

# **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Provision Scrutiny Panel Report**

## **An Investigation on the Effectiveness of Children's SEND Provision in Camden**

Report commissioned by:

Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Scrutiny Committee, London Borough of Camden

Report authors:

SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel, comprised of the following elected and co-opted members of the CSF Scrutiny Committee:

Cllr Sylvia McNamara (Chair), Cllr Lotis Bautista, Margaret Harvey,  
Cllr Jenny Headlam-Wells, Sarah Jafri, Cllr Nanouche Umeadi, and Dr Rachel Wrangham.

Date of publication:

30 September 2024

# Contents

Foreword .....	3
Glossary .....	4
1. Background, Aims and Objectives of the Inquiry .....	5
2. Methodology.....	6
Interviews .....	8
Questionnaires .....	10
4. Literature Survey.....	10
5. Findings and Recommendations.....	15
A. Effectiveness and Efficiency .....	16
A1) Funding.....	16
A2) Inconsistencies.....	17
A3) Diagnosis .....	18
RECOMMENDATIONS:.....	19
B. Appropriacy and Sufficiency of Provision .....	21
B1) Provision .....	21
B2) Lack of specialist Resources.....	22
B3) SENCO Workload.....	23
B4) Right staff/Right Qualifications .....	24
RECOMMENDATIONS:.....	24
C. Accountability.....	26
C1) Transparency.....	26
C2) Information and Guidance.....	27
C3) SENCO relationships with parents.....	28
RECOMMENDATIONS:.....	28
D. Equity .....	30
RECOMMENDATIONS:.....	30
6. National Recommendations.....	32
RECOMMENDATIONS:.....	33
7. Bibliography .....	35

## Foreword

Cllr Sylvia McNamara, Chair of the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel

The Panel spent much time listening to parents, teachers, officers and voluntary sector workers. What we heard from all cohorts interviewed is that there is a great deal of suffering in relation to Special Educational Needs Provision. Whilst there are families who are grateful for the support and provision for their children, and Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinators (SENCOs) and Educational Psychologists (EPs) excited by their jobs, there are equally many who feel the opposite.

We know that for many, there will be uncomfortable reading in this report; some of the issues raised are hard to hear, but without proper listening, we cannot start to fix the real issues, and as will be seen from this report, there is much to fix.

In carrying out this inquiry, we read and heard repeatedly the phrase ‘the system is broken,’ to which a reasonable response is – ‘then fix it.’ The national context is bound by The Children and Families Act 2014 and the subsequent ‘SEND Code of Practice,’ which provided parental choice but not the resources in Local Authorities to deliver. Austerity cuts for schools, the Council’s education budgets and health services, compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, have exacerbated the gap in resource provision.

The challenges that Camden is facing are nation-wide, and there is a heightened focus on SEND in Westminster as we write this report because newly elected MPs across the country are being lobbied by desperate, frustrated and upset residents whose children’s needs are not being met. Both locally and nationally, there is an increase in demand for autistic assessment. Camden’s wait time for children’s autism assessments is 86 weeks – there are other local authorities up and down the country where it is even longer. This cannot be right. These national issues that need fixing will take time, effort, money, and probably changes to legislation.

In this situation, it becomes easy for one group of people to blame another. As brilliantly outlined by the ISOS report from July 2024 (Page 55), no one should be single-handedly blamed for the current challenges in supporting children and young people with special educational needs. Children should not be faulted for their reactions to unmet needs or insufficient support and parents and carers are simply advocating for the best possible care and education for their children. Likewise, teachers and staff are often under-resourced and lack the necessary training to provide effective inclusion, despite their efforts. Practitioners across various services are stretched by rising demand and limited capacity, while local government leaders are constrained by increasing responsibilities and finite resources. Each group is navigating a system that places immense pressures on them without providing adequate means to address underlying issues.

We recognise that Camden has tried hard to work creatively within its budget – the Exceptional Needs Grant (ENG) for swift access to funds before the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process and Camden Local Inclusion Fund (CLIF) for Early Years are examples of this. There are also examples of good innovative practice such

as the Inclusive Intervention Teams (IIT) and Camden Kids Talk (CKT) that support children in nursery and in the transition to primary school that others can learn from both across the Borough and beyond.

However, there is so much more to be done to fix a system that is currently failing many of Camden's children with Special Educational Needs. This report identifies a thirty-seven recommendations to improve Camden's SEND provision. However, what we found in this inquiry is that there is no easy fix to overcome these systemic issues.

Some of our recommendations for change sit at national level or require a significant increase in resources which might not lie in Camden's power. We also identified a number of quick-fix solutions, actionable by the Council, which could make a difference to children and parent/carers with SEND in the short term. Amongst these, one key recommendation is to create a clear roadmap for parents, outlining what support they can expect, what provision exists, and how to access it. Raising awareness on autism and neurodiversity across the whole system is another key area of intervention which could be transformational – as part of Continuing Professional Development for teachers and Camden officers, as well as training for parents and carers of children with SEND.

We also want to acknowledge the SEND Strategy Year 2 Implementation Plan 2024 which it is identifying many of the issues we have in our recommendations. We welcome the plan and its metrics. We think the areas of commonality and overlap show how clear the need for some of these actions is. We hope that this inquiry will also help identify additional areas of concern and recommendations, with the aspiration to see Camden become a truly inclusive Borough where our children and young people with SEND can thrive.

## **Glossary**

EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan)

ENG (Exceptional Needs Grant)

TA (Teaching Assistant)

SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

CLIF (Camden Local Inclusion Fund)

SALT (Speech and Language Therapists)

EP (Educational Psychologists)

OAB (Ordinarily Available Provision)

ICB (Integrated Care Board)

JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment)

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

SEMH (Social Emotional and Mental Health needs)

SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs & Disability Information, Advice, and Support Service)

## Introduction

This report is a summary of the findings and recommendations of the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel, reporting to the Camden's Children, Schools and Families (CSF) Scrutiny Committee in October 2024.

The CSF Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the SEND Provision Scrutiny Panel and agreed its terms of reference at the [Committee meeting held on 7 September 2023](#), with an additional update to the terms of reference agreed at the [Committee meeting held on 9 November 2023](#). The task of the Panel was to investigate the provision for children with SEND in Camden.

The Panel was formed in response to concerns raised with CSF Scrutiny Committee members by parents and professionals.

The intention of the Panel has been to hear from as wide a range of stakeholders as possible. We have made particular efforts to ensure that all parties have a voice and have listened to as many voices as possible.

Despite these efforts, we have spoken to a relatively small numbers of people, and we do not intend this to be seen as a piece of academic research. Our sampling is neither random, nor academically robust. But it has been thorough and wide-ranging. We have sought out, and heard, many different voices and we have been thanked for doing work in this 'very important area,' by many of the stakeholders.

From the outset of this project, it was our intention to listen to stakeholders, then make recommendations that Camden Council could implement within the current legal and financial constraints. This we have done, however we are acutely aware, as many of the recent reports on SEND have highlighted, that what is needed is a change to those legal and financial constraints in the shape of new policy and legislation from the government, backed by an increase in resources. Until then it is important for all stakeholders, to resist the temptation to blame one another and to continue to work in partnership to deliver better outcomes for our children in Camden.

## 1. Background, Aims and Objectives of the Inquiry

This inquiry was prompted by the findings from Camden CSF Scrutiny Committee Special Panel report on the Impact of Covid-19 on Early Years Development 2023, where the issue of children in the early years not getting diagnosis or support for language development until they reached primary school was raised by parents. Councillors on the committee were also receiving emails and surgery visits from parents with concerns about SEND provision for their children.

These panel inquiries usually carry out investigation in the Autumn term then produce a report in the spring term in time for the end of the political year in April. Given the number of newly recruited, senior level, Camden officers in the Special Educational Needs field, we decided to carry out research throughout the academic year and present a report to the October 2024 CSF meeting. The newly appointed officers have

worked at pace and produced both a JSNA on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities among children and young people in Camden and a Year 2 implementation plan for the SEND strategy. We are pleased to see that the latter document has many actions that support our recommendations.

We were determined that this report would provide recommendations that were entirely Camden focused and within Camden's gift to deliver. Whilst we have done this, the literature review and officer and parental comments have alerted us to the fact that these issues are being played out nationally and Camden is, in many ways, delivering better outcomes for young people with SEND than many other boroughs/local authorities. Accordingly, we have made some recommendations for changes at a national level.

The Panel's terms of reference specified aims and objectives, which were shared with interviewees in advance.

The overall aim of the Panel was to investigate the effectiveness and quality of provision (incorporating diagnosis, provision, outcomes and communications) for children and young people with SEND in Camden.

'Quality' was understood as having 6 dimensions:

- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Equity
- Accountability
- Appropriacy
- Sufficiency

We wanted to see how these qualities in SEND education were understood, valued, measured and ensured by the different stakeholders.

## **2. Methodology**

The Panel was established on 7 September 2023 and the information-gathering phase ran from 2 October 2023 to 10 June 2024. Due to the many changes in senior Officers in Camden we decided to extend the investigation over two political terms and one academic year.

Our data collection period started with a focus on officers and commissioners, who we interviewed early in the autumn, to find out what provision and processes exist. We then focused on parents and school leaders/staff, to hear more about their experiences.

To investigate the effectiveness and quality of provision for children and young people with SEND in Camden we focused on the following questions:

1. How can we build a system of trust and shared values in SEND in Camden? (**accountability**)
2. In your experience, what do parents and schools understand as being 'good' and 'good value' in SEND provision? (**effectiveness/efficiency**)
3. In your experience, is there **appropriate and sufficient** provision locally to meet the needs of children and young people within Camden at different stages?
4. In your experience are the services that are in place meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities? (**equity**)

Where appropriate we also tried to probe possible solutions:

- What are the barriers to improvement in each of the 6 dimensions of quality?
- What would excellent value in SEND provision look like in Camden, and what are the most important steps that can be taken to bring this about?

Most information was collected via interviews (in-person and virtual) and visits. We also carried out 3 targeted surveys with head teachers, SENCOs and parents.

Overall, we recognise that none of these numbers are truly representative of the whole of Camden but we also value the rich data that has come out of this process.

We have ensured a clear line through from the evidence to the recommendations.

## Interviews

- **12 individual/group interviews with non-school officers** providing or managing services for children with SEND in Camden:
  - SEN Inclusion Intervention Team Manager
  - MOSAIC Senior Practitioners
  - SENDIASS Manager
  - Case Worker SEN Manager
  - Early Years and SEND Lead
  - Camden Special Parents Forum CSPF lead
  - Educational Psychology Service Principals
  - Children with Disabilities Service Manager
  - Finance and Commissioning Manager Children and Learning
  - Head of Children's Integrated Commissioning
  - Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion
  - Senior Adviser – SEND Children and Learning
  
- **10 School visits**  
These included (note categories overlap)
  - 9 Camden and 1 Hackney school
  - 4 special schools
  - 1 hospital school
  - 1 maintained nursery school
  - 3 mainstream primary schools
  - 1 mainstream secondary school
  - 2 schools with an ARP (Additional Resource Provision)
  
- **Meetings with SENCOs**  
We attended one training session to which all Camden SENCOs were invited, and one SENCO cluster meeting.
  
- **Parents**  
We met with four parent groups convened by three different organisations.



## Timeline of Panel Meetings and Interviews

Activity	Dates
Children Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee (establishing the panel)	7 September 2023
1. Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion	2 October 2023
SEND Panel Meeting 1	4 October 2023
2. SENDIASS	30 October 2023
3. SEND Finance and Commissioning	31 October 2023
4. Children's Integrated Commissioning	2 November 2023
5. SEND Senior Advisor (Camden Learning)	9 November 2023
6. Children and Young People Disabilities Service	13 November 2023
7. Camden Special Parents Forum Co-ordinator	6 December 2023
SEND Panel Meeting 2	13 December 2023
8. SENCO Meeting	14 December 2023
9. Cluster Inclusion Meeting	7 February 2024
10. Royal Free Hospital Children's School	19 February 2024
11. Parent Advisory Board – Meeting 1	27 February 2024
SEND Panel Meeting 3	27 February 2024
12. Netley Primary School and Centre for Autism	28 February 2024
13. MOSAIC (Integrated Service for Children and Young People with a Disability)	28 February 2024
14. Acland Burghley School	4 March 2024
15. Parents Advisory Board – Meeting 2	6 March 2024
16. Parent Partnership Group	12 March 2024
17. Kingsgate Primary Lower School	21 March 2024
18. Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children	25 March 2024
19. Educational Psychologists	26 March 2024
20. Rhyl Community Primary School	27 March 2024
21. Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion and Head of SEND and Inclusion	2 April 2024
22. Early Years	15 April 2024
23. SEN Service	17 April 2024
24. Stormont House Special School	18 April 2024
25. Thomas Coram Centre	22 April 2024
SEND Panel Meeting 4	22 April 2024
26. Swiss Cottage School - Interview with school	25 April 2024
27. Swiss Cottage - Interview with parents and carers	
28. Inclusive Intervention Team	7 May 2024
29. Alexandra Centre	4 June 2024
30. Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion and Head of SEND and Inclusion	10 June 2024
SEND Panel Meeting 5	13 June 2024
SEND Panel Meeting 6	26 June 2024
SEND Inclusion Board	9 September 2024
SEND Panel Meeting 7	10 September 2024
SEND Panel Meeting 8	25 September 2024
Children Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee (final paper reporting to Committee)	8 October 2024

## Questionnaires

Our questionnaires were intended to allow us to cast our net wider, and to hear from a larger number of respondents than we were able to interview. We did not intend to use them as a robust source of quantitative data, but as a way of hearing from a wider range of voices. Given the low response rate, evidence from the questionnaire should not be seen as representative of the whole Camden community of schools, SENCOs and parents/carers.

- **Schools:** we had a low response rate to our school questionnaire. We received 8 responses which came from just 4 schools. Three of these were special schools/schools with ARPs (Additional Resource Provision). We believe the low response rate was due to timing and perhaps to over-surveying: the Director of Education Commissioning and Inclusion held a well-attended three-hour workshop with schools around the same time as the questionnaire went out; it was also close to the Easter holidays.
- **SENCOs:** we had a better response rate, with 19 responses from 19 schools.
- **Parents/carers:** a survey was sent to a significant proportion of Camden parents/carers with children with an EHCP plan for whom we held up to date email contacts; as well as shared through the SEND and Inclusion bulletin shared with headteachers and chairs of governors, and through the special parents' forums. From this, we had 72 survey responses, which broadly equates a 9% response rate of parents/carers who were directly contacted.

A **Literature survey** was also carried out as part of the research process, to ascertain to what extent the issues identified in Camden were reflected in the national picture. The findings are outlined below.

## 4. Literature Survey

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, SEND provision has gained increased visibility, with various stakeholders including parents, educators, and governmental bodies voicing concerns. The literature is largely concerned with the growing number of SEND cases, stretched resources, and delays in assessments, with rising diagnoses in conditions like autism. It should be remembered when considering the data that prior to the 2014 Children and Families Act, children were issued a 'statement' instead of an EHCP, and that 2014-2016 was a transitional phase when both were in use with new assessments issuing EHCPs and statements were being transferred to EHCP format.

### 4.1 Legislation

The idea of having children with special needs' rights laid out in law is to protect the most vulnerable children in our society. This process began under Margaret Thatcher who commissioned Dame Mary Warnock to carry out a review: The Warnock Report of 1979, which was followed by the 1981 Education Act laying out the provision, definition and entitlement of 'special educational needs' – disability was not covered in the legislation at the time. This Act also set out the process for children with Special

Educational Needs to have a statement of need which would then be funded and it recommended that children should be educated in mainstream classrooms wherever possible.

This legislative framework was reviewed by the coalition government when they came into power in 2010, leading to the replacement Children and Families Act 2014. The 2014 Act extended the rights of children with Special Needs to cover pre-school children (0-5 years) and upwards from 16 years – the end of compulsory school age to 25 years. This act was accompanied by a code of practice that replaced the previous code accompanying the 1981 Act.

The 2014 Act in its definition created the term SEND - to include Disability as well as Special Educational Needs. It is the code of practice that sets out detailed information on the support available for children and young people aged 0 to 25 under the 2014 Act.

Broadly, there are two levels of support:

- SEND Support, provided to a child or young person in their pre-school, school, or college
- Education, Health, and Care Plans which provide a formal basis for support for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN Support.

The volume of discontent with the SEND process has been growing. This dissatisfaction is linked to an increase in the number of referral requests for SEND assessments. As more requests come in, waiting times for support have lengthened. Local authorities are facing financial pressure due to the rising number of EHCPs. In some cases, this has resulted in budget deficits. These issues led to the Department for Education's (DfE) SEND review in 2019. The review culminated in a report published in 2022, after the pandemic. By this time, statistics showed increased waiting times for diagnoses, EHCPs, and therapeutic help.

The 2022 report stated the review had been prompted “in a response to the widespread recognition that the system is failing to deliver for children, young people and their families.” It identified “a vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation.”

The review was followed by a Green Paper ‘SEND Review: right support, right place, right time,’ outlining proposed changes based on the review recommendations.

An improvement plan based on the review was published in March 2023. The plan contained no plans to change the law to support children with SEND, and no plans to directly implement the recommendations in the Green paper<sup>1</sup> Instead, it created an improvement project named ‘The SEND change Programme’, as a test and learn pilot. Camden is part of the London group along with Barnet (lead), Islington, and Enfield.

---

<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63ff39d28fa8f527fb67cb06/SEND\\_and\\_alternative\\_provision\\_improvement\\_plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63ff39d28fa8f527fb67cb06/SEND_and_alternative_provision_improvement_plan.pdf)

## 4.2 Volume of SEND Cases

Recent data shows a sharp rise in the number of children requiring SEND support, particularly those with EHCPs, which set out the statutory support individuals are eligible to receive. Reports indicate that between 2007 and 2017 the proportion of students with statements or EHCPs remained the same at 2.4 % each year, however since then it has increased each year reaching a peak of 4.8 % in 2024. While SEND cases overall represent 18.4% of the school population, a rise from 14% in 2014<sup>2</sup>. This growing number is reflected in a near doubling of children in the SEND system over the past decade, with most of these students in mainstream schools but a growing percentage in special schools.<sup>3</sup>

## 4.3 Increasing Incidence of Autism

The most common need for those with an EHCP is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and for those with SEND support is speech and language communication needs<sup>4</sup>. Autism diagnoses have surged, with referrals for autism and speech and language needs increasing by 27% September 2022 to 2023<sup>5</sup>.

Delays in diagnosis are exacerbated by limited healthcare resources, NHS figures show 85% of patients are waiting longer than the recommended 13 weeks for assessment<sup>6</sup>, while one in four parents have waited more than three years<sup>7</sup>. This issue has led to what has been described as a 'forgotten generation', where health systems, particularly in the NHS, struggle to meet the rising demand for autism and ADHD assessments<sup>8</sup>. The rise in autism diagnosis is partly attributed to improved recognition of the condition, though there are calls for better diagnostic methods. The British Medical Association in 2024 estimates 1/100 children may be on the autism spectrum. The healthcare system is under intense pressure, with some predicting that current NHS capacity cannot meet the unprecedented demand for autism services<sup>9</sup>.

In Camden, there is an 86 week wait for an autism diagnosis. Whilst this figure is highly disturbing, the Children of the North initiative report found that "more than one in four parents have waited over three years to receive support for their child."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Department for Education, July 2024, based on January Census.

<sup>3</sup> Fleming L. & Walker M. 2024 National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Impact Report: The MAT Factor Exploring how multi academy trusts are supporting pupils with SEND; ISOS Report, Towards an Effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England, July 2024

<sup>4</sup> DfE Special Educational Needs: June 2024 annual statistical data

<sup>5</sup> Centre for young Lives, An evidence based plan for addressing the autism assessment and support crisis. Child of the north N8 research partnership February 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> NHS Digital

<sup>8</sup> NHS Digital

<sup>9</sup> Health Think Tank Nuffield Trust

## 4.4 Delays and Challenges with EHCPs

One of the few metrics the government has imposed on Local Authorities in relation to success indicators for supporting children with SEND is the length of time it takes the local authority to complete an EHCP. The expected time is within 20 weeks.

Camden is faster at this process than many other boroughs. In Camden 96.6% EHCPs are completed within 20 weeks compared to 70% across London and 50.3% nationally. This metric does not, however, measure quality of EHCPs and Camden is working to improve the quality of the EHCPs it produces.

Camden's ENG system has ensured that it does not have high numbers of EHCPs. From a 2022 study of a group of LAs seen as having effective practice in managing their high needs block funding, Camden had the lowest growth in EHCPs at just 3.9% compared to a range of 13.95% to 40.61% for the other boroughs<sup>2</sup>.

Since the 2014 reforms of the SEND system, the issuance of EHCPs has risen from 240,183 in 2015 to over 500,000 children in 2023, an increase of 1405 in a decade<sup>10</sup>. Together with 138,000 initial requests - up from the 114,500 in 2022 this created an increase of 11% in the years 2022-23<sup>11</sup>. Many children wait longer than the mandated 20 weeks to receive plans, with over 20,000 waiting beyond this timeframe<sup>12</sup>. The lack of adequate funding exacerbates the issue, with the increase in Dedicated School Grant (DSG) funding (42% to £10.2 billion) not keeping pace with the rise in EHCP requests<sup>13</sup>

## 4.5 Funding and Resource Constraints

The gap between the rising demand for SEND services and available resources may have led to rationing by local authorities. Despite a 60% increase in the High Needs DSG budget between 2019-2024 to £10.2 billion and additional capital funding for special school places, this growth has been insufficient to manage the surge in SEN cases<sup>14</sup>. Several councils have faced budgetary crises resorting to drastic measures like issuing Section 114 notices<sup>15</sup>, and some authorities have a SEND overspend, these two may well be related.

## 4.6 Staffing Issues and Increased Special School Placements

Staffing shortages further complicate the issue, with schools struggling to recruit teaching assistants (TAs)<sup>16</sup> and other specialists needed for SEND support, against a

---

<sup>10</sup> DfE statistical release EHC plans and ISOs report 2024

<sup>11</sup> DfE statistical release Special Educational Needs

<sup>12</sup> DfE statistics EHC plans and Beyond the Labels a SEND system which works for every child Rachel de Souza children's commissioner November 2022

<sup>13</sup> DfE DSG funding 2024

<sup>14</sup> DfE statistical release 2024 Special Needs funding

<sup>15</sup> Local Government Chronicle, "Exclusive: Call to write off 'two to three billion' Send deficit", 26 October 2021, [Exclusive: Call to write off 'two to three billion' Send deficit | Local Government Chronicle \(LGC\) \(lgcplus.com\)](https://www.localgovernmentchronicle.com/news/exclusive-call-to-write-off-two-to-three-billion-send-deficit)

<sup>16</sup> Unison Survey, February 2022. 3,000 members took part in the survey, of these 92.3% reported their school was experiencing shortages of support staff and 83.4% shortages of teaching staff- slightly higher in primary schools.

background of teacher shortage and recruitment difficulties<sup>17</sup>. As a result, children with complex needs are often underserved, leading to an increase in special school placements. Between 2014 and 2024, special school placements grew by 60%, with a significant rise in placements at Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSSs)<sup>18</sup>.

#### **4.7 Growth in Home Education**

The number of children being home-educated has also risen, reaching 92,000 by 2024<sup>19</sup>. Mental health challenges, dissatisfaction with mainstream education, and concerns over bullying and lack of support for individual needs were cited as key reasons for this shift<sup>20</sup>. The transition to secondary school proved particularly difficult for some SEND students, prompting parents to seek alternatives. Home Education is different to Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) which is local Authority provided and paid for education usually SEND associated<sup>21</sup>.

#### **4.8 Rising Mental Health Issues**

The literature also highlights a growing mental health crisis among children, with the NHS Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) under significant strain. Referrals for mental health services surged to nearly 950,000 in 2023, reflecting the mounting pressures children face<sup>22</sup>. Mental health services in schools are expanding, but demand far outpaces available support, leaving many children waiting for care<sup>23</sup>.

#### **4.9 Reduction of Other Support Services**

Budget cuts and austerity measures have diminished the broader support services available to children with SEND. Key services like speech and language therapy<sup>24</sup>, educational psychology, and mental health support have been reduced, making it harder for children in mainstream education to access necessary interventions. As a result, EHCPs are increasingly viewed as one of the few ways to secure additional support for children with SEN.

There is a recognised need for more money to be invested in recruitment and retention of speech therapists to meet the growing need and demand. Responding to the Local Government Information Unit's report on the alarming financial situation in adult social care and children's services<sup>3</sup>, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) called on Jeremy Hunt in February 2024 to provide additional funding. Again,

---

<sup>17</sup> NFER research Teacher Labour Market in England annual Report 2024 March Dawson McLean, Jack Worth and Andrew Smith.

<sup>18</sup> ISOS Report 2024.

<sup>19</sup> DfE census data 2023/24 Home Education.

<sup>20</sup> Sonia Sodha Observer 14/01/2024 "Yes Parents have a right to educate their children at Home but children have rights too."

<sup>21</sup> IPSEA legal advice and DfE guide for parents Elective Home Education, April 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Young Minds Report 2024

<sup>23</sup> Mental Health of children and young people in England 2023- wave 4 follow up to 2017 Digital .nhs.uk

<sup>24</sup> Royal College of speech and Language therapists 23/07/2024 Chief Exec Steve Jamieson said 'Speech and Language therapy services are close to breaking point with high vacancies rates and not enough people in the workforce to fill the roles. - Just under a quarter of London's SLT posts are vacant.

Camden has done better than other local authorities in recruitment: Camden SLT recruitment and retention rates are better than the national average (based on RCSLT data) and has continued to improve. As of September 2024, Camden SLT vacancy rate is 13% compared to England average of 17%<sup>4</sup>.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

The literature reveals a complex and growing crisis in SEND provision, exacerbated by increased diagnoses, insufficient resources, and stretched public services. The rise in autism and SEND support needs, coupled with delays in assessment and EHCP issuance, underscores the urgent need for systemic reform. A cross-sector approach that includes education, health services, and social care is essential to address the growing demand for SEND services and to ensure that children receive timely and adequate support.

### **5. Findings and Recommendations**

As outlined in our methodology section above we, interviewed many people from Camden local authority services, voluntary services, parents/carers and schools. These four groups will be referred to below as the four stakeholder groups. In the findings section below, we have summarised the comments made by the key stakeholders we interviewed or sent questionnaires under the key lines of enquiry headings; these comments can be traced back to a summary document which can be found in the appendix along with the notes from the interviews. Recommendations, which themselves have arisen from the interviews and questionnaires, conclude each of the key lines of enquiry. In that sense, this section is evidence based.

## **A. Effectiveness and Efficiency**

Despite the high level of funding Camden devolves to schools and ENG funding, which most other local authorities do not have, and which provides a more flexible route to additional funding, many of the individuals across the four stakeholder groups commented on:

- there being insufficient resource available to meet need,
- too much time being taken up in applying for short-term funding,
- EHCPs not easily managed, and there being a high turnover of SEND case workers which impacts negatively on schools and parents when trying to get EHCPs established for children,
- inconsistencies between schools, case workers, boroughs, which creates more pressure for schools, SENCOs and parents,
- diagnosis taking a long time, being very stressful to manage and in some cases leading to expensive tribunals. For parents this isn't the end of the SEND journey, which was the hope and expectation of many.

### **A1) Funding**

The national funding allocation for SEND has not kept pace with the increasing and complex demands. Camden, in response, introduced the ENG to alleviate some of the burdens associated with applying for EHCP funding, which can be resource and time intensive. This initiative has been praised by the DfE and Treasury<sup>25</sup>.

Despite this, many schools, officers, and voluntary organisations have highlighted insufficient funding, given the rising number of children requiring EHCPs, ENG, and the CLIF. Schools also argued that funding should follow inclusion, meaning that higher funding should be awarded to more inclusive schools with higher proportion of pupils with SEND. Whilst this does already happen to an extent, headteacher feedback is that they think the allocation between schools could be better, making it easier to support children with SEND. The impact of macroeconomic factors, such as Covid-19, on children's development has further complicated the funding needs, though additional resources have not been provided to address these challenges.

Early years support has been particularly emphasised by officers and voluntary organisations, citing the long-term benefits of early intervention. The increasing complexity of needs relating to children with SEND has led to schools spending considerable time applying for additional funding. The rise in demand for ENG awards has led Cluster Panels to require more robust evidence of need, adding to the workload of teachers and SENCOs. Many headteachers and SENCOs expressed that schools should be funded for a full-time SENCO role, particularly as smaller schools often require SENCOs to be full-time, which increases staffing costs.

A complicating factor is that funding is tied to specific children, who may leave the school, and both ENG and CLIF funding are short-term. CLIF funding, for instance,

---

<sup>25</sup> Gray et al., 2022



applies only to early years and needs to be renewed each term, while ENG lasts for up to two years. This makes it particularly difficult for early years schools to make permanent appointments for TAs, leading to instability, frequent staff turnover, and a reliance on agency workers.

There is also a growing concern about the time it takes to secure funding through the EHCP process. Camden is in fact faster than other many other boroughs, completing over 96% of its EHCPs within the statutory 20 weeks, however, some parents still feel the process is too long. Other parents think that the EHCP threshold is too high, while others resort to tribunals to obtain the resources their child needs. Schools and parents have commented on the mismatch between EHCP expectations and actual school funding, leading to challenges in delivering the required support. Issues such as the high turnover of caseworkers and unresponsive officers further exacerbate the situation, with some families unsure of who their caseworker is or experiencing delays in annual reviews.

In some mainstream schools, where there are high numbers of children with EHCPs, funding is insufficient to support children in need of SEND support (SEN K students). The way in which SEND funding is allocated means that these schools are facing unrealistic financial strains. This is because, in Camden, schools are expected to meet the first £11,000 of provision out of their own budget (nationally, schools are expected to meet the first £6,000 of any additional provision out of the notional SEND budget; in Camden further funding is devolved, so that schools are expected pay the first £11,000 of costs, before additional EHCP funding can be considered). In schools where there is a higher-than-average number of children with EHCPs the devolved funding does not cover the funding gap. This can leave schools in deficit; but just as importantly, it also means that none of the notional SEND budget is left available to support children in need of SEND support.

Ultimately, the current SEND funding system is seen as inadequate, particularly in light of the growing complexity and demands for support, creating significant financial and administrative pressures on schools.

## **A2) Inconsistencies**

Parents, officers, and schools highlighted the negative impact of inconsistencies in SEND services on children and their families. Parents reported feeling unsupported and disbelieved during the diagnosis and assessment process, with unclear timelines and unhelpful advice. Schools raised concerns about inconsistent requirements for EHCP applications, varying thresholds for support, and inconsistent provision of therapeutic services.

School staff also mentioned inconsistent advice from Camden SEND services, citing recent upheaval in SEND services as detrimental to the quality of support. The introduction of the SEND strategy implementation plan (June 2024) was welcomed by headteachers, signalling that newly appointed staff are listening to stakeholders. Despite the autism training the council has been running for its staff since 2021, there were calls for specific autism training to create a shared understanding within the SEND community.

Officers and voluntary organisations emphasised the need for a whole-system approach rather than over-reliance on SENCOs, who also requested more prioritisation of SEND in school agendas. Some suggested that requiring schools to have a provision map could improve consistency.

Inconsistencies between local authorities and external agencies also pose challenges, particularly for SENCOs managing students across different boroughs and for families dealing with out-of-borough transfers. Parents advocated for better collaboration between authorities and training for caseworkers to improve the consistency of EHCPs.

### **A3) Diagnosis**

Over the past five years, there has been a significant increase in the demand for assessments, particularly for autism and ADHD, alongside growing complexity in cases. This is both a national and local issue. Wait times for autism assessments have become notably long, averaging 86 weeks (nearly 20 months), which has led to widespread frustration among parents, officers, voluntary organisations, and health workers. Parents in particular voiced concerns about the diagnosis process, with many reporting long waits, difficulty in being taken seriously, and even struggles to get onto waiting lists. Many expressed desperation, with some noting that after securing a hard-fought diagnosis, little meaningful change occurred for their child. During the waiting period, it was reported that there is no therapeutic support available, and school or early years support is often inconsistent. Parents, officers, and voluntary organisations all called for increased support during these prolonged waiting times, including parent training and counselling for children.

Post-diagnosis, many parents expressed disappointment at the lack of immediate support, even though intervention is supposed to follow need rather than diagnosis. Families often face additional delays if they need to apply for an EHCP, compounded by a shortage of specialised professionals such as occupational therapists, SALTs, trained TAs, and qualified SENCOs. Concerns were also raised about the quality of diagnoses, particularly for children who mask their behaviours, and the need for teacher training to prevent delays in the process.

Parents often feel ignored when they first identify developmental issues in their young children. Many believed that earlier diagnosis could prevent escalations to tribunals, which are often seen as adversarial. Some parents and schools highlighted that children without diagnoses often fall through gaps in mainstream education, and one voluntary organisation representative felt that the threshold for diagnosis was too high.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **We note the review of the distribution of High Needs Block (HNB) funding in the Camden Council SEND Strategy Implementation Plan. We would urge the working group in its review to ensure that funding follows inclusion.**  
(The ordinarily available £6,000 per pupil per school is clearly essential (and has to be passported to schools under the High Needs block School Funding System SFS) and the developed additional funding (£5,000) provided in Camden for children with complex needs is welcomed, however for those schools with significant numbers of children with EHCPs the 'top up approach' is insufficient, and whilst we recognise that there is limited funding and that our recommendation may mean taking some money away from some schools we would encourage the review work that, encouragingly, has started, to explore funding following inclusion.)
2. **We note that a review of commissioning arrangements of ARPs, special schools, local post 16 specialist provision, post-16 places and AP, advisory services, SEMH and therapeutic services is in the Camden Council SEND Strategy Implementation Plan.** We strongly recommend that this review enables mainstream schools to enrol children with autism or complex needs with greater continuity of funding and staffing.
3. Consider the possibility of **awarding notional funding to early years settings through the Camden Local Inclusion Fund (CLIF)** and address inconsistencies between early years and school age funding.
4. **Reduce SENCO workload** by: aiming for Camden's SEND services to pro-actively communicate with SENCOs; supporting SENCOs with Continued Professional Development providing sufficient time to attend Camden Learning and Camden SEND training and development sessions; clarifying and streamline the ENG application processes.
5. Deliver **comprehensive training and support on person-centred practice for all professionals** who support children, young people, and families with SEND across the partnership, maximising the opportunities presented through the development of the newly created Centre for Relational Practice.
6. Training on autism for all professionals who engage with children. Camden to produce a developmental framework on autism for use by all professionals.
7. **Camden Learning to consider further opportunities for peer learning between schools**, so that any problematic inter-school inconsistencies are reduced, and all schools play a strong part in Camden's overall inclusive vision. This might include using:
  - Continuing Professional Development
  - Reviewing the curriculum and pedagogy to ensure the ordinarily available meets all needs
  - Schools Requiring Additional Support (SRAS) meetings
  - Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP)

8. **Use school scorecards to understand and improve the SEND offer for schools.**
9. **We note the excellent work of the Inclusive Intervention Team (IIT) in Early Years and recommend that Camden SEND explore an all-age intervention advisory service** to support parents and children in statutory school age education.
10. **To reduce wait times for assessment for children with SEND**, we urgently request the North Central London Integrated Care Board to provide scrutiny with a plan as to how they are working with commissioned health providers to reduce waiting times for assessment and report to scrutiny on progress towards it.
11. Camden SEND to consider how to help parents and carers to **know who to hold to account for what for their EHCP**, this would be a person or arbiter who sits above their caseworkers, as this level of accountability is outside the caseworker's role.

## **B. Appropriacy and Sufficiency of Provision**

Perspectives on the appropriacy and sufficiency of provision for children with SEND in Camden vary, but there is a general consensus that gaps exist, particularly for autistic children without learning disabilities and for those with moderate learning disabilities but without autism. Stakeholders, including officers, schools, and parents, agreed that there is insufficient choice and limited post-16 options, which led many to describe the system as "broken."

Of 66 long-form responses to a question about Camden's services, 46 respondents stated that the support and services were inadequate. Only 14 respondents said Camden had the right services, but even they noted issues such as long waiting lists and limited after-school or holiday options.

Key concerns raised by those who felt Camden's provision was lacking included:

- Delays in needs identification, diagnosis, and support
- Insufficient training for mainstream staff supporting SEND children
- Inconsistent access to therapists and therapeutic support
- Lack of psychological support for parents
- Inadequate individualised education and support for SEND children
- A single special school not meeting diverse needs
- Insufficient Resource Base places
- Difficulty accessing support for working parents due to daytime-only appointments
- Vague and unclear EHCPs

These gaps highlight a pressing need for more tailored, accessible, and timely support for SEND children and their families in Camden. The inadequate post 16 provision reflects the failure of the government to provide funding when it extended responsibility for 16–25-year-olds in the 2024 Children and Families act. More funding is needed to create more post 16 options.

### **B1) Provision**

There is widespread consensus that funding for SEND in Camden is insufficient to meet the growing and complex needs of children, which is exacerbated by a rising number of children with SEMH needs and falling school rolls. The lack of adequate resources has placed extreme pressure on schools, parents, and children. Many parents have expressed the need for specialist schools for children without learning disabilities, particularly for those autistic pupils, though falling rolls complicate the creation of such options.

Falling rolls have also increased parental choice, leading to some schools with strong reputations for inclusive SEND provision taking on a disproportionate number of children with highly complex needs, while others face far lower numbers. This imbalance places significant strain on schools, with some heads expressing that they are no longer running mainstream schools due to the high concentration of SEND

students. Schools with resource bases are particularly burdened by rising referrals and a lack of early diagnosis in primary schools. One head noted the lack of limits on the number of children with additional needs being placed in their school, affecting both staff and other students.

This uneven distribution of needs creates a sense of unfairness among schools and negatively impacts children, especially those traveling long distances, affecting their attendance and social connections. Insufficient funding for increasingly complex needs further impacts the quality of education and staff retention, as heads struggle to keep trained personnel.

Several school heads criticised Camden's pupil place planning, stating that it fails to account for the sufficiency of SEND provision across the borough. Many called for more resource bases in both primary and secondary schools and a new commissioning model for specialist provision, particularly for autism, rather than relying solely on ENG/EHCP funding. Heads also pointed out the lack of secondary specialist support beyond autism and voiced concerns about Camden SEND officers not understanding schools' capacity when making placement decisions.

Heads and officers emphasised the need for bold innovation and collaboration in addressing the rising demand for SEND support. The introduction of Camden's 'test and learn' pilots was seen as a positive step toward addressing these challenges. However, the current pressure on provision remains immense, with one officer describing the system as 'effectively broken' due to too many high-needs children and too few placements or interventions.

Parents echoed these concerns in the parent questionnaire, with many moving their children between settings due to schools being unable to meet their learning needs. Out of 74 respondents, 47 children had moved schools, with 29 citing unmet learning needs as a reason for the move. Heads also raised the lack of SEMH provision and noted that inadequate support often leads to exclusions, particularly for students transferring from mainstream to specialist settings.

The shortage of early childhood resources and the limited capacity of primary schools to afford extra resources further contribute to the pressures, underscoring the urgent need for a more robust and equitable SEND provision system in Camden.

## **B2) Lack of specialist Resources**

There are significant challenges related to the availability of specialist resources for SEND children in Camden, particularly in accessing crucial therapy services, which are managed by NHS not Camden Council. Schools report ongoing shortages of key professionals, including SALTs, Occupational Therapists (OTs), Physiotherapists, Counsellors, and Dieticians. The use of agency staff to address these shortages often results in a lack of continuity and consistency in care, which negatively impacts children's progress.

The shortage of SALTs has been particularly acute, though the recent efforts by the Chief Speech Therapist and her team in improving recruitment and retention have been

positively received. Despite these improvements, schools still face difficulties. One school head noted that many students entering the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) had not been referred for assessment, nor had EHCP requests been made, highlighting the insufficiency of current provisions.

In response to the lack of reliable access to specialists, some schools have resorted to buying in additional staff, such as Educational Psychologists (EPs), SALTs, and trained TAs. This places additional financial strain on schools already struggling with limited resources. Heads also mentioned that they are often required to take on additional students without adequate specialist support, further exacerbating the strain on their resources.

Parents echoed these concerns, particularly highlighting the challenge of accessing support during work hours, as appointments are typically only offered during the day. Many parents expressed a need for psychological support for themselves as they navigate the lengthy assessment process for their children. Some even pointed out the need for social services support during this time.

Overall, there is a clear demand for more individualised support and specialised education for SEND children, as many parents and schools feel that current provisions are not meeting the needs of the children effectively.

### **B3) SENCO Workload**

The workload of SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators) in Camden is substantial and has led to high turnover in the role. Many SENCOs are also classroom teachers, which exacerbates the challenge due to the lack of dedicated time to focus on SEND responsibilities. This dual role adds pressure, as SENCOs struggle to balance their administrative tasks with classroom duties. The demand for completing paperwork to secure funding, such as EHCPs and ENG, is particularly burdensome, with one SENCO noting that it can take up to 8 hours to complete an EHCP application and 2 hours for an ENG, a significant drain on school resources.

Despite these challenges, many SENCOs expressed satisfaction when they receive sufficient support from external agencies and the local authority. They appreciate collaborating with TAs, teachers, and health services, particularly when the partnerships are effective. SENCOs find great reward in seeing the progress of SEND children when placed in nurturing, inclusive environments. Feedback from parents in the questionnaire echoed these positive experiences, with many praising schools that foster inclusion and safety.

However, there are serious concerns about the strain SENCOs are under, particularly the overwhelming administrative workload and the frustration of securing insufficient funding. Many SENCOs have asked for therapeutic supervision due to the emotional and mental strain of the role, and they are calling for more training, especially in response to the increasing complexity of needs, including the rising incidence of autism.

Suggestions for alleviating this strain included creating a virtual outreach service where schools could access support from educational psychologists, occupational therapists,

and speech therapists. This innovative model, which exists in Islington, could provide much-needed outreach and hands-on support to both schools and families.

#### **B4) Right staff/Right Qualifications**

Headteachers and SEN Coordinators (SENCOs) express appreciation for their experienced staff but highlight concerns about new recruits lacking training and experience. This results in less experienced staff supporting the most complex students, compounded by low pay and high turnover rates for teaching assistants (TAs).

Interviews with officers and voluntary organisations emphasise a critical shortage of therapists, particularly SALTs and occupational therapists (OT), needed for effective interventions due to increased demand for assessments.

Questionnaire responses reveal a pressing need for consistent speech and language support and mental health services in schools. Recruitment of TAs, especially those trained in SEND, is becoming increasingly challenging, with Brexit having a detrimental impact on staffing in specialised provisions.

Headteachers and SENCOs identify a significant need for comprehensive training to enhance staff capacity and retention. They stress that many educators lack the real-life experience and training necessary to address the complexities of SEND, particularly in understanding autism's varied manifestations. Enhanced training is deemed essential for improving staff effectiveness and supporting students with diverse needs.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

11. **Therapists** – especially Speech and Language therapists (SALT) /Speech Language and Communications Teachers (SLCN) – to share their plans to **recruit, retain and develop their workforce**. Providers to also explore/alter their model of delivery to meet the needs of the school-based community.
12. Explore the **creation of an all-service Camden outreach team to support schools and families**. This team should have the aim of providing further specialist support for complex children in mainstream schools and be comprised of professionals from both education and health services.
13. **Ensure that the Camden SEND Strategy Implementation Plan develops a strategic plan for Camden schools** that considers: the increase in demand for assessment, the increase in positive diagnosis because of the assessments, falling rolls in some schools, need for more reliable supply of Speech and Language Therapists, need for more support to schools/SENCOs/children and families from specialists.



14. **Camden Council and Camden Learning should continue to work with schools in partnership to explore new approaches to meeting the needs of Camden's children.** This could include:
  - a. Schools working in partnership
  - b. Test and learn projects where schools work together and develop different models to meet the needs of Children and young People with SEND.
15. Explore how best to **match the profile of need across the continuum of provision:** which could include strengthening inclusive mainstream as well as additional ARPs and Special School places, to ensure there is appropriate, local provision for pupils.
16. Ensure that **relational practice is front & centre to improve relationships between all partners**, recognising that there may, at points, be differences of views, recommendations and constraints.
17. From the parent questionnaire we had hoped to learn more about the specific gaps in provision that parents identify, and several parents did indeed provide their views on this. Specifically, parents wanted to **see what services and provision were in place for children and young people without a learning disability.**

## **C. Accountability**

Accountability in the context of SEND support in Camden is significantly influenced by two key issues: building trust and establishing shared values between parents, schools, and support services.

A primary concern among parents is the lack of clarity regarding the process to obtain help for their children and the specific support available. Many parents reported feeling uncertain about what assistance their child may need and how to access it. This uncertainty often leads to frustration and emotional distress, particularly when long waiting times for assessments, diagnoses, and support - such as EHCPs - are involved, with waits for autism assessments reaching up to 18 months.

There is a notable gap between parental expectations and the actual support schools can provide. While parents often desire one-on-one support for their children, schools struggle to meet these expectations due to a number of constraints, including limited resources, the complex needs of students and the needs of the whole class. One school suggested that creating a provision map to outline the SEND support available could help bridge this gap and clarify what families can expect.

Furthermore, communication breakdowns between SEND caseworkers and families contribute to mistrust and dissatisfaction. Schools cited the lack of trained caseworkers, who frequently miss meetings, exacerbates this issue, leaving parents feeling unsupported and without a clear accountability framework. To resolve this schools wanted improved communication and consistent engagement from SEND caseworkers are essential for rebuilding trust.

Additionally, schools acknowledged the emotional toll that long waiting periods for assessments and therapies can take on parents. The frustration of unmet expectations regarding timely support can lead to increased anxiety and distress for families.

In summary, enhancing accountability in SEND support requires clearer communication, improved understanding of available services, and a commitment to building trusting relationships between parents and educational authorities. Addressing these areas is crucial for aligning parental expectations with the realities of what schools can provide.

### **C1) Transparency**

The issue of transparency in Camden's SEND provision is a significant concern among parents, schools, and support services. While officers emphasised inclusion as a core approach, no parents in the enquiry mentioned inclusion, many parents expressed confusion about what SEND provision actually means for the support available to their children. A representative from a voluntary organisation highlighted that a lack of transparency has eroded trust, suggesting that stakeholders need to openly communicate the realities of funding constraints and the high thresholds for accessing support such as EHCPs and ENGs.

Headteachers echoed these sentiments, noting that parents desire clearer information about the services offered and the realities of what can be expected. Many parents reported receiving a diagnosis for their child but then struggling with inadequate follow-on support, leading to feelings of frustration and helplessness.

Responses to questions about children's wellbeing in their current settings varied: while some parents reported their children being happy and settled, others noted significant dissatisfaction. This mixed feedback indicates a need for improved clarity regarding the support and resources available, as well as ongoing communication about how to navigate the system.

In response to these concerns, Camden officers and voluntary organisations have made efforts to co-create documents, policies, and online resources, such as the five-year Camden SEND Strategy, to demonstrate that they are listening to parents. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on the actual clarity and usefulness of the information provided, ensuring that it meets the needs of families seeking support.

Ultimately, enhancing transparency in the communication of services, expectations, and available resources is crucial for rebuilding trust and ensuring that parents feel informed and empowered in advocating for their children's needs.

## **C2) Information and Guidance**

Information and guidance regarding SEND support in Camden present significant challenges for families, particularly those navigating the system for the first time or who are non-native English speakers. Headteachers noted that many parents are unaware of their rights and lack a clear understanding of how the system operates, highlighting the need for more straightforward and accessible information.

There is a consensus that families require reliable guidance, as mixed messages from various contacts within Camden can create confusion. The local offer on the website has been described as unclear and not entirely transparent, making it an inadequate primary resource for communication with parents. There is a strong call for improved information and support to guide parents through the process, as they seek clarity about the next steps for their children.

While many schools show empathy and understanding for families with children who have high needs, SENCOs reported the stress of managing communication with some parents. Many parents expressed appreciation for the support they receive from Camden, schools, and other families, but they still desired clearer communication regarding available resources and support options.

Additionally, parental dissatisfaction tends to increase as children age, particularly in the post-16 and over-20 age groups, as reflected in the parent questionnaire. This underscores the need for ongoing support and clarity as children transition through different educational stages, ensuring that parents feel informed and empowered in advocating for their children's needs and additional national funding to match the legislation of 2014 to improve outcomes and provision for post 16.

### **C3) SENCO relationships with parents**

SENCOs highlighted both the joys and frustrations of their roles, particularly in their relationships with parents. Some said that building relationships with students and families is a rewarding aspect of their work. However, they also noted that a significant portion of their time is consumed by interactions with a small percentage of parents, leading to stress and the need for additional support and supervision.

Many SENCOs called for a revamp of the parent contract to better protect their roles and facilitate healthier interactions. While some parents are supportive and appreciative of the efforts made, others raise concerns about the consistency and quality of SEND provision.

Parents reported feeling exhausted by the system, often facing challenges while advocating for their children's needs. They expressed a desire for a kinder, less blame-oriented system. This sentiment was echoed in the parent questionnaire, where a larger number of respondents felt unsupported and blamed at various stages compared to those who felt well-supported.

Specifically, feedback regarding support for children aged 16 and older was particularly negative. Out of 40 responses providing further insight, only 13 were neutral or positive, indicating a significant majority (27) had a negative view of the support received. This underscores the need for systemic improvements to better support families navigating the complexities of SEND provision.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

18. **Camden should set out, for itself and for parents, exactly what provision exists. And ensure this is reflected in the school score cards. There should be a clear, simple statement of what is available, why this is the case, and how Camden's approach to education, including the education of children with SEND, differs to those of other local authorities.** Such a statement should set out clearly the reasons for and benefits of an inclusive approach for all children, but especially those with SEND. The statement should make clear what is available within the borough for children with different types and levels of need and clarify the options for children whose needs cannot be met within the borough (either due to an absence of sufficient places, or the absence of appropriate specialist provision).
19. **An easy to access guide to 'what is ordinarily available,' in schools.** This should be referenced in the school score cards.
20. Camden SEND to work with Voluntary and Charitable Sector (VCS) and organisations such as SENDIASS to **help parents and young people with SEND to become peer mentors/peer champions /hand holder to support others through the SEND educational journey.** This could be both operational and strategic support.

21. **Expand the autism journey map** to incorporate broader services across the system to help families understand the steps and support along their journey.
22. Council departments and parents to **co-design a process/system that ensures that families are able navigate** much easier resulting in them not telling the same story over and over.
23. A clear **'you said we did,' annual form of communication for parents** and as a follow up to any questionnaires put out to parents.
24. Camden to **review and expand the wraparound support** provided specifically to **parents/carers with SEND children**, to ensure parents feel supported and empowered by the council in their journey to care for their child.
25. Officers in contact with parents/carers with SEND children to **follow a relational practice model**, with a strong emphasis on ensuring that parents/carers don't experience a sense of being 'blamed' by professionals.

## D. Equity

Stakeholders expressed significant concerns about the inequalities and inequities present in SEND education, although they noted a lack of robust data to support their observations. There was a prevailing belief that more affluent parents, who are familiar with navigating the system, can secure resources for their children more effectively than those from poorer backgrounds. This creates disparities in access to support.

Additionally, there were concerns about the under-representation of certain ethnic groups in SEND diagnoses, suggesting systematic under-identification of needs. Some officers indicated that cultural and social factors might prevent parents from acknowledging their child's special needs and/or disabilities, but again, specific data on this issue was lacking. Some organisations have made efforts to address potential ethnic biases by hiring staff with relevant language and cultural skills.

A notable disparity was also highlighted between boys and girls, with two-thirds of autistic children diagnosed in Camden being male, although the recently commissioned SEND JSNA does show a narrowing of this gap in recent years. This difference underscores the need for greater awareness and attention to female autism and the delays in diagnosis that girls often face.

Many schools recognised the challenges faced by parents of children with SEND, particularly those experiencing poverty. One headteacher described how overwhelming everyday situations can be for these families. The cost of essential items, such as nappies for older children who are not toilet trained, adds to their burden, along with sleep deprivation.

Families facing poverty often lack access to early years support or parenting skills classes, which are typically provided through nurseries. Moreover, stigma associated with SEND and mental health issues can deter families from seeking help.

Transitioning to adulthood was identified as another critical area of concern, with families feeling abandoned as their children reach 18. The shortage of accessible apprenticeships and the overwhelming demand for the Specialist Centre for 18-25 Learning and Physical Difficulties further exacerbates this issue.

Parents also expressed frustration over the lack of after-school clubs and holiday activities that can adequately accommodate their children's complex needs. Overall, the sufficiency of provision remains a pressing issue, requiring systemic changes to address these inequities effectively.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

26. To follow the recommendation from the recent Camden SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which recommended to **further improve data collection on those with SEND and protected characteristics** and their outcomes to better understand differences in prevalence seen, including overrepresentation in Black ethnic and mixed/ multiple ethnic groups and under-representation in Chinese communities.

27. Camden council to actively promote **more accessible apprenticeships and supported internships within the council** and with its partners to do the same.
28. Camden to explore the **sufficiency and effectiveness of the provision for pupils post-18** and that the outcomes of existing provision are meeting the needs of this profile.
29. Camden Local Area SEND Partnership to take a system wide approach in **raising awareness of the prevalence of autism amongst girls** and its gender-specific manifestations, ensuring that they are identified and receive appropriate diagnosis, intervention and support.
30. Camden to explore **working with voluntary agencies to improve the quantity of good quality after school and holiday clubs** for children/young people with SEND.
31. Based on specific requests that came out of the parent questionnaire, to improve provision for teens and post-16, specifically more **comprehensive life-skills training**; better **sixth form provision** (A-levels/BTEC vocational qualification) in smaller schools; and to provide **overnight respite care**.

## 6. National Recommendations

As mentioned previously, this enquiry was intended to investigate and make recommendations for improvement that were local to Camden and in Camden's control to improve. However, we found that there were many constraints that hampered the Borough from carrying out the changes that would make a difference to outcomes of Camden's children with SEND. While there are national recommendations in recently produced reports (ISOS Report 2024, Child of the North SEND Report 6 2024) that we wholly support, this section looks at the recommendations we would make as a result of carrying out this Camden enquiry.

We really heard the desperation of many parents when they spoke of the cliff edge as their children ended full time education, this might be aged 18, 23, or 25. It seems to us that in addition to more provision at post 16 education, there needs to be a national conversation about what society we want. Currently, qualification and employment outcomes for young people with SEND are not good, and we cannot guarantee that young people with SEND will be welcomed in the adult world. If we want the increasingly higher proportion of young people with SEND to fully participate in the adult world of work, family and happiness, this issue must be addressed, and it is much wider than education.

Hence, the call for a national conversation, perhaps led by a 'schooling framework commission' as outlined in the book by *About our Schools* by Brighouse and Waters, to establish principles and values around the kind of society we all want, that education curriculum and assessment can then work towards providing.

Given the number of negative issues that have arisen from the 2014 Family Act, which the DfE 2022 Review was instigated to investigate, and in the light of the fact that the Green paper drawn up because this review was never enacted or moved on to a white paper, we think that a review of the 2014 Act cannot be avoided.

We would expect that such a review would create a properly funded system, with a different role for SENCOs to alleviate the administrative load they currently carry, and to allow them to focus on organising the actual day to day support for children in their school. In the meantime, SENCOs need respite from that administrative burden and sufficient time for teaching interventions, so in the short-term consideration needs to be given to providing additional funding to increase SENCO capacity.

Curriculum and Assessment was raised by some of our officers and school staff. For the last ten years, there has been a steer away from the focus on oracy and group work as part of the previous government's national strategies for teaching Maths and English replacing course work and final exams with testing by exams only. Moreover, a broad curriculum that treated community languages for GCSE on a par with modern foreign languages, encouraged aspects of art and drama at GCSE, A level and BTEC level has been replaced with a narrow academic curriculum, and a focus on children's behaviour with whole class teaching as a recommended pedagogy. This negatively impacts on children with broader interests and with learning needs that do not cope well with written



final assessment or whole class teaching and those who struggle with the fine motor control needed for constant writing.

The recent announcement by the new government to undertake a curriculum and assessment review, and the creation of the oracy commission, which is due to produce its final report this month, alongside the national call for more Continuing Professional Development, should all help to move the profession in a direction that will enable more pupils with SEND to participate fully and for mainstream schools to become more inclusive and meet the needs of these children.

Regarding the rise in numbers of children who have both been diagnosed with autism and are on the waiting list for such a diagnosis, we were really struck by the dearth of research regarding the causes of such a recent rapid increase and by the apparent lack of national consideration for what this means for our education system. This leads us to a recommendation for more research on autism and a clear long term national plan for schools to meet the needs of those children.

Having carried out the research for the CSF Scrutiny Committee's previous scrutiny panel, [an investigation of the impact of Covid-19 on the language development of early years children in Camden](#), we were also sensitive to the issue raised mainly by SENCOs and headteachers that there had never been properly funded catch up programmes for children after the pandemic, nor had the profession been consulted on what they thought would be the most helpful catch-up support. Hence, recommendation 37 focuses on revisiting a Covid-19 compensation funding stream.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

31. Government to launch a **national consultation on how we might create an inclusive education curriculum for children with SEND**, perhaps led by a 'schooling framework commission', and use resulting principle and values that emerge from it to be the measure of success for assessing our education system. This should also take careful note of the soon to be published Oracy report.
32. Government to **undertake a review of post-16 provision for children with SEND and allocate funding immediately** to increase provision for 16-25 years old. This should happen alongside a **broader reflection of how we might foster an inclusive society where neurodiverse adults participate fully in community life**.
33. A **review of the 2014 Family Act and code of practice legislation**, creating the legislative protection for SEND with the right funding from the outset.
34. Ensuring that the legal protections for children and the funding for local government have a **mediation process wrapped around** for any disputes rather than the adversarial tribunal system that we have at present.

35. Government to provide **immediate funding to increase SENCO capacity** to alleviate their administrative burden and have sufficient time for teaching interventions.
36. Government to **commission research on the causes of the increase in demand and diagnosis of complex needs**, especially autism and ADHD.
37. Revisit an education **Covid-19 compensation national funding stream** to include a focus on **early years and KS1 intervention**, as well as tracking the cohort of children 0-5 years old in the Covid-19 years.

## 7. Bibliography

10978 Warnock Report DfE

1981 Education Act and code of Practice DfE

2014 Children and Families Act and code of Practice DfE

2019 SEND Review DfE

2022 Green Paper SEND Review: right support, right place, right time.

DfE SEND change programme

Flemons L. & Walker M. 2024 National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Impact Report: The MAT Factor Exploring how multi academy trusts are supporting pupils with SEND;

ISOS Report, Towards an Effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England, July 2024

Centre for young Lives, An evidence based plan for addressing the autism assessment and support crisis. Child of the north N8 research partnership Report 1 2024.

Centre for young Lives, An evidence based plan for plan for addressing the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) assessment and support crisis Child of the north N8 research partnership Report 6 2024.

NHS Digital

Health Think Tank Nuffield Trust

Beyond the Labels a SEND system which works for every child Rachel de Souza children's commissioner November 2022

DfE Special Educational Needs in England DSG funding 2024: EHC plans/DSG funding

DfE census data 2023/24 Home Education.

Local Government Chronicle, "Exclusive: Call to write off 'two to three billion' Send deficit", 26 October 2021, [Exclusive: Call to write off 'two to three billion' Send deficit | Local Government Chronicle \(LGC\) \(lgcplus.com\)](#)

Unison Survey, February 2022.

NFER research Teacher Labour Market in England annual Report 2024 March Dawson McLean, Jack Worth and Andrew Smith.

Sonia Sodha Observer 14/01/2024 "Yes Parents have a right to educate their children at Home but children have rights too."

IPSEA legal advice and DfE guide for parents Elective Home Education, April 2019.

Young Minds Report 2024

Royal College of speech and Language therapists 23/07/2024 Chief Exec Steve Jamieson

Mental Health of children and young people in England 2023- wave 4 follow up to 2017 Digital .nhs.uk

About our Schools Improving on Previous Best Tim Brighouse and Mick Waters 2021 Crown house Publishing