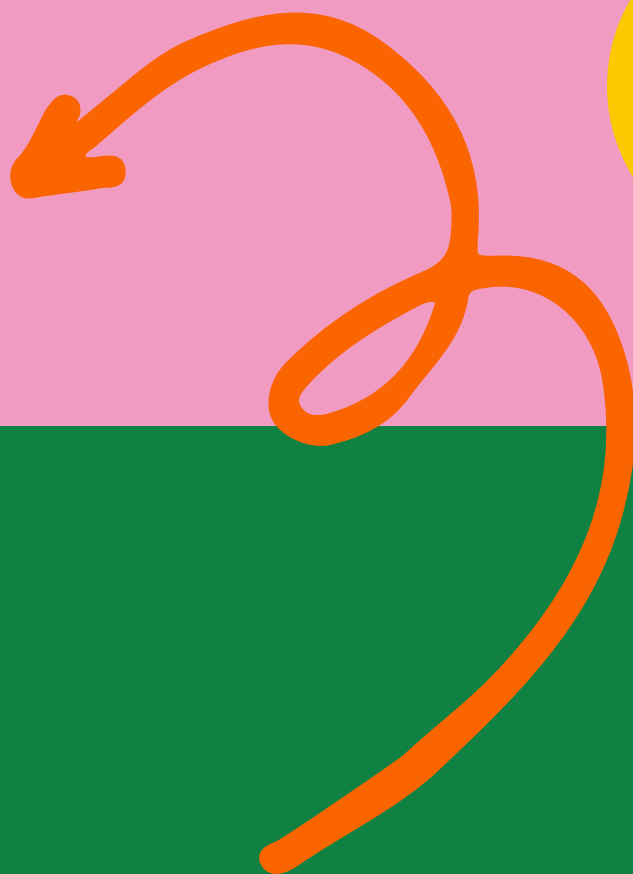
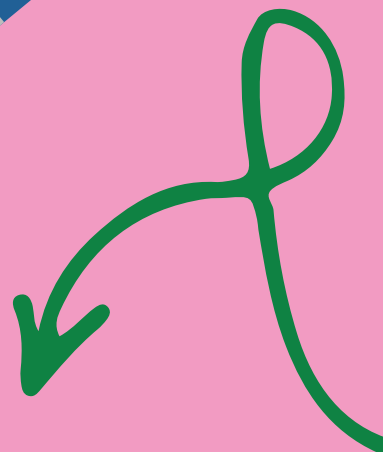
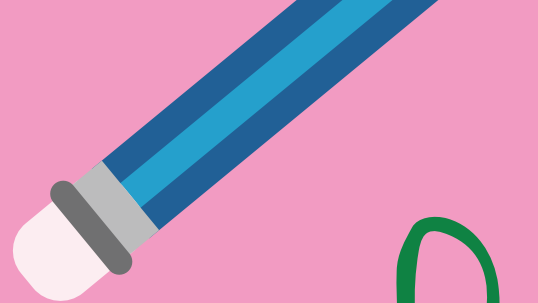


What is education like for young people with SEND?

Young people friendly version of:
Educational experiences of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England



Office for
National Statistics

About this report

This report tells you about research done by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) with the support of the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen). We wanted to find out more about the experiences of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in schools and other educational settings. Our findings will hopefully help decision makers as they develop new SEND policies and rules.

Did you know?

In October 2021, the Inclusive Data Taskforce said that more children and young people should be involved in research. It also said that we should do more to understand disabled people's lived experiences. This report is one way of doing this.

Glossary

ONS: Office for National Statistics

nasen: National Association for Special Educational Needs

SEND: Special educational needs and disabilities

EHCP: An education, health and care plan for young people with SEND who need more support than is normally available

Educational settings: This could be mainstream schools, special schools, alternative provision or home education

Inclusive Data Taskforce: A group of experts that advised us on how to make UK data more inclusive

Our research

Listening to the voices of young people and those around them was at the heart of our research. Here is an overview of the research we did, including who we spoke to, what we asked and the methods we used.

Who took part?	What we asked	How we did it
62 young people with SEND aged 11-16 years	What is going well? What could be improved? What would your ideal school look like?	1-hour interviews using creative tools such as Lego and drawing to help get people talking
64 parents and carers	What is your experience trying to get your child the support they need?	30-minute phone interviews
23 members of educational staff	What is SEND provision like where you work?	90-minute online focus group discussions

FACT

In this research, we asked young people to choose a fake name instead of their real name. We also used an age bracket rather than their exact age to ensure their privacy.

What young people told us...

Young people described a range of experiences in their educational setting, affecting them in different ways.



Helpful strategies

Young people told us about strategies they use to help them concentrate better and manage their emotions. These include:



Wearing sunglasses or headphones



Doodling or fidgeting



Going to a safe space which was quiet and relaxing

Young people told us that teachers sometimes think these strategies are distracting and disruptive. But when teachers understand and support these strategies, young people said they learn better and feel better. They said it also makes them more comfortable to share their feelings and ask for help.



If you know that you have to fidget with things to concentrate, tell the teacher that you have to do this certain thing. Because if you want me to do well in your class, I'm not going to do well if I'm just sat there staring at the board.



Jess, 11 to 13 years old

Feeling included

How young people are treated at school can make a big difference. It either makes them feel they belong and fit in, or judged, left out and alone. Young people told us things that help them to feel more included.

What can help?

- Opportunities to build friendships and feel part of the school community.
- Schools offering clubs, buddy systems and coaching to develop interaction skills, but finding what works for each individual is most important.
- Not singling young people out as different.



“My teacher just set me a textbook and I was there to work out of that, which made me feel like an outsider, because everyone was learning off the board, and I was learning off a book. I just felt dumb.

Andy, 14 to 16 years old



Bullying

Young people told us about their experiences of bullying, which they said was damaging for their learning and wellbeing. They said that tackling it through mediation and raising awareness of the impact of bullying sometimes works better than telling students off, isolation or detention.

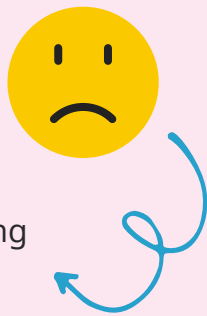


Feeling understood

Young people told us that their needs are not always met or understood at school. They said it makes a big difference when their needs are understood.

When young people feel misunderstood, they said they sometimes:

- feel angry
- ignore teachers
- mess around
- distract others
- get punished for being 'naughty' through isolation or exclusion
- fall behind even further



Young people said staff could help them to feel understood by:

- building awareness of SEND needs and differences
- being open and accepting of SEND
- recognising students for all their achievements, not just grades
- changing lessons to suit different learning styles
- adapting the curriculum to meet different needs, such as having the option to take fewer subjects at once so young people do not get overwhelmed



“Because I'm very shy, I don't like to talk in front of other people. My math teacher, he knows that I don't ask for help. So, he comes up to me and he starts explaining it just so I do get to start to understand then.

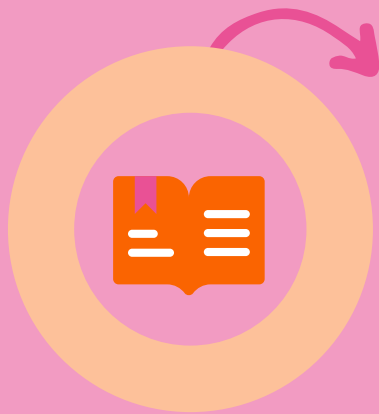
Clio, 14 to 16 years old





Listen up!

Young people told us that everyone has their own unique set of needs, wants and preferences about what is helpful for them at school. Young people said that listening to them, involving them in decisions about their education and support, and being flexible could help them to thrive at school.



Support plans

Young people told us they want to be involved in developing their support plans in the way that suits them best. Some young people who do not have EHCPs told us they have plans sometimes called “passports”. But some young people with this type of support said there were provisions they should have received but did not, such as extra help or extra time in exams. Parents, carers and staff said that young people with EHCPs are prioritised for support, which often means those without are left behind.



What parents, carers and staff told us...

Parents, carers and staff shared their views and experiences of SEND systems and processes.

- **Spotting SEND early:** Parents and carers described long delays in accessing support. They said that getting a formal diagnosis and an EHCP, if needed, is important for young people to get the right support at the right time. But these were said to be difficult to get and do not always ensure young people receive the support they need.
- **Getting support can be long and complicated:** Parents and carers told us about the extra work, resources and time it takes to prove the need for support for SEND, especially when a young person’s needs are less visible. But not all parents have access to these resources.
- **School matters:** Getting a school that is a good fit for a young person’s needs was said to be crucial for them to thrive and excel, but this is not always possible.



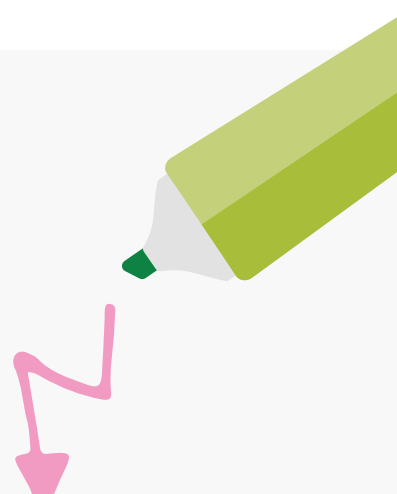
I'm supposed to have extra time for tests, but I don't always. Our last assessment was one in religious studies, and I was supposed to have extra time, but they didn't give me it.

Stitch, 14 to 16 years old



Ideas for improvements from parents, carers and staff

- ✓ Have open discussions about SEND at school to raise awareness and promote an inclusive culture.
- ✓ Understand and find ways to accommodate young people's needs and preferences.
- ✓ Improve consistency of support across the different local authorities.
- ✓ Improve communication between everyone involved in the support process.
- ✓ Have more regular, specialist staff training on working with young people with SEND.
- ✓ Ensure staff salaries reflect their specialist roles and knowledge.



More information

Thanks to all the young people, families and staff, as well as everyone else who helped us with this project.

Read the full [‘Educational experiences of young people with special educational needs and disabilities in England’](#) release on the **ONS website**.

If you want this information in another language or format, send an email to: equalities@ons.gov.uk or call this telephone number: **0800 298 5313**



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