



# Lambeth SEND and Inclusion Strategy

*A report on children and young people's views*

## Executive Summary

Healthwatch Lambeth engaged with children and young people aiming to hear their views on the Lambeth Council's SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Sixty (60) children and young people aged 14 to 25 took part in individual and group interviews and online survey.

The respondents commented on two priorities of the Strategy - preparation for adulthood and/or independence and children and young people participation. Some key findings include the value children and young people put on education, access to information and support, and provision of support to families. Whilst some good practices had been mentioned, it also became apparent that there are gaps in services to prepare young people for adulthood and/or independence including access to information and advice, lack of support to parents and families of SEND children, and limited opportunities for volunteering or work placements.

On children and young people's participation, all respondents agreed that their involvement is very important. They said that participation approaches should be appropriate to the different needs and interests of young people, creative, and inclusive. However, it has been found that only a few respondents have had the opportunity to express their views in the past.

Young people made some suggestions to help them achieve their full potential. They said that there should be better provision and support to families so that they can continue helping young people as they move to independence. Support could be by way of services and information. Equally, genuine participation of children and parents should be a priority where services and professionals would listen to their views so that services would be more responsive to the needs of all young people in Lambeth.

## Introduction

Healthwatch Lambeth (HWL) is an independent charity that acts as the voice for people in Lambeth. HWL conducts engagement activities and listens to people on their experience of health and social care. It works with service providers and commissioners so they can improve the services or address identified needs. HWL has three workstreams, namely: children and young people, mental health, and older people. HWL also hosts Black Thrive, a partnership on BAME mental health, Lambeth Learning Disability Assembly, and Advance Care Planning consortium. HWL works with Lambeth Together and is represented in all its alliances.

From July to December 2020, Healthwatch Lambeth facilitated a series of consultation activities with children and young people in Lambeth, aimed at determining their views on the proposed Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

(SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2020-23. The Strategy aims at fully inclusive education offer to all children whatever their circumstance or need so that they can achieve their full potential. We consulted on two of the seven priorities, namely: preparation for adulthood and/or independence and children and young people's participation.

This report presents the views of 60 young people who took part in the consultation, as follows: 5 individual interviews; 5 focus group discussions attended by 29 young people; and online survey to which 26 young people and/or parent/carer responded.

This report is in two parts. Part one is on the individual and group interviews and part two presents the data from the online survey.

## Methodology and Scope

Healthwatch Lambeth promoted the consultation through its website and social media pages and requested partner organisations in the voluntary sector and Lambeth Council to also promote it to their service users via their respective communication channels. A flyer and link to the online questionnaire have also been sent to partners.

Despite promoting the survey in various social media sites including Instagram and Twitter, there has been low take up of the online survey. This could be due to a number of reasons including 'consultation fatigue' resulting from various online questionnaires during the pandemic. It could also be because young people did not access the information or were simply not interested. Nevertheless, the rich data from the qualitative interviews could potentially inform the strategy to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Due to the pandemic, all individual interviews and most of the focus group discussions were done by video call apart from one focus group which was held in one college. Two young HWL volunteers co-facilitated 3 of the 5 FGDs with one HWL engagement officer.

**The questions asked during the interviews are the following:**

### *Questions on participation*

- How can we effectively engage CYP and families?  
Probe - ways/methods they have been engaged - e.g. forum, telephone, face to face meetings, surveys, digital/tech based, etc.
- What challenges do you think we may encounter in using those ways of engagement (specify which one to get specific answers and suggestions)

### *Questions on preparation for adulthood / independence*

- How are you being prepared for adulthood or independence?  
Probe - services you currently receive - e.g. employment, apprenticeship, college or university placement, living independently, training on building resilience, etc.
- If there are needs that are not being addressed, what do you think can be done? What support or services should be put in place?

## **Research ethics**

HWL adheres to Healthwatch England's Research Governance Framework which includes seeking informed consent and protecting the privacy of respondents. Parent/carers' consent was sought for young people who lack mental capacity. Young people who needed support due to their learning disability were accompanied by their support worker during the interview. All respondents were informed that their participation in the consultation is voluntary and that they could stop their participation at any stage of the process. The lead facilitator explained the purpose of the consultation and the main contents of the Strategy and encouraged them to ask questions before they give their consent. Respondents were told that they would receive update as to the outcome of the consultation in due course. To date, all participants had been sent notes from the interviews.

One staff member was also present in each of the group interview to ensure that young people would be supported in case they are emotionally affected. Respondents were also told that they could leave should they find the interview distressing. All interviews went well and the participants expressed that they enjoyed their participation.

The notes from the interviews were saved securely in HWL laptop accessible only to one staff member. No identifiable information about all respondents has been recorded or used in the report.

## **Part 1 - Findings from individual and group interviews**

This section discusses the data gathered through individual (N=5) and group (N=29) interviews.

### **Profile of participants**

Five young people who attended individual interviews have Learning Disability and were 19 to 21 years old. They were taking up courses in one college.

Of the 29 young people who attended the group discussion, six were looked after and care leavers, six were young carers and 17 were young people with English as a

second language and are between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. One of the six young carers has been diagnosed of learning disability and all six are caring for siblings with learning disabilities.

It can be noticed from the Table 1 below that there were more males than females. Also, the respondents reflect Lambeth diverse young people's population as shown in Table 2.

Participants	Sex/Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Looked after children and young people & care leavers	2	4	6
Young carers	1	5	6
YP with English as a second language	14	3	17
YP with Learning Disability	5	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>34</b>

**Table 1: Gender**

Young people participants	Ethnicity					Prefer not to say	Total
	Black Caribbean	Black African	Black Other	White Other	Mixed (African /White)		
LACYP & care leavers	4	2	0	0	0	0	6
Young carers	2	3	0	0	0	1	6
ESOL students	0	6	1	8	1	1	17
YP with LD	1	2	0	2	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>34</b>

**Table 2: Ethnicity**

## A. Views of young people on Preparation for adulthood and/or independence

### 1. What matters most to young people

Young people value education and access to information and support on education, mental health, and housing. They also said that family support is important.

#### 1.1 Value of education - both formal and informal

Young people said that it is important to be supported on their education because education will make life easier for them. Education prepares them to deal with everyday tasks - e.g. practical things like finding locations and knowing which bus to take, using Math in everything like buying goods from the shop, etc.

In addition to formal education, they value getting life skills which include managing money, being responsible with time, and preparing them to take responsibilities as they become adults.

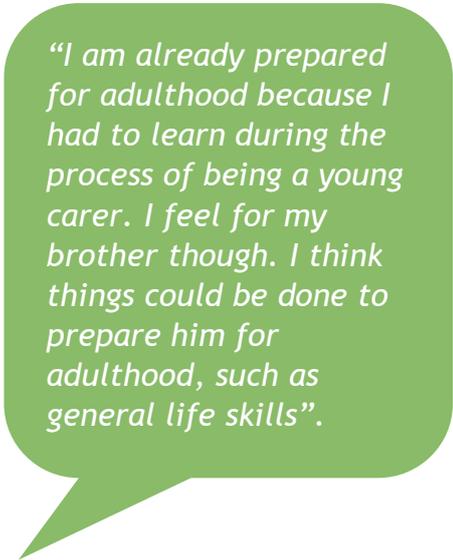
Young carers also presented the issues faced by the young people they care for and said that those with learning disability and autism should also be supported in gaining skills such as taking public transport, shopping, etc. so they will become independent.

#### 1.2 Mental health support

Almost all young people whose first language is not English commented that they are not aware of mental health support. They all agreed that they should be supported in maintaining health and wellbeing and if they have concerns and should be able to access confidential support, such as psychological support and other mental health support.

#### 1.3 Access to information and support

Some care leavers and young people whose first language is not English said they had issues with housing but could not access the information they needed to make informed decisions. They received some support but they were not timely. It was suggested to strengthen the provision of information and having a support assistant or adviser who can guide young people in making informed decisions not only on housing options but other things like welfare and benefits, the UK education system, and other services that they can access.



*“I am already prepared for adulthood because I had to learn during the process of being a young carer. I feel for my brother though. I think things could be done to prepare him for adulthood, such as general life skills”.*

One young person shared her difficulty she faced when she moved to her new flat.

*“It would be good to get support, for someone to check on me that everything was ok with managing bills, balances, etc. I was fortunate to have a sister who guided me. Without her, I would have not known what to do”.*

There was an appreciation that some services are already available but that they need to improve. For example, one young person said:

*“I think that the focus should be on improving services Lambeth already have before extra ones are added. For example, Drive Forward (a service providing support with looking for jobs) is ok but not the best. The council should be focused on our health, work and housing so we can be prepared for adulthood.”*

The experience of young people with learning disability resonates with the above in that they could not access work placement opportunity in a timely manner. One said that he has been waiting for a long time for his placement in one restaurant. Another said that he wants to learn how to sell toys which he hopes to do when he grows older but his college could not find him work placement.

It also emerged that family and friends were sources of information and support and are often the default help when services are not accessible.

#### **1.4 Language support**

For young people and their families who are new to the country, getting information is difficult. They said they use ‘google translate’, dictionaries, and talk to family members and friends who can speak English. Lambeth College also have teachers and staff who speak different languages. However, most young people said that they and their parents have experienced difficulty in finding information when they first arrived in the country.

This was also raised by some young carers whose parents cannot seek help due to difficulty in speaking the language, making it more challenging for young carers as they have to write emails or make phone calls themselves.

#### **1.5 Family support**

There has been an appreciation of the value of families and parents. For example, young people with learning disability said that their parents are their primary carers and teachers as they teach them skills at home.

Interestingly, young carers’ experience is different as they feel that they are independent and often seen as capable. One said that she is managing well and that her family depends on her in communicating to services about her brother’s care. She said that her experience is tough but that she has learned to do things on her own. However, it was also raised on the family’s dependency on young carers. They said that there is not much support available for families of SEND children and information on services is not available.

In addition, as young carers are often seen capable, their needs are overlooked. For example, one participant said that her own disability was only picked up last year after more than three years of asking for support. It was she who made her condition known to the school though it also took time before she was diagnosed with Dyslexia.

One participant also commented:

*“I needed more support but the processing speed for support was slow”.*

## 2.0 Good practice and gaps in services

In addition to what had been discussed above, young people also identified the following good practice and gaps in services.

### 2.1 Good practice

Young people also mentioned about services/schemes they have taken part in the past and would like to see more of those, such as:

- a. Mentoring scheme. Lambeth College used to run ‘Girls Network’ where mentors were assigned to young people as they explore careers options. One young person found the mentor’s support extremely helpful in thinking about pursuing nursing career.
- b. Enrichment programme. Lambeth College runs an enrichment programme to support students’ interests - e.g. poetry, dance, drama, sports. They can also plan talks on topics that would be helpful for young people.
- c. Student Union - Lambeth College has student union and the rep can meet with the students to listen to their views. Student Unions also plan group activities.
- d. Digital engagement - Young people said they look at the college website for information. Some also have Instagram accounts. Information can be posted there and/or sent via email.
- e. Teachers - Young people can always speak with their teachers if they have concerns or suggestions.
- f. Renaissance Group was mentioned by young carers. The group used to run fun activities for young people where they can socialise and take a break from their caring tasks.

### 2.2 Gaps in services

- a. Information on UK education system. This is particularly important for parents and students who are new to the country. It was pointed out that there are different routes to acquiring qualification and training but that young people and their parents who are new to the country are not aware of those. It was suggested for the Lambeth Council website to include information for parents and students or invite speakers who can talk about it in classes or events.
- b. Information on benefits and other support for the family. Parents and students need accessible information on the support that is available to

families and students. They should be written in plain English and if possible, translated to other languages.

- c. Job opportunities, apprenticeship, etc. which young people can see and apply for.
- d. Things to do - like activities young people can access their other interests like sports, drama, and poetry.

## B. Views of young people on their participation

### 1. Ways to effectively engage with children and young people

Young people talked about some strategies on how adults and services can effectively engage with them and their families. It emerged that they want to participate and suggested that approaches in participation should be creative, inclusive, and tailored to the needs and interests of young people.

#### 1.1 A wide range of tailored engagement events

Almost everyone said that hosting more events for young people is a good way of engaging with them. They suggested that activities should be genuinely engaging for young people and would entice them to go out of their homes and participate. Their suggestions include:

- provide activity-based and fun sessions to attract and connect young people;
- provide some incentives (e.g. food and vouchers);
- be creative (e.g. turn it into a rap or song);
- promote it widely in spaces where young people are (e.g. schools and colleges); and
- provide more opportunities to listen to guest speakers so that young people can also learn new things.

*“Young people don't have the power to directly change matters, so having a say is important so that people who do have power know how to help young people”.*

One respondent said:

*“There should be more focus groups such as the one we are participating in now, it is helpful. It can lead to a discussion about more general issues that they could express with fellow young people without the need for getting too personal if they didn't feel like it”.*

## 1.2. Acknowledge young people's needs

Young people said that events and services should be tailored to the needs and interests of young people in order to actively engage them and overcome challenges and/or barriers faced in interacting with this target audience.

However, there was also an appreciation of the different needs of young people and therefore it is imperative to tailor the approach accordingly. For example, young people in care suggested that events should consider their needs as they face additional barriers that other young people do not. They reiterated that the specific needs of young people in care should be recognised and catered for.

It was suggested that people facilitating engagement events with looked after children should have worked with young people with certain needs as young people often face barriers that need to be acknowledged.

However, according to young carers, group activities may not always be appropriate especially when there are private issues to discuss. This is particularly true for young carers who may want to share not only their views but also the views of young people with Learning Disability and autism that they are caring for and whose needs are not often met.

One young person commented:

*“It is not always easy to talk openly in front of others. One-to-one session with mentors is better, young people would feel more heard”.*

## 1.3 Consider language, different abilities, disabilities, and interests

Young people said that some things are not being understood because they are not communicated effectively. This discourages young people from speaking up. This might be due to language that do not resonate with young people's experience or not easily understood.

They also said that some activities conflict with schoolwork and young people always prioritise schoolwork. This does not mean they are not interested but only unable to participate. Lastly, young people also said that some young people are not interested because of prior experience with adults/facilitators.

## 1.4 Rapport, trust, and building relationships

The respondents said that children and young people need to be comfortable in order to open up and that this takes time. They added that if facilitators leave or change jobs, consistency in the relationship is lost and the process of relationship-building has to start again.

Young people also said that focus groups can lead to a discussion about more general issues that they could express with fellow young people without the need for getting too personal if they didn't feel like it.

## 2. Current good practice

- a. Student Union - Lambeth College has student union and the representative can meet with the students to listen to their views. Student Unions also plan group activities.
- b. Digital engagement - Young people said they look at the college website for information. Some also have Instagram accounts. Information can be posted there and/or sent via email.
- c. Teachers - Young people can always speak with their teachers if they have concerns or suggestions.

## Part 2- Findings from online survey

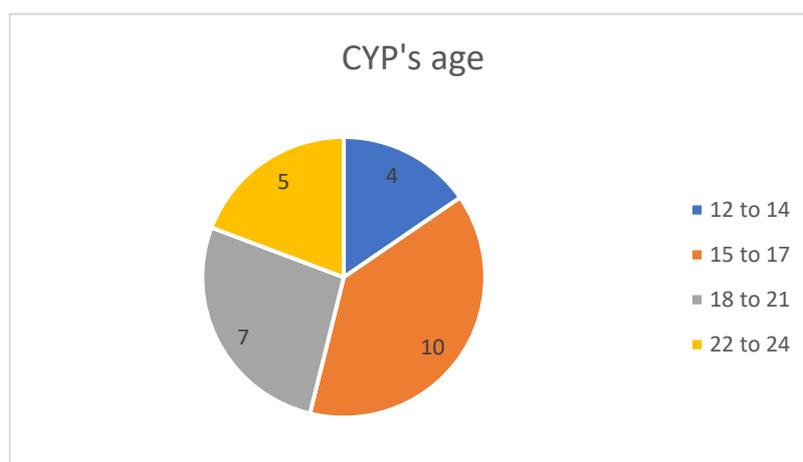
Twenty-six (26) young people and/or carers responded to the online survey questionnaire which was published in August until end of December 2020.

### 1. Profile of the respondents

Twenty-six young people and parent/carers took part. Of the 26, eight (8) said they have certain disabilities and special needs including Autism (3) Learning Disability (2), social emotional and mental health (1), and other disabilities and special needs (2). Some young people are also service users such as one Looked After Child and eight (8) mental health service users.

#### 1.1 Age

Four young people are between 12 and 14 years old; 10 are between the ages of 15 and 17; seven young people are aged 18 to 21; and five are between 22 and 25 years old.



#### 1.2 Gender and sexual preference

Of the 26 young people, 17 are females, 6 males, one binary, and one prefers not to say. As for their sexual preferences - 21 are heterosexual, 2 are bisexual, and 3 prefer not to say.

### 1.3 Ethnicity

The table below shows the diversity of the respondents.

Asian/Asian British	1
Black African	6
Black Caribbean	4
Mixed: Asian/White	2
Mixed: Black African/White	2
Mixed: Black Caribbean/White	1
Mixed: Any other	1
White British	4
White Irish	1
Other White	2
Other Black British	1
Prefer not to say	1
Total	26

#### A. Views of young people on preparation for adulthood/independence

Ten (10) respondents said they currently receive some support such as volunteering, job placements, and training to hone their skills. However, more than half (N=14) said that they don't receive support to prepare them for independence/adulthood. They said they need assistance to help them prepare for employment, or to find volunteering opportunities or work placements. However, opportunities such as those are not available. In fact, 11 respondents said they don't receive information on services they need whilst seven (7) said they could not access mental health services.

When asked about the people who support them, they said that their parents/carers are the most helpful (20 respondents). Some young people also said that in addition to their parents, they speak with their SENCO/teacher (7), health professionals (5), youth worker (4), church groups (2), other groups in the community (2), and social worker (1).

## B. Views of young people on their participation

All respondents said that having a say on things that affect them is important. Most of the answers reflect the idea that young people have better understanding of how things affect young people and that their opinions may improve services not only for them but for other young people. For example, one commented:

*“It is important to consult with service users and their families to ensure that services are targeted in the most effective way. There’s no point spending money designing a flashy service that doesn’t meet people’s needs”.*

*“It is important for me to have a say because the only person who experiences my life is me; therefore, I am the person best equipped to decide what might or might not benefit me”.*

Young people also believe that their opinions and views matter because as one said: *“it will affect us and our future”* (YP, 18-21 y/o) and that decisions can’t be left to a few people that won’t be affected.

It appears that the respondents appreciate that they cannot change things on their own. One said that young people don’t have the power to directly change matters, so having a say is important so that people who do have power know how to help young people.

However, 20 of the 26 recalled not having been asked about their views in the last 6 months. One young person said:

*“It’s [participation] very important because there are decisions that are being made on a daily basis that affect all of us, yet we do not have a say in the decisions being made”.*

Five said they were consulted on health services and by their university. One of respondents is parent/carer who said:

*“I’ve been engaged in a ‘co-production’ exercise with Lambeth as a parent. But the views of the parents who gave up their time (many hours) for free weren’t taken into account. Ultimately the service wasn’t redesigned, as promised, but stayed exactly the same. It felt like a waste of our time, that we were just there to tick a ‘participation’ box rather than as partners, which is what co-production actually means”.*

Given that young people felt they have not been engaged, young people said that they talk to their parents or friends if they need to say something about the support they receive (N=21). Some also talk to their teacher (4), youth worker (4), and health professional (7), and social worker (2).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

From the perspective of young people, it is important to support them as they prepare for adulthood and/or independence. There has been an appreciation of the value of education - both formal and general life skills, family support, and access to information and timely services. However, it also emerged that there are gaps in services. Despite that, young people with specific needs felt that things can be improved.

Equally, it appears that young people felt that participation is not just a privilege but a right, and that opportunities should be created to listen to their views. Services, staff, and the whole system can do a great deal to genuinely engage with young people, for example, by making activities creative, inclusive and appropriate. Participation approaches should also be tailored to specific needs of young people.

The above being said, we recommend that the draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy should be informed by the lived experience of young people so that it can support young people in attaining their outcomes and maximise their potential.

It is also recommended that the concerns young people have raised and the suggestions they have made through this consultation are reviewed and embedded in planning and service commissioning.

Lastly, young people should be kept updated as to the outcome of their participation in this consultation.



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