Vision for Inclusive Education – Consultation Analysis

Report for City of Edinburgh Council

Social Research

Service Design & Innovation

Strategy & Collaboration

Evaluation Support

Social Impact Measurement

December 2024

Social Value Lab

Index/

1. Introduction

Background

The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) has recently updated its vision for inclusive education, building on a series of communication and dissemination events with an online consultation that ran between March and May 2024. 523 people submitted a response to this consultation.

CEC commissioned Social Value Lab to provide a thematic analysis of the consultation responses, including responses to both structured and open questions. The tasks have included:

- Reading and coding materials
- Analytical framework covering groups, themes and tone
- Demographic analysis and breakdowns where appropriate
- Written report containing analysis of structured and open data

Respondent analysis

Respondents were asked to provide information on their role or interest in the consultation, the full breakdown is provided below.

TABLE 1.1 RESPONDING AS…

Role	Count
Parent/carer of a child or young person who attends an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	53
Parent/carer of a child or young person who attends an early years, primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	179
Member of school staff in a promoted post (e.g. Leader, Head teacher etc.) in an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	22
Member of school staff in a promoted post (e.g. Leader, Head teacher etc.) in an early years, primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	45
Class teacher of an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	27
Class teacher of an early years or primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	104
Member of school staff in a support role in an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	19
Member of school staff in a support role in an early years, primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	50
Member of central team staff (e.g. Additional Support for Learning Service Team, Educational Psychology Service Team, etc.)	51
Member of staff with a partner agency (e.g. Social Care team, Occupational Therapy team etc.)	14
Other (please state)	92

Source: Consultation respondents (523)

The consultation received many submissions from parents and carers of children in mainstream schools (179), and teachers in mainstream schools (104), followed by parents and carers of children in special schools (53). There were significant numbers of education professionals from central teams (ASL, EPS etc) as well as staff in leadership and support roles.

In order to investigate key differences between different groups of respondents, these roles have been grouped into:

- Parents and carers (235)
- School staff and other roles (357)

Respondents were able to give more than one role (many school staff have children and caring responsibilities of their own). 84 respondents gave more than one role, so their responses have been included in both breakdowns. Many of those who selected 'other' have been manually included in one of the two groups based on the description they provided.

Implications for 'representativeness'

We have also broken down the results across different demographic groups, the main findings are:

- 395 (86%) respondents are female (2 transgender)
- Most aged between 45-54 (39%) or 35-44 (32%)
- 69 (15%) from BME communities, 85% White Scottish or White British
- 20 (5%) from non-Christian religious groups, 33% Christian
- 75 (17%) with a disability (long-term physical or mental conditions)
- 68 (15%) are primary carer of a disabled child or adult

Further breakdowns

The final sample includes relatively few members of BME communities or religious minorities, though it is possible to isolate and look for patterns in the responses given by:

- Parents
- School staff and other roles
- Carers of disabled children or adults
- Female respondents
- Respondents from BME groups[1]

---

[1] Defined here as everyone not white Scottish or white British.

As many are relatively small samples, we have not undertaken detailed crosstabulations of the responses for individual groups, instead looking for differences in the kinds of response given.

2. The Vision

Vision

CEC's vision for inclusion states that in Edinburgh, every child or young person irrespective of identity, background or ability is part of a resilient and positive learning community where they feel:

- We belong
- We contribute
- We learn
- We are supported and we help others

This aligns with the four features of inclusion set down in Scotland's national guidance on the presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting, which states that all children and young people should be present, participating, achieving and supported in education.
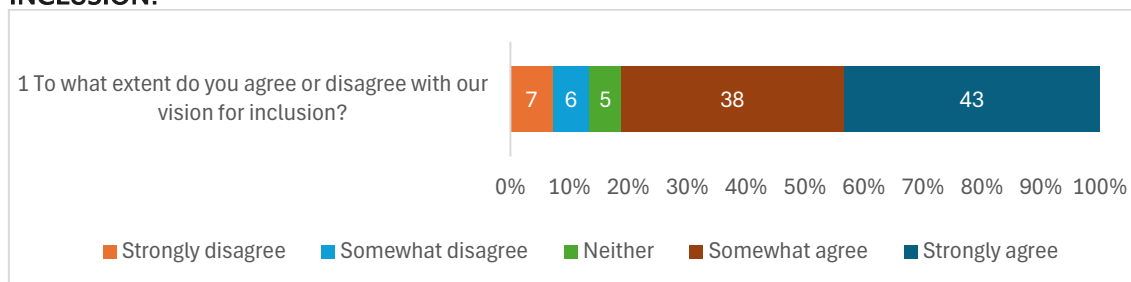
In practice this entails increasing numbers of children and young people with different additional support needs learning in local schools in their own communities, rather than special schools.

The Council acknowledges that achieving this vision will require support, resources and staffing in the right places and doing the right things. It means education environments that adapt design and physical structures, teaching methods, and curriculum as well as the culture, policy and practice of education environments so that they are accessible to all students without discrimination. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without these adaptations does not constitute inclusion.

'Inclusive education in Scotland starts from the belief that education is a human right and the foundation for a more just society. An inclusive approach which recognises diversity and holds the ambition that all children and young people are enabled to achieve to their fullest potential is the cornerstone to achieve equity and excellence in education for all of our children and young people"[2]

---

[2] Guidance on the presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting
https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2019/03/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting/documents/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting/govscot%3Adocument/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting.pdf

FIGURE 2.1 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH OUR VISION FOR INCLUSION?

| 1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for inclusion? | 7 | 6 | 5 | 38 | 43 |

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Neither ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

Source: All consultation responses (525)

There was a high level of agreement with Edinburgh's vision for inclusion, amounting to 81% across all respondents (strongly agree or somewhat agree). There was however some variation in the responses of different groups, for example school staff (85%) were more likely to agree than parents (77%). People who cared for disabled children or adults were less likely to agree than others (69%), though they still supported the vision in general. Respondents from BME communities (88%) were more likely to agree (88%) than White Scottish or British people (80%), and male respondents (83%) were more likely to agree than females (82%).

Key word analysis

What three words you would use to describe your understanding of inclusion? –

Once common functional words have been removed, the most frequently mentioned terms are:

▪	everyone	58
▪	supported	57
▪	equity	55
▪	support	47
▪	belonging	47
▪	inclusion	45
▪	access	42
▪	respect	40
▪	diversity	38
▪	acceptance	36
▪	opportunity	35
▪	equality	33
▪	understanding	31
▪	community	29

▪ empowerment	27	
▪ learning	25	
▪ engagement	24	
▪ growth	22	
▪ fairness	20	
▪ participation	19	

We have grouped the suggested keywords into themes, beginning with the four main features of inclusion defined in the vision documents, followed by some additional themes showing how keywords can be organised in a different way. The following table present this information, with themes in approximate order of significance.

TABLE 1.2 KEYWORD THEMES…

Key features	Description	Example words
1. **Supported** / We Are Supported and Help Others	Emphasises the need for assistance, fairness, and resources to ensure individuals feel supported and can support others.	everyone, supported, support, access, fairness, equality
2. **Present** / We Belong	Focuses on fostering inclusion and belonging, where individuals feel accepted and valued as part of a community or group.	belonging, inclusion, respect, community, diversity, acceptance
3. **Participate** / We Contribute	Captures active involvement and contributions, highlighting opportunities to engage meaningfully in collective activities.	participation, engagement, empowerment, opportunity, contribute
4. **Achieving** / We Learn	Reflects aspirations for growth, learning, and knowledge acquisition, highlighting the importance of progress and understanding.	learning, growth, understanding, achieving, knowledge
Additional themes	Description	Example words
1. Justice and Equity	Addresses systemic fairness and the pursuit of equality, focusing on overcoming barriers and achieving impartiality.	equity, fairness, justice, equality
2. Diversity and Inclusion	Reflects the recognition and appreciation of differences, ensuring all individuals feel valued and celebrated for their unique attributes.	diversity, inclusion, acceptance
3. Personal Agency and Empowerment	Highlights individual autonomy, confidence, and the ability to influence one's circumstances and environment.	empowerment, opportunity, engagement
4. Ethical Practice and Responsibility	Focuses on ethical values, respect for others, and acting with accountability and integrity.	fairness, respect, equity

Source: Consultation respondents (523)

Parents and carers were slightly more likely to emphasise **supported** and **present** themes more than others, reflecting a focus on their children's need for inclusion, resources and assistance. School staff also highlighted justice, equity and **achieving**, aligning with their roles in promoting fairness and fostering educational outcomes.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision for inclusion? - Do you think there are any changes needed?

Most respondents agreed with the general vision for inclusion (words like great, excellent, admirable were among the most used) and appreciated that this is a general aspiration or framework for ongoing action. Among the suggested changes, the following came up multiple times:

1. Respect, value, acceptance (more than belonging?)

2. Being heard or understood

3. Feeling safe and supported

Several people felt that resilience was not a helpful concept, as it can be interpreted as children and young people being expected to deal with poor support or systemic issues.

While most appreciated that this is a general framework, asking people to comment on such broad, subjective themes invites very different responses.

1. Many people described the vision as vague, fuzzy or open to interpretation with others saying that it was fine in theory, or on paper, but was not connected to practice, or unrealistic considering current resources and pressure on services.

2. There was some criticism of the inclusion of 'identity' in the vision, but perhaps less than might be expected for such a high profile and often controversial topic.

3. There was also a common view that support for learning, attainment, maximising abilities or helping children to thrive was more important than inclusion per se, or at least identified a tension between inclusion and attainment.

"Inclusion for one is greatly impacting and draining resources in mainstream for the rest of the children who would also greatly benefit from and deserve support."

People often preferred to share their experiences and views of current practice rather than policy matters. Several discussed individual cases (including their own children), some with disabilities or additional support needs who have had negative experiences with CEC, education services or in mainstream schools for different reasons.

Many respondents compared the vision with their understanding of current reality in Edinburgh schools (at the first opportunity, they do not wait for the appropriate question!). A very common view was that inclusion is not being delivered in practice, that the vision is not being implemented effectively or being translated into action.

"I think the vision is great. I am not sure that it is being achieved."

Among the most significant barriers and problems are:

1. The lack of resources, money, funding and capacity in the system, or institution and class sizes in mainstream schools.

2. A shortage of teaching professionals, particularly support staff, trained and skilled pupil support assistants (PSA) and specialists (psychology, additional support needs, social work, challenging behaviours).

3. Teaching staff who are already under significant pressure and not supported to develop specialist knowledge (disability, anti-discrimination, mental health) or general skills (listening, empathy, patience). Some felt they were unfairly blamed for social problems by leaders and parents.

4. A perceived lack of training, particularly around additional support needs, behaviour and safe restraint, autism and neurodivergence.

"The irony is that so many ND children are gifted but struggle to realise their natural abilities in the typical large school environment. The Vision needs to appreciate that one size does not fit all, especially if the one size on offer is based on a neurotypical child without a requirement for additional support."

Overall, there was general support for the presumption of mainstream education in most cases, where this was the right setting and where children (and their parents) were comfortable with mainstream provision. In some cases, mainstream schools were not the right option, and a small number commented that it was important to maintain choice.

"I strongly agree with the vision. However, inclusion does not mean dumping children with additional needs into mainstream schools with little to no support."

There were a number of recurring concerns. Many felt that it is difficult to meet very different needs for learning and support in mainstream settings, and there is often a lack of adequate support or adaptations for children and young people with additional needs.

"Without additional staffing, spaces and support, the mainstream classroom becomes a 'one size fits all,' which it clearly doesn't."

Several respondents talked about the negative impact of having very disruptive (sometimes violent) children in a large class, or the fact that managing crisis situations or supporting children with challenging behaviours takes a lot of time and attention, detracting from teachers' ability to support the learning and development of the rest of the class. This was a particular issue in classes with lots of children with additional support needs or communication difficulties.

"My understanding of inclusion is about love and nurture, acceptance of differences and safety. What I actually see is children consistently overwhelmed and struggling, needs not being met, staff struggling to meet the needs of the children with little to no support."

Some felt this mostly affected teachers' ability to support the development of the most able pupils, while others felt it was others with less severe problems (without obvious problems or a formal diagnosis?) that were more likely to miss out on support.

> *"It's not kids who have diagnosed conditions or are disruptive. It's those kids who sit under the radar who are respectful, kind and nice but struggle, they are often missed as teachers are too busy dealing with challenging behaviours."*

This meant that there was a risk of a learning gap developing, and that while achievement is relative (to each pupil's challenges and abilities) it is difficult to support a large number of children with very different needs in a single classroom.

Others commented that it was unrealistic to expect good peer relationships to develop where there is a large gap between learners, or where children are keenly aware of differences in capabilities and needs.

> *"There is little inclusion where a child cannot develop positive relationships with peers due to limited mental age or development, for example."*

> *"Inclusion is not the same for everyone. Being in the same building as others does not mean inclusion."*

Key features

Inclusive practice is considered in this document through four key 'features' of inclusion, with individual indicators and questions under each. These are:

- Present
- Participating
- Achieving
- Supported

The following questions are asked in each of the relevant sections of the consultation and have been brought together here to provide an overview.

FIGURE 2.1 TO WHAT EXTENT IS EDINBURGH DOING WELL WITH THE FOLLOWING FEATURES OF INCLUSION?
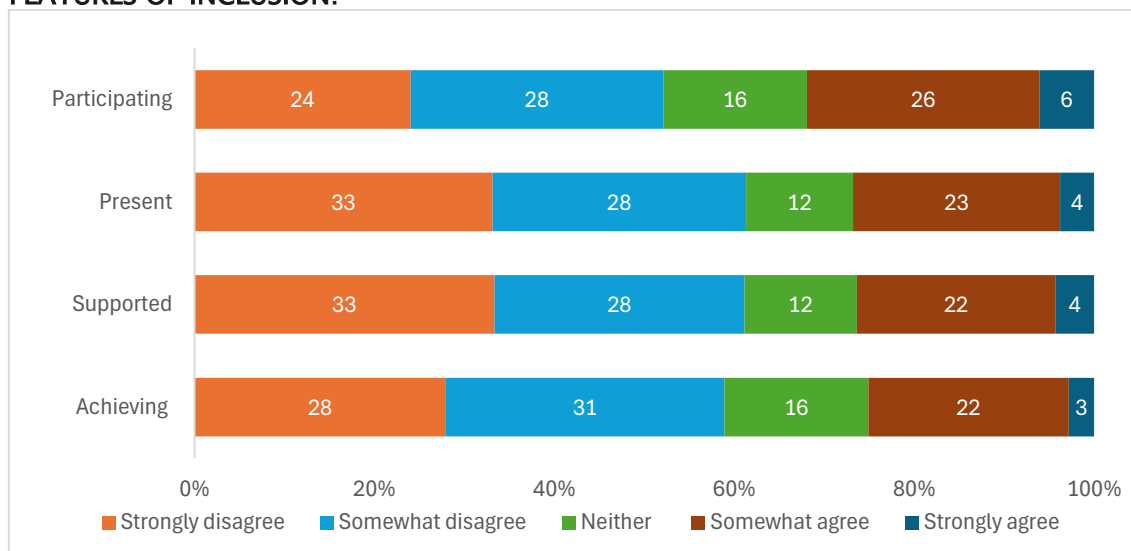
Source: All consultation responses

While we have seen that respondents tend to agree with the vision in principle, this shows that most disagree that Edinburgh is currently doing well. The least positive features are Supported and Present. Even for the most positive aspect Participating, only 32 % agree that Edinburgh is doing well. The main reasons for this and patterns in the responses by different groups are explored more in the relevant sections.

Respondents were also provided with two opportunities to provide open comments in each 'Feature' section i.e.:

- What is working well with regards to the key feature 'present'?

- What would help us to improve on the 'present' feature of inclusion? -

We have reviewed and analysed the open comments provided in each of the four 'Feature' sections. There is a great deal of overlap in terms of content, particularly around availability of support, resources, staffing and the specific needs of different groups of learners.

Responses by group

We have also looked at key differences in the responses provided by different groups. Perhaps unsurprisingly, parents and carers tended to focus on children's need for support, alongside concerns over their child's attendance and engagement. Several mentioned the need for practical support to maximise attendance and prevent escalation,

"Efforts to keep children in school are good, but without support, it doesn't always work."

School staff tended to emphasise more systemic challenges, including availability of specialist support, staffing, resources and workload in general, as well as the impact of large class sizes, disruptive behaviour and the need to balance competing needs. In this context, lack of resources was felt to be a barrier to greater inclusion.

"We need smaller classes and more staff to help children who are struggling to stay present."

Carers of disabled young people and adults highlighted barriers for children with ASN and unmet needs, focusing on the importance of tailored support and specialist interventions. Many expressed a desire for greater understanding of the needs of specific groups among school staff or education teams.

"Children with additional needs often miss out because schools don't have the capacity to support them properly."

While there are fewer responses from BME respondents, they were slightly more likely to emphasise the importance of equitable access to education and support for children from diverse backgrounds.

"More needs to be done to ensure children from different backgrounds are included and supported to attend school."
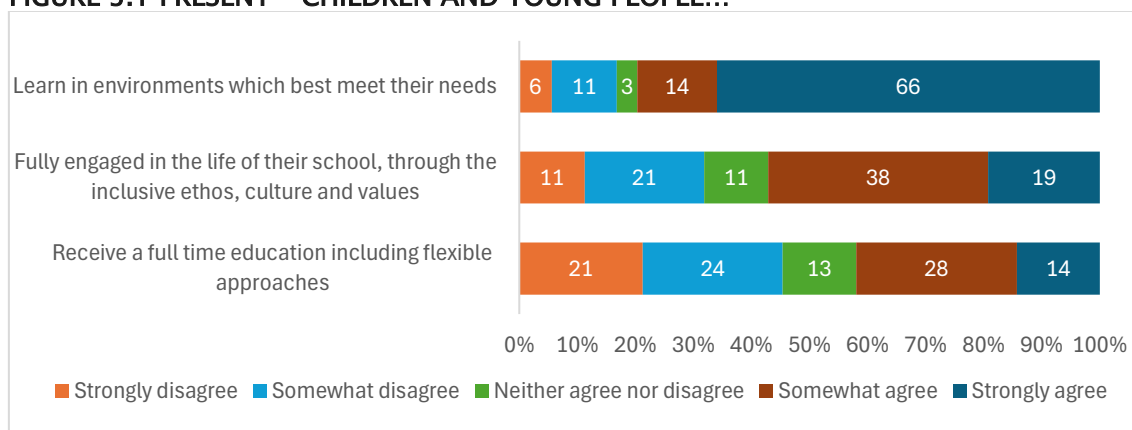
3. Present

The Present feature requires that:

- All children and young people should learn in environments which best meet their needs.

- All children and young people should be fully engaged in the life of their school, through the inclusive ethos, culture and values of the school.

- All children and young people should receive a full-time education including flexible approaches to meet their needs.

The following chart shows the extent to which respondents agree with the relevant statements.

FIGURE 3.1 PRESENT – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE...

Source: All consultation responses

We have reviewed the open comments provided in order to provide further context around the main elements of 'Present.'

Children with additional support needs (ASN), including those with disabilities, neurodivergence (e.g. autism), or mental health challenges, were most frequently identified as having unmet needs. Carers of disabled children highlighted the lack of tailored, specialist support and adaptations to help these children thrive in mainstream settings.

"Children with additional needs are often overlooked because schools don't have the staffing or spaces to give them the support they need."

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds and BME communities were also mentioned, with concerns about equitable access to resources and culturally responsive support.

The most frequently suggested changes focus on staffing and resources, particularly smaller class sizes to reduce overcrowding and allow for more individual attention. There were also calls for increased availability of trained support staff, particularly pupil support assistants (PSAs) and specialists, to address diverse needs.

"We need more PSAs and smaller groups so every child can be supported properly."

Among the suggestions for improvements were more suitable physical spaces, such as quiet areas or specialist rooms, for children who struggle in large or overstimulating environments. Others talked about the need for additional funding to ensure schools can meet the growing demands of inclusion.

"Overcrowded classrooms and a lack of funding make it impossible to meet the needs of all children."

Children with ASN and those experiencing mental health issues were identified as being at the highest risk of inconsistent attendance or disengagement. Respondents noted that while some children are physically present, they are often unable to meaningfully engage in learning.

"Some children are in school but not really present – they're overwhelmed and disengaged because their needs aren't being met."

Additionally, children with challenging behaviours or those from disadvantaged backgrounds were noted as more likely to miss out on education due to exclusions, lack of support, or struggles at home.

Some respondents discussed the importance of flexible approaches to better meet the needs of diverse learners. Suggestions included:

- Providing part-time or tailored timetables for children who struggle with full-time attendance.

- Offering alternative learning spaces or smaller group environments to support children with complex needs.

- Using individualised learning plans to ensure flexibility and appropriate adaptations for children at risk of disengagement.

"More flexible approaches, like small group work or tailored timetables, would help children who can't manage full mainstream provision."

Many respondents highlight the difference between attendance and engagement, being physically present does not guarantee meaningful learning or progress. For example, there were repeated concerns about the effect of disruptive or challenging behaviours on the rest of the class.

Systemic issues such as funding, staff shortages, and overcrowding emerge as barriers to ensuring children remain consistently present and engaged.
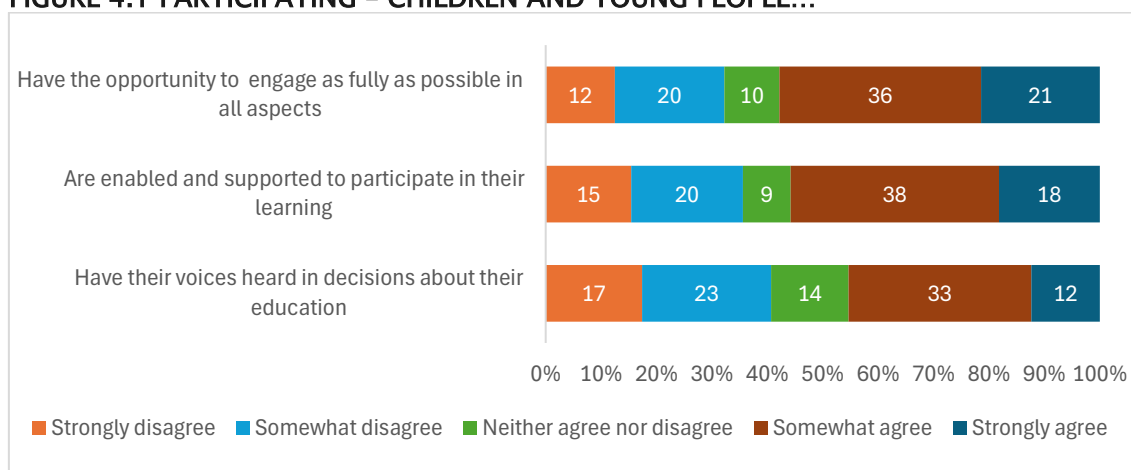
4. Participating

Participating is defined as:

- All children and young people should have their voices heard in decisions about their education. Including decisions on where they learn.

- All children and young people will have the opportunity to participate and engage as fully as possible in all aspects of school or early learning and childcare life, including trips and extracurricular activity.

- All children and young people should be enabled and supported to participate in their learning.

The following chart illustrates the level of agreement with each of these statements. Respondents were most likely to agree that all children have the opportunity to engage fully, and less likely to feel that all children have their voices heard in decisions.

FIGURE 4.1 PARTICIPATING – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE…

Source: All consultation responses

Many of the previous themes around support, staff, and unmet continue to receive attention, so the analysis of this section seeks to build understanding of the different elements of Participating. Several barriers prevent children from engaging fully in learning, with the following themes emerging.

A lack of tailored support for children with neurodivergence (e.g., autism), disabilities, or emotional and behavioural challenges makes it difficult for these children to engage fully, exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms and staff shortages.

"Many children with ASN are present but unable to participate because their needs are not being recognised or addressed."

Anxiety, emotional overwhelm, and other mental health issues make it difficult for some children to engage meaningfully.

"Children struggling with anxiety or emotional issues often disengage because the environment is too much for them."

Overstimulating classrooms, large class sizes, and challenging behaviours disrupt learning and make engagement harder for both affected children and their peers.

"Behavioural challenges in the classroom take up so much time and attention that it's hard for other children to engage."

Respondents highlighted several aspects of school life that contribute to a sense of belonging. Opportunities for group work, extracurricular activities, and smaller group sessions help children feel part of the school community.

"Extracurricular activities like clubs and group projects help children form friendships and feel included."

Teachers and pupil support assistants (PSAs) who create safe, nurturing relationships were widely praised for fostering belonging.

"The efforts of staff to include all children and make them feel valued are so important for belonging."

Quiet or sensory spaces allow children who struggle in large, busy classrooms to feel more comfortable and included.

"Having dedicated spaces for children to reset or work in smaller groups helps them feel they belong."

Several groups were identified as underrepresented or overlooked in discussions about participation. While the needs of children with ASN and disabilities are frequently mentioned, their direct perspectives on participation are not always collected or presented.

"We talk about supporting children with ASN, but we rarely ask them what would help them feel included."

Several concerns were raised about cultural and language barriers that prevent some children and families from feeling heard.

"BME children are often overlooked when it comes to participation – they need targeted support and representation."

Children who "fly under the radar," particularly those struggling without obvious behavioural issues, were highlighted as missing out on attention and support.

"The children who quietly struggle are often missed because they're not disruptive."

Respondents provided several suggestions to improve participation and ensure all children feel included. More well-trained pupil support assistants (PSAs), mental health specialists, and teachers would be able to provide tailored support and manage diverse needs.

"Having enough trained staff would make a huge difference to engagement and participation."

Smaller group work, tailored timetables, and alternative spaces for children who struggle in mainstream classrooms would also help.

"Flexible approaches, like smaller sessions or sensory spaces, would help children who find big classrooms overwhelming."

Policymakers should explore any opportunities for collecting direct feedback from children with ASN, BME backgrounds, and others likely to be overlooked.

"We need to ask children directly what would help them feel included and able to participate."

Providing more extracurricular opportunities, group projects, and culturally inclusive practices can help promote feelings of belonging.

"More clubs, group work, and inclusive activities would make school feel more welcoming for everyone."

.

5. Achieving

The components of Achieving are:

- All children and young people should be achieving to their full potential.

- All children and young people should have access to a varied curriculum tailored to meet their needs.

While respondents agree that children and young people have access to a varied and tailored curriculum, they are less likely to feel that all learners are achieving their full potential.

FIGURE 5.1 ACHIEVING – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE...
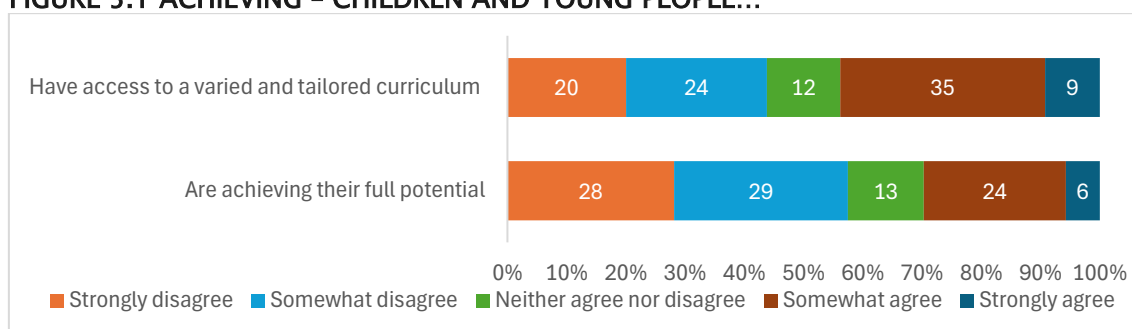
Source: All consultation responses

Respondents made different suggestions for adapting the curriculum, for example many parents talked about more inclusive pathways and recognising achievement beyond traditional academic success. A wider focus on practical, creative, and vocational skills would enable more children to thrive while others mentioned creating space for social, emotional, and creative development.

"Consider rewarding different types of intelligence that children demonstrate. The current curriculum rewards a narrow interpretation of intelligence and there is too much focus on assessment and grades."

Once again respondents highlighted the need for better training and additional time to implement inclusive classroom strategies.

"We need schools to embrace strengths-based approaches and to plan for children to actively work on the things they are already good at, instead of overly focusing on their deficits."

Children with additional support needs (ASN), those from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those with English as an additional language (EAL) were identified as least likely to reach their full potential. Barriers include insufficient resources, funding gaps, and a lack of targeted interventions.

"A lot of children with ASN are not supported well as mainstream schools do not have the budget, facilities, people or resources needed with the ever-increasing amount of additional needs."

"Those from a disadvantaged background, poverty, English as an additional language, amongst other factors, will struggle to achieve in schools."

The primary reasons given were underfunding, lack of specialised staff, and overcrowded classrooms, which prevent tailored support for individual learners. Many respondents argued that insufficient resources and specialist staff limit the capacity of schools to address diverse needs effectively.

"Placing pupils in a mainstream classroom with insufficient resources to do anything more than pay lip service to their needs inevitably leads to poorer attainment – both for them and other pupils."

In addition, larger class sizes, disruptive behaviour, and competing demands make it difficult for teachers to provide meaningful support.

"There are many children who spend periods of time unfocused or unsupported due to a lack of staffing. They may be doing tasks that are not as meaningful as they could be due to the resources available to us."
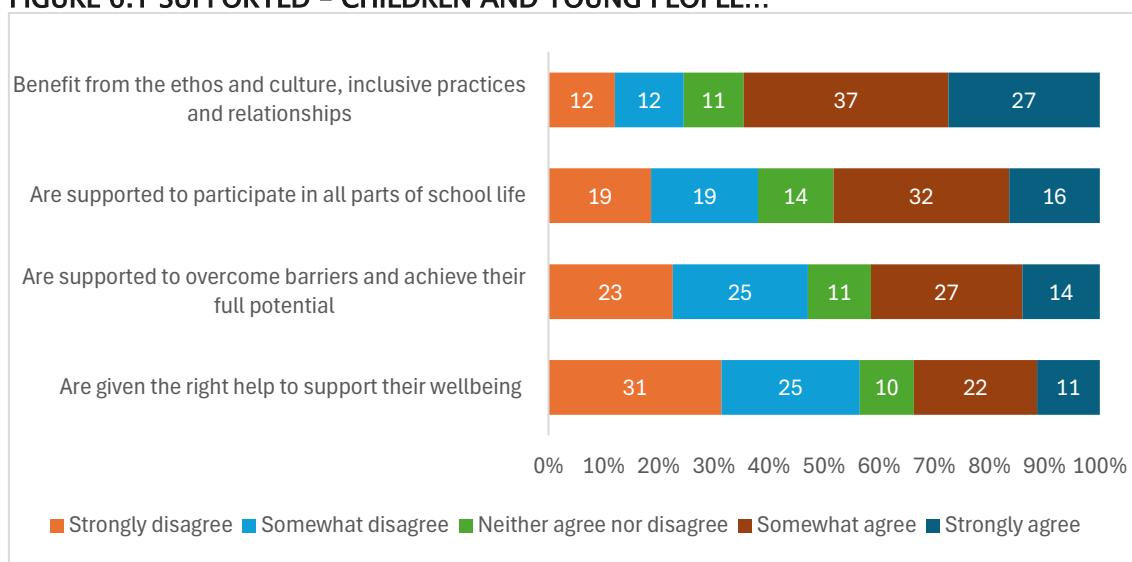
6. Supported

The elements of Supported are defined as follows:

- All children and young people should benefit from the ethos and culture of the school, inclusive learning and teaching practices and relationships.

- All children and young people should be given the right help, at the right time, from the right people, to support their wellbeing in the right place.

- All children and young people should be supported to participate in all parts of school life.

- All children and young people should be supported to overcome barriers to learning and achieve their full potential.

FIGURE 6.1 SUPPORTED – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE...

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Benefit from the ethos and culture, inclusive practices and relationships	12	12	11	37	27
Are supported to participate in all parts of school life	19	19	14	32	16
Are supported to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential	23	25	11	27	14
Are given the right help to support their wellbeing	31	25	10	22	11

Source: All consultation responses

While schools work hard to develop an inclusive ethos and culture, many respondents felt that children were less likely to receive the support they need for their development and wellbeing.

As highlighted in previous sections, children with complex additional support needs (ASN), behavioural difficulties, or from marginalised backgrounds are less likely to fully benefit from school ethos and culture.

Limited staffing, training gaps, and resource shortages can lead to inconsistent or insufficient support, leaving children at risk of disengagement. Respondents highlighted examples of children requiring specialist support, such as individualised learning plans or therapeutic interventions, not receiving adequate attention.

Mainstream classrooms can prove challenging for children with sensory, emotional, or learning needs, particularly where staff struggle to balance the needs of all learners.

"Children with complex needs often just cope, rather than thrive, because support is stretched."

Identifying needs relies on timely assessment, regular monitoring, and input from both professionals and families. However, resource constraints and competing priorities make this more difficult. Respondents emphasised the importance of frequent, structured assessments to identify learning, emotional, and social needs early, enabling timely interventions.

Ensuring children's voices are heard, alongside input from parents and carers, can help illuminate developmental barriers.

"By listening to families and children, schools can understand what is missing and act faster to help."

School staff would benefit from continuous professional development to spot early signs of difficulty and implement effective support strategies.

"Teachers need to feel equipped to recognise issues before they escalate."

Creating inclusive environments that support all children requires investment in people, spaces, and relationships. Respondents highlighted examples of actions to promote equity and engagement across school life.

Increasing funding for additional staff—trained PSAs, counsellors, and specialists—would help ensure children receive individualised attention and support.

"More funding of PSOs, counsellors, teachers, and PSAs - people and time. Invest in people to support our greatest asset, our children."

Establishing smaller classrooms, breakout areas, and quiet spaces allows children to engage in a way that meets their needs.

"Alternative spaces would allow children to engage at their own pace and in a way that works for them."

Promoting extracurricular activities, peer mentoring schemes, and whole-school inclusion initiatives can help children feel valued and connected.

"Extracurricular opportunities give children a sense of purpose and belonging outside the classroom."

Inclusive practices are closely connected to emotional and social well-being, as children thrive in environments where they feel supported, valued, and understood. Several respondents recognised the role of committed staff in fostering inclusion, despite challenges.

"Things are changing and happening due to the hard work and dedication of staff."

Inclusion strategies, such as tailored interventions, quiet spaces, and peer support systems, can create environments where children feel safe and capable of participating fully.

"Feeling included and understood reduces anxiety and allows children to focus on learning."

Some argued that inclusion must go beyond academic support to address emotional health, relationships, and extracurricular involvement.

"Well-being and inclusion are inseparable—when children feel they belong, their confidence and happiness improve."

"Money [is needed] for more resources and more staff so that schools don't have to choose between providing uniforms or paying for mental health support."

7.Final comments

Respondents were also asked to give their views on central agency support and the relevance of current policies and procedures.

FIGURE 7.1 WHICH SERVICES AND SYSTEMS SUPPORT OUR VISION...

Source: All consultation responses
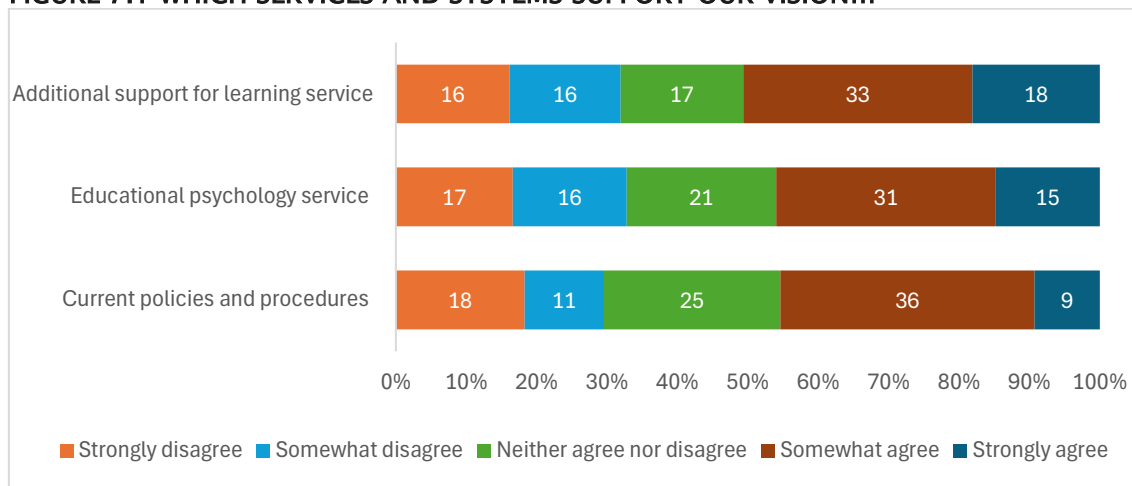
The CEC Education Services team have undertaken a detailed analysis of consultation responses relating to the Educational Psychology and Additional Support for Learning services, provided as an annex to this document.

What would help us to improve our inclusion policy? –

Please tell us if there is anything else you feel is important for us to know or consider.

Respondents were given additional opportunities to make detailed comments at the end of the consultation. They tended to reiterate many of the themes and concerns touched on earlier, but perhaps arriving at stronger positions as they reach the end of the online survey. The leading themes here are:

1. The urgent need for funding, resources and staffing required for effective inclusion in schools, considering staff workloads and the demands involved working with large class sizes and different needs.

2. General support for special schools and specialised provision, for children and young people requiring a more supportive environment.

3. Review the presumption in favour of mainstream provision, children and young people should have options and not be required to struggle in mainstream schools before being considered for more specialised support.

4. The need for policymakers to listen to staff, parents and support workers, visit schools and take account of day-to-day conditions in Edinburgh schools.

A number of other comments were made more than once:

- Policymakers need to consider the lived experience of neurodiverse young people and adults who been through the system.

- Encourage the greater use of assistive and digital technologies.

- Schools need to be able to deal with disruptive behaviour, often affecting the development (and inclusion) of other learners.

- More and better training for PSAs.

- Greater collaboration between central agencies, schools and community organisations able to support learners.

Annex 1: Inclusion Review Consultation Feedback for Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Service and Educational Psychology Service – CEC Analysis

Background

Commencing March 2024, a citywide consultation was conducted to gather views around what is currently working well within the Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Service and the Educational Psychology Service, as well as what can be considered to help improve each of these services. Staff working within City of Edinburgh education settings were consulted, as well as parents and carers. Staff working within the ASL Service and Educational Psychology Service were also invited to participate in this consultation to share their own perspective.

Methodology

A survey was shared with all staff working within City of Edinburgh Council and shared with parents and carers of children and young people attending City of Edinburgh Education settings. This survey was made available from March until May 2024. 523 responses were received.

Additionally, an open invitation was extended to staff, parents and carers to attend a series of live information events (in person and online) and focus groups, to hear about the review and share their views. 350 people attended. The table below provides an overview of survey respondents.

Respondent	No. Respondents
Parent/carer of a child or young person who attends an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	53
Parent/carer of a child or young person who attends a early years, primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	179
Member of school staff in a promoted post (e.g. Leader, Head teacher etc.) in an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	22
Member of school staff in a promoted post (e.g. Leader, Head teacher etc.) in an early years, primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	45
Class teacher of an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	27
Class teacher of an early years, primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	104
Member of school staff in a support role in an early years, primary or secondary special school in Edinburgh	19
Member of school staff in a support role in a early years, primary or secondary mainstream school in Edinburgh	50
Member of central team staff (e.g. Additional Support for Learning Service Team, Educational Psychology Service Team, etc.)	51
Member of staff with a partner agency (e.g. Social Care team, Occupational Therapy team etc.)	14
Other	92

Feedback gathered from each of these activities was collated and organised into thematic categories. An overview of feedback for each service is provided below, including anonymised quotes from respondents.

Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Service

Responses to the consultation include praise for a committed, highly trained, collaborative and flexible team of staff who have a positive impact on learning and inclusion. There is a call for greater clarity on the roles and functions of ASL Service staff, which should avoid duplication of efforts and ensure effective use of resources. There is a discrepancy in understanding of the rationale behind ASL Service model of support and agreement about what model is considered most effective in building capacity and ensuring effective support for individuals.

> *'ASL have vast knowledge and expertise ...They work hard to spread this knowledge and support schools to support learners, and they are a vital piece on including learners with ASN in Edinburgh.'*

> *'I am very impressed by the knowledge, dynamism and commitment of the staff I have worked with in these teams. they work really hard to try and make a tangible difference to children and families'*

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that the current additional support for learning service supports our vision for inclusion: '*We belong, we contribute, we learn, we are supported and we help others'*.

The chart below gives an overview of responses.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the current Additional Support for Learning Services supports our vision?
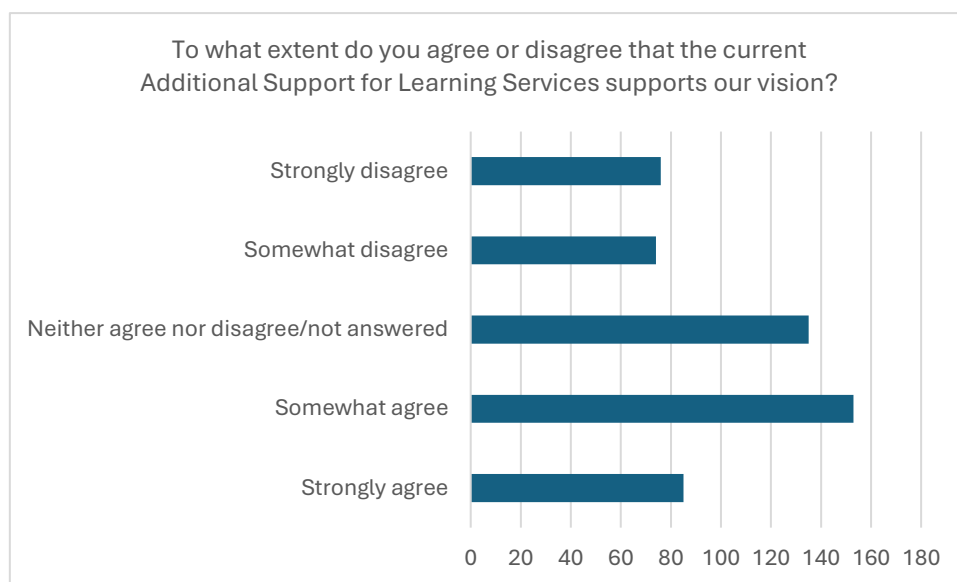
Main themes for consideration of ASL Service restructuring of inclusion support

Eight prevailing themes arose from the consultation.

Each of these is considered below.

- **Staffing and resources:** There was a strong emphasis placed on the need for more ASL staff to meet increasing demands. Many contributors mention that current ASL teams are overstretched, which limits their ability to provide effective support. Suggestions include increasing the number of ASL teachers and support staff, ensuring they are present in schools more frequently, and providing dedicated ASL staff for each school.
- **Training and Professional Development:** Regular and comprehensive training for ASL staff, pupil support assistants, and general teaching staff is highlighted as crucial in responding to a diverse range of additional support needs. There is a specific call for training on issues such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), trauma, neurodevelopmental differences and other specific needs to ensure that interventions are appropriate and effective.

'Lots of the advice is things that schools are already doing as a matter of course and good practice. As the needs of children in mainstream rise, we are looking for the ASL service to provide us with highly specialised advice to enable us to really get it right for all our pupils.'

- **Consistency and standardisation:** A recurring theme is the need for greater consistency in how ASL services are delivered across different areas. This includes having standard practices, joint working opportunities for ASL staff from different areas, and more consistent evaluation and feedback mechanisms.

'Sometimes there can be a misunderstanding of the role of the ASLS in schools. Ensuring that schools have realistic expectations and a clear understanding of remits and roles and capacity might help relationships in some situations'

- **Collaboration and communication:** Many respondents stress the importance of better collaboration between ASL staff, schools, parents, and other stakeholders. This includes having ASL staff work in pairs for more effective support, increasing their presence in schools, and improving communication and transparency with parents about available services and support options.

'For our children, relationships are key. We would like to see staff partnered with schools so that children, and families, feel safe and supported. For our families with more complex needs arising from trauma, having to retell your child's story over and over, is traumatic and would be easily avoided by better system management.'

- **Direct support and intervention:** There is a call for ASL staff to provide more direct support to students rather than merely offering advice or creating plans. This includes working one-on-one or in small groups with students, being more actively involved in classrooms, and providing hands-on assistance to teachers.

'It is not enough to just observe and then suggest an approach ... and then visit again (or worse, just a phone call) in 6 months.... It is putting too much of the onus on school staff who are...often thrown in at the deep end with very little training. These staff need much more modelling, teaching, demonstrating and regular support to understand the why and the how of what these approaches are and why they are being suggested.'

➤ ***Tailored support and individual plans:*** Developing individualized support plans for each pupil to address their specific needs is another key theme. Respondents suggest that ASL services should focus on tailored interventions rather than generic strategies.

'... the model ... is outdated and not fit for purpose. As we have come to better understand the workings of young people's brains and understand the importance of key adults, relationships, consistency and a need to build trust ... it would be better for ASL to be working in schools for a block each term rather than moving to a different school each day'

'It can feel very distant from the teachers in the classroom. Advice that is given often does not reflect the demands already placed on the individuals and service which can lead to resentment and frustration'

➤ ***System management and flexibility:*** Improved system management to reduce the need for families to repeatedly tell their child's story and to provide more flexible support structures that can adapt to staff absences and varying needs across schools.

➤ ***Evaluation and feedback:*** There is a call for more robust and meaningful evaluation procedures to ensure that feedback is effectively gathered and acted upon, helping to continually improve the services provided.

➤ **Locality working:** Many comments include consideration and support for a move towards locality working.

'The more face to face time professionals can spend with individual learners or their teachers (as appropriate) the better. Ensuring there are sufficient levels of staffing that schools and families are not waiting excessive periods before help. Greater time spent in school.'

Benefits of locally available support expressed within the responses include:

• *Local Support:* Emphasis on having ASL staff based in localities to ensure they are readily available and familiar with the specific needs of the community. This aims to provide more tailored support and quick responses to issues as they arise.
• *Learning Communities:* The importance of building strong learning communities where ASL staff, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders collaborate closely. This involves regular meetings and joint training sessions to foster a unified approach to supporting students.

- *Resource Allocation:* Calls for equitable distribution of resources across different localities to ensure all students have access to the support they need, regardless of their geographic location.
- *Community Involvement:* Encouraging local community involvement in ASL services to create a supportive environment for students with additional needs. This includes engaging local health services, social services, and voluntary organizations in the planning and delivery of support.
- *Feedback Mechanisms:* Implementing feedback mechanisms within localities to continuously assess the effectiveness of ASL services and make necessary adjustments based on community input.

Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Service

The Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Service has three main functions to enhance the educational experience and support for pupils with additional support needs:

1. Direct support to children and young people
2. Modelling inclusive practice to staff in schools and:
3. Building capacity across schools and system

While all three roles are important, respondents tend to place the highest importance on direct support, followed by capacity building, and then modelling.

➤ **Direct support:** Direct support is frequently highlighted as the most immediately impactful, with many respondents stressing the necessity of direct interaction and personalised strategies for student success. Many respondents highlight direct support as crucial, emphasising its role in addressing the immediate needs of pupils.

➤ **Capacity building:** Capacity building is considered slightly less immediately impactful than direct support but is crucial for sustainable, long-term improvement. Respondents note the value of training and professional development in empowering school staff to independently support students with additional support needs. Building capacity is sometimes however, seen as less effective due to the high turnover of support staff and the overwhelming caseloads faced by ASL Service staff. Some respondents feel that while building capacity is necessary, it is often not sufficient on its own without direct support and modelling.

➤ **Modelling:** While modelling is highly valued for its practical benefits and effective demonstration of strategies, it is seen as part of the broader capacity-building effort. Respondents comment that this hands-on approach helps in effectively translating theory into practice and ensures that teaching and support staff are better equipped to handle diverse classroom situations. Modelling is also considered to be effective in reducing teacher workload by providing ready-to-use resources and demonstrating effective support strategies in the classroom.

Overall, the responses reflect a preference for immediate, hands-on support for students, coupled with efforts to enhance the overall capability of school staff to maintain and

expand upon these supports. Respondents seem to feel that improvements should focus primarily on increasing direct support, with modelling as a complementary strategy to enhance the effectiveness of capacity-building efforts.

Educational Psychology Service

Many respondents comment on the value of assessment and advice provided by Educational Psychologists, their role in aiding problem-solving and offering different perspectives based on psychological theory and evidence-based practices. The Service is praised for their child-centred approach which actively seeks and incorporated the views of children, young people and their families into planning, ensuring plans are tailored to individual needs.

There is a call for clarification of the Educational Psychologist role through improved and enhanced communication systems with education settings and families, as well as an increase in active involvement.

'The service has a very committed workforce'

'Our EP ... is very responsive and present- she attends several CPMs regularly and in particular, has been a great support to us and families'

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that the current Educational Psychology Service supports our vision for inclusion: '*We belong, we contribute, we learn, we are supported and we help others'*.

The chart below gives an overview of responses.
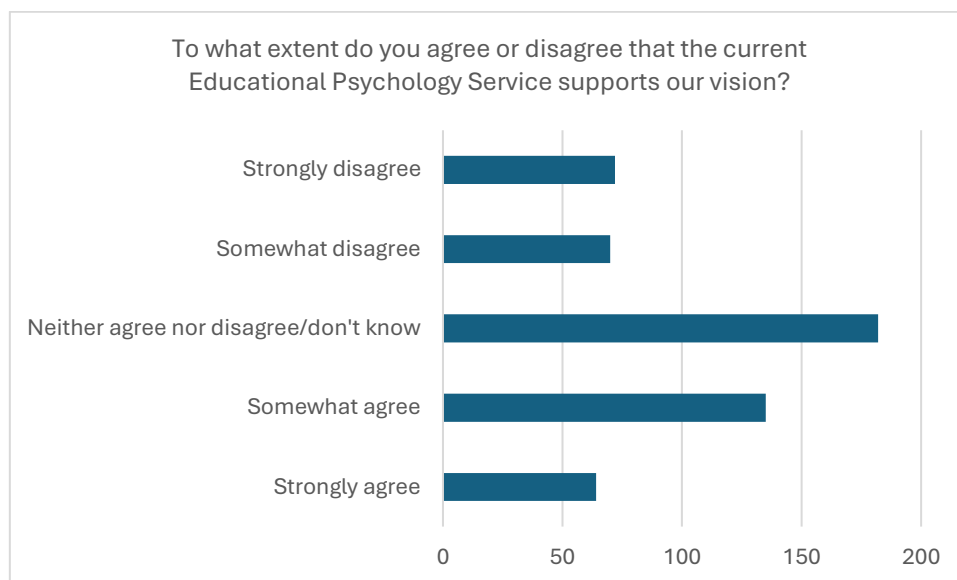
Main themes for consideration of Educational Psychology Service restructuring of inclusion support

➢ ***Increased Direct Interaction:*** Consistent and meaningful engagement with children and families is necessary to provide relevant and effective recommendations. Educational Psychologists need to work directly with children and young people and staff in settings, providing in-class support and understanding the children and young people's needs firsthand.

'A lack of working directly with our young people or understanding the challenges we face can result in suggestions and strategies that have already been tried or are just unfeasible. When these are raised in meetings with parents, it can set unrealistic expectations and damage the relationship between school and home.'

'To have a conversation with them about a child, not always in the formal setting of a meeting.'

➢ ***Specialized Training:*** Educational Psychologists should receive training in adoption, kinship issues, trauma-informed practices, and support for children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). More time should be allocated for development, research, and effective implementation of learning from training sessions.

➢ ***Systemic and Structural Changes:*** Establishing systems that allow quick access to Educational Psychology Services for children and young people, especially those with previously looked after status. Increasing the number of Educational Psychologists to reduce caseloads and allow more time for each child and young person.

'There can sometimes feel like completing paperwork for permission can be a barrier and additional task for already drowning school staff.'

➢ ***Clear Communication and Role Definition:*** Clarifying the role of Educational Psychologists to schools, parents and carers, and partner services and agencies to manage expectations and improve understanding, as well as transparent communication about the services provided and the capacity of Educational Psychologists.

'Information about pathways of support and the role of the EP is not readily accessed by some parents and if it was more visible it would better manage expectations.'

➢ ***Funding and Resources:*** Adequate funding to hire more Educational Psychologists and provide them with resources to effectively support schools and families. Addressing high workloads to enable Educational Psychologists to form genuine relationships with students and staff.

'The number of children being referred to our Ed Psych is ever growing and all of our allocated time is used up with CPMs, meaning very little time for observations, work in class and assessment.'

➢ **Active Involvement in Schools:** Educational Psychologists should have a higher profile and be more visible in schools, participating actively in the educational environment rather than only attending meetings. Support should be provided to educators in understanding adaptive behaviours and providing relevant interventions.

'Maybe educational psychologists should be part of the school staff? It would be amazing to have that kind of knowledge and support locally, in school, and there right when it is needed.'

➢ **Inclusive and Relationship-Based Practices:** Implementing relationship-based practices that empower educators and support social cohesion and mental health in school communities. Promoting restorative practices and understanding the broader context of children's lives.

➢ **Consistency and Stability:** Consistency in the assignment of Educational Psychologists to schools to build lasting relationships and ensure continuity of support. Stability in political and administrative environments to support long-term planning and implementation of inclusion services.

➢ **Accessibility and Responsiveness:** Improving accessibility to Educational Psychologists services with shorter wait times and more proactive engagement with schools and families. Creating clear and efficient communication channels between EPs and school staff to facilitate timely and effective interventions.

'... it is important to maintain a school allocation model. Frequent face-to-face interactions with school staff helps to develop and maintain relationships that are key to building a sense of connectedness with our service... to ensure the EPS does not become detached from the school learning communities and the pupils and families they serve.'

➢ **Holistic and Collaborative Approach:** Educational Psychologists should collaborate with other agencies (like CAMHS) to provide comprehensive support to children. Involving families and children in the training and development of EPs to ensure their practices are informed by lived experiences.

➢ **Locality working:** Several comments include references to a move towards locality working.

Benefits of locally available support expressed within the responses include:

- *Presence and Consistency in Localities:* Ensuring that Educational Psychologists stay within the same locality to build continuity and build upon successes.
- *Localized Support:* Educational Psychologists need to be more present in school environments, attending planning meetings, getting to know students, families, and supporting staff in a consistent and informed manner.
- *Visibility and Integration:* Educational Psychologists should be a permanent and visible part of every school, engaged in the life of the school, and available to work with children and families.

- *Consistent Staffing*: Having the same Educational Psychologists oversee one or two learning communities, rather than changing staff frequently, to ensure continuity and help build relationships with staff, parents/carers, and pupils.

Overall, these themes highlight a need for a more integrated, well-funded, and hands-on approach to the delivery of Educational Psychology Services, ensuring that Educational Psychologists can effectively support the inclusion and well-being of children in educational settings.

Find out more
www.socialvaluelab.org.uk