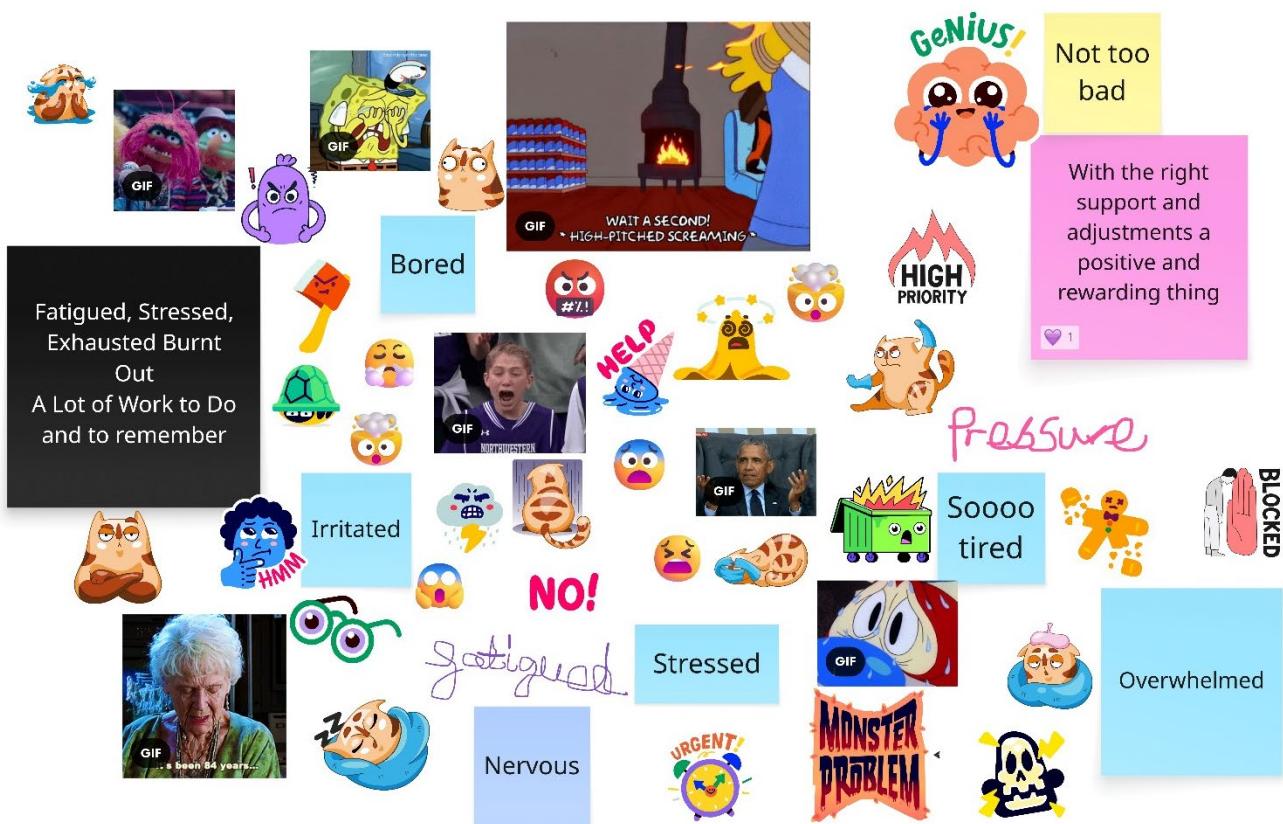


## Exam support and access arrangements

A session was held on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025 and was attended by 5 young people. This was a lower number than usual due to multiple factors including being held on a different weekday, which happened to clash with prior commitments, and also the session falling within the exam period.

Kids supported a group of young people to attend a coffee morning held by their MP to discuss issues that were impacting them. Included in this was discussion around EHCPs, access arrangements, and wider support around exams. The MP had good local relationships which included headteacher and SENCo networks, and proposed working together to share information and young people's experiences on access arrangements and exam support.

Initial focus was around young people's thoughts and feelings on exams.



Most felt that their experiences of exams were not positive. Most preferred alternative forms of assessment, however 1 said he didn't really care which assessments he did.

Young people preferred coursework and things like ASDAN that are more practical. They also spoke about open book exams as more like real life, as

generally within daily life you have resources and information there and available to you.

The group generally found exams stressful and that they were a test of memory rather than a test of knowledge, skills and understanding.

Experiences were shared where they didn't receive their full extra time, were penalised in internally run exams (timed practical tasks) due to an overlap caused by receiving extra time, LSAs talking to other students and opening windows, not getting the scribe they were supposed to get and also not being supplied with notes they were supposed to receive.

1 young person stated that they were "lucky with school, as they were extremely supportive"

Some of the access arrangements that they had including:

- Lights off and curtains shut
- Rest breaks
- Individual rooms
- Visual aids
- Reader
- Reading pens
- Scribe
- Use of laptop or similar
- Extra time
- Prompter

"The difference between those who get support and those who don't is whether it is a can do or can't do school. "

Young people spoke about the importance of having time before to allow them to relax and enter the exam in a calm state, and then afterwards to enable them to destress and "wind down".

The group spoke about various methods that can be helpful to decrease the stress felt around exam periods. These included:

- Going outside
- Listening to music
- Colouring and drawing
- Taking a bath or shower
- Having an early night
- Playing games

One young person spoke of a school giving out GCSE survival kits which included top tips for exams and preparing for them. Young people felt that what works is often very individual and that this could be followed up by a lesson where individuals think about what is likely to work best for them.

Revision sessions during school times and study leave are helpful, not just held right before but in the days and weeks leading up to the exam. These were deemed especially helpful when young people were able to speak to the teacher and get some individualized support. 1 young person said, "I'd do them, they're beneficial and give you a better chance in exams".

Young people felt a lot of pressure about exams and the preparation time. Mocks should be spread out like the actual GCSE exams and lessons shouldn't focus solely on completing past papers.

There is a lack of aspiration for those with SEND, with young people being told that they won't pass GCSEs and practitioners recommending day centres (even when the young person has higher aspirations including university).

When young people have been doing ok, schools have declined to assess young people and put support into place. For some, they understand but are unable to put their answers into the right words within the exam setting and timeframe. One young person spoke about getting 7s, however in exam conditions with the access arrangements in place the same young person was able to achieve 9s.

"A supportive environment and the right adjustments can make exams a rewarding and positive experience."

Final takeaways were that people need to ask and listen to what support is needed, and that the right support includes teachers and LSAs that are able to support you in the right ways. Young people feel that it comes down to attitudes; if the school are willing to try adjustments, then it works.