



Summary of feedback from the SEND Futures engagement with parents and carers and children and young people in Kingston (June to September 2023)

Introduction

This report presents a summary of feedback received from children and young people and parents and carers about the quality of local services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Kingston. This feedback covers health, education and social care services, as well as what it is like to be a part of the local community. The information from this engagement work will then be used to update the SEND Futures Plan, which is the strategic plan to improve services for children and young people with disabilities, within the financial and other resources available. The purpose of this engagement work is to ensure that the views and ideas of the children and families we are supporting are reflected in the work and future planning that we do.

Who we engaged with:

- Children and young people who live in Kingston
- Children and young people with SEND who attend school or college in Kingston or are eligible for local health/social care services in Kingston
- Parents and carers of children or young people with SEND who live in Kingston
- Parents and carers of children and young people with SEND who attend school or college in Kingston or are eligible for local health/social care services in Kingston

Sources of engagement

Targeted engagement work conducted with children and young people:

- Surveys for children and young people, including SEND Futures survey and Transition survey
- Visits to holiday clubs for children and young people with SEND
- Focus groups and workshops with children and young people in schools
- Focus groups with children and young people at short breaks
- Focus groups with young people in College/Alternative Provision

Targeted engagement work conducted with parents and carers:

- Surveys for parents and carers, including SEND Futures survey, Parent Carer Forum (PCF) survey, Transition survey
- Focus groups co-run with Kingston PCF for parents and carers
- School transition events for parents and carers
- Workshops with parents in partnership with the voluntary sector e.g. Small Steps

- SEND Parent Carer Consortium meetings
- SEND Futures Workstream meetings
- SEND Parent Champions Events
- Voluntary sector Health Transition events

In addition to this targeted engagement work, feedback was also gathered from the following sources that are collected as part of business as usual:

- Kingston Parent Carer Forum Survey
- School Entry Early Health Survey
- SEN Support Survey
- Annual Review Survey
- EHCP Issuance Survey
- Readiness for School Survey
- Carers Strategy
- Age Learning Disability Partnership Board
- Kingston Parent Carer Consortium Meetings
- NHS South West London's Five Year Plan
- South West London, Integrated Care Partnership Strategy 2023-2028
- Health and Wellbeing Board, Who Cares for Carers

The findings from this engagement work has been split into the following themes, based on the first five parts of the [SEND inspection criteria](#), which focus on evaluating the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND:

1. How can we make sure your children and young people's needs are identified and understood as early as possible?
2. How can we make sure your child and your family get the help they need when they need it?
3. How can we make sure that you are involved in decision making about plans and support that involve your children?
4. How can we make sure that you and your children are ready for their next stage in life? e.g. moving from primary to secondary school and beyond
5. What can we do to help you and your family be seen, included and valued in Kingston?

Results

How can we make sure your children and young people's needs are identified and understood as early as possible?

Children and young people

What's working well?

Overall, a number of young people felt that they were listened to by professionals in local services, in particular in education, where they got to talk to staff about their likes and dislikes. Children and young people with SEND recognised that their needs were different to those children without SEND, and that despite these differences they still feel listened to in the same way as their neurotypical peers.

What's a worry?

Some young people said that they experienced anxiety when visiting medical settings such as the dentist or doctors, suggesting the need for better staff training in order to ensure young people feel comfortable and at ease as possible in these environments.

What could be done to improve?

Improved consistency of training, in particular with health practitioners, in order to ensure inclusive practice and reduce anxiety amongst young people with SEND when attending appointments.

Parents and carers

What's working well?

Parents and carers gave examples of proactive referrals for their children, in particular from health professionals. Families also spoke about the importance of regular check-ins with staff to ensure early identification e.g. the useful role health visitors often play in identifying their children's needs. Some parents spoke positively about their child's use of the physiotherapy service and how much of a difference accessing this service has made for their children. In addition, parents praised educational staff who used empowering language and asked helpful questions when identifying and discussing their children's needs e.g. *'How do their needs present?'*

What's a worry?

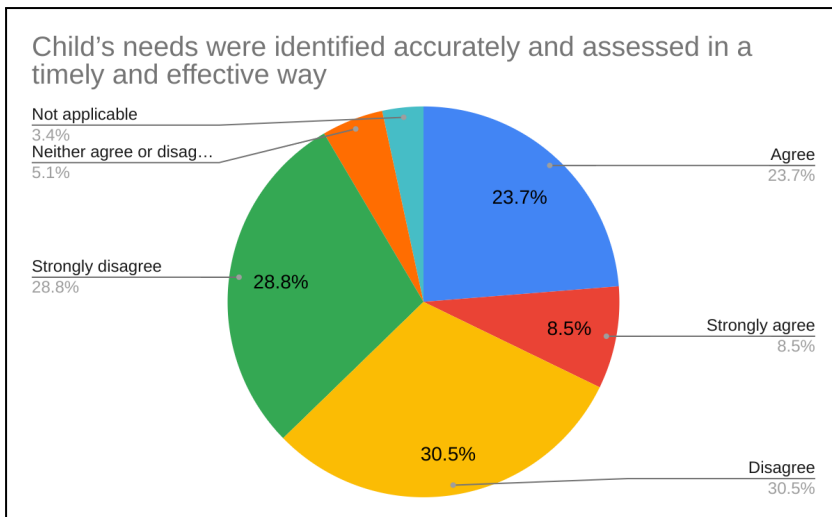


Figure 1: Chart demonstrating the percentage of parents and carers who felt their child's needs were identified accurately and assessed in a timely way. Source: SEND Futures survey for parents and carers (59 respondents)

There were concerns that there is a lack of a clear pathway for identifying needs. In particular parents feel that the process is too bureaucratic and complex. Another concern amongst parents when identifying their children's needs is that their views and concerns are not taken seriously by professionals. The third primary worry was waiting times for a needs assessment/diagnosis. The extended waiting times led a number of parents to seek a private diagnosis.

Parents feel "discouraged by bureaucracy and walls of misunderstanding".

What could be done to improve?

Parents suggested further investment in resources and support for parents prior to diagnosis, in particular if there are long waiting times. For example, one parent suggested holding online evening workshops for parents to help them through the system e.g. through SENDIASS, whilst awaiting diagnosis. Parents also felt that more training was needed for parents and staff on neurodiversity and the signs to look out for in identifying neurodiversity and other disabilities. For example, one parent suggested providing courses on emotional intelligence. Parents also felt it would be helpful if specific teams within services e.g. Portage adopted a more holistic approach and were able to broadly signpost to other services. Parents feel practitioners need to "look at the whole family" when thinking about how to ensure needs are met and not think of the young person with SEND in silo.

How can we make sure your child and your family get the help they need when they need it?

Children and young people

What's working well?

100% of the young people who completed the Easy Read transition survey felt supported by teachers, social workers, carers and/or support workers. During focus groups, some young people with an EHCP noted that meetings about their EHCP allow them a space to express their thoughts and feelings. Some young people praised the therapy team for helping them improve their health through exercise, weight and diet programmes. Children and young people also stated that they loved attending after-school clubs as it was a good way to form friendships and engage with their peers.

What's a worry?

Waiting times came up as a barrier for young people accessing the support they needed. For example, a young person advised that a request for a personal assistant to support the family is pending after 10 months.

What could be done to improve?

Young people felt that there should be shorter waiting times to access services and more support available for mental health issues and to be given more *“strategies for coping with stress and anxiety”*. In addition, children and young people wanted more short break opportunities in the borough.

Parents and carers

What's working well?

There were a number of examples of practitioners from across all sectors working with families to try to achieve the best outcomes for a child, for example, school staff giving a child on the SEN register a private room to work in which the classroom became overwhelming. Parents cited the voluntary sector as an invaluable resource for families e.g. one parent said that ADHD Embrace was an excellent support for her and her child, and two parents noted that SENDIASS had been a helpful resource for them in getting help and support for their child.

“We are very grateful that AfC has granted our child an EHCP and that they have allocated him a space in our preferred provision. I'd like to pass on my thanks to everyone involved with this outcome.” - Parent

What's a worry?

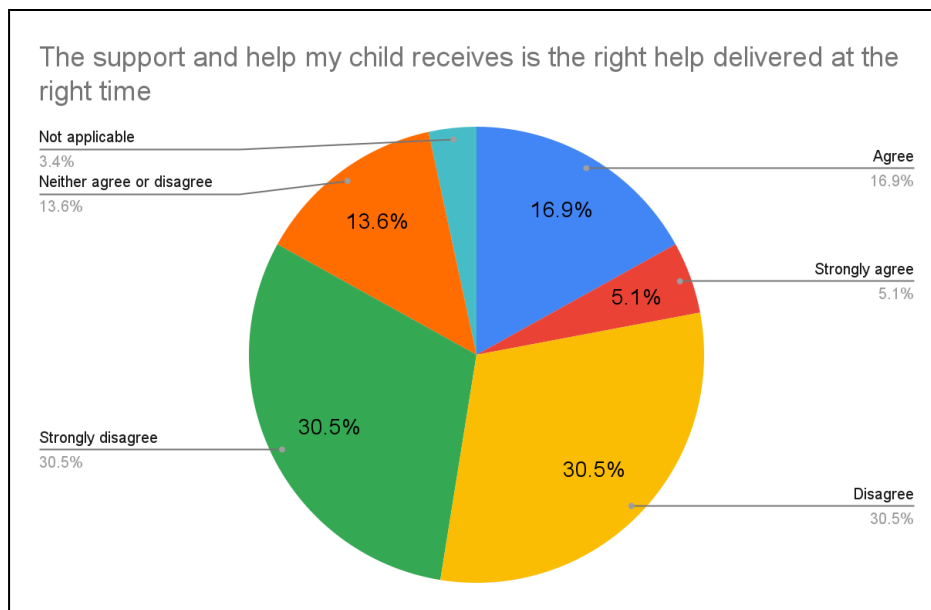


Figure 2: Pie chart demonstrating the percentage of children and young people who feel their child receives the right help delivered at the right time. Source: SEND Futures survey for parents and carers (59 respondents)

SEND Futures survey results demonstrated that 61% of parents and carers either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their children get the right help delivered at the right time. This is reinforced by concerns raised by parents in focus groups that the waiting times for accessing treatment e.g. for occupational therapy or speech and language therapy are too long. Another key concern that came up several times during focus groups and through survey results was the lack of post-diagnosis support for parents and carers, in particular harder to reach groups. Parents felt there was a lack of support from practitioners as well as access to peer support groups.

Parent: "We got a diagnosis and then that was that. You feel a bit like you are flapping in the wind."

Parents and carers were also concerned about the inconsistency in the quality of support depending on the school a child attends. There were also concerns about the recruitment and retention of staff across education, health and social care and the impact this had on families ability to access support.

What could be done to improve?

A key message from parents was that there was a need to improve post-diagnosis support. It was suggested that services think about ways that they can deliver services more quickly and efficiently, for example through offering online courses for parents to complete whilst waiting for appointments e.g. ichatter, which is pre-recorded and sent out immediately. In addition it was suggested more effort should be made by local services to contact harder to

reach families e.g. non-English speakers. Parents felt like more reasonable adjustments could be made for children with SEND, in particular in schools e.g. adjustment that make it easier for a child with SEND when completing examinations. Parents also felt there could be clearer communication points into a school to discuss SEND children's progress.

How can we make sure that you are involved in decision making about plans and support that involve your children?

Children and young people

What's working well?

Young people in focus groups noted that they felt at ease at school to talk about themselves: *"So I normally talk about what I need to say, and I feel I can talk"*. Young people also demonstrated that they are given structured opportunities to have their thoughts and questions heard by school staff: *"Yes, I get to use our question and answer system in class, I get to write questions and teachers will answer them at different times (free time)"*.

"I feel supported in class and outside of class I feel equally supported."- Young person

What's a worry?

Some young people felt unsupported and frustrated when professionals they worked with did not come to key meetings about their care e.g. one young person spoke about her social worker being unable to attend an annual review meeting, leading to funding being denied. In addition, survey results demonstrated that young people could not confidently say that their views and feelings had been heard.

What could be done to improve?

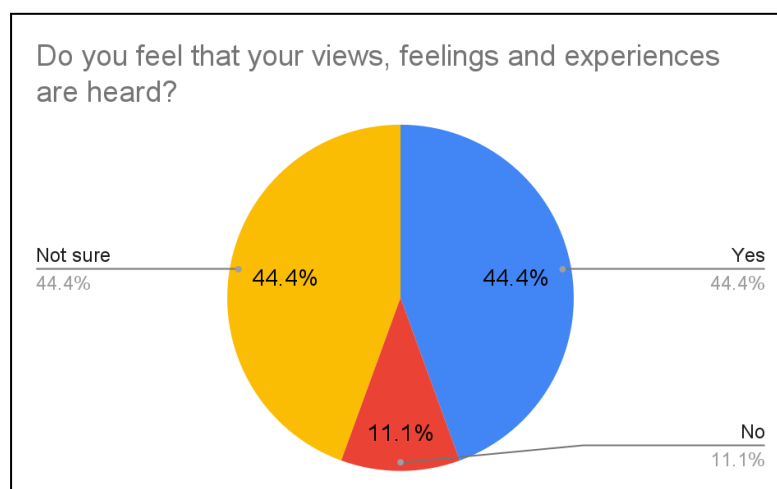


Figure 3: Pie chart demonstrating the percentage of children and young people with SEND who felt their views, feelings and experiences were heard by those supporting them. Source: Easy-Read transition survey for young people (9 respondents)

Survey results demonstrate that some young people do not feel listened to or aren't sure, meaning that more work needs to be done to include young people in the decision making process around their care. There is also a need to ensure that there is a team around the child, and that professionals a child or young person relies on are present at key meetings or can communicate any absence effectively to the child or young person they work with.

Parents and carers

What's working well?

Feedback from the SEND Futures survey demonstrated that 66% of parents and carers either agreed or strongly agreed that they were actively involved in decision making about their plans and additional support.

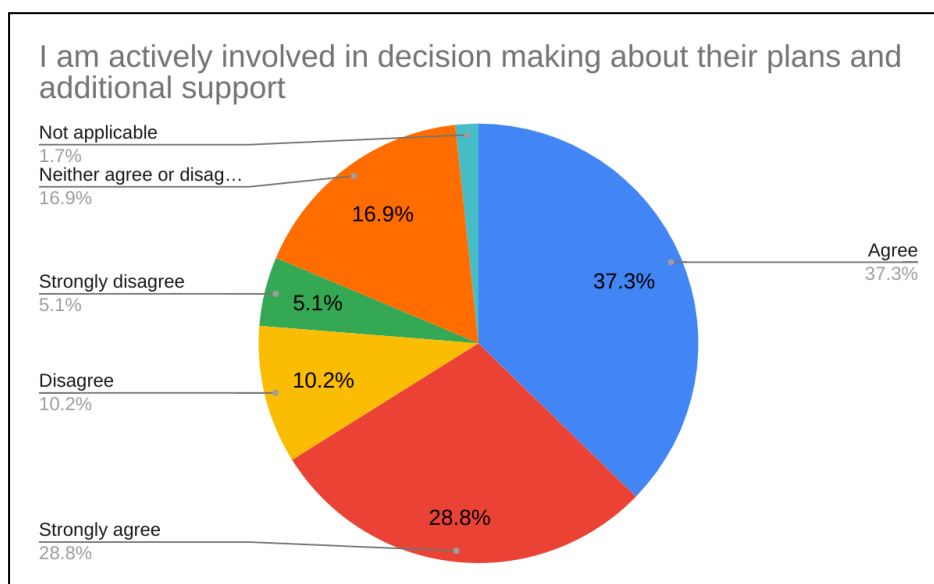


Figure 4: Pie chart demonstrating the percentage of parents and carers who felt they were actively involved in decision making about their child or young person's plans and additional support. Source: SEND Futures survey for parents and carers (59 respondents)

Some parents spoke about good communication links with schools, and those whose children had EHCPs valued the opportunity to meet once a term with staff to discuss their child's progress with the EHCP. Parents felt that the subsequent annual review meetings ensured that everyone involved in delivering a child's support had a specific opportunity to get together. One parent noted that there is *"dedicated time carved out to speak about this, as all the key stakeholders come to that meeting"*. Parents also praised school staff, for example, one parent felt the family support team at a local special school was 'excellent'

"The school has been amazing. The support we've received there has been excellent, and I don't think my daughter would be where she is now without them. They are very consultative - it feels like a partnership, and we really value their expertise and insight." - Parent

What's a worry?

Parents felt that there was a lack of clarity or structure in terms of what support was available to children on SEN support, as opposed to those with an EHCP, whose support was clearly planned out. Some parents felt that their views were not taken into account by professionals and that staff needed more training on SEN support. Of those parents and carers whose children did have an EHCP, some were concerned that their children were not getting the support specified in their plan e.g. speech and language, due to lack of funding or availability. Parents and carers also felt that many families do not have the time or means to understand the legislation and statutory requirements around what schools need to deliver for their children. Another concern for parents and carers was around inconsistency of practice amongst SENCOs e.g. parents stated that some SENCOs only work part-time or their role is shared with other duties.

What could be done to improve?

Parents and carers suggested a need for a clearer offer on what is Ordinarily Available Provision within mainstream schools. Families also suggested more of a structure for children on SEN support in mainstream schools, for example sit down meetings with parents and carers to create a learning plan. Many parents also felt that the SENCO should be a dedicated full-time role. It was suggested that best practice with SENCOs be shared more freely between different schools.

How can we make sure that you and your children are ready for their next stage in life? E.g. Moving from primary to secondary school and beyond

Children and young people

What's working well?

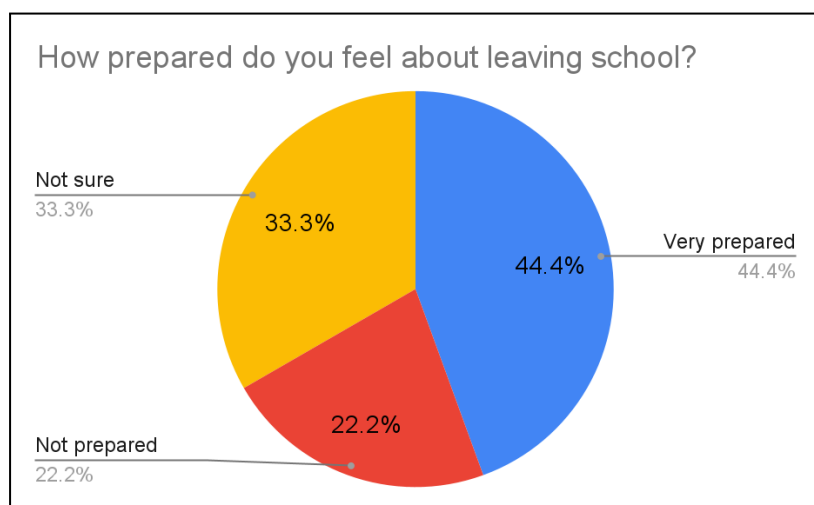


Figure 5: Pie chart demonstrating the percentage of children and young people with SEND who felt prepared for leaving school. Source: Easy-Read transition survey for young people (9 respondents)

Some of the young people spoken to had received college placements, demonstrating good practice by schools in preparing young people for transition. Some young people also praised the staff at their colleges, for example, one student reported that when he enrolled at the college he felt very anxious but that staff helped him to enjoy college. There were also examples of best practice from other young people, who had been given help by professionals to take the next step into independence. One student, with the help of their social worker and the college, has found employment at Teddington library which she describes as *"her dream job."*

"I feel prepared to be an adult and moving into the next phase of my life." - Young person

What's a worry?

There was a shared concern that there weren't enough employment opportunities for young people with SEND and therefore did not feel accepted. Linked to this was the worry that there was a lack of inclusivity amongst employers, who they felt were unwilling to hire young people with SEND. One student also reported that there is a shortage of options post-college which challenge them intellectually.

What could be done to improve?

Young people wanted more inclusive practices amongst employers, so that they would be more willing to offer work experience and hire young people with disabilities.

Young people also felt that the transition process from one educational setting to another needs to begin earlier, so that they can feel more prepared for the next stage. Survey results also revealed that young people would like more support and guidance in choosing what courses to take moving into sixth form or college.

"Bring in people to help us decide which course we could do based on our interests" - Young person

Parents and carers

What's working well?

Parents and carers gave examples of best practice when talking about their children; transition from primary to secondary school. For example, one mainstream secondary school held a tea party for all SEND children transitioning there from primary school during the summer holidays before term started. Parents also gave examples of schools preparing children and young people for adulthood by arranging work experience opportunities and arming them with the skills for independent living.

“Excellent support from AfC in organising work experience and discussing post-16 career options with my daughter.” - Parent

What’s a worry?

Parents flagged that if a child has an additional need but does not have an EHCP, there is not enough structure and support for their transition to the next stage of their life and planning for the future, employment and independent living. Another key theme that came up was the shortage of post-16 educational placements within mainstream schools. A number of parents had children who wished to stay on in mainstream school but could not due to schools not having the correct support in place for sixth form. Parents also raised concerns about the transition from children to adult health services, noting that this was often not a smooth transition and that there was a lack of support for the family during this period. In particular, it was noted that Continuing Healthcare must be improved in order to ensure young people feel better prepared for adult life.

“Post-16 is a very important stage as it is when they are becoming more independent. We (parents) can only do so much.” - Parent

What could be done to improve?

Parents suggested having more ‘adaption days’ and summer courses for children and young people with SEND moving from primary to secondary school, and for young people moving on to college. Other parents felt that it would be helpful to have more opportunities for young people with SEND who do not have an EHCP to have more access to supported living and help with accommodation. Parents also felt that better forward planning and provision was needed for post-16 young people with SEND within mainstream schools. Finally, parents suggested clearer and more robust pathways from children to adult health services, and more support for the family during this transition.

In the SEND Futures survey, nearly equal numbers of parents and carers either agreed/strongly agreed or disagreed/strongly disagreed, demonstrating that although some families have had good experiences of preparation for adulthood, there is still work to be done.

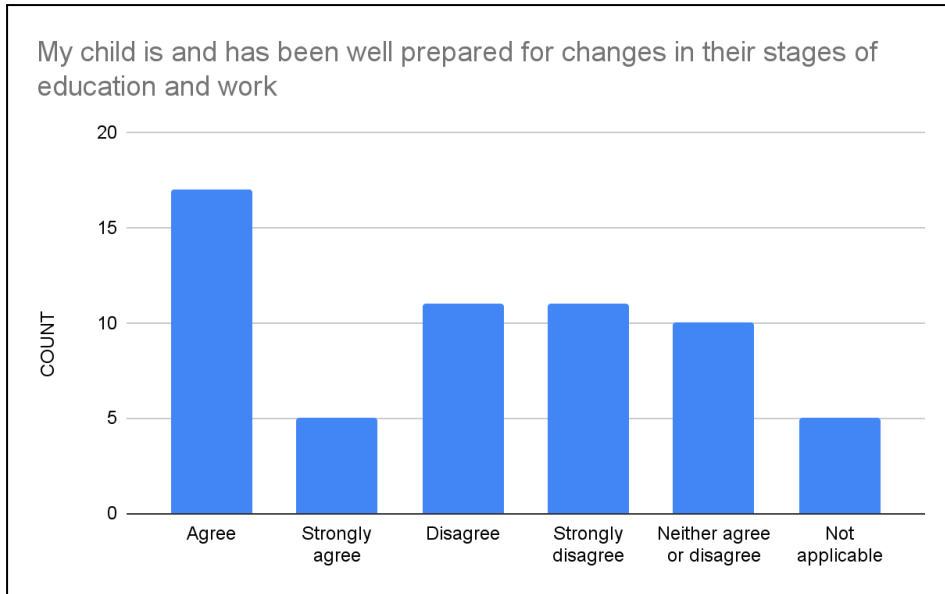


Figure 6: Bar graph demonstrating the number of parents and carers who feel their child or young person has been well prepared for changes in their stages of education and work. Source: SEND Futures survey for parents and carers (59 respondents)

What can we do to help you and your family be seen, included and valued in Kingston?

Children and young people

What's working well?

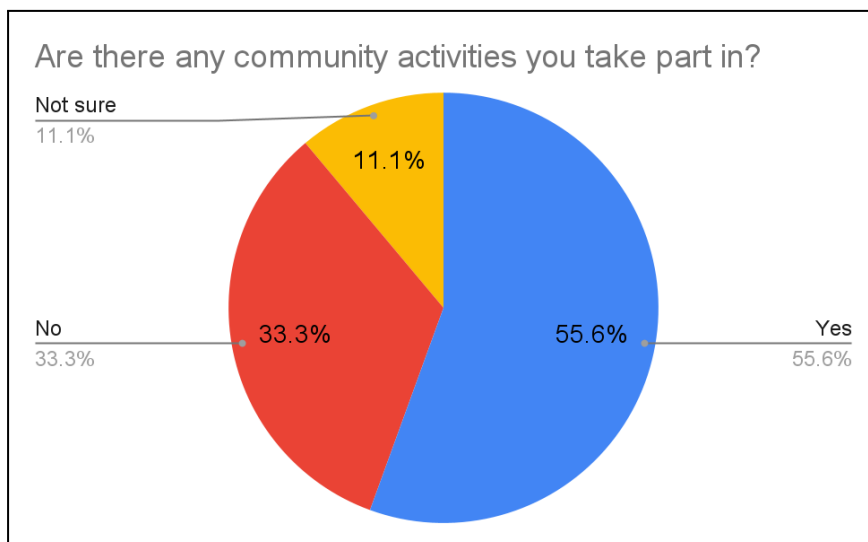


Figure 7: Pie chart demonstrating the percentage of children and young people with SEND who take part in community activities. Source: Easy-Read transition survey for young people (9 respondents)

Young people told us that they enjoy holiday activity clubs where they can be creative and participate in arts and crafts activities, in addition to doing exercise such as swimming. They spoke about the fact that they *“really enjoy after school club”*, and were able to do things in the local community, such as go swimming, attend local parks and ride the bus.

“Staff at Short Breaks makes me feel very safe”. - Young person

What’s a worry?

Young people felt that there was a shortage of swimming facilities across the borough. Young people also mentioned that overgrown grass and hedges in local parks and roads is a common issue. This impacts on a student’s ability to be independent in the community as they must rely on staff or personal assistants to accompany them. The issue of using public transport was also raised, for example, only one wheelchair per bus is permitted which can cause delays for appointments.

What could be done to improve?

Young people asked for more accessible swimming activities including accessible changing rooms and hoists. In addition, young people suggested improving public transport such as making it more accessible for wheelchair users to travel independently. Young people also wanted more opportunities to participate in mainstream activities e.g. cinemas, nightclubs.

Parents and carers

What’s working well?

Parents and carers gave examples of best practice within the voluntary sector. For example, ADHD Embrace and TAG youth Club were seen as brilliant voluntary provisions/resources for children with SEND, and gave parents valuable time for short breaks. Parents and carers also gave examples of good support networks for other parents and carers e.g. Kingston Carers Network and Young Carers Network. A number of parents enjoyed attending council-run stay and play clubs such as the Tuesday Club, as it gave them the opportunity for peer support. Parents also mentioned that there were good resources available for children and young people with autism and ADHD.

What’s a worry?

Several parents and carers were concerned about the number of mainstream clubs that are not accessible or inclusive of children and young people with SEND. This causes additional worry for families given the difficulty this causes to access childcare, especially during the school holidays with one parent stating their child feels *“abandoned and neglected.”* Some parents said that they find the AfC website and Local Offer difficult to navigate and they

struggle to find the right information. Parents also noted a lack of blue badge parking spaces and difficulty accessing blue badge permits which makes accessing town centres difficult.

What could be done to improve?

Parents and carers suggested working with providers of mainstream holiday clubs and activities to help them become more inclusive and improve the universal offer for children and young people with SEND. They also felt there could be more short break opportunities for young people post-16. A number of parents felt that it would be beneficial for children and young people with SEND to have more opportunities to learn life skills in the community such as cycle safety. Parents also suggested a Local Offer flow-chart for easier access to information. Parents also suggested more opportunities for peer support with other parents and carers would be useful.

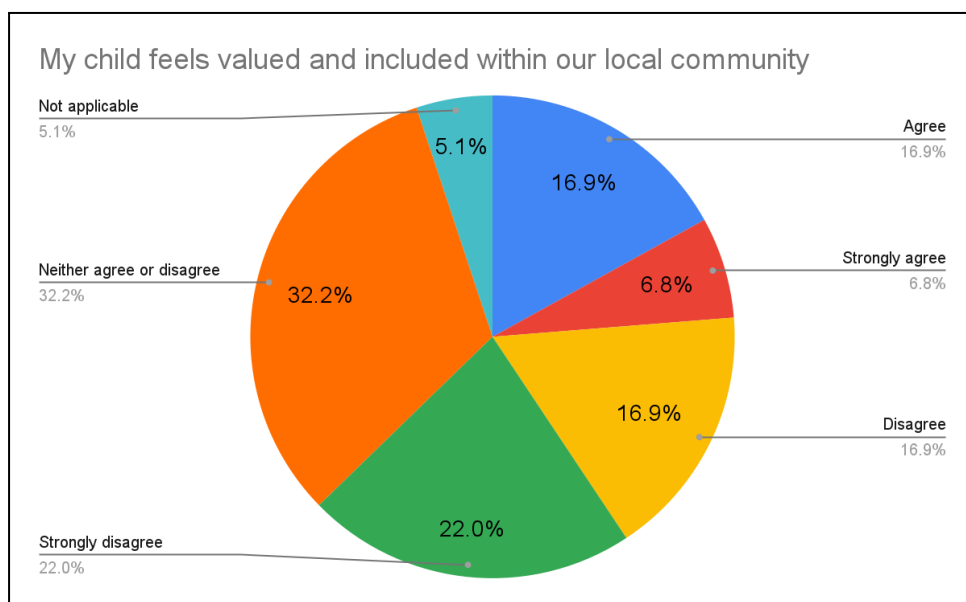


Figure 8: Pie chart demonstrating the number of parents and carers who feel their child or young person feels valued and included within their local community. Source: SEND Futures survey for parents and carers (59 respondents)

Survey results demonstrate that a large proportion of parents and carers (32%) feel neither included nor excluded from their community, and a further 22% felt that they are not included. This demonstrates the need to increase opportunities for families with children with SEND to feel part of their local community.

Next steps

The feedback, thoughts and ideas we have received through this engagement work will be used to feed into the new SEND Futures Plan, Kingston's strategic plan for improving SEND services in the local area.