Resource for SEND Practitioners

UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

YOUNG RESEARCHERS
YOUNG VOICES

Our main aim is to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people identified as having SEND

We are four researchers who investigate the views and experiences of children and young people (CYP) identified as having special educational needs and disabilities (SENDs). We all identify as disabled or neurodivergent. We all have lived experience of SEND support in schools and colleges, and within mainstream and specialist settings. We all have experience of the EHCP and the annual review.

We do co-research with more experienced researchers from the University of Derby. We are involved in all aspects of decision-making including gathering, analysing and presenting.

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111 Children and young people identified as having SEND interviewed

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19 Settings: mainstream and special schools and colleges

9–26

The age range of our interviewees: 9–26

We have gathered data about:

- what CYP identified as having SEND **want** and **need** from their SEND support and their EHCPs
- what they actually **get** from their SEND support
- what they think is **important** and **relevant** about their SEND support
- how SEND support helps them plan for their **futures** and achieve their **goals**
- how CYP are **involved** in the **decisions** made about their support.

This resource is designed to help SEND practitioners facilitate conversations with **CYP** identified as having **SEND** so that they can help them:

- **feel more confident to talk** about their SEND with:
  - SEND practitioners and teachers
  - their classmates, friends and families
- **think** about what their SEND means to them and take ownership of their it
- **understand** what their SEND means to others
- understand how their SEND and **support** may change or not in the future
- **advocate** for their needs and **educate**

01

SILENCE AROUND SEND

Our research discovered a 'silence' around SEND. We start with this because we feel it is important for understanding the other sections.

Some CYP felt anxious and embarrassed about their SEND and their support:

> Even the days where my one-to-one was just with me, I still struggled asking for stuff just because I'm too scared in front of other people. I didn't want to be seen needing support. I didn't wanna be different.
>
> What support do you think you might need at college? I think ... I don't ... I don't know, I think. Erm. Support. I don't, I don't really know.

They seem to lack the words to describe their SEND. Some told us that they had never been asked about their SEND or their support in the ways that our project allowed:

> I feel I would love to talk about things that make me feel different.

Some CYP did not always associate with their disability and/or their support.
Why was this?

- Why could they not voice their disability?
- Were they uncomfortable or unconfident?
- Did they not have the words, language and ideas to communicate about their disability?
- Was their disability a taboo in all areas of their lives?
- Were they not being asked the right questions?
- Were they deciding not to share their views and experiences? If so, why?
- Who were they not sharing these things with?
- Was anyone communicating about their disability for them?
- If so, who and why?

Some of them did not seem to connect the support they received with their EHCP:

> I still have no clue what it was or how it works … We all just sat in a classroom and discussed targets for the future.

Others were deliberately not asking for support:

> Because [support] would just seem like a weakness, in terms of just saying 'I can't do it on my own', you know?

… or wanted their SEND and their support plan to be kept private:

> I don't want my class teacher to see [my EHCP]. There's a lot of personal things on there I don't want them to see.

Some were not able to advocate for themselves in asking for the appropriate support:

> I didn't think there was anything they could do about it. There was never really an opportunity to bring it up. Even when my one-to-one was just with me, I still struggled asking for stuff just because I'm too scared in front of other people. I didn't want to be seen needing support. I didn't wanna be different.

We suggest that this 'silence' impacts on the ability of children and young people to confidently communicate about their SEND. They often can't or won't take ownership of it. It can prevent them getting the right support when they need it.

Making a noise

Some of the CYP we interviewed used words and phrases that seemed to be the **opposite of silence:**

- **Agency**
- **Having a voice**
- **Having choice**
- **Identity**
- **Being in control**
- **Feeling in control**
- **Asking for change**
- **Evaluating support**
- **Self-awareness**
- **Self-acceptance**
- **Having conversations**

Each of these is a big area and there are connections between most of them. We have picked three to help us think about addressing the silence around SEND.

Agency

Agency means being able to make choices and changes, set goals and make decisions. It means taking ownership and having control. It means having "responsibility to participate in the world and, in so doing, to influence people, events and circumstances for the better" (OECD 2018). CYP with agency are acting, rather than being acted upon.

Agency is linked to notions of identity, a sense of self and inclusion, as well as wider ideas such as leadership, citizenship, community and democracy (Thomson and Maloy 2022).

> I'm focussed on coming back to college next year to do level one [catering] and potentially doing level two or level three, depending on where my future decides to go...

Voice

Voice means more than just talking and communicating about disability and other things related to SEND. CYP with a 'voice' are involved in decisions that affect themselves and other disabled people. They are able to analyse their support and be critical about it. They are empowered to advocate for change.

> Young Researchers Young Voices has been transformative for many reasons. Above all, it is "disabled people doing disabled people's research". As disabled and neurodiverse people, we've been able to use our voice to empower and amplify the voices of others. And, as a result of this USP, we're embedding those voices in practice and policy through the Change Programme Partnership and beyond.
>
> (Jo, Young Researcher who has quadri-plegic cerebral palsy)

Identity

Identity is linked to self-awareness and self-acceptance, and to belonging and participation (Gibson and Edwards 2015). Identities are formed in social groups - friends and families, settings such as schools and colleges, and other groups that have their own 'culture'. CYP who have been identified as having SEND will have multiple identities. Not all of them will be framed around their disability. They will have intersectional identities that include their gender, race, age and social status.

> I'm accepted as an individual ... I think it's quite difficult when people are unaware of who you are as a person. When you know people around you don't know who you are and probably might judge you, then that sort of makes you feel like I'm not being accepted for who I am.

We made a video about **self-advocacy** based on our lived experiences and our insights. We pass on our tips and techniques for being and becoming a self-advocate.

Agency, voice and identity and the other words and phrases in this section help us think about how CYP discussed their experiences of some of the other areas covered in this resource: **EHCPs**, **Belonging**, **Learning** and **Futures**.

Through our research and our own lived experiences, it has become apparent that in order to improve outcomes for children and young people identified as having SEND, **the silence around SEND, support and disability more broadly must be addressed**.

Questions

Here are some of the questions that we asked CYP in our interviews. They may be helpful to you. Ask the questions to the CYP that you support. What do you think they will say? What did they actually say? How might reflecting on their answers help you to start addressing the silence around SEND and support the students to develop their agency, voice and identity?

- How do you feel about your SEND?
- Do you think the EHCP and the meetings change anything about your support?
- What to you is the most important thing about your support?
- If you didn't have the support that you get now, what would change?
- Can you make choices about your support?
- What are the EHCP meetings like?
- What changes to your support would you like to see?
- Do you know what your EHCP says?
- How do feel about what it says?

Recommendations

Support CYP to help them:

- be confident to engage in conversations about their SEND
- take ownership of their SEND
- get the right support when they need it
- advocate for themselves and others
- Be an ally for CYP labelled as SEND

This section is summarised in Appendix 1 on page 33

02 EHCPS

The Education, Health and Care Plan or EHCP is a document which describes the health and care needs of children and young people up to the age of 25. It includes a plan of how those needs will be met.

It is framed around key pieces of legislation such as The Children and Families Act, The SEND Regulations, and guidance documents such as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 years.

The EHCP is rooted in legislation around inclusion, equality (The Equality Act), human rights, and the Rights of the Child (United Nations Convention)

EHCPs are assessed by the Local Authority. As it says in the SENCO induction pack, the plan should include the views of the child or young person and their family, and be reviewed by them and the SENCO every year at a meeting (p.37).

The Council for Disabled Children has published information about the EHCP - what should go in them and how parents can apply.

Rather than repeating published information about the EHCP, this section gives voice to the CYP we interviewed. We hope that their experiences and opinions will help you reflect on how you and your setting could make the EHCP process and the annual reviews better for them.

Positive experiences

Many of the CYP we met had good experiences of the EHCP:

> I think my EHCP is good, and I can see what progress I have made – so I can see goals like 'putting my hand up in lessons' so then I can see if I have achieved the goals.

> My teacher will talk about what I've done great. And then I'll feedback on it and say actually, I've done great. The last EHCP review meeting I had was this month. It helped me underst and more about the sections of the document, what I am, what I do, and what's my diagnosis. (Nicholas, Young Researcher who is neurodiverse).

They understood the purpose of the EHCP:

> The purpose of it is to help me with like my disabilities. And that's why school and college and all them people will see it.

… and what made it accessible for them:

> I do understand the EHCP and what is in it. It has bullet points, and this makes it easier to read.

Being included. Feeling included

However, some of our interviewees said that they did not know what was in their EHCP:

> I know I have one, but I don't know what it means.

> There were some words, I didn't know what they mean.

> I haven't read it. I have a rough idea what it is.

> I don't know much about it.

> I think I've read it, but I still have no clue what it was or how it works …

> **Do you have an EHCP?**

> Yes, I do.

> **Have you seen it?**

> No.

> **Do you want to see it?**

> Yes.

> The EHCP is a bit wordy. There's a lot of information at once.

Some CYP did not want to participate in the EHCP process. They told us why:

> I don't want to hear it.

> **Why not?**

> Because I know what I've got, and I don't want a piece of paper telling me.

> I don't want my class teacher to see it. There's a lot of personal things on there I don't want them to see.

These and many other CYP were expressing a 'silence around SEND'.

One young person felt that they were not the main focus of their own EHCP:

> I just want more of a point of view about me. What is a day in the life of [Josh]? How can we help him?

As Young Researchers, we reflected on what the CYP had told us and discussed who we thought the EHCP was important to:

> And as we saw with our own research… I think it's seen as more important to the professionals than the children and young people. (Emma)

Young Researcher Emma highlighted the limitations of the EHCP based on her own lived experience:

> It's not necessarily the golden ticket, like 'Woohoo! We know what the problem is now! Everything's fixed now'. I think people are often shocked that it takes a long time.
>
> You can have all of it written down… but if they don't turn up with the wheelchair, it doesn't make any difference.

Review meetings

The EHCP document is accompanied by annual review meetings. The SENCO Induction Handbook says what the meetings should focus on:

- progress made and the extent to which **outcomes** have been met
- the **evidence** to support the judgments made
- the **views of the learner** on the support and intervention and the next steps
- the **views of the parents**… and the next steps
- the **views of the teachers and staff** involved…
- the **impact** of the review process on the ongoing planning cycle for the next stage. (p.28)

Families and teachers

One CYP described how they, their family and their teacher were involved:

> I answer some questions. Mum answers some questions and staff answer some questions, and it gets typed up.

One Young Researcher explained the value of her family in the process:

> It also depends on the people around you … that could advocate for you. I've definitely needed the family to come and support, and I think that plays a big part in it. (Emma, Young Researcher who has cerebral palsy)

Access and participation

Many of the issues mentioned by CYP about the EHCP and the review meetings concerned access and participation. Some found the meetings positive in these respects:

> It felt very good because it was a very calm environment, and it was just us in the office so we could talk freely about our opinions.

Some CYP felt unable to participate fully in the meetings. In some case, this might be because of their SEND, their age and the ways that they related to the adults in the room:

> It's boring. Sitting there doing nothing.

> It's lot of typing and gossiping. One lasted three hours.

> A child or young person can be involved in their support without actually having to sit in a three-hour long meeting. When you're six, it feels like it's forever. (Jo, Young Researcher)

> **Have you ever been shown your support plan?**
>
> Yes, I have, multiple times, but I don't remember what it says because I have problems with my memory. I'm not bad at reading things, but when I look at words, it's so difficult.
>
> Because I have a hearing impairment, I find it hard to hear on the laptop or on the computer screen. It's clear when you're speaking to someone face to face. I would rather meet up in person.

Others made it clear that they were not being asked to participate:

> Would you like to be invited? Probably. I'm nosey … It will help me … I don't know what's happening.

… or were disassociated from the process in other ways:

> **Do you go to meetings with your mum?**
>
> No, I don't know if she has meetings. I don't really ask her. Would you like to go to them or know what's in your EHCP? Yeah, I would.

For some CYP, a family member went to the meetings on their behalf:

> I don't think I've been in one. I've had times when my dad's been in the, whatever it's called, EHCP review. He's asked me, "Do you need to say something?" and I've told him what I want and then I think that [my opinion] has been taken…
>
> Do you know what's in your EHCP? No, but my mum does.

We thought about the positive role that parents and carers play in the EHCP process:

> Especially when you are younger, I think it's important for your parents to be there because you need somebody to advocate for you. (Emma, Young Researcher)
>
> In my case, I need time to process so my mum would get the information and then reword it into a way I can understand. (Alex, Young Researcher who is Autistic and has ADHD and thought-processing delay)

One of us mentioned the number of voices in the room:

> Parents have their own agendas that can unintentionally override the child's voice. You've also got various professionals coming at things from their own agendas which conflict with everyone else. (Jo, Young Researcher)

Some CYP did not know how their EHCP and their meetings were linked to their support:

> **Do you know how your plan influences or affects the support that you get?**
>
> No, I don't think so.
>
> My thoughts would be taken, but I don't know if they actually included them at all.

Others mentioned barriers to access in the meetings:

> It's a group of people that you've barely met once, and they're telling you about your life and 'she's done this to move her legs', and 'she's got this title' or whatever, then it can be scary, can't it? … It's like looking at your life under a microscope constantly. (Emma, Young Researcher)

EHCPs

Questions

Changes to support can make some identified as having SEND feel anxious. **How could you balance change with the consistency of support?**

How could you make the EHCP more accessible? CYP have told us about font sizes, the number of words, the layout and the lack of colours. **Is it possible to create a version that is accessible to them as individuals? Could they be involved?**

Can the CYP access the meetings and participate fully? Hearing impairments, communication barriers and processing delays may limit this. **How can you improve their participation?**

Who are the EHCP and the meetings really for? We know there might be conflicting voices and different agendas involved. **How can these be managed so that the CYP is at the centre of the process?**

How could you make sure that the CYP is expressing their own views?

> Maybe it's about allowing the CYP to speak first or having an advocate to speak to the child independently just so you've got their raw opinion as opposed to it being influenced by the parent or the teacher or whoever else is in the room. (Jo, Young Researcher)

Nicholas, one of the Young Researchers, suggested referring to it as the **Education Health and Care and *People* Plan**

> "because it's the people who matter most to the child or young person".

Is this something you could try?

How could you make the EHCP less challenging for parents?

> "Because sometimes, not intentionally, it can be a bit like, 'Oh, you should be doing this, and it's taking forever to get the child to learn to talk. And she should be able to walk now'. And you're like, woah, steady! (Emma, Young Researcher)

As well as parents, we know that SEND staff in settings feel pressure around the EHCP. **How could you work with your SLT and others, both inside and outside of your setting, to reduce the stress and anxiety of all involved?**

One interviewee told us,

> "I would really like to say stuff on a video that could be played there."

Is this something you might consider?

Could the EHCP work as an app? Young Researcher Alex suggested that this would, "make it easier to get to and easier to review. It would be accessed by the CYP, the parents and the teacher. The child could put comments about what help they think they need but not edit it."

Recommendations for improving the EHCP and annual review process

- Make sure that the CYP knows that they have an EHCP.
- … and that they know what is in it.
- Try to make the EHCP more accessible. Ask each CYP what this might mean for them.
- Try to make the process feel less pressured – for CYP, parents, other staff and yourself.
- Ensure that EHCP outcomes are timely to the CYP's needs.
- Consider updating the EHCP more often, especially when the CYP's needs are changing fast.
- Consider using alternative ways (apps, video) of including the CYP.
- Advocate for a joined-up support process that recognises that some conditions are lifelong and extend beyond the age of 25.

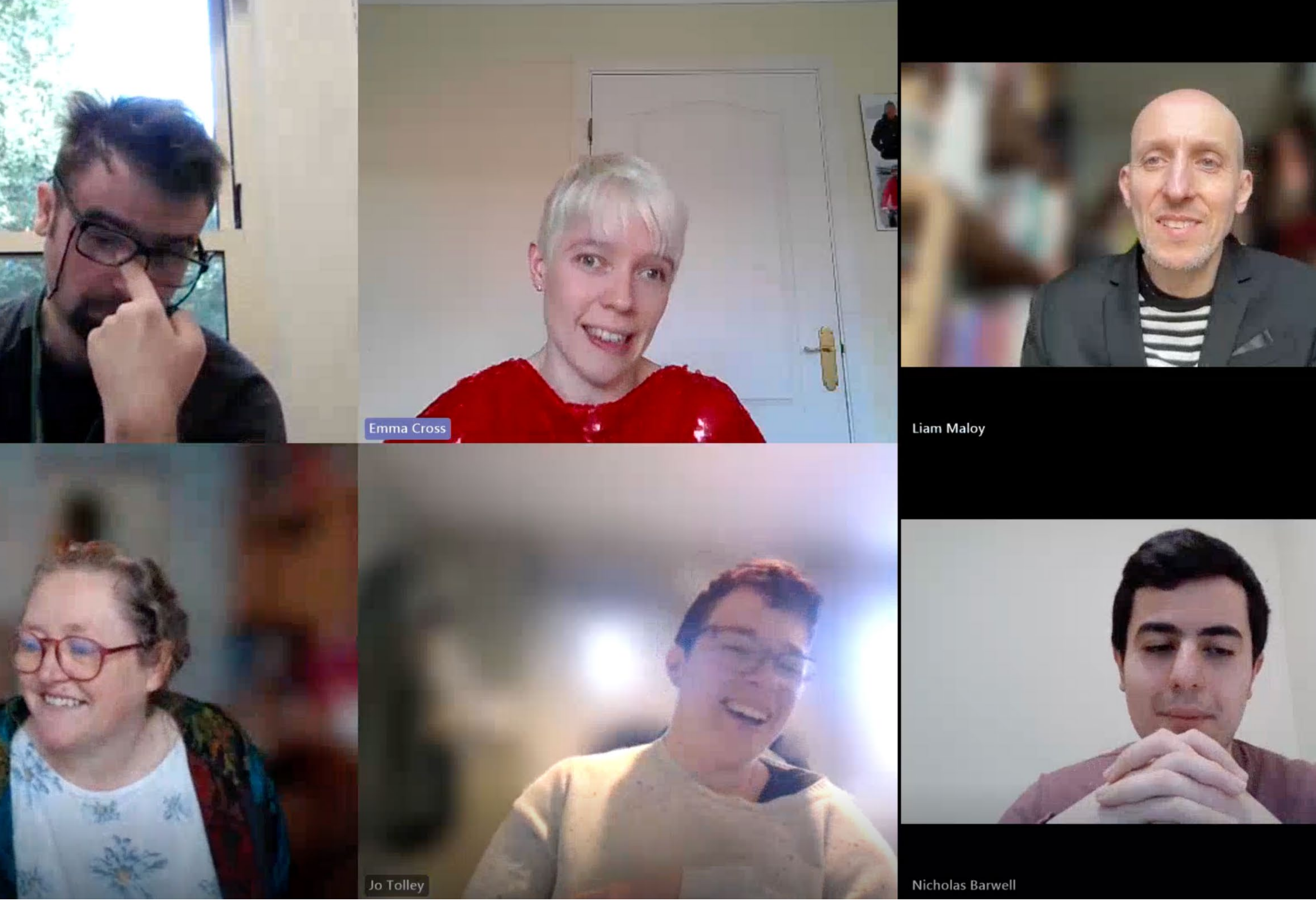
This section is summarised in Appendix 2 on page 36

03 BELONGING

This section brings together a range of themes that emerged from our research around the idea of belonging. These include:

Participation, inclusion, feeling safe, fitting in, access, relationships, rapport, trust, friends, acceptance by others, people, respect

Some of these are related and overlap. We focus here on three themes that were often mentioned in our research – **Participation, Feeling Safe and People**. These underpin other sections in this resource. For example, if CYP don't feel safe or don't have good relationships, this will have a negative impact on their ability to engage with their learning, their support, their EHCPs, their friends and families.



Participation

We heard examples of how CYP participated in school activities and their EHCPs:

> **Did you feel like your voice was heard and listened to?** They definitely listened to me. At every meeting they obviously ask for your opinion before the meeting to put it in as your own words, and that's good.

However, many CYP shared their thoughts about **not participating** both in and out of the classroom:

> Most of the time, I feel like I'm invisible. Literally people will just ignore me and pretend like I'm not even there.
>
> On the field and things, I just get left out.

Often, the person's SEND seemed to play a part in whether they:

- were able to participate
- felt able to ask to participate, or
- were asked to participate

Being able to participate

Some of the CYP that we interviewed told us about some of the ways they were not able to participate:

> I don't feel included in anything. I mess about. I run away from the teacher and run around the building. I can't sit still.
>
> A lot of the day I'm not really a sociable person and I stutter a lot.

Feeling able to ask to participate

Some CYP expressed how difficult it was to ask to participate:

> In unfamiliar places and with people I don't know, I get shy and nervous. I am nervous with strangers. In class, I often don't put my hand up if I need help.

> Socialising, it's really hard ... Talking to someone and actually putting yourself out there is really difficult.

> I can't tell someone's body language. I won't be able to communicate because I don't look at people sometimes even when I'm talking. And then they call me rude sometimes because of the lack of eye contact.

Sometimes, not being able to participate was linked directly to the CYP's support:

> My friend [in school] was a completely different person to when the TA wasn't there. My TA was a middle-aged woman, so my friends didn't really relate to that obviously.

We heard about how separate SEND facilities affected participation:

> I went to [an inclusion unit in a mainstream] because of me having a disability. I lost all my friends in the process

CYP told us that they struggle to participate in lessons and learning without academic and emotional support. They valued the support they received.

Participation is linked to **inclusion**.

It is worth noting that children and young people labelled with SEND will be **included and excluded in different ways and to different degrees** in the various educational, social, familial and other groups that they are part of. See the work of The Qvortrups for more about this.

Questions about participation

- **What do you do to support all CYP to participate in lessons and learning?**
- **What else could be done in your setting to ensure all CYP have the opportunity to participate?**
- **What support do staff in your setting need to be able to support Identified as having SEND to understand and communicate their needs?**

Feeling safe

Alex, one of the Young Researchers, shared their experiences of being bullied at school:

> When I was at secondary, I had someone who used to torment me. They put a lighter near my eye. They used to punch me all the time. They made a Facebook account about me without my permission. I got called Down Syndrome. I had to change class. They just did it to be cruel. I was at the point of begging mum not to make me go to school.
>
> In my eyes, school was always just, hold your breath, wait for the day to end and then just get through the next day until the weekend starts
>
> Whenever teachers get involved, the bully finds out and then they just make your life worse.
>
> I got a lot of help from the staff. It was the students. That was the worst part.

The CYP we interviewed also shared their experiences of being bullied:

> In the lessons, I'm always getting bullied when there's no support. And most times I get fed up of it.

Emma, another Young Researcher, explained how **not feeling safe** at school might affect learning, progress, grades and other aspects:

> If you don't feel safe, if you feel like you're going to get picked on, then you're not going to have the capacity to learn because you're in fight and flight mode all the time.
>
> If you feel secure, within reason, you can flourish, and then you'll learn more.
>
> It's about feeling heard and safe so that you can try your best.
>
> You don't have to like it at school. Not everyone does. But there should be no fear about going to school. You shouldn't wake up and say 'I don't want to go to school. It makes me feel physically sick'. It's about reducing the fear, isn't it? And that goes with disability and everything, doesn't it?

Emma continued:

> Disability is something that you can get picked on for. Even if you can't get rid of it, it's reducing the fear surrounding it.

The CYP in our study told us about specific times and situations in the setting where they felt insecure and vulnerable. These were when they moved from:

- Room to room
- Year to year
- School to school

They also shared that **playgrounds** were a site of insecurity.

How could you support CYP to feel **safer**, **more secure** and **less vulnerable** in each of these four situations?

People

When children and young people told us about their experience of support, they overwhelmingly shared their thoughts about the importance of **relationships and rapport** particularly with support staff. What mattered to them was that people valued them, understood them, listened to them and cared about them. CYP felt that these people were important to them and helped them:

> The teachers understand my needs. We actually talk to each other and it's not like they're just talking at me and telling me what I need. They're like having a two-way conversation.

> You can speak to people, not like at my old school where you used to not be able to speak, where they'd say, "go and do your work and be quiet" and stuff.

They discussed how staff understood them and their emotions, and showed them respect:

> I sit at [the TA's] desk and he always helps me. He understands me.

> The support helps me because they respect my boundaries.

> They can tell when you're upset. They can tell when something is hard for you so they make it easier for you.

One Young Researcher reflected on one of our research visits to a school:

> The staff had a good rapport with the students. Even though it was a massive place, they still managed to see each individual as their own person. (Emma)

One CYP told us about making friends and being in the right setting:

> It was like a school full of people just like me … I could make friends with people because I knew they shared the same qualities as me.

Questions for SEND professionals about feeling safe

- What makes you feel safe in your job role?
- What makes you feel safe in your personal life?
- Are there any places or situations that make you feel unsafe?
- Is this the same for your colleagues? Ask them.
- What do you do to help your colleagues feel safe?
- What does your organisation do to help you and your colleagues feel safe?
- What do you do to help children and young people identified as having SEND feel safe?
- What more could you, your colleagues and your organisation do?

Recommendations to help CYP identified as having SEND feel they belong

- Foster an environment where CYP feel able to ask to participate.
- Build relationships and rapport around SEND so that staff understand why CYP may feel unable to participate, or unable to ask to participate.
- Foster an environment where CYP are asked to participate — by staff and other students.
- Make changes to learning activities in the classroom — ask the CYP for their ideas.
- Think about changes to help CYP participate in activities outside the classroom.
- Give CYP the opportunity to learn how to critically evaluate their support so that they can actively participate and make informed choices.
- Support staff and students in your setting to understand more about disability and the issues faced by CYP identified as having SEND.

This section is summarised in **Appendix 3** on page 38

04 LEARNING

Support for learning

Many children and young people identified as having SEND valued the support they got for their learning:

> [without the support] I couldn't really be the student I am now … I wouldn't even be going to school.

> If I didn't have the support, I'd be late to a lesson, or I wouldn't get there.

Without support, one student felt that they were unable to engage with school at all:

> I wouldn't last a week in the old school without getting kicked out. I had no support or anything.

Some interviewees told us exactly how their support helped with their learning:

> In English, I've got a person sitting next to me, reading questions.

> They can reword it or explain to make it sound less complicated.

> If I don't know, they can explain it in a different way to me.

> Writing things down so I can remember… not rushing the words and telling me step by step.

Ways of learning

We interviewed many CYP with a range of neurodiverse conditions. Sometimes they made the link between their condition and their preferred ways of learning. Many had learned what type of support or way of teaching worked best for them. They also told us about the challenges they faced in lessons and how these might be overcome:

> I like to be shown a few times. Because even though I've been shown once, I'm not going to be able to remember everything.

> [I like science because] they weren't just questions on a sheet, and we weren't just told to write stuff down. It was more hands-on.

> You sit down for a long time. I don't like sitting around for long.

> What do you like about Art? The quiet and taking time to enjoy the view. I go out in nature and find a nice calming place to draw it out.

> I like the fact that my autism can make me extremely interested in stuff and I can become quite knowledgeable. I don't like the fact that I get overwhelmed with a lot of stuff like noises and I struggle with talking to people and stuff like that.

The children and young people often mentioned three aspects that they felt affected their learning in different ways:

Noise and stimulation	The main reason I don't want to go to most of my lessons is because it's too chaotic. I don't want to go to any lesson if it's too loud. I do my work over here and it's just quiet. I can concentrate more over here, because in some lessons, I get very distracted. I get stressed with lots of people just talking in the room at the same time.
Smaller class size	It is much more better and much more calmer. And you get your work done quicker. When I was in the big class in maths, I used to always shout. I can concentrate.
Alternatives and Assistive Technologies	I can't read very fast and I can't spell. The only way I can get things in my brain really fast is to watch a movie. If I need to learn how to do it, I look on YouTube tutorials. I like learning online, because I don't have to think about how I'm standing or anything like that, or every little thing I'm doing with my body, I'm just talking. How does your smartwatch help you? It helps me walk, my steps and how many scores I made. And energy. When it goes to the moon, I go to bed, go to sleep. Next morning I wake up with the sun.

Exercise: Ask your CYP to answer these questions and leave short comments.

When you are learning best, who are you with?

Question	Tick	Comment
Are you on your own?		
Are you with another person? If so, who are they?		
Are you in a small group?		

When you are learning best, who is teaching you?

Question	Tick	Comment
Have they taught you before?		
Do they know about your SEND and how it affects you?		
Do you feel comfortable with them, enough to ask them to rezpeat something or explain something in a different way, even if everyone else seems to understand it?		

When you are learning best, where are you?

Question	Tick	Comment
A classroom with about 30 other students?		
A small group?		
In a classroom with lots of colours and displays?		
In a classroom with mostly white walls?		
Can you make decisions about the lighting by asking someone to make it darker or lighter?		
In a room where people are talking and there is lots of noise?		
A quiet room?		
Can you move around the room?		

Reflect on their answers and comments.

Share with your CYP about their answers and your reflections.

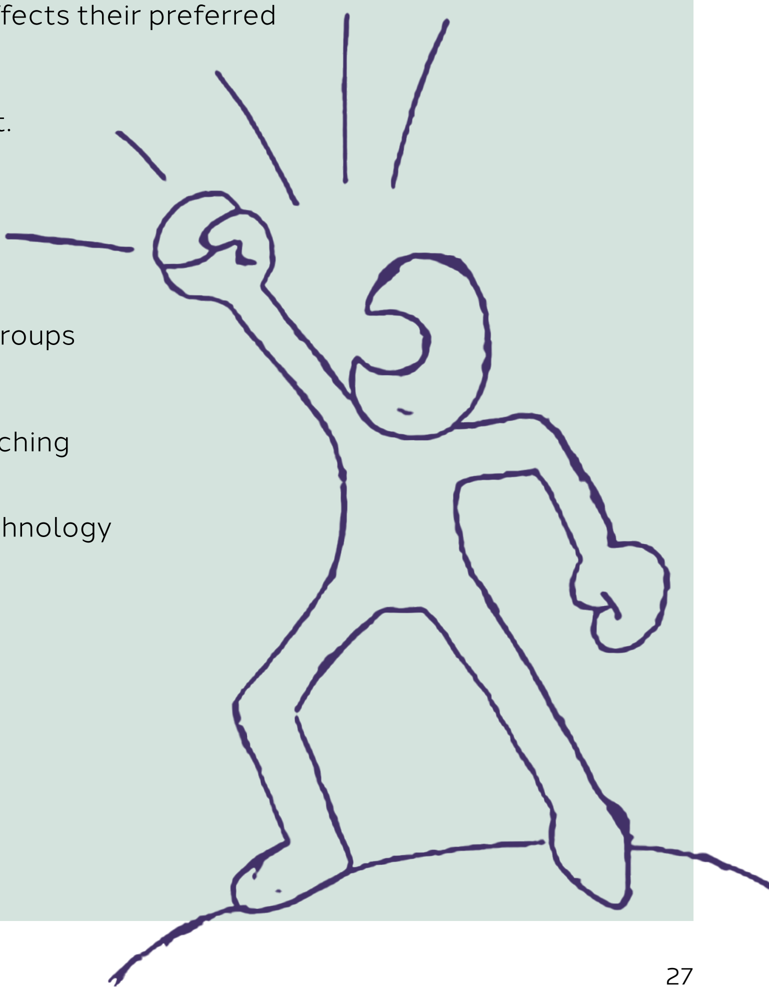
Reflect on your own practice, your classroom and your setting.

What changes could you and others make... ?

... To your classroom
... To other indoor space
... To outdoor spaces

Reminders for how to help CYP identified as having SEND learn best

- Make sure they feel safe - emotionally and physically.
- Understand how their SEND affects their preferred way of learning.
- Build relationships and rapport.
- Be aware of how noise and a busy classroom can overstimulate some of them.
- Consider teaching in smaller groups if possible
- Consider using alternative teaching methods, videos, online games and assistive technology where possible.



This section is summarised in Appendix 4 on page 40

05 FUTURES

The children and young people we interviewed shared with us about their futures. This was linked to the goals that were set in their EHCPs, their independence, their transitions to new year groups and settings, upcoming qualifications, their employment and their future lives more generally.

What do you currently do to support CYP identified as having SEND to prepare for their futures? After reading what the CYP said, reflect on how you might change and improve what you do.

Independence

Our interviewees valued support that helped them become more independent:

> I have been able to get the bus … which is a massive, massive step up for me … I needed a bit of support to get on the bus. Doing it without any adults being around is a huge, huge step for me, and I'm proud of that.

> I like using my powered wheelchair because I can go where I want.

They looked forward to being more independent of their support:

> It just helped me to grow a bit more. Just having that support there and then have it fade bit by bit. I could grow a bit more independent.

> There's going to be people around that I can talk to in case of an issue … I do appreciate the support … it's just me personally wanting to become a lot more independent for myself.

Some already felt able to do things that they were currently being supported for:

> They help me to sit up which I don't need help with. I say 'Can you not help me to sit up? I can do it without you.' They said — no I can't.

> Sometimes, I can feel a bit angry, because there are certain aspects which I think 'I am capable of doing this on my own.'

Support was sometimes linked to smooth transitions – between classes, year groups, schools and other settings:

> You've got to make your own way there, but [the teachers are] still there holding your hand.

> Knowing that support is there is more reassuring than me getting through that period independently.

Push the students more to become more independent … so that they leave school feeling they can do things independently.

(CYP identified as having SEND)

Employment and Independent Living

A desire to seek employment was often associated with the drive to be independent. CYP discussed wanting to be a:

> mechanic, nanotechnologist, animator, drummer, actor, film director, paranormal investigator, footballer, gamer, an occupational therapist and a variety of other job roles.

However, while ambitions were high, the evidence shows that the opportunities to explore a range of career paths is less available to CYP identified as having SEND.

Others envisioned a future where their support wasn't needed, either because they wanted to become independent of it or because they felt it was irrelevant to their career plans:

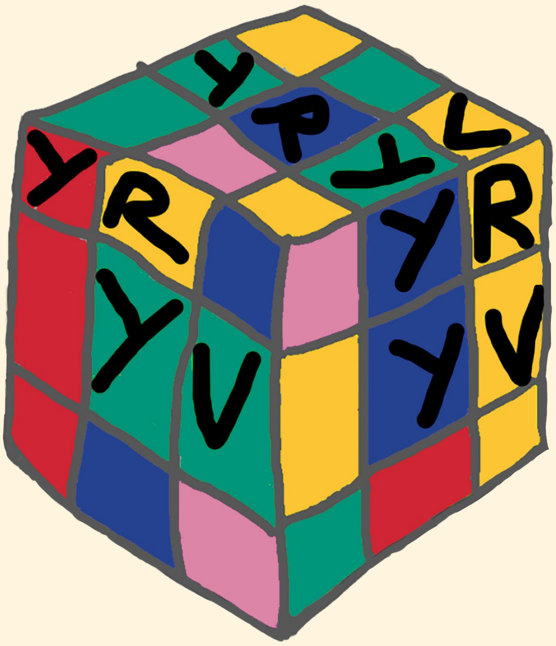
> Do you think you'll need help in the future?
>
> No, I think I'll settle down a bit.
>
> I can do most of the work in class on my own ... To get into the Army you don't need any GCSEs, just a couple of fitness tests.

Some were more realistic about their support needs in the future:

> I am hoping for a full-time job and to live independently in my own flat and not worry about the financial side and having a bit of support as well.
>
> What is important is that I know that that support is still there even if it does get a bit bumpy in the road.

One student doing a catering work placement was asked if their support was helping them get a job in catering. They replied:

> I want to be doing something else ... in a hotel.



We were told about the low expectations that young people identified as having SEND encounter:

> A guy came in from the council and the first thing he said was about what benefits we get. Great! He didn't know about Access to Work.

This speaks to the disability employment gap and demonstrates the amount of effort still required to secure and maintain equitable access and outcomes for young people with SEND in the workplace.

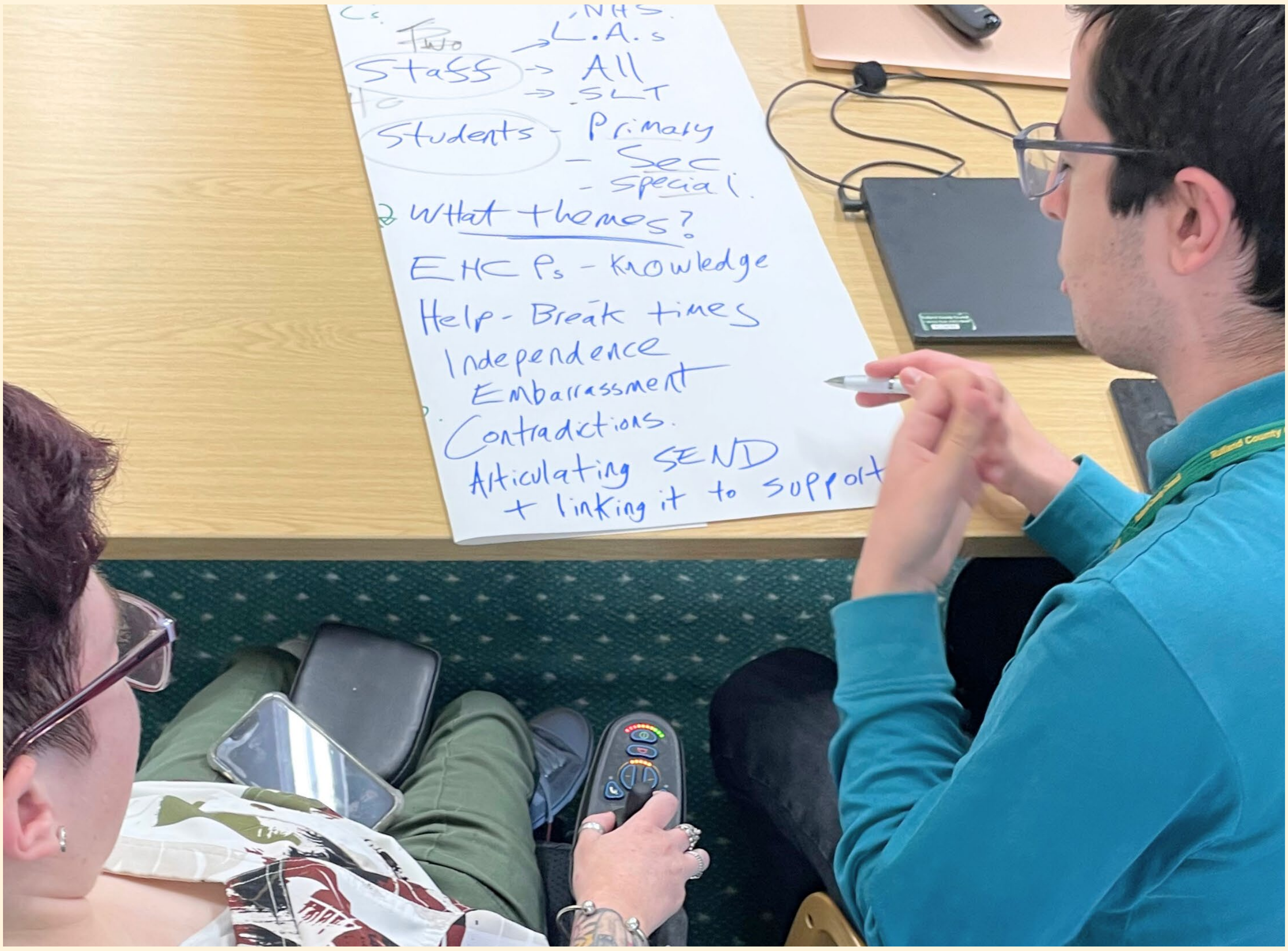
Government papers and strategies in this area such as Transforming Support, Shaping Future Support and Improving Lives overwhelmingly focus on disabled adults rather than the children and young people in our study. The few exceptions include The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, Supported Internships and the related Access to Work adjustment passports.

Some of the quotations in this and other sections come from the Supported Interns we have interviewed.

Questions about futures

- Could any of the information and recommendations in the government publications above be useful for your work with children and young people? (How) could they be **adapted**?
- How can you and your colleagues begin to **address the low expectations** around CYP identified as having SEND?
- How could you develop your CYP's levels of **independence**?
- How could you improve what you do to support CYP, from primary age upwards, in some of the other future-related aspects that we were told about: **personal growth, setting goals, public transport, choosing qualifications, moving to other settings, money, employability, careers advice and work experience?**

This section is summarised in Appendix 5 on page 41



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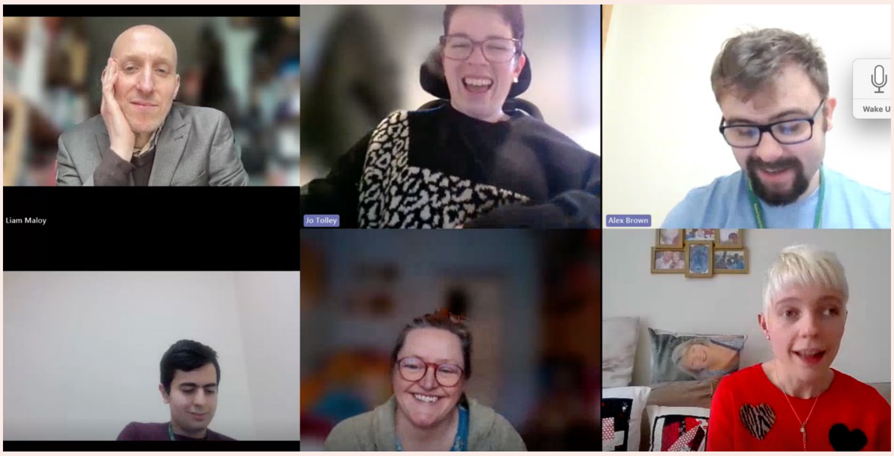
Thomson, P. and Maloy, L. 2022. The benefits of Art and Design Education in Schools: A Rapid Evidence Review. NSEAD (National Society for Education in Art and Design).

See also the hyperlinked references within the text.



Our video resources

The project and findings: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFI7I4_B794&t=19s

Meet the Young Researchers: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F38ev7RU-jRY&t=7s

Self-advocacy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ftKJ1sR3Ks&t=38s

Jo explains the project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFI7I4_B794&t=19s

Appendix 1: 'Silence' around SEND

Summary

- Some CYP felt anxious and embarrassed about their SEND and their support
- Some seemed to lack the words to describe their SEND.
- Some told us that they had never been asked about their SEND or their support in the ways that our project allowed.
- Some of them did not seem to connect the support they received with their EHCP.
- Others were deliberately not asking for support.
- Some wanted their SEND and their support plan to be kept private.
- Some were not able to advocate for themselves in asking for the appropriate support.

Agency means making choices, changes and decisions, setting goals, taking ownership and having control.

Voice means CYP getting involved in decisions that affect themselves and other disabled people, analysing their support, being critical about it and advocating for change.

Identity is linked to self-awareness and self-acceptance, to belonging and participation, and is formed in social groups. Not all of your CYP's identities will be framed around their disability. They will have intersectional identities that include their gender, race, age and social status.

Appendix 1

Questions for SEND practitioners

Some CYP did not always associate with their disability and/or their support. Why was this?

- Why could they not voice their disability?
- Were they uncomfortable or unconfident?
- Did they not have the words, language or ideas to communicate about their disability?
- Was their disability a taboo in all areas of their lives or just some?
- Were they not being asked the right questions?
- Were they deciding not to share their views and experiences?
- If so, why was this?
- Who were they not sharing these things with?
- Was anyone communicating about their disability for them? If so, who and why?

Questions to ask CYP identified as having SEND

Here are some of the questions that we asked CYP in our interviews. They may be helpful to you. Ask the questions to the CYP that you support. What do you think they will say? What did they actually say? How do their answers help you to start addressing the silence around SEND?

- How do you feel about your SEND/condition/disability/neurodiversity (pick the term you use in your setting)?
- Do you think the EHCP and the meetings change anything about your support?
- What to you is the most important thing about your support?
- If you didn't have the support that you get now, what would change?
- Can you make choices about your support?
- What are the EHCP meetings like?
- What changes to your support would you like to see?
- Do you know what your EHCP says?
- How do feel about what it says?

Appendix 1

Recommendations

Support CYP identified as having SEND to help them:

- be confident to engage in conversations about their SEND
- take ownership of their SEND
- get the right support when they need it
- advocate for themselves and others
- Be an ally for CYP labelled as SEND

Take steps to address the silence around SEND, support and disability more broadly.

Appendix 2: EHCPs

Summary

- Many of the CYP we met had good experiences of the EHCP.
- Some did not know what was in it
- Some CYP did not want to participate in the EHCP process.
- Some said that they valued teachers, other professional and family in the process.
- Others said that the number of voices in the room, each with their own agendas, can unintentionally override the voice of the CYP.
- They talked about access and participation.
- They often said that they felt unable to participate fully in the meetings.
- Others were not being asked to participate in the EHCP process.

Questions for SEND practitioners

- How could you balance any changes with the consistency of support?
- How could you make the EHCP more accessible? Is it possible to create a version that is accessible to them as individuals? Could they be involved?
- Can the CYP access the meetings and participate fully? How could you improve their participation?
- Who are the EHCP and the meetings really for? How can these be managed so that the CYP is at the centre of the process?
- How could you make sure that the child is expressing their own views?
- Could you try referring to it as the Education Health and Care and People Plan?
- How could you make the EHCP less challenging for parents?

- How could you work with your senior leaders and others both inside and outside of your setting to reduce the stress and anxiety of all involved?
- Could CYP submit their views on video?
- Could the EHCP work as an app?

Recommendations

- Make sure that CYP know that they have an EHCP.
- … and that they know what is in it.
- Make the EHCP more accessible. Ask each CYP what this might mean for them.
- Try to make the process feel less pressured for CYP, parents, others and yourself.
- Ensure that EHCP outcomes are timely to the CYP’s needs.
- Consider updating the EHCP more often, especially when the CYP’s needs are changing fast.
- Consider using alternative ways (apps, video) of including the CYP.
- Advocate for a joined-up support process that recognises that some conditions are lifelong and extend beyond the age of 25.

Appendix 3: Belonging

Summary

- Belonging is linked to participation, inclusion, feeling safe, fitting in, access, relationships, rapport, trust, friends, acceptance by others, people, and respect.
- Many CYP participated in school activities and the EHCP process and valued the support they received to do so.
- Others CYP were not participating both in and out of the classroom.
- The CYP's SEND seemed to play a part in whether they were able to participate, felt able to ask to participate, or were asked to participate.
- Not being able to participate in friendship groups and in class activities was sometimes linked directly to their support.
- Not feeling safe at school affects learning, progress, grades and other aspects.
- Relationships and rapport with support staff are particularly important for CYP.

Questions for SEND practitioners

Participation

- What do you do to support all CYP to participate in lessons and learning?
- What else could be done in your setting to ensure all CYP have the opportunity to participate?
- What support do staff in your setting need to be able to support Identified as having SEND to understand and communicate their needs?

Feeling safe

- What makes you feel safe in your job role?
- Are there any places or situations that make you feel unsafe?

- Is this the same for your colleagues? Ask them.
- What do you do to help your colleagues feel safe?
- What does your organisation do to help you and your colleagues feel safe?
- What do you do to help CYP feel safe?
- What more could you, your colleagues and your organisation do?
- How could you support CYP to feel safer, more secure and less vulnerable as they move from year to year, school to school, and between spaces, including the playground?

Recommendations to help CYP feel they belong

- Foster an environment where CYP feel able to ask to participate.
- Build relationships and rapport around SEND so that staff understand why CYP may feel unable to participate, or unable to ask to participate.
- Foster an environment where CYP are asked to participate - by staff and other students.
- Make changes to learning activities in the classroom and to classrooms and other spaces. Ask CYP for their ideas.
- Think about changes to help CYP participate in activities outside the classroom.
- Give CYP the opportunity to learn how to critically evaluate their support so that they can actively participate and make informed choices.
- Support staff and students to understand more about disability and the issues faced by CYP identified as having SEND.

Appendix 4: Learning

Summary

Many CYP value the support they got for their learning.

Many CYP know what type of support or way of teaching works best for them.

The three main aspects that CYP felt affected their learning are:

- Smaller class size (positively)
- Alternatives and Assistive Technologies (positively)
- Noise and stimulation (negatively)

The exercise on page 25-26 is designed to help CYP reflect on how they learn best.

Recommendations for how to help CYP learn best

- Make sure they feel safe - emotionally and physically.
- Understand how their SEND affects their preferred way of learning.
- Build relationships and rapport with them.
- Be aware of how noise and a busy classroom can overstimulate some of them.
- Consider teaching them in smaller groups if possible.
- Consider using alternative teaching methods, videos, online games and assistive technology where possible.

Appendix 5: Futures

Summary

- ‘Futures’ includes goals set in EHCPs, independence, transitions to new year groups and settings, qualifications, employment and future lives more generally.
- CYP value support that helps them become more independent.
- They look forward to being more independent of their support.
- Some can already do things that they are currently being supported for.
- A desire to seek employment was often associated with the drive to be independent.
- Some CYP envision a future where their support is not needed. Sometime this was unrealistic.
- Some were in work placements but would rather being doing another job.

Questions

- Could any of the information and recommendations in the government publications on page 30 be useful to you?
- (How) could you adapt them?
- How can you and your colleagues begin to address the low expectations around CYP identified as having SEND?
- How could you develop your CYP’s levels of independence?
- How could you improve what you do to support CYP from primary age upwards in some of the other future-related things that we were told about: personal growth, setting goals, public transport, choosing qualifications, moving to other settings, money, employability, careers advice and work experience?

Recommendations

- Start discussions around transitions and next steps early.
- Make sure there is time and support to explore all options for employment and next steps.
- Support children and young people so that they have the best chance of achieving their independence in different areas of their lives.
- Ensure their goals are both ambitious and realistic.

Appendix 6: Settings Visited

Setting	Location
Leicester College	Leicester
Bemrose School	Derby
Dorothy Goodman	Hinckley
Moulton School	Northampton
Westbrook Vale School	Loughborough
Lincolnshire Young Voices	Lincoln
Hugglescote Primary	Coalville
Uppingham Community College	Uppingham
St Francis School	Lincoln
Old Basford School	Nottingham
St Martin's School	Derby
Royal Derby Hospital	Derby
Choices College	Lincoln
Kingsmead	Derby

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> **WE NEED A WILLINGNESS TO TALK TO EACH OTHER, TO SEE EACH OTHER ... AND EDUCATION**
>
> **Emma Cross, Young Researcher**