Intersectionality in SEND: Families experiences in schools

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Special Needs Jungle Ltd

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Introduction

Special Needs Jungle has long recognised that distinct issues, concepts, values, and practices come together to create the context in which ethnic and marginalised communities experience the SEND system. It is also SNJ's position that experiences, other than those of white families, are seldom given the space and platform to enable transparent, solution-focused conversations to be held.

While there is much commonality in the experiences of families in the SEND system, this common ground has become a handy leveller for those in positions of power. It allows policymakers to believe that improving the 'generic' experience of families is acceptable for all. But this conveniently overlooks the reality that many families' SEND experiences are so far below acceptable that generic improvements will barely be felt.

Acknowledging intersectionality in SEND illustrates how multiple modes of advantage, and disadvantage, discrimination, and privilege, affect children's access to services. These factors also impact a family's ability to advocate for their child. This intersection is fundamental in predicting outcomes for children. When you consider we have a SEND system that already fails children who are otherwise advantaged, it is easy to see how those at the margins lose out even further.

Given the time restraints with the imminent publication of the SEND Review Green paper, the aim of this survey is to offer a snapshot of families' experiences that are seldom heard by the decision makers. In the short time it has been active, the survey has already received 138 submissions. It's clear from the information shared that many families experience overt and covert racism and racial discrimination on a daily basis, and that this coexists with and exacerbates the issues that thread through the SEND system.

We recognise the limitations of this survey, but believe it highlights the need for a much wider understanding of the SEND system than is currently available. Those developing strategic solutions must understand how intersectionality impacts all aspects of families' lives. Without it, clear and appropriate strategic action to reduce inequalities will be impossible.

Background

We already know from the Education Policy Institute analysis[1] that children with SEND in more deprived areas have to have far more pronounced needs to attract support than children with SEND from more prosperous areas.

It isn't too hard to extrapolate that a child who continues through school with an unidentified learning need is unlikely to reach their potential. Equally, a child who is incorrectly labelled is also less likely to succeed. In many cases, failing to, or incorrectly, identifying children's needs can lead to placement breakdown. This affects the child and wider family in all aspects of their lives.

> "Bias and parental response to historical bias or the current threat of bias could plausibly form a part of the explanation for the disparities experienced by ethnic groups that have taken the brunt of racial discrimination. Historically and prior to the mainstreaming of most children with SEND following the Warnock Review in 1978, Black Caribbean children were over-identified with SEND and segregated from other children in schools for the 'educationally subnormal', to the clear detriment of their educational and broader life outcomes (Coard, 1971)."
> *Identifying pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, Jo Hutchinson, EPI*

As Jo Hutchinson reported in the EPI report: *"The most disadvantaged children attending academies had the lowest chances of identification, but this was driven by a combination of other characteristics they shared, such as higher rates of BME ethnicity, in addition to the effects of academisation."*

However, it is inaccurate to surmise the issue is simply under-identification of SEND in marginalised groups. A 2021 study[2] into the ethnicity of pupils in England who had been identified as having special educational needs, found that Black Caribbean pupils were over-represented compared to White British pupils, while all other ethnic minority groups were under-represented.

This over-representation still does not lead to improved outcomes; far from it. In fact Black Caribbean and Mixed White and Black Caribbean pupils continue to be the lowest-achieving ethnic groups at age 16 and are also the only groups to underachieve relative to their White British peers after their socioeconomic status is accounted for[3]. Compared

[1] https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/education-policy-institute-research-proves-why-every-teacher-must-teacher-send/

[2] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0014402921990895

[3] Strand, S. (2014). Ethnicity, gender, social class, and achievement gaps at age 16: Intersectionality and "getting it" for the White working class. Research Papers in Education, 29(2), 131–171. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02671522.2013.767370

with White British pupils, they are also twice as likely to be excluded from school[4], over twice as likely to be unemployed[5], and three times more likely to be arrested. The latter potentially pushes young people into the school-prison pipeline.[6]

While many studies have theorised that this over-representation could be due to demographic factors such as gender, year groups, or socioeconomic disadvantage, very few have considered the role that race, and racial bias, might play in accessing the right provision and reducing outcomes for these pupils.

Although written 50 years ago, Coard's book *'How the West Indian Child is made educationally subnormal in the British School System'* is still just as relevant today according to Karl Pupé,[7] who explores the three biases that lead to this over-representation:

1. "Cultural bias. Children emigrating from the Caribbean had accents and dialects which were assumed to be inferior to English, in particular Patois, which was known as broken English. Teachers perceived children as not speaking, reading, and writing English 'properly', and therefore assumed they had a low IQ.' (If you think this has changed, unfortunately not, as recent research into accent bias has found).
2. 'Middle class bias. The school system in England was historically modelled around middle class ideals and rhetoric. This is still the same today, with the curriculum catering to middle class interests. This bias doesn't just affect ethnic minorities, as working class white boys now perform lowest. However, Black Caribbean pupils are twice as likely to come from working class backgrounds.
3. 'Coard called the third bias, 'emotional disturbance' but I am going to rename it as SEMH. There is a belief that BAME children are more difficult to deal with, more aggressive, and more prone to anger - and that that pertains to intelligence because they are emoting rather than reasoning, and therefore must have SEMH needs. However these children are coming from one culture to another, and often these cultures are diametrically opposed. Although things are different now, from my experience of working with children with SEMH needs we are still dealing with very complex problems - systemic racism, poor housing, perceptions of Black Caribbean pupils. All of these things become a toxic stew. Sadly, they are then sometimes kicked out of mainstream schools because the teachers can't handle them. But the problem with that, is that if

[4] Strand, S., Fletcher, J. (2014). A quantitative longitudinal analysis of exclusions from English secondary schools. University of Oxford

[5] U.K. Government. (2019). Ethnicity facts and figures: Unemployment. https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/unemployment-and-economic-inactivity/unemployment/latest

[6] U.K. Government Race Disparity Unit. (2019). Black Caribbean ethnic group: Facts and figures. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethnicity-facts-and-figures-black-caribbean-ethnic-group/black-caribbean-ethnic-group-facts-and-figures

[7] https://www.twinkl.co.uk/blog/send-semh-and-race-an-interview-with-karl-pupe

you look at the ethnic makeup of youth offenders, *51% are from a BAME background*. This is known as the school to prison pipeline. Pupils are excluded from school and go into a pupil referral unit, they may not be diagnosed properly, and have no clear pathway. Youth service and skills based pathways have been stripped away, resulting in a loss of opportunity, leading them into anti-social behaviour.

4. If you're not giving people options, they get into things they shouldn't be doing. Schools might think they've got rid of a problem pupil, but don't realise that they've put them on a negative path. People that have got learning difficulties are 8 times more likely to go to prison. They often haven't been diagnosed, and sometimes they are dealing with trauma as well.'

SEND, SEMH and Race - An Interview with Karl Pupé

However, noticing bias is not the same thing as dismantling it. The Oxford study that was published in 2018[8] suggests the data may point to, *"inappropriate interpretation of ethnic and cultural differences including teacher racism, low expectations and a failure of schools to provide quality instruction or effective classroom management"*. This conclusion is widely reflected in the responses to our survey that have come from a range of racialised and marginalised communities.

Not "Hard to Reach" but Seldom Heard

Ethnic communities are often referred to "hard to reach" but are only hard to reach if you have not been looking to meet them where they are, literally and figuratively.

We haven't included much analysis of the comments made, because it is not necessary; they speak for themselves. We hope what these parents have to say will give you pause—and maybe even shock you. Most of all, we hope that they will foster an understanding of what thousands of families endure on a daily basis.

Given that so far, the data has led academics to the conclusion that a serious and systemic problem exists, SNJ believes the next step is to start reframing how we view SEND through an intersectional lens as standard practice. In this way, considering intersectionality becomes normalised and we become able to see the patterns without trying. Our survey lends itself as a starting point in this process.

We note the recommendations in the newly-published Government Policy Paper, Inclusive

[8] Strand S, Lindorff A (2018)Ethnic disproportionality in the identification of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in England:
Extent, causes and consequences http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Executive-Summary_2018-12-20.pdf

Britain: government response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities[9] We've included below the section of the report that relates to race and SEND.

It is clear that the Government is relying on the SEND Review to solve the racial disparities in SEND education but we are not aware of any work the Review has done in this area.

We hope this report can provide vital evidence of the experiences of families, as reported by the families themselves, in their own words. SNJ and its Intersectionality panel would welcome the opportunity to work further with the DfE to address this issue.

4.5 Increase quality of alternative provision in education

Outcomes for pupils in alternative provision (AP) are not good enough and we know some ethnic minority groups are overrepresented in AP schools. In January 2021, there were 12,785 pupils whose main school registration was in state, place-funded AP. Of those pupils, 71.4% were white British compared to 64.9% in all schools. All Asian ethnic groups are underrepresented in AP, whilst other groups are overrepresented, such as black Caribbean (2.7% compared to 1.0%), white and black Caribbean (3.7% compared to 1.6%) and Gypsy/Roma (1.1% compared to 0.3%)

We also know that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are being excluded or are absent or missing from school much more frequently than other pupils nationally. Certain ethnic groups, such as black Caribbean pupils, are disproportionately represented in different types of SEND identification, which negatively impacts the provision and support received. To ensure that vulnerable children have the same opportunities to succeed, we are conducting a SEND Review which we will use to consult on proposals for transforming outcomes for young people in AP. This transformation will make early support the norm for all young people who need it in mainstream schools and ensure stable and high-quality education is available throughout a young person's time in AP.
Inclusive Britain: government response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities

Action 35

The DfE will take action to improve the quality of education outside mainstream schools. These proposals are part of the forthcoming schools white paper and the SEND review and measures will be announced in 2022 to deliver significantly improved outcomes for children and young people at risk of being excluded from school or who are in Alternative Provision.

[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-britain-action-plan-government-response-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/inclusive-britain-government-response-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities

Conclusion

"…when we deliberately choose intersectionality frames we cannot help but notice who is missing from the room. What must follow is daily commitment to become intersectionality-minded educators, constantly checking our own biases, working to dismantle our own deficit, majoritarian thinking as well as the wider cultures, structures and barriers that prevent true inclusion for all. This is a perpetual conscious process for ourselves and everyone in education so that together we can tear down the walls of the room in education"
Zahra Bei

Reference:[10]

It is the job of educators to ask the right questions, no matter how uncomfortable or alien these may at first seem. How can a governing board write equitable and fair policies for all its pupils, if it doesn't involve representatives from its marginalised communities?
How can teachers understand the behaviours of all their pupils without looking through the multiple intersectional lenses through which children see the world through every day? Is it a family that is "failing to engage" with the school, or a school that is not accessible or welcoming enough?

Addressing racism has become less of a priority in initial teacher training and in schools, yet many subtle acts of racism continue to occur[11]. Claiming 'colour blindness' in the classroom comes from a mistaken belief that the very best society is one that does not see colour. Not acknowledging someone's race denies the significance of a person's racial/ethnic experiences and history, and the individual as a racial/cultural being. By attempting to assimilate everyone's experiences with that of the dominant culture diminishes the value of difference. In turn, this increases both the isolation of people from other cultures, and the perception that anything outside that dominant culture is somehow less "acceptable".

Schools often conform to this "colour-blindness", with policies and beliefs that reflect the values and norms of the dominant, white, culture. They may strive to seem inclusive, with statements on their websites and equality and diversity policies written and signed off by the governing board. But why isn't this "inclusivity" reflected in the experiences of pupils and their families from marginalised backgrounds?

"Human Rights must be afforded to Black and Brown children too. Racism is a disease and it must be eradicated."
Marguerite Haye, SNJ Intersectionality Panel

[10] https://www.allfie.org.uk/news/inclusion-now/inclusion-now-54/intersectionality-inclusion/

[11] Pearce S, 2018. 'It was the small things': Using the concept of racial microaggressions as a tool for talking to new teachers about racism. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 79, pp. 83-92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.12.009

"Collaboratively we can make these changes that are long overdue. By staying quiet we continue to suffer in silence and this affects the next generation too. We need to unite so that all voices are heard - after all it is about time "equal" is practised in the Equality Act"

Mala Thapar, SNJ Intersectionality Panel

Our research shows a snapshot of experiences from around the UK. The story it tells is one of systematic racism faced by both pupils and their families on a daily basis.

When concerns are raised, they are either ignored, misinterpreted, weaponised, or parents and children are made to question the veracity of their own experiences. Our research suggests that while our current education system claims to welcome inclusion and strive for an inclusive school environment, this does not extend to looking at the education opportunities they offer through an intersectional lens.

This requires urgent, positive action in response to a need identified by members of the community. It requires the education system to replace passive colour-blindness with actively developing a clear understanding of race and ethnicity, unconscious bias, and how that relates to their daily interactions.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions[12] are everyday subtle actions or reactions that communicate a person's bias towards a marginalised group. While most would insist they are not racist, their unconscious behaviours can communicate bias without them ever realising. It doesn't go unnoticed, however, by the family whose child with SEND is facing microaggressions on a daily basis. This is particularly so if a school prides itself on inclusivity but nonetheless fails to educate its staff on racial and cultural bias and intersectionality.

This is exacerbated when those engaging in microaggressions refuse to believe that their actions or words are racist[13]. When a family raises concerns, they are likely to be met with denial, defensiveness, and maybe even anger. This rejection of the family's experience creates further barriers and they may withdraw, because they have not been believed or heard.

This experience of denial-led, defensive responses from staff in education settings is seen in many of our survey responses. Set this against a background of schools not always working with parents, or not valuing their input about their children with SEND and it's easy to see why so many families from marginalised communities feel so disempowered when it comes to advocating for their children.

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[12] Pearce S, 2018. 'It was the small things': Using the concept of racial microaggressions as a tool for talking to new teachers about racism. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 79, pp. 83-92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.12.009

[13] https://www.npr.org/2020/06/08/872371063/microaggressions-are-a-big-deal-how-to-talk-them-out-and-when-to-walk-away?t=1647371218445

Everyone has prejudices and we are all capable of microaggressions. If bias is part of the human condition, recognising it and its impact on how we interpret, process, and respond to situations should be an essential part of our education system, both for the educators and children. Instead, we are often unable, or unwilling, to discuss it. However, not acknowledging a problem doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

You don't need to be part of a marginalised group to understand that something is unjust. Our survey clearly shows that there is inequity in the way that many marginalised communities are being treated. This is not acceptable.

While we recognise that changing behaviour takes time, effort, and can be an incredibly uncomfortable experience, we believe the important first step is to welcome open conversation about the existence of bias, how we can learn to recognise it, and how to challenge our own biases.

We need to understand what our particular bias is, and why we have it before then seeking to change our behaviour. Unbelievably the Government itself scrapped anti-bias training[14]. Whilst training is useful, SNJ believes it is not enough to simply recognise we have a bias, (or more than one). Instead, we must develop tools to identify behavioural patterns and identify when we are colluding with 'norms' that serve to compound bias, discrimination, and negative outcomes experienced by those we are trying to help. As a society, we decide what is normal. Educating ourselves about what normal looks like through an intersectional lens is the start of creating a more equal and humanistic approach to an education system that is alive to its own prejudice.

Recommendations

The SEND Review must seek to develop a set of principles aimed at eliminating racial bias and promoting respect and dignity for people of ethnic communities.

We are therefore making the following recommendations that the SEND Review and consultation:

1. Pay particular attention to including marginalised voices in SEND of both parents and children.
2. Find out in greater depth what the experiences of ethnic and cultural communities are in relation to SEND
3. Understand why they differ from the majority and how they have been marginalised
4. Investigate why trauma is so prevalent in the experiences of SEND families from ethnic communities when it comes to dealing with schools and public bodies.
5. Seek to reinstate the collection of racial statistics for Tribunals to enable better statistical analysis.

[14] https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2021/03/24/is-unconscious-bias-training-still-worthwhile

6. Ensure transparency of existing data regarding ethnic communities and SEND that hasn't yet been published publicly.
7. Ensure that Equality Act duties are considered in all decisions made by the DfE in regard to SEND policy, implementation, and service delivery.
8. Focus on increasing cultural competence. Diversity training and awareness of unconscious bias are key and should be standard practice for everyone working with families. It should be given as much importance as safeguarding training with the same emphasis on updating skills regularly.
9. Look at training needs: When pupils' needs are being identified, it is vital that those that know the child the best are involved as key members of the team so the assessment can be carried out through an intersectional lens. Assessors should be aware of their own competency when considering intersectionality and bias in relation to the child they are assessing.
10. All assessments of SEND should include the duty to identify other factors that marginalise the child and/or family and steps needed to address these.
11. Whole school policies should reflect inclusion and diversity not just the dominant culture of the school. Any policy setting out the norms or values of a school should be agreed with the community via a consultation period to ensure they do not discriminate against any marginalised groups.
12. The importance of a diverse workforce in schools, local authorities, and government offices should be acknowledged and steps taken to identify how this can be increased.
13. There should be a systematic move away from making "behaviour" the fault of the pupil / parents/ school. This leads to sanctions being relied upon rather than solutions being found. Exclusion is not a solution that will ever benefit a child.
14. Ethnic and cultural diversity should be factored into all key decisions made about children with SEND at school level, local authority level, in charities and in government.

Marginalised groups are not responsible for fixing the issues that they face; we all are. However, it is imperative to listen to and to understand perspectives from different experiences without judgement, misconception, or further oppression.

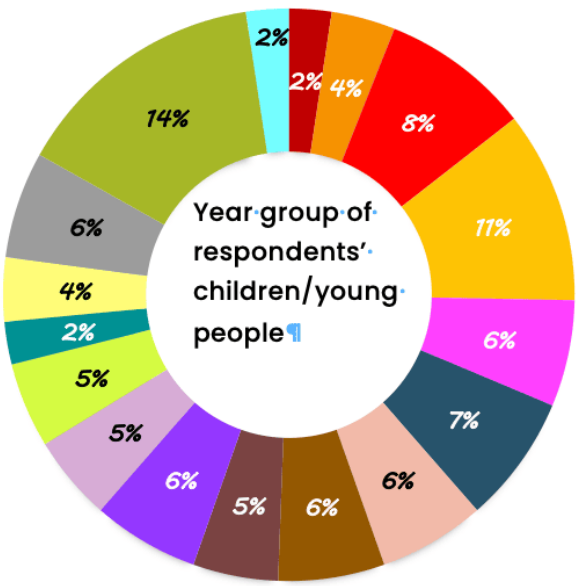
We hope this collection of responses from parents has proved enlightening as well as concerning. We hope this report will enable the SEND Review team and the Minister to open a wider conversation about the added pressures and unfairness faced by families of children and young people with SEND from marginalised and ethnic communities.

Children from Black, Brown, and other ethnic and cultural communities have a massive amount to offer to the country's future. Children and young people with SEND from these communities are no different and they deserve an equal and fair opportunity to benefit from a good school, expert teaching, and great aspirations.

Our schools must be places where every child, every parent and carer, and every practitioner, regardless of their background or the colour of their skin, should feel safe, welcomed, understood, and valued.

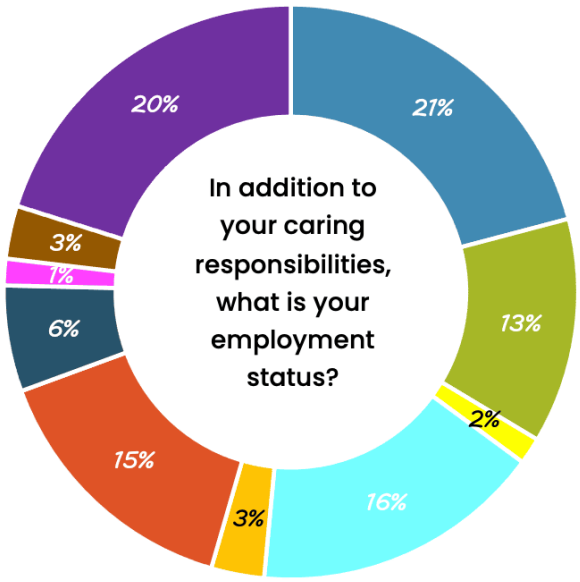
Who took part in the survey?

Year Group of children



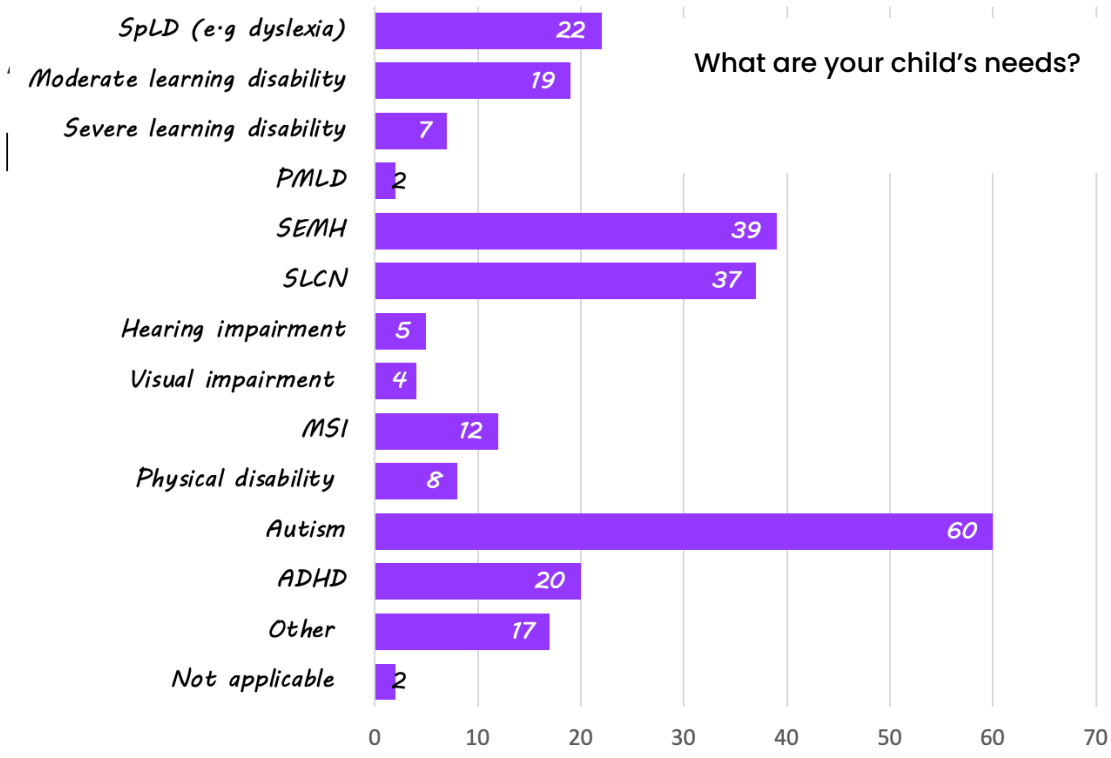
- Preschool (0)
- Reception (2)
- Year 1 (3)
- Year 2 (7)
- Year 3 (9)
- Year 4 (5)
- Year 5 (6)
- Year 6 (5)
- Year 7 (5)
- Year 8 (4)
- Year 9 (5)
- Year 10 (4)
- Year 11 (4)
- Year 12 (2)
- Year 13 (3)
- 16-18 FE (5)
- 19-25 FE (12)
- Apprentices/S. Intern (0)
- 16-25 NEET (2)

Employment status of respondents, in addition to caring duties



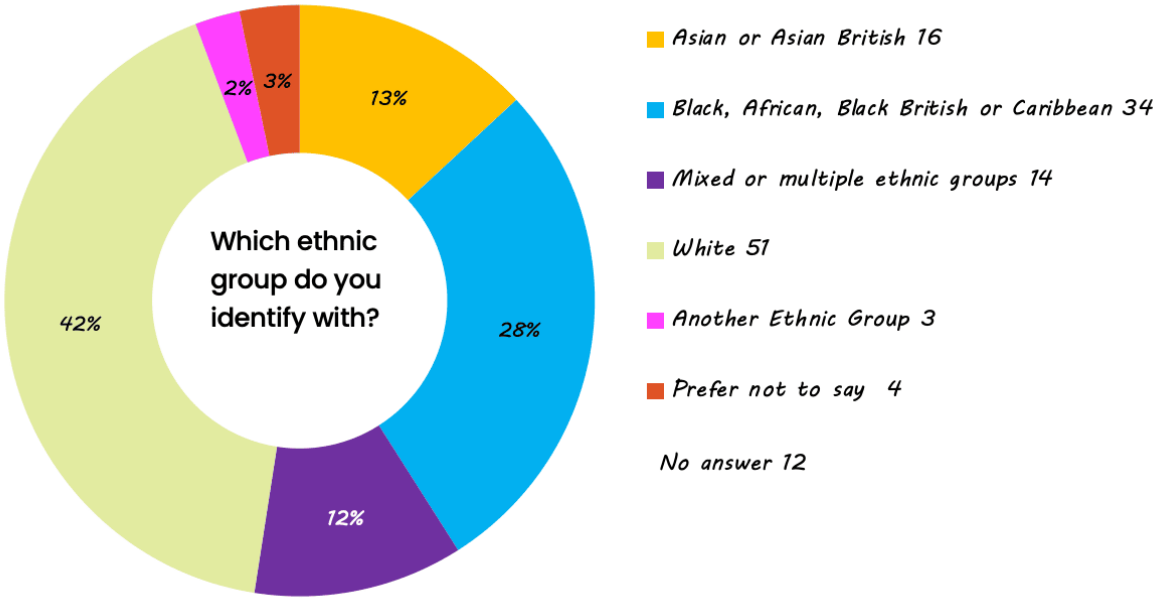
- Full time employment 28
- self-employed 17
- work two or more part-time jobs 2
- part-time employment 22
- currently looking for work 4
- carer full-time, no paid work 20
- Volunteer (full or part time) 8
- I am disabled & unable to do paid work 2
- Student (full or part time) 4
- I am a SEND profesisonal 27

Areas of SEND need

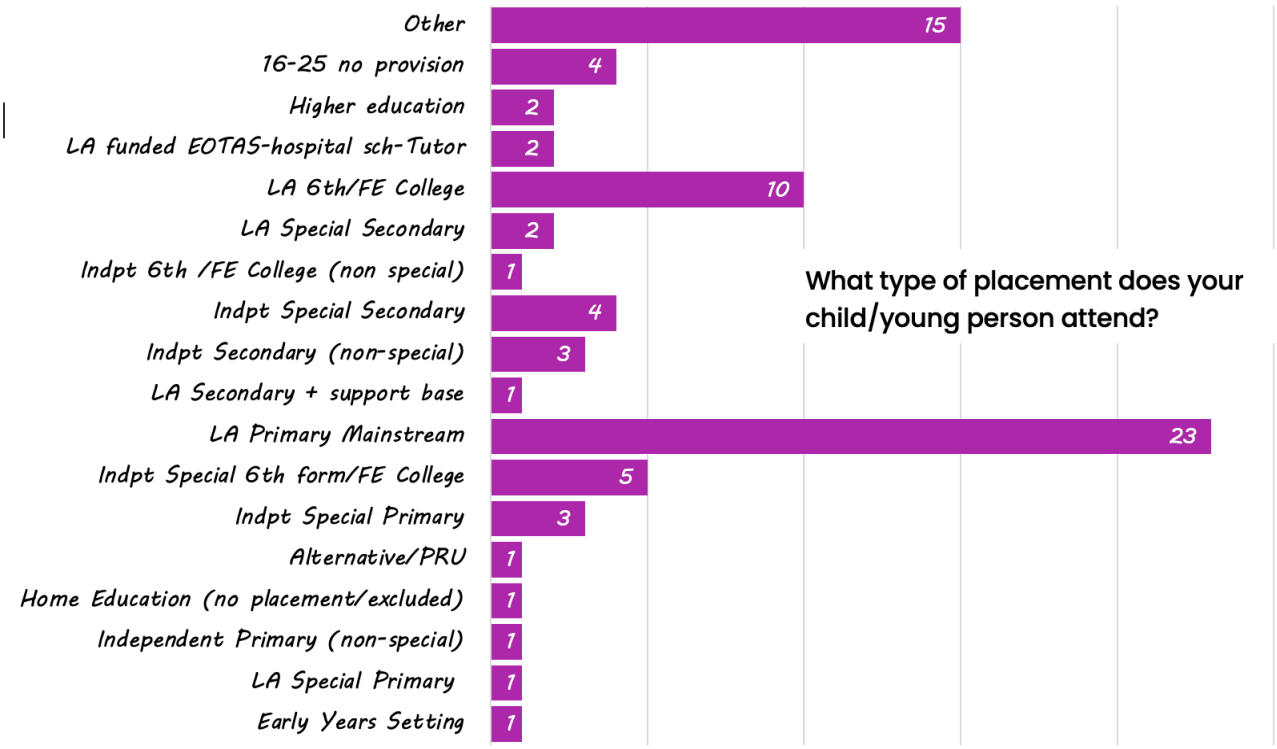


*NB: participants were able to choose more than one option to reflect co-morbid/multiple diagnoses

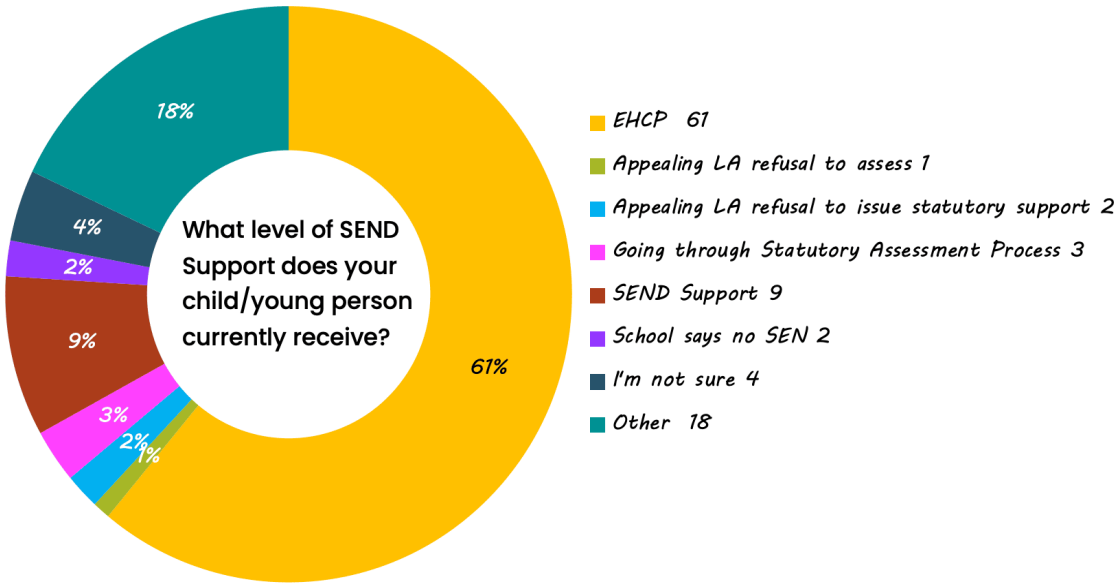
Which Ethnic or cultural community do you identify with?



What kind of educational/training setting do they attend?



What level of SEND Support does your child/young person currently receive?



Question: What have you experienced in SEN education that you believe is because of racial/ cultural stereotyping/ discrimination as a parent/professional?

"I can't say for sure, but my son has said several times that the teachers don't like him because he is Indian and what should he do? Should I change my colour to white?"

"Lack of understanding around SEND needs, cultural expectations, and lack of empathy both parent carers and professionals. Muslim children - the belief is that parents won't accept their additional needs because it will bring shame to the family."

"My son being Black and from a single-parent household is treated and described as aggressive. The setting does not spend any time identifying what they find unsettling for him. A root cause analysis has never been carried out. In addition to that, the setting has never spent any time trying to work out how best to support him. Even when I have spent time telling them what is unsettling for him, we are both ignored and therefore nothing changes. He gets more anxious, shuts down and is constantly in fight or flight mode."

"My youngest boy, who is mixed-race, has no diagnosis but has an EHCP to support his social & emotional needs at school. He is only seven but has been excluded multiple times from school. He is currently out of school & receives home tutoring provided by the LA until a suitable primary school is found. His latest exclusion we went to an Independent Review Panel for disability discrimination and the school was found to have made multiple failures towards our son, so he was reinstated but we decided it wasn't the right school to support him. Another school he was always excluded from class activities like assembly and banned from going on a school trip. The police were also called to the school over a meltdown instead of myself who was only 5 minutes from school. I have heard of other children with similar needs to my son who are supported in school & the only difference I see is race. It's been a constant fight just for an education for my son. I tried home education as well to let his mental health recover."

"Nothing about our culture is ever mentioned like we don't exist. Bullying, name calling about our looks. Even that we're not real Hispanics/ Latinos. We don't even come up on an ethnic questionnaire. Made to feel less adequate than other ethnic groups because we're "not dark enough", "you're a weird colour", racial slurs such as spick dago. Comments about our hair especially if we're curly that we're trying to be a different race. We can't possibly face discrimination. Not allowed to talk about our culture as it's not "really important ", "why don't you go back or to America " even "why do you /your child want to know?". Libraries with virtually no info"

"SENCo at state school refused use of lift saying 'all you Black people are just lazy, use the stairs' Specialist Consultant had written to the school to say she must use the lift for her own safety."

"The fact that I have to bring my white husband to meetings where I know more than the teachers in order to be taken seriously (but then they still don't do anything), but when I'm alone it's very much all talk and no action."

"The lack of cultural competence. The lack of anything that bears in mind some of the dynamics around race and culture. No real equality and diversity policy.
The lack of any understanding around criminalisation of black young people and implications like cautions by police etc."

"Disability Discrimination is widespread that is a given. Then there is a significant disregard of the family's cultural or ethnicity-related needs in the design and delivery of their education & healthcare needs being met in the EHCP and in the school or healthcare setting.
There are also significant issues with racial stereotyping & assumptions as well as direct discrimination against ethnic minority parents/ carers & children. The lack of equalities training and inclusive behaviour is so glaringly obvious among professionals it's embarrassing to have to point it out."

"When my daughter started reception, the school knew I was unemployed However they did not realise I was highly educated. Because of this and my having a mixed race child, they assumed many things about me. They kept calling me to pick up my child, claiming they were sick, even though they were not. Within months I got a role in politics and informed them of this, they changed their ways very quickly and have not sent my child home since claiming her to be sick. We experience racism quite often from all walks. Being a Turkish woman I did experience racism prior to having a mixed-race child, however it really is on another level when you are "black/mixed race". My heart breaks at times but I continue to challenge it."

"Our children have been blamed for retaliating to peers bullying them, hitting them, assaulting them, stealing their property. The 'white' children were not sanctioned/ investigated in line with policies. Fixed Term Exclusion as a result of retaliating after months of assault. SEN needs ignored. Head teacher at primary school said SENCO has "no time" to understand child's SEN. When clear reports from hospital were shared, Head/SENCO did not apply necessary SEN policies. All needs ignored in primary.
Secondary SENCo robustly tried to prevent independent experts coming to assess my child. All of their needs were systematically ignored. I have been inappropriately threatened with a s.47 referral. Instead of an EHC needs assessment referral I requested, the school made a MARF [Children's Safeguarding Multi-Agency Referral Form] referral. It was closed down immediately when I ended up speaking with the person in charge at the LA, as there was no basis, it was an inappropriate referral."

"There are a lot of assumptions about what parents might think or feel or accept in terms of their child's SEND that is put down to assumed cultural issues. It's assumed African cultures will not accept SEND and so difficult conversations are not always had with parents.
In my school, with a high proportion of African heritage, it is as if children are either aiming for the 11+ or their parents aren't interested. This is not how I think."

"Unconscious bias from SENCOs, professionals automatically presume you can't speak English or don't know what is needed. The system is extremely difficult to navigate."

"Yes, I believe my child is overlooked & I notice white children from the same school get preferential treatment over me and my child. A lot of the time, they assume I don't have enough knowledge or know-how to complain or are surprised I even speak English. So until I complain we are ignored and fobbed off."

"When my son was younger, I feel he was stereotyped as having difficulties (emotional, outbursts when younger) due to him being brown. I don't feel that my concerns about his needs were taken seriously enough earlier on, and throughout. I had a gut feeling he was more than autistic and had to advocate for years to be taken seriously. At the same time I was anxious speaking up as I knew I would be perceived as being an "aggressive brown woman" (doesn't help that I'm anxious and have difficulties regulating my emotions."

Question: In what way do you believe your child has been treated differently because of their origin/race when it comes to SEND identification, provision, and family participation?

"The unmet needs of Black and brown children are the direct result of cultural insensitivity at best, and at worst, institutional racism. The child is often labelled based on behaviours that are not understood outside the racial and cultural lines. Parents are often not in a position to challenge decisions due to lack of information and time (especially working parents) they are burned out from fighting on multiple fronts and thus their children are being left behind."

"There have been many times that schools have articulated that my child is not worth fighting for or that too much is being expected, despite displaying the [potential] to be able to do more. Or they have been quicker to place my child on a part- time timetable than his white counterparts, even though they have been part of the same incident."

"There are limited places to complain about racial discrimination or paths to follow it up seriously. Black & brown children are more likely to be categorised as SEMH, rather than ASD if they do receive a diagnosis, or ADHD, which then opens the door to medication as an option. While there is nothing wrong for those who feel medication is right thing for their child, an autism diagnosis pushes more for a reasonable adjustment approach. This does not seem to be the more common approach for black children in our experience."

"There is often a negative starting point to interactions, e.g. assuming parents are difficult /don't understand. Assuming cultural issues to blame for lack of understanding rather than professionals haven't adapted to meet parent need"

"Assumption that less support is available at home and that they will be shunned by their community for having additional needs."

"Incorrect identification. Over and under diagnosis. Unfair and untrue assumptions made about our family."

"My child mistaken for another. Deliberate off rolling. Forced to off roll 3 times. Head teacher described me as an angry black woman. Local send service not giving proper support due to worker also being a governor at our child's school. Manipulating individuals to isolate son. Trying to turn other parents on to police me. Gaslighting and closing ranks."

"I feel like we miss out on the communication and understanding extended to others."

"All professionals assume mum (white) and Dad (Black) are no longer together., which is not the case. They assume our child's condition is genetic or from neglect (it's not). When assessing our youngest child for SEN, the state school decided it was the use of two languages at home that was cause of slow speech and processing. We are both British and only speak English!"

"The proportion of traveller children in schools is very small and often in 'pockets'. In my almost 30 years in schools I am only now in a school with a high proportion of traveller families. I think this ethnic group are very often overlooked and misunderstood. Parents are often suspicious of institutions and do not always understand SEN processes."

"A common feature is the lack of awareness or knowledge of many professionals about intersectionality in disability, especially in relation to race and culture."

"As a SEND professional, I've witnessed and heard of Black and Brown families disrespected by all levels of staff.
I've seen white children's behaviour treated with far more understanding and trauma informed approaches than Black and Brown children. I've also heard disparaging and stereotypical comments made by staff of all levels, including racist language used and/or ignored."

"Reception staff have had a prejudice towards my child due to their prior experiences with other mixed-race or black children with special needs and had no faith in my child and spoken negatively about them for weeks in front of my child knowing my child cannot advocate for herself at all."

"Racism and overwhelmingly white management staff perhaps believing that these children are less valuable, combined with shrinking LA High Needs budgets and a need to save money wherever possible."

"Institutional racism. Inequitable policies & processes. Lack of representation in strategic positions. Lack of awareness of specific needs of racialised children and that of their parents/carers and no willingness to develop it. Lack of empathy for Brown and Black lived experiences.

- Predominantly white school
- No representation of black/Asian staff in leadership
- Lack of training in unconscious bias
- Staff need to have regular reflective discussions to tease out these biases and the way they view students

While partly due to an underfunded and under-resourced education system, it feels as though staff do not want to invest in assessments for black/brown children, as funding can be prioritised elsewhere in the budget, which seems more important than our children meeting their potential. There is also an expectation as black / brown people, we are strong mentally but our mental health is impacted by these failures in the system."

"In the 3 settings I've worked in, I believe the adults involved either don't care or are closet racist. They don't listen to the views of Black & Brown people (colleagues or families). Nor are they educating themselves outside of their role (books, talks, podcasts etc) so exist in an echo chamber of white, middle-class, uninformed opinion. I have heard the most outrageous generalisations made go unchallenged—because other white people just accepted it at face value. People of colour are not in a position to "push back" lest we're seen as having a "chip on our shoulder". No people of colour in any senior position. No people of colour with lived experiences of SEND asked/given opportunities to share our expertise, even when we've offered."

"Double whammy for people like me, mainly because we're black & refugees. Support only arrives when you're tearing apart"

Question: In your opinion, what practical steps are needed to improve the experience of disabled children & parents within your community?

"A more racially and culturally diverse range of practitioners, at all levels within organisations, are needed, to represent and work with children, young people, and families. Along with ongoing analysis and consultation with communities to work towards sufficient, culturally specific services being in place"

"To eliminate racism in all settings including provisions, services and health & for there to be consequences & formal investigations with accountability"

"Unconscious bias training for a start. Active training across the whole school on anti-racism training and the presentation of SEN in Brown and Black kids."

"More parental advocacy to help parents feel more empowered to raise concerns, ask for support etc. More representation (but not tokenistic) of Black & Brown people in the White and English dominated workforce. Those making the decisions maintain the status quo."

"Racial differences have been imprinted in people since childhood by their parents so we should educate society as a whole to not discriminate."

"Regular training for staff on unconscious bias, cultural competence, and reflective discussions to unpick judgements/assumptions made. - there really needs to be a sense of belonging and connectedness to the school for our children who already struggle with their identity & fitting in to a white society, let alone how they are treated by staff"

"LA management and staff having more diverse representation; more SEND funding from government"

"[I think the terms] 'community' & 'hard to reach' are used to show 'inclusion' but may be part & parcel of institutional racism."

"Inclusive culture in schools where all families feel welcomed & valued. When this happens parents then trust in the support the children are receiving."

"Start seeing our children as little people whose needs are not being met, not violent offenders. Our voice needs to be heard too."

- Establish every child as a unique individual.
- Understand taboos within black and brown communities. Open dialogue with parents to help their understanding.
- Offer networking between cultural groups and communities.
- Educate professionals around an open dialogue and focus on identifying needs & provision Also understand how it impacts families and their community.
- Professionals to work with communities raising awareness of SEND"

"Professionals need to listen and learn about different cultures and not label children based on their appearance and behaviour."

"In all honesty, I believe Black and Brown children will not get the support they need in British schools. The same behaviours and policies are replicated with little awareness or concern for the harm caused.
There is too much defensiveness. In my lived experience, I believe this may be worse where the pupil cohort are Black and Brown—white people automatically think this proves they're doing enough, without ever engaging with people from the communities, attempting to see things from our perspectives."

"- access to community support
- access to the same information
- resources in other languages
- pay the community to do the work not just the white-led charities and those with no lived experiences, no connection
- alter laws to introduce accountability
- particularly in relation to schools
- have proper ways to report and take action for racial discrimination"

"Stop framing Black and Brown children's SEND experience as behaviour issues. Treat them as capable as any white child. Do not be threatened by people of colour knowing more on certain subjects. Do not expect people of colour to be the only people talking about racism (and for free!) etc, as it is traumatising.
Rethink behaviour/ safeguarding/ hair/ uniform policies. Get people of colour involved *during* re-writing the process.
Actively seek out people of colour to be governors. One is not enough.

"Improved support for parents to navigate SEND minefield (i.e. trained professionals from Ethnic minorities working in SEND as teachers, SENCOs, LA & Social Care Professionals)
[Consideration is needed for] Multiple-intersectional factors for parents with children from black/Asian ethnic/ cultural backgrounds. For example, single parent families, low income, other children with SEND within the family, undiagnosed SEND issues, living conditions, poor health, etc.
[Also needed are] improved knowledge/ visibility of the issues, better leadership/ narrative-sharing. These children are often 'left behind' in so many ways, have early experiences of trauma. We need to unlock their voices and hear their experiences and create wrap-around services!"

"Better training for teachers.
More access to interpreters.
Schools need to be more open to families and their cultures"

"More Black SEND specialists who understand fully the intersection between SEND, health, British culture & challenges, and negotiating these as well as possible."

"Bringing black and brown parents and carers of SEND children- people with the lived experience- to the forefront of conversations and acknowledging them as experts. Experts born out of experience for better understanding collaboration and co-creation"

"Weaponised diversity is a big issue, when they feel the "race card" will be used they then put a person of colour in those positions of power simply to ward off accusations of discrimination. Stop looking at the parent for blame."

Question: Is there a message you would like to include for the SEND Review team?

"Training on these issues need to be included with Safe Guarding Training, it should be a statutory obligation"

"We cannot have an all-inclusive conversation without acknowledging that our community is disproportionately affected. This is not accidental nor incidental it is deeply structural and historical and it's important to acknowledge this as we work our way forward."

"Who is critiquing the practice of your hand-picked members and have they done anti-racism training and what resources have been invested in this?"

"Inclusivity & diversity should mean just that. Your heritage is not always determined by the colour of your skin. How a school often deals with children comes from who's in charge"

"Racism should be treated as a safeguarding issue Ensure safeguarding also protects OUR children & not just the schools & teachers"

"Schools without knowing are preparing our children for prison. If myself and my child's dad didn't keep fighting for the basic right for our son to have an education he wouldn't be thriving at home in all areas. We often went to the school governors to challenge a school exclusion based on both racial & disability discrimination but learnt they side with the school even with the best representation."

"What does provision and identification for SEND look like for black and brown young people in comparison to non-black/brown? [You need to] make explicit what the cause is for any disparity...How will you ensure BME groups can access support? When will action be taken to improve the lives of those with SEND in the BME groups?"

"I would like to see people of colour with SEND and parents/professionals involved in all aspects of the support and resources for us. People not affected by issues largely seem unaware of their blind spots. create specialist resources that tackle the SPECIFIC issues Black and Brown people in the SEND community face"

"More training regarding double discrimination"

Further reading

1. Coard, B. (1971). How the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal in the British school system: The scandal of the Black child in schools in Britain. London: New Beacon for the Caribbean Education and Community Workers' Association.
2. Strand, S. (2008). Minority ethnic pupils in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: Extension report on performance in public examinations at age 16. Department for Children Schools and Families: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7916/1/DCSF-RR029.pdf.
3. Strand, S., & Lindsay, G. (2009). Ethnic disproportionality in special education: Evidence from an English population study. *Journal of Special Education*, 43(3):174-190.