

**“What do I need? I need people to notice all the things I can do...”**



**Responding to the SEND Green Paper: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time**

**Children and Young People's thoughts, wishes and feelings**

**July 2022**

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### **Our Voice is the Children and Young People's Participation Programme for Kirklees.**

We work with anyone aged 4-19 (or 25 if you experience Special Educational Needs and or disabilities, are a young person leaving care or a young parent), who lives, works, or attends school or college in Kirklees.

We aim to involve young people in local decision making.

We support children and young people to communicate their thoughts, wishes and feelings to the Senior Managers in our Council, Elected Members, Partner Agencies and to the 'Buyers' (Commissioners) of our services. In this engagement, these messages are to share nationally, with the Government. Our ethos is that young people are experts in their own lives. By sharing their knowledge and experiences, we can listen and adapt what we offer to meet their needs, promote inclusion, and create a climate for co-production.

We do this because we are a restorative service. We believe we should 'work with young people, rather than doing to them'. We value young people's contributions, and our work is underpinned by Article 12 of the UNRC-That children have the right to express their thoughts, wishes and feelings and for these to be taken seriously. We know that by involving children and young people in decision making, it helps them develop skills, feel included and ensures our services can be designed to meet need.

## A summary participation

Kirklees Council has several approaches to engaging with young people who experience Special Educational Needs and or Disability (SEND). Our Voice: Kirklees Children and Young People's Participation Programme, works by building relationships with young people, in their chosen environments, using games and activities which make conversations, accessible, meaningful, and enjoyable. The young people who we have developed relationships with as part of this network have participated in this response.

Overall, 74 children and young people have contributed to this response. Their ages ranged from 8 to 22.

42 of the young people who responded, shared that they have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The remaining young people receive SEN support. Some young people who receive SEN support may also have an EHCP but chose not to volunteer this information.

A summary of those who gave their time and participated:

- 11 young people who attend two specialist provisions (one in North and one in South Kirklees). The young people all have their own strengths and abilities and receive support with lots of differing things. This ranges from adaptations for visual, hearing, and physical impairments. Some of the group have complex and layered needs, they use communication methods like signing or pictures. The members of staff who work alongside the young people know them very well and can advocate meaningfully in partnership with the young people.
- 16 young people who attend two alternate provisions. The young people here talk about struggling with anxiety, depression, managing their emotions and being confident. They also have a flexible and condensed curriculum, tailored to their needs.
- 15 young people from two funded participation groups, which provide a short break for those who attend. The young people here experience various SEND, from mobility needs to learning difficulties. There are also young people who are neurodiverse.
- 9 young people from a post 16 college provision, which supports young people with significant barriers to learning. The group talk openly about challenges regarding their Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Some of this group did not complete their secondary education through absence/non-attendance, attended alternate provision and have come to the course from 'not in education, employment, or training' (NEET) pathways.
- 23 young people from two, college entry level and foundation skills further education courses. The young people here have support for physical, hearing, and visual impairments, learning difficulties and neurodiversity.

## What methods and approaches did we use?

For young people who felt able and confident to communicate their views verbally, we held discussions around the key questions in the [green paper](#). These were:

1. Who should be involved in making decisions about help for children and young people with additional needs?
2. What are the most important parts of your EHCP?
3. When an EHCP is being written the person who the plan is for, should receive a list of the schools/college/provisions they could access. What do you think the people preparing the list of schools should think about when they put it together?
4. What kinds of support are most important for you, to help you prepare for adulthood?
5. What might help you take part in an apprenticeship?
6. If you attended Alternate Provision, please tell us what might have helped you stay in school, instead.

Not all questions were relevant to all young people. Most young people struggled with question 3, despite many attempts to phrase it in understandable language or break it down. This is because they were already attending an alternate or specialist provision, and so 'looking back' at when their EHCP was created, which in some cases, could have been years before our discussion, was difficult.

It should also be noted that for young people who experience more complex disabilities and have alternate communication methods, the questions had to be reduced and adapted. They were simplified and refined to make engagement and participation possible.

Some groups used iPads to participate via quiz apps, another group contributed through play, by adapting the questions into a physical game. A bespoke arts-based activity was run between the staff in one of the specialist provisions and the Our Voice team. This enabled children who use alternate methods to verbal communication to be included. This session featured the communication symbols the young people use, day to day in their school and home lives. By co-working with staff who know the young people, signing could be facilitated. These key members of staff understand the young people; the verbalisations and behaviours specific to those participating and could support communication. This meant meaningful advocacy could occur. For this, we are grateful.

The information from all the young people has been presented together, but the age and type of provision is indicated alongside the key messages. All responses have been anonymised to protect the identity of the young people and provisions who participated.

## What did we hear: Who should be involved in making decisions about help for children and young people with additional needs?

*“Me. I deserve to the right to put my views up” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

*“The people I live with. I trust them and also official people who give me advice. I should still be able to say no, though, when I don’t agree” (Young person 15-Alternate Provision)*

*“To make decisions, I need to understand what I’m being asked” (child aged 8-Participation Group)*

*“Me. I’m studying not them. I should decide what I’m doing” (Young Person 16-Foundation Skills)*

Across all groups, where children and young people were able to verbally share their views, it was evident that first and foremost young people should not only be involved, in decisions about their lives, but also be ‘truly listened to’.

There was an acknowledgement that adults with specialist knowledge should be available to advise. Moreover, that any information should be made accessible and understandable, using an approach which was simple and engaging. Young people spoke about having trusted people who could provide a ‘space’ for listening to their ideas, worries or preferences, whilst they ‘worked through’ decisions. This raised discussions around advocacy. Those participating were able to see a value in an independent person and were generally unaware of what an advocate does or how they may be able to source this support in decision making. This highlighted a possible gap in service. As some children and young people will be eligible for independent advocacy in their lives and care, it may be beneficial to understand this concept earlier in their ‘journey’s’.

Some young people felt their voices carried equal weight to the others around them. They were able to challenge injustice or things they did not agree with...

*“You have to speak out and say, ‘No’ I don’t think that’s right” (Young Person 14-Specialist Provision)*

However, some young people spoke openly about significant challenges to doing this.

*“I know they want best for me [parents], but we don’t always agree. Sometimes I want to be able to say what matters to me. What I really would like and what I think; and for this to mean as much as all the others around me” (Young Person 17, Foundation Skills)*

The young people who participated, who experience complex communication, learning and health needs, were able to share ‘Who helps me?’ and ‘What do they help me with?’. An image of their trusted ‘supports’ who help with day-to-day living can be seen on the following page. Parent(s) or family members were the most referenced helpers. They would assist with traveling places like the park, the pool, or shops. The ‘Doctor’ was the preference for help, when at the hospital or medical appointments.

This indicates that the family network is key for supporting the young people. Ensuring they receive holistic support, would increase the likelihood of the young people’s needs being met. School and health featured heavily in their answers too. Again, suggesting all these people and services are important in these young people’s lives.

# Who helps me? What do they help me with?



## The experiences of children with complex needs

**Young person's life in window 1:**

**My family helps me at home. The Doctor helps me at the hospital.**

**Young person's life in window 2:**

**My Mum helps me at home and to go to the shops, supermarket, park, and pool.**

**Young person's life in window 3:**

**My family all help me at home. When I go to the shops, it's my Mum. At the hospital, it is the Doctor.**

**Young person's life in window 4:**

**My Dad helps me with things at home (like tying my shoes and getting dressed). He also helps me go places like the cinema and park. Signing helps me communicate with others. I'm helped by my teacher at school, and I also go to the hospital.**

**Young person's life in window 5:**

**At home, my family help me, especially my sister. They care for me and help me go to places like the park. The bus driver helps me get to school by bus and my teachers help me at school. I like the pool. Wheelchair services help me too.**

\*This is a graphic to illustrate the 'windows' created by the young people in the session. The symbols used in the session are subject to copyright. Therefore, actual pictures of the artworks created, could not be printed in this response.

**What did we hear: When an EHCP is being written the person who the plan is for, should receive a list which offers details of all the schools or places that they could go to learn? What do you think those preparing the list of schools should think about when putting it together?**

*“Sometimes it’s good to have choices, rather than being told what to do, knowing the options to choose from, works better” (child aged 10- Participation Group)*

Question 1 identified that, overall, young people wanted to be involved in the decisions about their lives and learning. However, for most young people, this question was too abstract to answer. Those participating were already at a provision which they felt was meeting their needs. Asking them to ‘look back’ or think beyond their current experience was a challenging task. Therefore, a solution to understanding whether this proposal is helpful to children and families, would be to pilot the concept of offering the list children and families, in a number of localities/areas. The children and young people would then have a tangible experience to contextualise the question.

*“I didn’t get a choice to come here. I was told this is the place I could move to. I didn’t mind though because I knew most of the people here and I knew the class sizes were smaller” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

We did discuss what might ‘sway’ a young person’s choice of their education provision. Is the ‘offer’-the setting and teaching key, being with friends, both or something different?

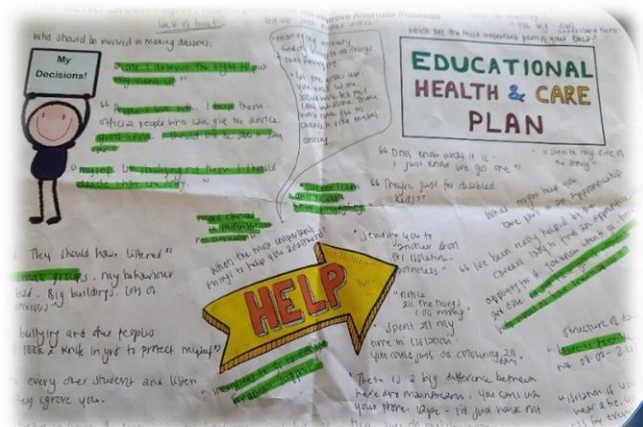
*“I think being able to go the same places as your friends is important, but I’d moved schools 3 times before I came here. When I got here, I knew half of the people here anyway. Some I’ve met in the other schools, some in foster care placements” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

*“Is it the right place for me? I know this is the right place for me because I can cope here. The classes are small, I’m in for half days and I don’t have to do all the exams I was expected to before” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

Young people’s wishes around this varied. Therefore, knowing young people and having a good relationship would enable adults around them to understand what they

The things young people did think were important about their provisions:

- Distance from home and ‘how they get there’
- That the staff understood their needs and could communicate
- That their timetable, curriculum, and class sizes were all adapted to their needs
- That medical support, where necessary, was available onsite.



## What did we hear: What are the most important parts of your EHCP?

*“What’s my EHCP?” (Young Person 15-Alternate Provision)*

*“I don’t understand my EHCP at all. Not even in the meeting” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

*“I’ve no idea what it is, I just know I’ve got one [laughs]” (young person 14-Specialist Provision)*

*“The adults use it to help me. I don’t really get it” (Young Person 14-Specialist Provision).*

38 of the 42 young people who had an EHCP, that we spoke with, did not know their EHCP by this name. They could reflect that professional people and their family or carers may have spoken about it, but they had not been able to understand the document or its purpose. The most basic definition, shared between the 4 young people who felt able to explain their EHCP was *“it’s a plan about how people help me”* (Young Person 15, specialist Provision).

There was stigma attached to an EHCP in some conversations, where young people felt the process was embarrassing or made them feel ‘different’. Young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs, also often saw the EHCP as *“Being something just for disabled kids”* (Young Person 14-Alternate Provision). Some young people who had an EHCP for learning based needs and SEMH were surprised they had a plan, when discussions reaffirmed this.

For young people who felt they had been able to communicate their thoughts, wishes and feelings in ‘Section A’ of the EHCP, this was because provisions had structures in place to work together on this. Usually this involved sitting independently and doing some focussed work, prior to the review meeting. Young people struggled to participate in their reviews due to the complexity/length of the written document and the formal nature of the meeting. They acknowledged that different approaches had been tried to make the EHCP more accessible.

*“I meet with my key worker before the meeting, and we talk about things. They go to the meeting with that” (Young person 14-Specialist Provision)*

A re-occurring theme discussed in this engagement, was those processes and praxis to involve children and young people in their plans, should be more engaging. Some young people discussed ‘apps’ or online approaches being preferential. They felt creative arts or tech approaches might also help.

‘Reflecting’ was observed to cause challenges for some young people, as time and recall were difficult concepts. Therefore, some young people discussed the idea of being able to ‘log’ on going challenges and achievements, in a ‘live’ manner as being useful.

*“It’s too big (long and complex) I just don’t understand them” (Young Person 15-Specialist Provision).*

Young people’s ideas for change: *“Consider an app or interactive way for us to record our achievements and challenges in ‘real time’. This should be simple and quick-but would then help reflect on and identify our support needs when it comes to our EHCP and other interventions”.*



## What did we hear: What kinds of support are most important for you, to help you prepare for adulthood?

*“I’d really like to be a sports coach” (Young Person 19-Foundation Skills)*

*“I want to work in a shop” (Young Person 19-Foundation Skills)*

The desire to move into employment was a strong and repeated theme in the young people who are from key stage 4, or who are aged 16+ and who participated in this response. Therefore, good quality, early careers advice became a topic of discussion. Most young people had an ‘idea’ of their aspirations. However, they did not always feel they knew how to move that idea, into a workable ‘plan’. This led to conversations around careers advice.

*“I don’t care what job I get, when I leave for college. I just want to earn money” (Young Person 15-Specialist Provision)*

The young people who participated and had been able to spend time with a career’s advisor were happy with the support they had received and had found this useful. Some younger teens spoke about being able to have this support sooner and ‘keep checking in,’ to be able to keep their plan ‘live’ and adapt to changes.

*“I think I want to be a dog walker” (Young Person-18 Entry Level)*

There was a strong sense of entrepreneurial spirit within the young people who took part. Some young people were aware how specific volunteering or work, would complement their strengths and abilities. Helping these young people with work-based skills or mentoring was seen as important. They felt they may be more ready to then think about reaching their career goals...

*“I built my own system (PC) and really want to do that all the time. I could do that from home. I don’t really know how to do the business bit of it though”. (Young Person 18-Foundation Skills)*

Alongside a desire for volunteering, mentoring and careers opportunities, there were also notable ‘challenges’ to the transition to adulthood.

*“I struggle to get anywhere unless it’s my college transport or my Mum’s day off” (Young person 16-Foundation Skills)*

*“Managing my anxiety. I need to find ways to do the things that worry me” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

*“Let me grow up. People just won’t let me. Social Workers and the adults around me tell me I can’t live alone, but they won’t even give me a chance to prove myself” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

**Young people’s suggestions for change: “The curriculum which prepares us for adulthood, needs to be ‘broader’ than ‘Maths, English and Science’”**

Young people suggested learning some things earlier in their lives too and that these lessons were ‘ongoing’. This includes how to assess and manage risks, how to safely travel alone or with friends, understanding feelings and managing mental health challenges. There was also discussion about preparing to live alone. Including cooking, cleaning, budgeting, staying safe and how to not become lonely. Some young people had partners or want a family too. Therefore, relationship (and sex) education was also raised by young people aged 13 onwards. Those year 9 and above, discussed identity (concepts of gender and sexuality), racism and homophobia.

## What did we hear: What might help you take part in an apprenticeship?

*“I worry about getting the grades I need. I didn’t come to this school [AP] until a few months ago. I am behind and don’t know if I will pass my exams” (Young Person 16-Post 16 Provision)*

*“Grades, I’m really worried about passing my exams” (Young person 15-Alternate Provision)*

Some of the young people we spoke with in alternate provision, were very anxious about being able to access their ‘next steps’ because of the GCSE Maths and English entry requirements. They had experienced gaps in their education and for some, frequent changes to their home and school lives. This meant they already felt they had ‘lots to catch up in school’, all whilst trying to address other significant life experiences.

The young people felt the current emphasis on passing exams could make focussing on their aspirations and longer-term goals very challenging. Therefore, they suggested finding alternate ways to develop their numeracy and literacy skills in the context of things which they excelled at, or were interested in.

**Young people’s ideas for change: “Look at alternate ways to assess our literacy and numeracy, that are in the context of the apprenticeship we are applying for”**

*“I’m worried about interviews. I don’t always know how to answer, what should I say?” (Young Person 17-Post 16 Provision).*

Preparing for interviews was discussed. Young people expressed concerns about a frequent lack of adaptations by some employers, and a need to consider how processes can include reasonable adjustments. Some young people suggested that offering the interview questions, in advance, with time to prepare and ask for clarity, would be a more enabling process.

*“Transport. I need support with getting to and from places. I find travelling on buses and trains quite frightening and I don’t feel safe” (Young person 16-Specialist Provision)*

Some young people spoke about the challenges of ‘getting to’ an apprenticeship. Others the ‘financial’ challenges.

*“I’d have left care and don’t really know if id be able to do it, unless financially they helped” (Young person 16-Specialist Provision)*

For those who had received careers advice, this was usually viewed as ‘quality’ and helpful in planning for an apprenticeship.

*“The careers person here has been amazing. They explained how I need to do my cv and visit some of the places offering apprenticeships. They helped me with knowing when to go-the time and date and they reminded me too. I really wouldn’t have got there, without them. I got to speak with the business owner and understand how they trained up and have worked onto owning their own business. I feel a lot clearer now on what I should do”. (Young person 16-Specialist Provision)*

**Young people’s ideas for change: “Support us earlier advice around post 16 options and ‘ongoing’ careers conversations. Look at mentoring, work experience and volunteering options alongside learning too.”**

**What did we hear: If you attended Alternate Provision, please tell us what might have helped you stay in school, instead?**

*“I should not have ever been anywhere else. This is the right place for me”.*

The young people we spoke with who attended Alternate Provision, could not see how they could have remained in a ‘mainstream’ setting. The main reasons for this were:

The whole ‘scale’ of mainstream provision, being overwhelming, with the days being too long and ‘inflexible’

*“It’s just too much, the rooms, the school, the classes. I just can’t cope. My anxiety is through the roof” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

The curriculum being too ‘big’ with pressure to study for and sit too many exams.

*“Here, I get to do more cooking, gardening and go to the gym. All the things I’m good at. The lessons I have are important, but there are less of them”. (Young Person 14-Alternate Provision)*

Relationships being poor with some staff members in previous schools and this escalating to the point the young person could not stay there.

*“The staff here are sick. They work with you when there is a problem. We have the time to work on changing things” (Young Person 14-Alternate Provision)*

Bullying and ‘social exclusion’ by their peers. There was a perception that ‘nothing had been done’ to address this in mainstream provision. Well structured, and clear pastoral support was suggested to alleviate this. There was also a feeling that ‘blame’ would always be apportioned to the young person who had been ‘in trouble more’.

*“I was bullied all the time. In school, outside and online. So, I took in a knife, and I was the one excluded” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

Punitive sanctions being used to address ‘non-compliance’ or unwanted behaviours, rather than working with the young person to understand the impact of their actions on others and workable ways to change this.

*“I have had three years wasted in education. I came here in year 10 and I had spent the past three years in school, sat in an isolation room. I used to walk around kicking doors and just not doing what I was told. I was angry, no one listened, and I was bored” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

*“I spent more time staring at an iso booth than learning anything. I just used to colour. Turn up, sit there, colour, sit there, eat your rubbish pack lunch in there. Repeat it all again the next day” (Young Person 16-Alternate Provision)*

*“My mental health was in a sh\*t state. I had massive issues at home, no one seemed to understand or really ask. I was just known for being dramatic. I’ve only just received the medication and help I need now, at 22” (Young Person 22-Post 16)*

Young people’s suggestions for change: “Work with us to understand our whole situation and then the right support can be offered at the right time. We might know the solutions-we need help to make these happen”.

## A summary of what young people shared

- All young people can and should be involved in making important decisions about their lives. The ways we help them do this are key. We all understand and communicate in a variety of ways. Adults around young people need to be afforded the time, training-if needed, and resources to help young people be able to communicate their thoughts, wishes and feelings for their EHCP.
- A simple shared explanation of what an EHCP is, would help young people understand it. It is hard for them to comment on what the important parts are, when they don't really understand the plan. Broader discussions or activities around "what is important in your life" or "What would you like to do when you aren't in school", may assist this. Having multiple ways to explore and record the EHCP would also allow the use of creative, IT or advocacy methods.
- Making the EHCP a 'live' process for young people, would help them identify challenges and strengths in 'real time' and log information for 'reflection'.
- Preparing for adulthood is broader than focussing on key exams. Being emotionally well and resilient, developing problem solving and entrepreneurial skills, having the confidence or ability to travel, being financially aware and understanding how to maintain friendships and safe relationships are all key things young people wanted to know. This sometimes meant looking further ahead and longer term. Balancing how this could be done, in a manageable way, was acknowledged as difficult, but crucial to the young people involved.
- In terms of apprenticeships and employment, early and accessible careers advice was seen as useful. Employers and recruiters need support to adapt processes to meet the needs of young people who experience SEND. Young people suggested apprenticeships and training having skills focussed entry requirements, different approaches to interviews and for adults to consider how apprenticeships/ traineeships can be financially viable. Transport should also be 'part of the package' for some young people.
- Young people who had experience of alternate provision, struggled to see how they could remain in 'school' unless there were radical changes to:

**Buildings.** These being inclusive in design, with break out, outdoor learning and quiet spaces. There was a desire for vocational skill-based areas and facilities.

**Curriculum** being condensed, refined, and tailored to individual need.

**Flexibility** in timetables and approaches to assessments.

**'Rules'** and expectations being manageable and achievable. Supporting young people with a key worker and using lots of energy to work on behaviours, may mean doing other things at the same time is very hard. How do we prioritise what's key and build skills?

**Relationships-** student-teacher-peer relationships being balanced/cohesive.

**'Holistic support'** is crucial for life challenges. This is as important as academic achievements. Being a young carer, having care experience, frequent moves of home, mental health challenges or health difficulties are all impactful. How do we balance these needs with learning?

## Thanks for reading: Here are a few important things to consider

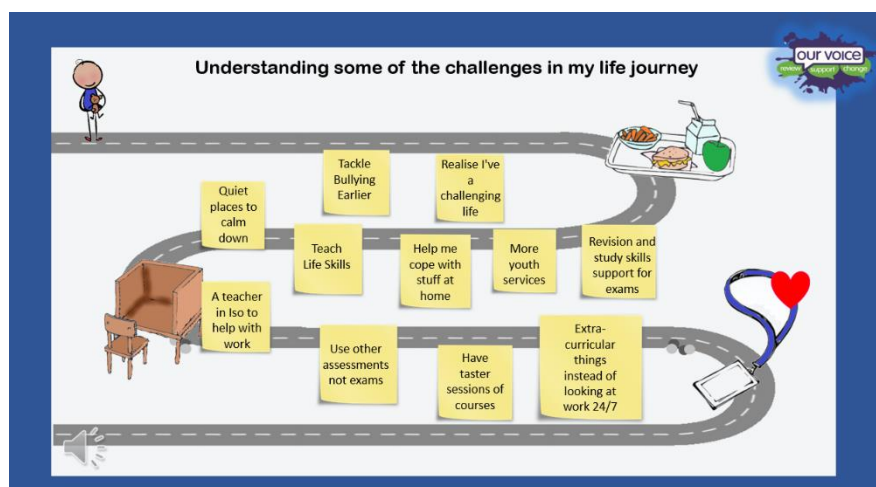
Young people volunteer their time to be part of the Our Voice Programme.

They are helping adults and decision makers, by sharing their lived experiences.

If you read this report, feel inspired, learn anything new or make changes to what you do as a result-please let us know. You can email [ourvoice@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:ourvoice@kirklees.gov.uk) or our contact details on the back of this report.

**ANYTHING** you kindly feed back to us, will be passed back to the young people who have contributed. It reassures young people we are listening and means they are more likely to help again, in future.

Thank you.



*A presentation prepared by young people who experience SEND/SEMh for our Children & Young People's Partnership Meeting*

We aim to be as transparent as possible, in the information we present. We ask broad questions and listen; we respond to what the young people say.

We do not pose research questions, or statistically sample. Therefore, we do not consider this summary to be representative of all Kirklees children and young people. However, it is a very valuable collection of lived experience, thoughts, wishes and feelings.

It should be noted that the young people in Alternate Provisions, often have a very direct and clear 'voice'. Therefore, we have tried to balance this with the voices of young people who experience SEND, from other provisions, in this report.

This information has also been gathered from young people, who are in majority, aged 11+. As an extension to this piece of work, it would be prudent to look at these questions with children from our primary provisions, as their experiences may differ. This way, we are likely to better understand the lives of children and young people who experience SEND.



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