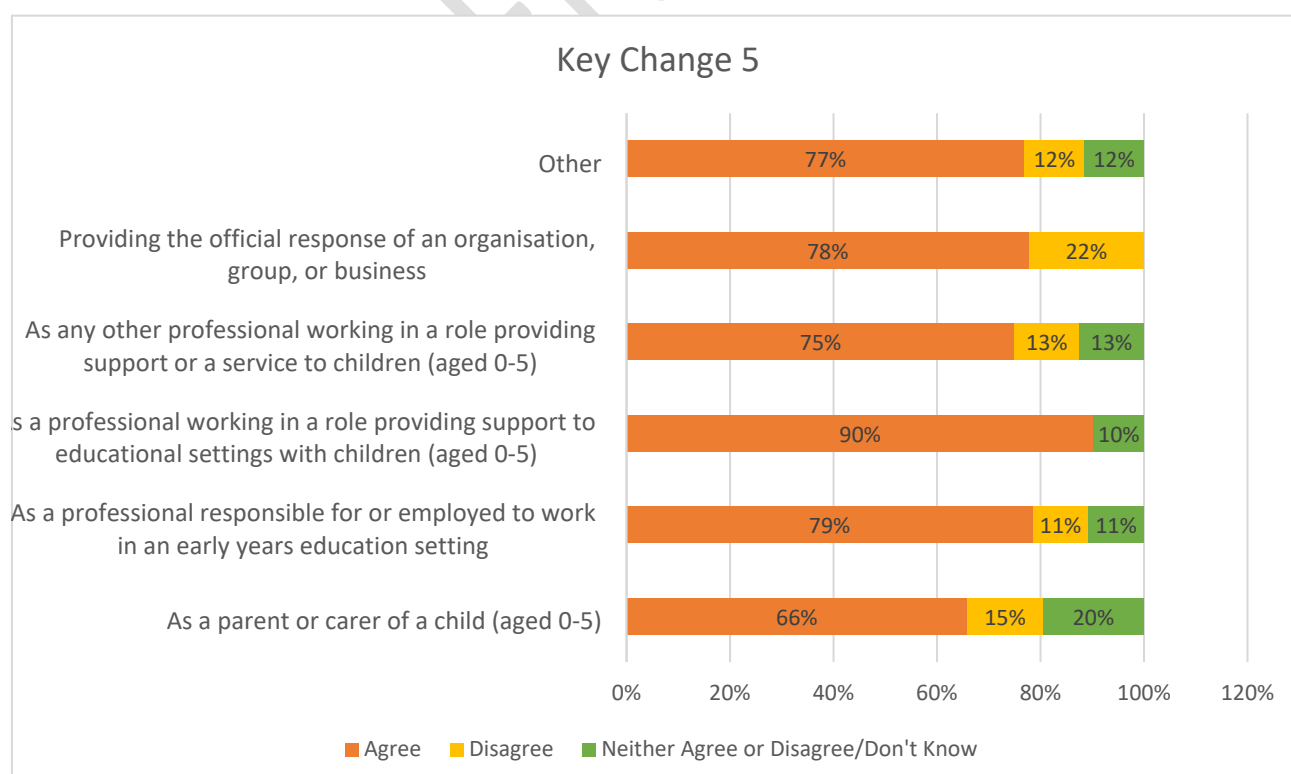
In this proposal, the process to apply for SENIF will change and move away from settings being reliant on written evidence provided by external professionals. Settings will still need to evidence that they have implemented a graduated approach of universal, targeted and specialist support in order to apply for SENIF, but the proposal is to introduce one document, such as Best Practice Guidance Audit Tool (BPG) that can be updated by the setting to illustrate how this response has been implemented and the impact that this has had on meeting a child’s needs.

This approach recognises the skills, knowledge and expertise of professionals working in early years settings and enables them to provide evidence of need without the requirement for other professionals to do so. Access to universal, targeted and specialist support will continue to be available to settings, but the aim of this change is to free up professionals to spend more direct time in settings by reducing the amount of additional paperwork that they must complete.

The following question was asked: ‘*To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?*’

236 individuals responded to this question - 77% of respondents strongly and tended to agree with this key change, 6% strongly and tended to disagree, whilst 17% neither agree nor disagree or don’t know.

**Chart 26: Illustration of how the stakeholder groups responded to Key Change 5:**



105 respondents submitted comments for this proposal. From the feedback provided by respondents who agree, there was an overall recognition that this change would reduce the bureaucracy in the system and create a smoother process for accessing help and support.

Some of the comments from respondents who agreed:

*“I welcome the view that a high proportion of early years and childcare settings have the skills and experience to implement and support the graduated approach and focus their time on children, rather than paperwork.”*

*“The current system to apply for SENIF is time consuming and does not make any logical sense. As long as the document is not too time consuming for settings, which would continue to discourage settings from applying, in principle this should be a better system.”*

*“This could also shorten the timescale between universal, targeted and specialist support as long as enough effective, specialist support is available. The documentation should also be transferable between settings, with a copy kept centrally linked to a child's identification/ registration number so that it supports a child's transition to school, even if a parent has withdrawn a child from an EY setting previously.”*

Additional comments from the those who disagree are summarised below:

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
Evaluate all the current documents there are to avoid duplication of information, which is currently what is happening in the system.	15
Training for settings who are less confident in completing paperwork.	11
Monitoring of the quality of evidence submitted is needed to ensure this is maintained consistently and utilise this to share learning.	10
Strong relationships between teams maintained so communication is clear and effective.	8

### 3.3.6 Key Change Six

Feedback received through the review process has indicated that the training offer for early years settings currently in place is patchy and not always relevant. We are proposing to review and refresh the funded training offer for the early years sector.

The following question was asked: *‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?’*

Although this question was only applicable to professionals working in early years to answer, some parents did respond.

160 individuals responded to this question - 89% of respondents strongly and tended to agree with this key change, 8% strongly and tended to disagree, whilst 3% neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

Chart 27: A breakdown of how they responded:

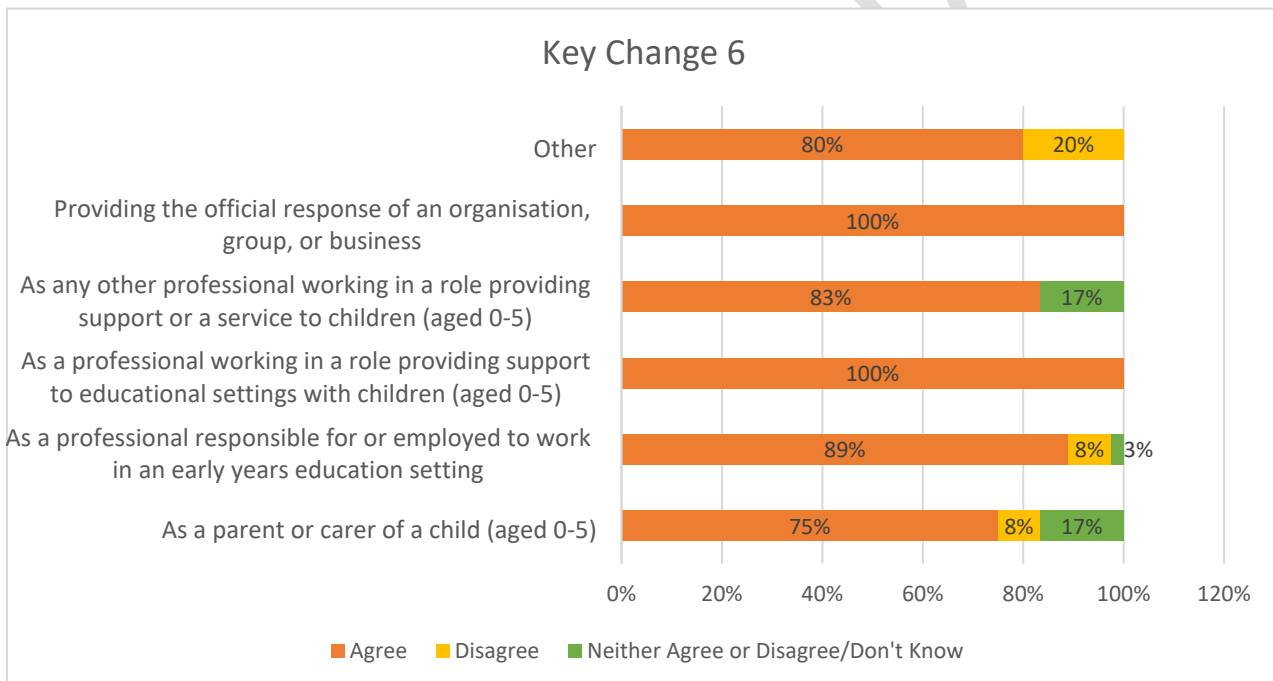


Chart 27 illustrates that most stakeholder groups agree with this proposal. Respondents were not asked to provide additional feedback on the above key change, as it has been recognised that if this proposal is implemented then further work will be undertaken to engage with the sector to establish what a refreshed early years training offer could look like.

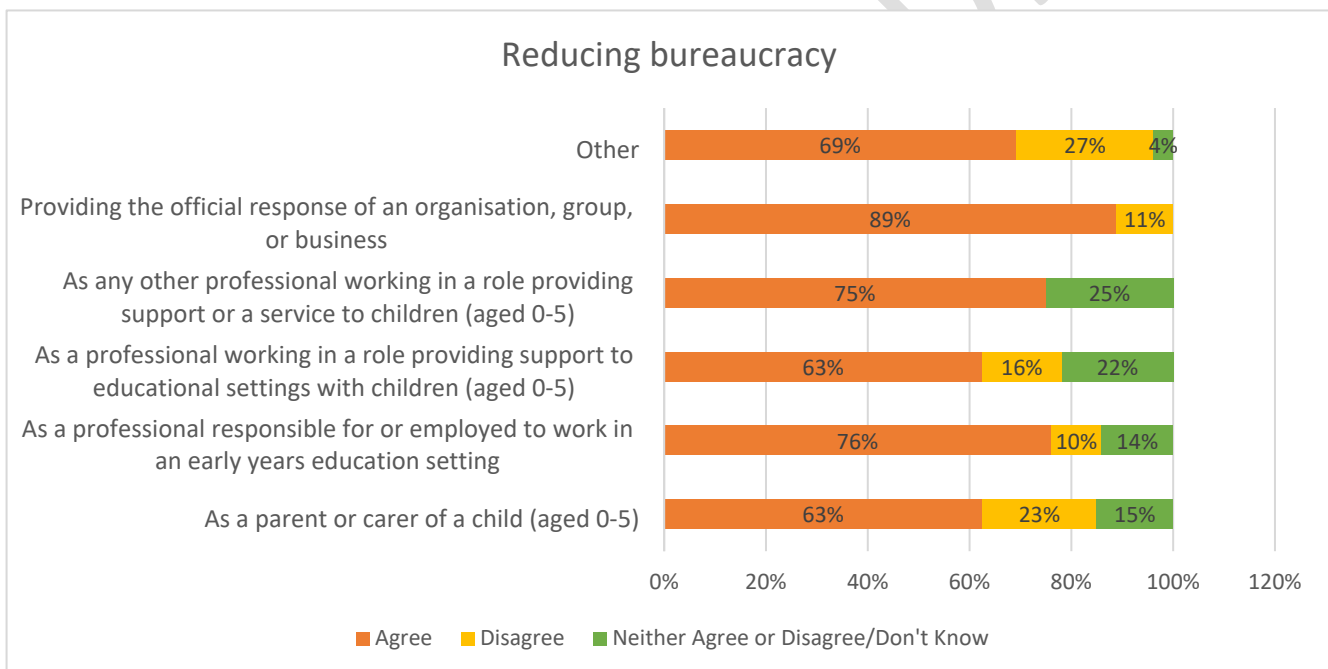
### 3.3.7 Reducing Bureaucracy

A key aim of the proposals submitted for public consultation is to address overly bureaucratic processes and systems within the current model that can delay support for children with additional needs being implemented.

As part of the consultation, the following question was asked: *‘To what extent do you agree or disagree that the model we are proposing will reduce bureaucracy (forms, applications, processes) and ensure that children are able to access the additional support needed sooner and more efficiently?’*

236 individuals responded to this question - 72% of respondents strongly and tended to agree with this statement, 14% strongly and tended to disagree, whilst 14% neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

Chart 28: A breakdown of responses from the main stakeholder groups:



Respondents were then asked: *‘Do you have any other comments, suggestions, or concerns on how the proposed model explained in this consultation can strengthen support in the early years sector?’*

107 respondents submitted a comment. Many comments referenced welcoming the reduction of paperwork required in the system and the change in the way support would be delivered as part of the graduated approach.

However, as noted above, many respondents were concerned about whether there was sufficient capacity within the workforce to implement the changes proposed. They also noted

factors such as recruitment and retention issues, sufficient funding and the increase in demand for support with the high number of children with additional needs.

Here are some comments provided by professionals working in an early years setting:

*“Reducing paperwork, referrals and allowing early years and childcare providers and professionals to focus on direct work with children and delivery will in turn reduce bureaucracy.”*

*“I strongly believe early identification is the best way forward for the child and their family. Proposals would reduce duplication and hopefully put resources both human and financial to better use addressing needs.”*

*“I think that all changes are good as long as the processes are quick and easy, early years settings do not have the time or money to spend duplicating paperwork over and over. We would love to be able to further enhance our staffs training, giving them more knowledge on how to support children with SEN but more often than not staff are overwhelmed, over worked already and don't want extra shifts, it is impossible to recruit which also has a knock-on effect to be able to send staff on training.”*

*“The overall intent is good, but implementation will be difficult. The impact of less children being in specialist nurseries and more being put into mainstream will at first negatively affect the recruitment and retention of early years staff.”*

*“Current qualifications for Early years do not cover SEND effectively, so until all settings have embedded knowledge and an inclusive culture, you will see settings not being able to accommodate children with needs and people leaving the sector.”*

#### 4 Part Four – Equality Analysis

Respondents were asked if they feel there is anything which should be considered relating to equality and diversity and the following themes were highlighted:

Theme	Number of comments/mentions
Considerations for the diverse population in Kent where some cultures have difficulty in accepting their child has SEND.	3
Considerations for children of families where English is an additional language to ensure ethnic minorities do not feel isolated.	3
Knowledge of accurately identifying needs in children must include factors such as gender as girls usually get diagnosed later than boys with SEND.	1

Comments included the following:

*“Ensuring mainstream early years and childcare settings have access to resources and support required, to ensure children can flourish and develop in their setting. Particularly if there is a reduction in time in specialist settings.”*

*“Kent has a diverse population and some cultures have extreme difficulty accepting their child has SEND. Ensuring link workers represent that diversity would be in the best interests of the children.”*

*“How are we ensuring that families who do not have first language English will be able to access the services. Many parents of SEND in ethnic communities can feel isolated and do not access services or support groups due to language barriers. How can we be reaching out to them?”*

*“Current on site staff in a specialist nursery will be expected to make a considerable change to their way of working which may not be appropriate for all individuals capacity.”*

*“Girls are often diagnosed later than boys due to the current knowledge of SEND. This must change. Some cultural differences can mean that some families do not accept that a child needs SEND support so again regular support for families through the procedures and systems can encourage parents to understand and make the whole this less complicated and mysterious.”*

Feedback will be used to further develop the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for this project.

## 5 Part Five - Next Steps

This consultation report will be presented to Children Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 2 July 2024, at which point recommendations in relation to the proposal contained within the consultation will be made.

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