

# YOUNG INSPECTORS

## REPORT 2025



Camden

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# Introduction

The Young Inspectors Programme has been running in Camden for nineteen years. Its purpose is to give young people with lived experience of services the opportunity to review how these services are delivered and to make recommendations for improvement and future development.

Each year, a group of Young Inspectors carries out research to understand the views of children, young people, parents, carers, and professionals. Their work focuses on Camden's services and the partner agencies that support and safeguard children and families. The programme is centred on listening to lived experience and hearing directly from the people who use and provide services. This approach helps identify what is working well and where change is needed.

This year's team included seven Young Inspectors aged 16 to 22. They were recruited through an open advert shared across Camden schools, special educational needs (SEN) networks, participation groups, and through Social Workers. The recruitment process aimed to include young people from Camden's Youth Mission Priority Cohorts. As a result, the team brought a wide range of needs, communication styles, and experiences. This included Inspectors with care experience, SEN, education, health and care (EHC) plans, and those with siblings who have SEN. Their individual perspectives shaped the questions they asked, the themes they explored, and how they carried out the project.



This year's team included seven Young Inspectors aged 16 to 22.



The insights, reflections, and findings in this report come directly from the Young Inspectors. They represent the voices of young people at the centre of Camden's ongoing commitment to improvement.

# 2025 Young Inspection Topic

## Ensuring Meaningful Participation in EHC Plans

### Local Support for Children and Young People with SEND

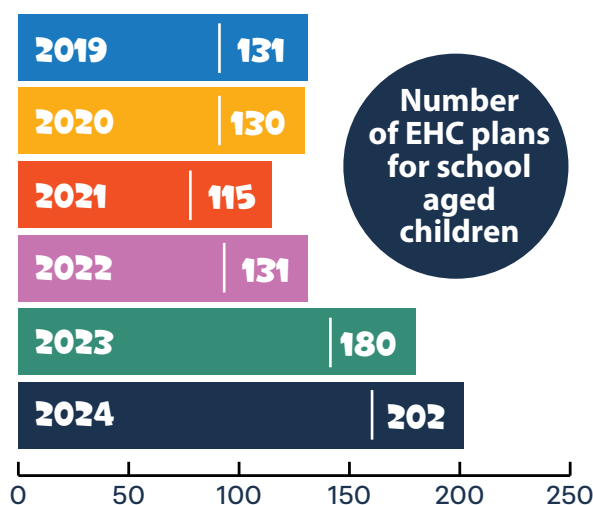
Most children and young people in Camden with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have their needs met in local mainstream early years settings, schools, or colleges. Camden also provides a range of specialist support for those with more complex needs. This includes three special schools, two Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), and two hospital based schools. In addition, mainstream schools offer a variety of support to meet different levels of need. Together, these settings offer tailored provision for children and young people who require higher levels of intervention.

### Overview of EHC Plans and SEN Support in Camden

As of January 2025, Camden's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) register included 1,607 children and young people aged 0–25. There were also 3,416 pupils identified as receiving SEN support, including 289 children who received an Exceptional Needs Grant.

The purpose of an EHC plan is to ensure that each child or young person receives the support they need to achieve positive outcomes across education, health, and social care.

Over recent years, the number of new EHC plans for school age children has increased. There were 131 new plans in 2019 and similar numbers in 2020 (130) and 2022 (131), following a slight reduction in 2021 (115). The number rose significantly in 2023 to 180 new plans and reached 202 in 2024. As more families enter the EHC process, it is even more important that the voices of children and young people remain central to decision making. An EHC plan should feel like a personalised roadmap that reflects who they are and what matters to them.



## Statutory Guidance on Participation



The SEND Code of Practice (2015, paragraphs 9.21–9.24) is clear that local authorities must involve children, young people, and their parents throughout the EHC needs assessment process. This includes engaging them from the beginning, providing clear opportunities for them to share their views, and ensuring they can contribute meaningfully to decisions about their support.

## The Importance of Meaningful Participation

This statutory requirement highlights the importance of ensuring that the voice of the child or young person remains central to all planning and decision making across education, health, and social care. Meaningful participation ensures that support is shaped around their lived experiences, priorities, and needs.



## Camden's Participation Approach



In Camden, a dedicated Participation Team within the SEN Service champions the voice of children and young people. The team ensures their views remain at the heart of planning and decision making. This reflects Camden's commitment to children's rights, including Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 states that all children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and that those views should be given due consideration.

## How This Informed the Young Inspectors' Work

This understanding guided the Young Inspectors' focus areas. The team explored how well children and young people's voices are heard and how their experiences influence the support they receive. Their work highlights the importance of ensuring that participation is meaningful and that lived experience continues to inform the development of EHC processes in Camden.



# Background

## Background from the Camden SEND Scrutiny Panel Report

The Camden SEND Scrutiny Panel's report, *An Investigation on the Effectiveness of Children's SEND Provision in Camden* (September 2024), emphasises the importance of listening to the voices of children and young people when shaping SEND services. The report highlights that EHC Plans must reflect what matters most to children, young people, and their families. Their views should remain central to all decisions made about their support.

### What This Means for Camden

The report also calls for clearer information for parents, greater transparency, and more inclusive practice. It stresses the need for children's views to play a central role in shaping the support they receive. These findings directly informed the areas the Young Inspectors chose to focus on for their work this year.

### The Focus of the Young Inspectors' Work

**This year, the Young Inspectors set out to:**



Explore how children and young people experience EHC planning and reviews in Camden.



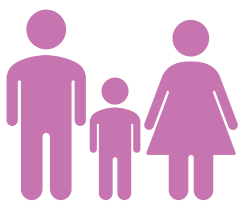
Understand whether children and young people feel their voices are heard and acted upon during the EHC process.



Identify barriers and opportunities for improving participation and communication in EHC planning.



Develop practical recommendations for Camden Council and partner agencies to strengthen how EHC plans reflect the views and needs of children and young people.



Explore the role of families in the EHC process, recognising parents and carers experiences and how these shape planning and decision making.

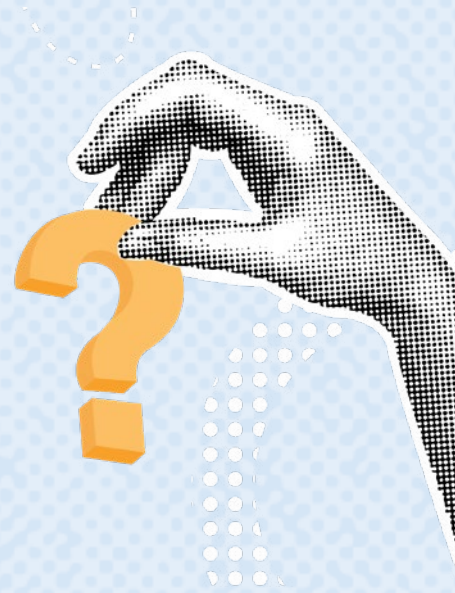


Understand how professionals work with children and families, and identify ways to strengthen joint working and improve clarity around roles and responsibilities.

# What they did

## How the Young Inspectors Gathered Information

The Young Inspectors used several methods to gather insights from professionals, children, young people, parents, and carers. Using a mix of approaches helped them understand lived experiences, uncover barriers, and ensure the findings directly supported the aims of the project.



### What They Did

#### Youth Led Design:

The Young Inspectors created their own questions for interviews and focus groups. They designed these questions based on what they felt was important to explore.

#### Focus Groups:

They ran group discussions with young people, parents, and carers. These sessions allowed people to share experiences and ideas together.

#### Interviews with Professionals:

The Young Inspectors held structured interviews to understand how SEND services work in practice. They spoke with:

- the SEN Operational Manager
- Case Officers
- Principal Educational Psychologists
- the Head of Virtual School
- the Designated Social Care Officer

They also took part in informal conversations with senior leaders, including the Director of Education and Inclusion, the Head of SEND and Inclusion, and the SEND Policy and Project Officer.

#### Questionnaires:

To reach more children, young people, and professionals, the team created questionnaires. These helped gather a wider range of views and experiences.

#### Review of Previous Reports:

The Young Inspectors looked at anonymised annual EHC plan reviews from earlier years. This helped them see how children and young people's voices were recorded and where improvements might be needed.

#### Research and Literature Review:

They reviewed relevant publications, reports, and videos related to inclusion and improving experiences for children and young people with SEN.

# Research



## Research and resources informing this Young Inspection included:

- **SEND Code of Practice (2015)** – Statutory guidance on supporting children and young people with SEND
- **Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** – Right of children to express views in decisions affecting them
- **Children Act 1989** – Places child welfare as paramount and sets out duties to safeguard and promote their wellbeing
- **Children Act 2004** – Framework for coordinated safeguarding and welfare services to keep children safe and ensure their needs are met
- **Children and Families Act 2014** – Introduced EHC plans and placed a strong emphasis on involving children, young people, and families in decisions about their support
- **An Investigation on the Effectiveness of Children’s SEND Provision in Camden (Camden SEND Scrutiny Panel, 2024)** – Findings and recommendations on improving participation and voice in EHCPs
- **SEND Team training materials** – Explaining what an EHCP is and how the process works



# Questionnaire

## Data Summary

### Feedback from Children and Young People

A total of 18 young people aged 14–24 completed the questionnaire about their experiences of SEN, EHC plans, and their Annual Reviews.

#### Key quantitative findings

Metric	Summary
Total responses	18
Age range	14 to 24
Know what Annual Review is	Yes: 15 (83%) No: 3 (17%)
Attended their Annual Review	Yes: 8 (44%) Sometimes: 6 (33%) No: 4 (22%)
Preferred meeting formats for an Annual Review	In person: 13 (72%) Online: 4 (22%) Other: 4 (22%)
Preferred persons to share views at an Annual Review Meeting (can select more than one option)	Parent/carer: 9 (50%) Teaching assistant: 6 (33%) Trusted adult: 5 (28%) Teacher: 3 (17%) Social worker/PA: 2 (11%) Self: 6 (33%)
Preferred methods to share views (can select more than one option)	Writing: 11 (61%) Drawing: 5 (28%) PEC cards: 3 (17%) Voice note: 3 (17%) Video: 1 (6%)

# Analysis

## Summary of What the Data Shows

The responses show that most young people know what an Annual Review is. However, their level of participation varies. Some young people attend all their reviews, while others attend only sometimes or not at all.

Most respondents prefer in person meetings, suggesting that face-to-face interaction helps them feel more involved. However, online meetings are still valued by some young people as a flexible and accessible option.

When sharing their views, writing is the most commonly preferred method. Young people also use drawing, Picture Exchange Communication (PEC) cards, voice notes, and video, showing the need for a range of communication options.

Young people most often trust their parents or carers to share their views. Teaching assistants and other trusted adults were also named frequently. Importantly, several young people said they would like to share their own views directly, highlighting the importance of enabling and encouraging this.

## Qualitative Insights

Young people shared a mix of positive and challenging experiences:

### Positive themes included:

- Being able to talk about their goals
- Having their achievements recognised
- Feeling listened to

### Challenges included:

- Not understanding what was being discussed
- Feeling unsure about what to say
- Not being asked for their views

### These insights emphasise the importance of:

- Clear communication
- Accessible explanations
- Good preparation and support
- Ensuring that young people are actively invited to share their views

Together, these findings underline the importance of making Annual Reviews more inclusive and youth centred.

# Feedback From Professionals

To complement the views of children and young people, feedback was also gathered from professionals involved in supporting Annual Reviews. Eight professionals completed the questionnaire. Respondents included inclusion teachers, SEND Coordinators, an educational psychologist, a SENDIASS manager, and the head of an additionally resourced provision.



## Key quantitative findings

How professionals help children and young people prepare for their Annual Review

Metric	Summary
Total responses	8
How professionals help children and young people prepare to share their views at Annual Review meetings.	Pre meeting visits: 6 (75%) Outlining purpose and format: 4 (50%) Choice of time/place: 2 (25%) Easy-read guidance/info sheets: 4 (50%) Other: 4 (50%)
How relationships with children and young people are built and maintained before and outside of meetings.	Regular check-ins: 4 (50%) Classroom observations: 4 (50%) Provide a 'One Page Profile' outing role: 4 (50%) Mini review ahead of annual review: 1 (17%) Other: 6 (75%)
Tools and resources used to help children and young people have their voice represented in Annual Review and 'All About Me' section of the EHC plans.	PEC Cards: 2 (25%) Communication apps/devices: 2 (25%) Interpreters: 1 (17%) Sensory aids: 2 (25%) Video/audio submissions: 0 Other: 7 (83%)

# Analysis



## Summary of Professional Feedback

The responses show that most professionals support children and young people before the Annual Review by visiting them and explaining the process in advance. Easy-read information and flexible choices about meeting arrangements are also used.

Professionals use a range of strategies to build relationships outside meeting spaces, such as check-ins, classroom observations, and One-Page Profiles.

A wide variety of tools are used to help children express their views. These include PEC cards, communication aids, interpreters, sensory supports, and other creative approaches. Although the sample is small, the feedback demonstrates a strong professional commitment to making Annual Reviews more inclusive and child centred.

## Key Challenges and Suggested Improvements

Professionals also shared open-text responses describing the challenges they face in ensuring that children and young people's voices are heard and valued. They also offered practical suggestions to improve participation.

### Challenges Identified

- Some children and young people do not fully understand the EHC process or realise the meeting is about them.
- Past negative experiences can lead to disengagement.
- In some cases, the child or young person's voice is used to reinforce adults views or historical needs rather than reflecting their current preferences.
- Parents and carers sometimes speak on behalf of young people who may be able to share their own views.
- Some young people decline to meet with professionals, making it difficult to gather their views while respecting their wishes.
- It can be challenging to interpret the voices of very young children, even with tools and aids.
- Annual Review deadlines are sometimes missed, particularly for young people without placements or those receiving home tuitions.

# Analysis

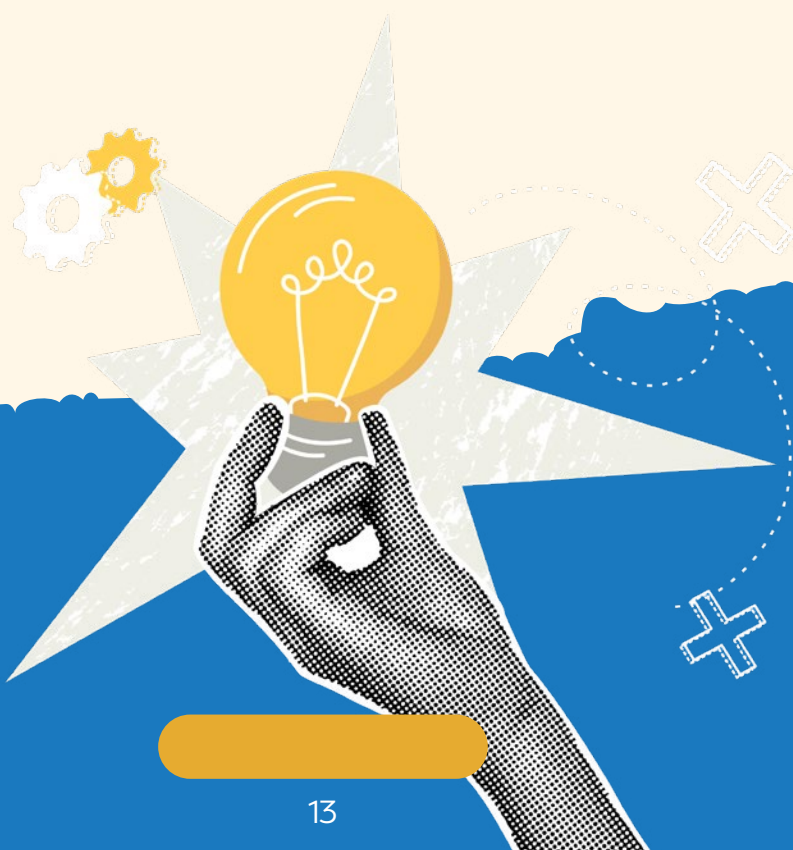
## Summary of Professional Feedback



## Suggested Changes, Improvements, and Resources

Professionals suggested several strategies to strengthen participation:

- **Listen regularly, not just annually:**  
Build trust-based relationships by gathering children and young people's view throughout the year, not only during Annual Reviews.
- **Use ongoing tracking tools:**  
Capture children's wishes and feelings over time to reduce the pressure on a single meeting and create a more accurate picture of their views.
- **Expand creative communication methods:**  
Use audio recordings, WhatsApp surveys, and well-supported Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools to help children who struggle with spoken communication.
- **Ensure impartiality:**  
Allow an independent person to record the child or young person's views so their voice is represented accurately and not overshadowed by adults.
- **Offer alternative ways to express feelings:**  
Provide creative outlets such as music or art therapy to help children share their thoughts and emotions in ways that feel natural to them.



# What the Young Inspectors said

What the Young Inspectors Said About Their Experience

“I got involved with the Young Inspectors’ project because of my personal connection, my brother is currently going through the EHC process. This opportunity really sparked my interest to see what it was like from both sides. I wanted to make an impact so that life is fair for everyone, so even those with disabilities can live life to the fullest. Working with the team has really helped me build my confidence, and I’ve learned a lot of valuable skills as well as gained insights into the system and how it works from the bottom up.”

— **Josh, Young Inspector**

“I wanted to join the Young Inspectors because I wanted to learn more about EHCP and make sure young people’s voices are heard. I learned this by understanding more about EHCP and developing skills in teamwork and communication.”

— **Najib, Young Inspector**

“Being a Young Inspector was really fun. It helped me use my skills to work as part of a collaborative team and taught me so much about EHCP and SEN. I feel like I’m really making a difference in the community.”

— **Mary-Lynn, Young Inspector**

“This project has helped me speak up and boosted my confidence to say what I wanted to say. I took this opportunity with the team so I could help with the things they needed to discuss. They improved my knowledge about SEN support and the teams working in it. I learned skills like holding interviews, working as part of a team, taking notes, and understanding both life and professional knowledge.”

— **Alicia, Young Inspector**

# Findings and Recommendations



The Young Inspectors recognised that Camden is strongly committed to supporting children and young people with SEN. Throughout the inspection, they heard that recent changes to the SEN departmental structure have improved responsiveness and made staff more accessible. These changes were viewed positively and were seen as helping to strengthen relationships with families, even at a time when the wider system faces significant pressures.

During the two week inspection, the Young Inspectors learned how good support in education settings can help young people thrive. They also heard that when support is limited or inconsistent, young people may feel isolated or disadvantaged. Young people spoke positively about internships, which help build confidence, independence, and employability skills. Job coaches were praised for the practical support and encouragement they offer. However, the Young Inspectors noted that more of this support is needed to ensure equal access to opportunities for all young people.

The findings in this section draw on evidence gathered through questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and discussions with young people, parents, carers, and professionals. While the team identified many encouraging examples, they also observed areas where improvements are needed. The following findings and recommendations aim to address these challenges and strengthen support for children and young people with SEN in Camden.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Timely Access to Support in EHC Plans (Accessible Version)

### Finding



Children and young people often wait too long for the help they need. High demand for services such as Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy leads to long waiting lists. This can leave families feeling unsupported and isolated.

### Recommendations



- Carry out an audit of waiting times and identify barriers preventing timely support.
- Develop solutions to fill gaps in specialist provision so children get the help they need when they need it.

## Understanding SEN and EHC Plans

### Finding



There is limited awareness of special educational needs and the support available. Children, school staff, and some professionals do not always understand SEN well. SEN is not discussed often enough in schools, and families need clearer, more accessible information.

### Recommendations



- Include SEN learning in Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons, assemblies, and other learning spaces in all Camden schools.
- Make SEN awareness part of each school's curriculum so everyone understands what SEN is and how to support one another.
- Provide SEN training for all professionals who work with children and young people.
- Create community spaces, such as Youth Hubs, where young people can learn about SEN and speak to professionals for advice.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Communication and Accountability

### Finding



Communication between families, schools, and the local authority is inconsistent. When information is unclear or delayed, EHC outcomes can be missed. Parents and carers often feel unheard or unsure where to go for help.

### Recommendations



- Embed Camden's relational practice framework in schools to improve listening, engagement, and collaboration.
- Set clear timeframes for responding to emails and phone calls from families.
- Ensure Case Officers and Managers monitor issues and resolve them promptly.
- Ask schools to update the council regularly on the support they provide and how funding is used.
- Create a simple, accessible way for children, young people, and families to raise concerns and get quick support.

## Frequency of EHC Reviews

### Finding



Annual Reviews feel too far apart. Families want more regular check ins so that plans stay up to date and support can be adjusted quickly.

### Recommendations



- Introduce progress reviews twice a year, alongside the statutory Annual Review.
- Make these progress reviews informal, relaxed, and centred around the child or young person.
- Create an alert system to flag concerns raised by children, young people, or parents so they can be followed up between reviews.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Voice and Participation

### Finding



Children and young people are not always involved in their EHC planning and reviews as much as they should be. Some do not get a chance to share their views beforehand, and others are not offered the option to lead their own meetings.

### Recommendations



- Track how often children and young people attend and actively participate in their reviews to monitor progress.
- Provide clear, accessible information about the EHC process and their rights, including the right to have a trusted adult with them.
- Allow children and young people to choose when, where, and how they meet with professionals.
- Offer them the choice to lead their own review meeting.
- Provide opportunities for private meetings with Case Officers if they want them.
- Use creative, low pressure approaches when gathering views from children and young people with SEN.
- Share simple One Page Profiles with photos of professionals before meetings.
- Offer video or WhatsApp check ins with professionals to help reduce anxiety.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Equal Opportunities for Education and Work

### Finding



Young people with SEN want the same opportunities to study and work as their peers. They want high aspirations and meaningful choices, especially after age 16. More support is needed to help them understand and access post 16 options.

### Recommendations



- Start transition planning from Year 9, involving school based key adults such as connection carers.
- Ensure young people with SEN have equal access to subject choices and are not directed towards SEN specific courses unless that is their preference.
- Provide more CV writing sessions and job preparation activities in schools.
- Offer mentoring and job coaching to all young people with SEN.
- Make sure professionals understand post 16 pathways so they can offer accurate guidance.
- Encourage schools to arrange visits from organisations that support young people into employment.
- Ensure professionals in care homes attend parents' evenings and meetings.

The SEND Code of Practice emphasises the importance of high aspirations. It states that discussions about long term goals should begin early, ideally before Year 9, and should focus on strengths, abilities, and the future outcomes the young person wants to achieve.

# Findings and Recommendations

## Celebrating SEND

### Finding



SEND should be recognised and celebrated more throughout the year. Children and young people with SEND want their identity and strengths to be acknowledged in positive ways.

### Recommendations



- Begin meetings by celebrating achievements and positive progress.
- Organise an annual SEND celebration event in Camden to share success stories, information and training.

# Timescales and Next Steps

## Timescales and Next Steps

Camden's SEND Strategy 2022–2027 sets out the vision and priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The implementation plan for 2026 will be finalised in January 2026. This timing is helpful because the Young Inspectors' report provides important insights that will inform this work. The updated implementation plan will consider and respond to the recommendations identified by the Young Inspectors.

To support continued engagement and transparency, the following actions are proposed:

- Provide the Young Inspectors with a summary document showing how their recommendations link to the activities in the implementation plan.
- Share regular updates on progress with the SEND Strategy, including opportunities for joint meetings with the SEND and Participation teams.
- Include a dedicated discussion on the Young Inspectors' report at the SEND Inclusion Board meeting in July 2026.
- Create a termly working group that brings together key professionals responsible for delivering the recommendations. This group will support timely implementation, maintain accountability, and encourage collaborative problem solving.

In addition, the SEND and Inclusion Service will carry out a range of activities that directly respond to the Young Inspectors' recommendations. These actions will be included in the service plan. As part of this commitment, a celebration event focused on SEND will also be organised.

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