

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<b>REPORT TITLE</b> Young Inspectors Report 2025 and Progress Update on Recommendations from the Young Inspectors Report 2024	
<b>REPORT OF</b> Director of Relational Practice Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO</b> Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee	<b>DATE</b> 13 January 2026
<b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b> <p>This report sets out the findings, key messages, and recommendations from the Young Inspectors' 2025 report entitled 'Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans; Capturing the Voice of the Child or Young Person'.</p> <p>The focus for our Young Inspector's this summer was: To explore how children and young people experience EHC planning and reviews in Camden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand whether children and young people feel their voices are heard and acted upon throughout the EHC process</li> <li>• To identify barriers and opportunities for improving participation and communication in EHC planning</li> <li>• To develop practical recommendations for Camden Council and partners to strengthen how EHC plans reflect the views and needs of children and young people</li> <li>• To look at the role of families in the EHC process, recognising the experiences of parents and carers, how it impacts them, and how their input shapes planning and decisions</li> <li>• To understand how professionals work with children and families and find ways to strengthen joint working and improve clarity of roles and responsibilities</li> </ul> <p>The conclusions provide seven key findings with detailed recommendations under each of these, which are aimed at strengthening practice and participation.</p> <p>The report also highlights the skills and experiences gained by the Young Inspectors and how their insights contribute to Camden's commitment to inclusive and child-centred practice.</p> <p>Appendix 1 includes the Virtual School's response to the Young Inspectors' 2024 report recommendations, demonstrating how previous feedback has informed ongoing improvements.</p>	

## **Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information**

No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is asked to comment on and note the report.

Signed:



Rashida Baig, Director of Children's Prevention, Family Help and Safeguarding  
(on behalf of Nana Bonsu & Vikram Hansrani)

Date: 29 December 2025

## **1. Purpose of the report**

A Young Inspectors' report is included in the Committee's work programme each year, and the Committee is invited to provide feedback on the Young Inspectors' findings from a Camden children's service.

In addition, Appendix 1 presents a progress update on the Children's Service's response to the recommendations from the previous year's Young Inspectors' report, which the Committee is asked to scrutinise.

## **2. Introduction**

The Young Inspectors Programme has been running in Camden for the past eighteen years, since 2007. Its purpose is to empower young people with lived experience of services to inspect how these services are delivered and make recommendations for their improvement and future development.

Each year, a group of Young Inspectors carries out research to explore the views of children, young people, parents, carers, and professionals about Camden's services and the partner agencies responsible for helping and safeguarding children and families. The approach centres on listening to lived experience, hearing directly from those who use and deliver support in order to better understand what is working well and where things could be improved.

This year's team was made up of 7 Young Inspectors aged 16 to 22, who were recruited through an open advert shared via Camden schools, special educational needs (SEN) networks, participation groups and Social Workers. As part of the recruitment and interview process there was a focus on including young people from Camden's Youth Mission Priority Cohorts.

Camden's Youth Mission is a borough-wide commitment to ensure that all young people especially those who face additional barriers such as care experience, special educational needs, or other vulnerabilities have equal opportunities to participate, influence decisions, and thrive.

This approach helped form a team with a range of needs, communication styles, and experiences across Camden that included some with care experience, some with SEN or their own EHC plans and or others with experience of siblings with SEN. Their unique individual perspectives shaped the questions they asked, the themes they explored, and the way they approached the project.

To capture authentic experiences and gain meaningful insight into lived experiences, the Young Inspectors engaged widely with the SEND community. Over the two-week project, they facilitated focus groups with eight young people and two parents/carers, conducted nine interviews with professionals, and gathered feedback through 18 surveys completed by young people and nine surveys from SEND professionals. The insights, reflections, and recommendations presented in this report come directly from this work and represent the voices of young people at the heart of Camden's continuous improvement.

### **3 Background: Ensuring Meaningful Participation in EHC Plans**

- 3.1 The majority of children and young people in Camden with SEN or disabilities have their needs met within local mainstream early years, school, or college settings. However, Camden also has a range of specialist provisions for children with more complex needs, including 3 special schools, 2 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), 2 hospital-based schools. In addition, mainstream schools offer provision to support pupils with a wide range of needs. Together, these settings provide tailored support for children and young people who require higher levels of intervention.
- 3.2 As of January 2025, Camden's EHC plan register included 1,607 children and young people aged 0 to 25, alongside 3,416 pupils identified with SEN Support. 289 children within the SEN Support group are in receipt of an Exceptional Needs Grant (ENG), which is additional funding for children who live in Camden, attend a mainstream school, and need support beyond what standard school budgets can provide. ENG offers the same level of funding as an EHC plan but through a quicker, simpler process, enabling schools to put tailored support in place promptly.

The purpose of an EHC plan is to ensure that the child or young person receives the right support to meet their specific educational needs, to secure the best possible outcomes for them across education, health and social care. It also aims to support their development and preparation for adulthood, ensuring their voice is central to decisions about their future.

Over recent years, the number of new EHC plans for school-age children has increased significantly. In 2019, for example, there were 131 new plans, a figure that remained similar in 2020 (130) and 2022 (131) after a slight dip in 2021 (115).

However, numbers have risen sharply since then, with 180 new plans in 2023 and a recorded 202 in 2024.

As more children and families enter the EHC process, it is essential that their voices remain central to planning and decision making. An EHC plan should feel like a personalised roadmap that reflects the child or young person's aspirations, strengths, and needs.

- 3.3 The SEND Code of Practice (2015, paragraphs 9.21–9.26), along with the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014, sets out that local authorities must ensure children, young people, and their parents are fully involved throughout the EHC needs assessment process. They should be engaged from the outset and given clear opportunities to express their views, share information, and contribute to decisions about support.”
- 3.4 This requirement emphasises the importance of meaningful participation, ensuring that the voice of the child or young person remains central to planning and decision-making across education, health, and social care.

- 3.5 In Camden we have a dedicated Participation Team within the SEN department who champion the voice of children and young people, ensuring their views remain at the heart of decision making. This work reflects our commitment to children's rights, particularly Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says that all children have the right to express their views freely in all matters that affect them, and that their views should be given due weight.
- 3.6 This understanding informed the Young Inspectors' focus areas, highlighting the importance of ensuring that children and young people's voices are meaningfully heard and that their experiences directly influence how support and decisions are shaped.

#### **4. Young Inspection 2025 – The Aims**

- 4.1 The [“Investigation on the Effectiveness of Children’s SEND Provision in Camden” report by the Camden SEND Scrutiny Panel](#) (commissioned and made up of members of the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee) published in October 2024 emphasises the importance of listening to children and young people's voices in shaping SEND services. It highlights that EHC Plans should reflect what matters most to children and families, ensuring their views are central to decision-making.
- 4.2 The report calls for a clear roadmap for parents, improved transparency, and more inclusive practices to ensure that children's views shape the support they receive. The findings in this report helped to shape the Young Inspectors' focus this year.
- 4.3 The focus of the Young Inspectors' work this year was:
  - To explore how children and young people experience EHC planning and reviews in Camden.
  - To understand whether children and young people feel their voices are heard and acted upon throughout the EHC process.
  - To identify barriers and opportunities for improving participation and communication in EHC planning.
  - To develop practical recommendations for Camden Council and partners to strengthen how EHC plans reflect the views and needs of children and young people.
  - To look at the role of families in the EHC process, recognising the experiences of parents and carers, how it impacts them, and how their input shapes planning and decisions
  - To understand how professionals work with children and families and find ways to strengthen joint working and improve clarity of roles and responsibilities.

## 5. The Approach

5.1 The Young Inspectors used a mixture of methods to gather insights from professionals, children, young people, parents, and carers. This helped them capture lived experiences, uncover hidden barriers, and make sure the findings supported the project's aims.

5.2 Here's what they did:

- **Youth-Led Method and Design** – The Young Inspectors created their own questions for interviews and focus groups, based on what they thought was important.
- **Focus Groups** – Group discussions with young people, parents and carers to share experiences and ideas together.
- **Interviews** – The Young Inspectors held interviews with key professionals to understand how SEND services work in practice. They interviewed the SEN Operational Manager, Case Officers, Principal Educational Psychologists, Head of Virtual Schools, and the Designated Social Care Officer. They also had informal conversations with senior leaders, including the Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion, Head of SEND and Inclusion, and the SEND Policy and Project Officer.
- **Questionnaires** – To reach a wider audience and get a more accurate representation of experiences, questionnaires were shared with a wider group of children, young people and professionals.
- **Review of Previous Annual Reports** – Looked at past anonymised EHC Plan reviews to see how children and young people's voices have been captured, and where improvements are needed.
- **Research and Review** – Reviewed publications, reports, and videos focused on promoting inclusion and improving experiences for children and young people with SEN

The project was delivered over a two-week period during the summer and combined interviews, activities, discussions, reflections, and meetings. The Young Inspectors also participated in learning sessions with SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service), which provided impartial advice and helped them understand the EHC process and the support available to children, young people, and their families.

5.3 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's 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 Education, Health and Care (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

## 6. Questionnaire Data Summary

### 6.1 Feedback from Children and Young People

A total of 18 responses were received from young people aged 14–24 to questions in relation to their experiences of SEN, EHC plans and their Annual Reviews.

Key quantitative results are presented below.

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%) Picture Exchange Communication System cards: 3 (17%) Voice note: 3 (17%) Video: 1 (6%)

The data shows that most young people are familiar with what Annual Reviews are, but that engagement with and attendance at them is more variable. Some young people have attended all their reviews, while others have only attended a few or none at all.

Meeting format preferences lean heavily towards in-person sessions, indicating that face-to-face interaction is considered important for meaningful participation. Online remains an important secondary option that some young people find better meets their needs.

When it comes to sharing views for the Annual Review, writing is the most common method, followed by drawing and alternative approaches such as PEC cards, voice notes, and video messages.

Respondents identified parents and carers as the most frequently trusted individuals to share views with, followed by teaching assistants and other supportive adults. Notably, several young people expressed that they would like to give their views themselves.

Qualitative feedback on their experiences showed positive feedback on themes such as being able to talk about goals, having achievements acknowledged, and feeling listened to. However, there were also some recurring challenges which included not understanding what was being discussed, not knowing what to say, and not being asked for their views. These insights underline the importance of clear communication, preparation and support, and ensuring young people's voices are actively sought and valued throughout the process.

## 6.2 Feedback from Professionals

In addition to the views of children and young people, feedback was gathered from professionals involved in supporting annual reviews by carrying out questionnaires. These included inclusion teachers, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators (SENDCos) an educational psychologist, a Special Education and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) manager, and a head of an additionally resourced provision. The following table summarises the key quantitative findings from eight professional responses.

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.	PECS Cards: 2 (25%) Communication apps/devices: 2 (25%) Interpreters: 1 (17%) Sensory aids: 2 (25%) Video/audio submissions: 0 Other: 7 (83%)

The data shows that, of the 8 professionals that shared how they support children and young people in and ahead of Annual Reviews, most reported visiting the person at the centre of the meeting beforehand and explaining the process, while some provide easy-read guidance and offer flexibility around timing and location. The questionnaire allowed professionals to select multiple options, which means responses reflect a range of strategies rather than a single approach.

Building relationships outside of meetings is common, with regular check-ins, classroom observations, and the use of One Page Profiles (a simple, person-centred summary of what matters to the child and how best to support them). When it comes to tools and resources for capturing children's voices, professionals use a mix of approaches such as PECS cards, communication devices, sensory aids, and interpreters, alongside other creative methods.

Although the sample is small, these insights highlight the commitment of professionals to make Annual Reviews more inclusive and child-centred, despite challenges.

### **6.3 Key challenges and suggested improvements**

Alongside the multiple-choice answers already highlighted, professionals shared open-text responses highlighting challenges in making sure young people's voices are heard and valued and gave suggestions for changes, improvements and resources that could help strengthen and amplify the voice of children and young people.

Challenges shared by professionals:

- Children and young people don't always understand the process and realise the EHC planning meeting is for them, while some disengage due to negative past experiences.
- The child or young person's voice is sometimes used to reinforce adult views or historical needs rather than current preferences.
- Parents/carers and children and young people sometimes have different views with parents speaking on behalf of children or young people who could share their own views directly.
- Some young people decline to meet professionals, making it hard to gather views whilst respecting their wishes
- Difficulties interpreting the voice of young children even with supportive aids.
- Legal Annual Review timeframes are sometimes missed, especially for young people without placements or on home tuition.

Suggested Changes, Improvements, and Resources:

- Listen regularly, not just annually by building trust-based relationships and ensuring children and young people are heard throughout the year, not only during Annual Reviews or for EHC planning.
- Introduce ongoing tracking tools that capture children's wishes and feelings over time, reducing the pressure to answer everything in one meeting to give a more accurate picture of their views.
- Expand creative communication methods by using approaches such as audio recordings, WhatsApp surveys, and well-managed Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools to support children who struggle to express themselves verbally.

- Ensure impartiality by having an independent person record the child or young person's views to make sure their voice is represented accurately and not overshadowed by others.
- Offer alternative expression opportunities through creative outlets such as music or art therapy to help children share their thoughts and feelings in different ways.

## 7. What the Young Inspectors Said About Their Experience

- 7.1 *"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**
- 7.2 *"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**
- 7.3 *"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**
- 7.4 *"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**

## 8. Young Inspectors Findings and Recommendations

- 8.1 The young inspectors recognised Camden's strong commitment to supporting children and young people with SEN. It was noted on several occasions that the recent changes to departmental structure had had a positive impact and that staff were more responsive and accessible, which was helping relationships with families despite the many challenges in the system.

Over the two-week inspection, the Young Inspectors heard how the right support in some education settings helped young people thrive, while settling with less support led to feelings of isolation. They received positive feedback about internships for building confidence and skills, and job coaches were praised for the practical help and encouragement they provided, though inspectors noted that more of this support is needed to ensure equal opportunities for equal opportunities.

The findings presented below draw on evidence gathered through all the methods used in this inspection, including questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups with young people, parents, carers, and professionals. While these positives are encouraging, young inspectors also identified areas for improvement. The following findings and recommendations aim to address these challenges and strengthen support for children and young people with SEN.

## 8.2 Timely Access to Support in EHC Plans

**Finding:** Children and young people often wait too long for the help they need. High demands and lengthy waiting lists for services like Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy mean families can feel unsupported and isolated.

**Recommendations:**

- Carry out an audit of waiting times and identify barriers preventing children and young people from getting support when they need it.
- Develop solutions to fill gaps in specialist provision so children receive help when they need it.

## 8.3 Understanding SEN and EHC Plans

**Finding:** There is not enough awareness of special educational needs and provision among children, school staff, and professionals. SEN is not discussed enough in schools, and families need better access to information.

**Recommendations:**

- Include SEN learning in Personal, Social, Health and Economics (PSHE) lessons, assemblies and other learning forums in all Camden schools.
- Ensure SEN awareness is part of every school's curriculum so everyone understands what this is and can support each other.
- Provide SEN training for all professionals working with children and young people so they know how to help young people with different needs.
- Create spaces in the community e.g. Youth Hubs for young people to learn about SEN and speak to professionals for advice.

## 8.4 Communication and Accountability

**Finding:** Communication between families, schools, and the local authority is inconsistent. When messages aren't clear, EHC outcomes can be missed, and parents and carers often feel unheard.

**Recommendations:**

- Embed Camden's relational practice framework in schools to improve listening and collaboration.
- Set clear timeframes for responding to emails and calls from families.
- Case Officers and Managers to monitor and resolve issues promptly.
- Schools to update the council on support provided and how funding is used.
- Create an easy way for children, young people and families to raise concerns and get help quickly.

## 8.5 Frequency of EHC Plan Reviews

**Finding:** Annual reviews feel too far apart. Families want more regular check-ins to keep plans on track and ensure accountability.

**Recommendations:**

- Introduce bi-annual progress reviews alongside annual EHC Plan reviews to check whether support and outcomes are being delivered and provide a chance for changes to be made.
- Make progress reviews informal, relaxed and child centred.
- Create an alert system to flag issues raised by children, young people or parents for quick follow-up between reviews.

## 8.6 Voice and Participation

**Finding:** Children and young people aren't always as involved in their EHC planning and reviews as they should be. Some do not get a chance to share their views beforehand or the option to lead their own meetings.

**Recommendations:**

- Ensure that schools and the Local Authority are able to track how frequently children and young people attend their reviews and actively participate in order to monitor progress and drive further improvement.
- Provide children and young people with clear, accessible information about the EHC process and their rights, including their right to have a 'trusted adult' present.
- Allow them to choose when, where and how they meet professionals to share their views.
- Let children and young people decide who leads their review meeting.
- Offer private meetings with Case Officers if children want them.
- Use creative, low-pressure approaches when communicating with children and young people with SEN
- Share simple "One Page" profiles of professionals with photographs before meetings.
- Offer video or WhatsApp calls with professionals before meetings to reduce anxiety.

## 8.7 Equal Opportunities for Education and Work

**Finding:** Young people with SEN want the same chances to study and work as everyone else and for our aspirations for them to be just as high as for anyone else. More support is needed for post-16 opportunities.

**Recommendations:**

- Start transition planning for young people with SEN from Year 9 with school-based connection carers.

- Ensure young people with SEN have equal access to the same subject choices as their peers and avoid narrowing the curriculum or pushing them into SEN-specific courses unless this is their preference.
- Provide more CV writing and job preparation sessions in schools.
- Offer mentoring and job coaching for all young people with SEND.
- Ensure professionals know about post-16 options to give better advice.
- Schools to organise for organisations to visit and speak with young people about support for employment.
- Professionals in care homes should attend parents' evenings and meetings.

The SEND Code of Practice emphasises that high aspirations are crucial to success. It states that discussions about longer-term goals should begin early, ideally well before Year 9 (age 13–14)—and focus on the child or young person's strengths, capabilities, and the outcomes they want to achieve.

## 8.8 Celebrating SEND

**Finding:** SEN as a characteristic and Children and young people with SEN should be celebrated more during the school year.

**Recommendations:**

- Begin meetings with positive celebrations.
- Organise annual SEN events in Camden to celebrate, share information and training.

## 9. Timescales and Next Steps

Camden's SEND Strategy 2022-2027 sets out our vision and priorities for improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The implementation plan for 2026 will be signed off in January 2026. This timing is ideal, as the Young Inspectors' report offers valuable insights. The updated SEND Strategy implementation plan will consider and respond to the identified recommendations.

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

- Provide a summary document to the Young Inspectors, showing how their recommendations align with the activities in the implementation plan.
- Share regular progress updates on the SEND Strategy with the Young Inspectors throughout the year, potentially through 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.
- Establish a termly working group with key professionals responsible for delivering the Young Inspectors' recommendations. This group will support timely implementation, maintain accountability, and enable collaborative problem-solving to keep progress on track.

In addition, the SEND and Inclusion Service will implement a range of activities directly responding to the Young Inspectors' recommendations. These actions will be embedded within the service plan. As part of this commitment, a celebration event focused on SEND will also be organised.

## **10. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance**

The Director of Finance has been consulted on this report and there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however the suggested changes and improvements recommended for EHCP processes, may have a financial impact which will need to be contained within the ring fenced High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant which is the main source of funding to support the provision of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

## **11. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor**

The Borough Solicitor has been consulted on the contents of this report and has no comment to make at this time.

## **12. Environmental Implications**

There are no environmental implications

## **13. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Progress update on recommendations from the Young Inspectors Report 2024

**REPORT ENDS**