

## Right support at the right time

Young people shared experiences on SEND support they received. Frequently this was delayed, and in too many cases led to crisis; however young people reflected that when they did receive the right support, the difference it made was invaluable.

During the event young people highlighted what good practice looks like:

1. Noticing early signs and recording them consistently
2. Joining the dots between small pieces of information
3. Responding quickly with early, low-level support
4. Acting before crisis: helping the child make sense of themselves
5. Delivering support in school, where the child actually struggles
6. Taking families seriously and valuing their expertise
7. Ensuring assessments are holistic, timely, and lead to real action
8. Providing the right environment: smaller, understanding, person-centred settings
9. Smooth transitions between stages of education
10. Sustained emotional support, not just academic focus

### **1. Early Signs Are Noticed, Logged, and Shared**

Good looks like:

- Staff recognising *patterns* even when the child is masking.
- Teachers recording “small” concerns – sensory struggles, perfectionism, difficulties with peers, emotional distress – not dismissing them as quirks.
- Systems that allow those notes to be shared and reviewed regularly.

*“If you add those things up, it really easily becomes a diagnosis years before my mental health crisis.”*

Early recognition isn’t about diagnosing – it’s about noticing, recording, and questioning.

### **2. Someone has Responsibility for ‘Joining the Dots’**

Good systems don’t rely on luck or a heroic parent.

Good looks like:

- A named person (SENCO, pastoral lead) reviewing patterns over time.
- Regular multi-professional conversations before crisis, not after.
- Staff understanding that academic success does **not** rule out significant need.

*“Just because young people are doing well academically doesn’t mean the world isn’t crumbling on the inside.”*

A child should never fly under the radar simply because they get high grades.

### **3. Early, Timely Support: Before Crisis, Not After**

Good looks like:

- Putting support in place as soon as concerns arise – not waiting for failure.
- Offering time, safe spaces, sensory adjustments, emotional check-ins.
- Ensuring young people do not have to mask until they break.

“My whole journey might never have happened if support had started just two years earlier.”

Prevention always costs less – emotionally, financially, and educationally – than crisis intervention.

### **4. Helping the Child Understand Themselves**

Good practice helps children:

- Make sense of their identity
- Understand their differences
- Feel accepted rather than “wrong” or “difficult”

One young person shared that earlier understanding could have transformed his life:

“If someone had realised sooner and I had been able to understand myself... I wouldn't have needed years of therapy and medication.”

Identity work is as important as academic work.

### **5. Specialists Come Into School –Not the Other Way Around**

Good looks like:

- OT, EP, autism mentors, counsellors *delivering support in school*.
- Child missing a single lesson instead of losing half a day.
- Reducing family disruption.

“If the place I'm struggling is school, why wouldn't the person come to school to see me?”

This is both practical and respectful.

### **6. Families Are Listened To, Believed, and Respected**

Good looks like:

- Taking parent concerns seriously even when school hasn't observed the same.
- Understanding masking happens most in school, so home behaviour may reflect the real strain.
- Not forcing families into battles or tribunals to be heard

Young people recognised their parents' relentless advocacy:

"Nothing would have happened. But no child should rely on their parent being a full-time fighter."

Good systems do not rely on parental capacity or privilege.

## **7. EHCPs and Assessments Are Timely, Accurate, and Lead to Real Support**

Good looks like:

- Needs assessments accepted when there is clear evidence of struggle.
- Reports written clearly, accurately, and collaboratively.
- The plan leading to *real support*, not just paperwork.

"You can have a whole list of support needs, but if nobody ever puts them in place, it won't make a difference."

Plans should lead to action, not just documents.

## **8. Educational Environments Fit the Child — Not the Other Way Around**

Good settings:

- Value young people as people, not just exam outcomes
- Offer smaller classes, relationships, flexible approaches
- Understand sensory needs, communication differences, emotional load

Young people thrived in settings that valued *them*, not just grades:

"They wanted the best out of me, not just the best out of my academics."

Environment matters as much as support.

## **9. Transitions Are Planned, Supported, and Joined-Up**

Good looks like:

- SEN information transferring seamlessly between settings
- Support continuing through transitions (e.g., to Sixth Form, college, uni)
- Preparation for adulthood starting early

When EHCPs end at university, young people have to rebuild everything:

"Trying to do a professional degree with people who don't fully understand your disability is incredibly hard, but at least they are trying."

Transitions must never be a cliff edge.

## 10. Emotional and Mental Health Are Supported Throughout

Good looks like:

- MH support that is specialist, appropriate, and offered early
- Staff recognising when distress is masking unrecognised need
- Interventions that prevent escalation into crisis

With support crisis is avoidable:

“The knock-on effect of everything blowing up at 14–15 could and should have been avoided.”

Good systems do not wait for crisis.

### In Summary: Good Looks Like

- **A system that notices early.**
- **Acts early.**
- **Listens early.**
- **Supports early.**
- **Prevents crisis before it ever begins.**

Young people shared “Prevention is better than cure every day of the week.”

Good practice is not complicated – it just requires:

- awareness
- consistency
- compassion
- joined-up thinking
- timely action

Young people facilitated a card game to highlight the significance of getting the right support at the right time. Initially receiving the “Early Childhood, Early Signs” card, players rolled a dice to confirm whether they would take the red or green pathways (with a roll of the dice after each stage to see if they would change to the other path).

### Early Childhood: Early Signs

- Enjoys maths, avoids football
- Sensory distress (ticking clocks)
- Perfectionism
- Bottling emotions
- Anger channelled through tennis

## Right support at the right time

<p><b>Staff Notice patterns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns recorded</li> <li>• Staff join up the small signs</li> <li>• SENCO alerted early</li> </ul>	<p><b>Signs not joined up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masking mistaken for coping</li> <li>• Academics hide distress</li> <li>• Concerns not connected</li> </ul>
<p><b>Early Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screening for neurodiversity</li> <li>• Screening profile created</li> <li>• Emotional regulation needs identified.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Escalation in School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year 9: Masking cracks</li> <li>• Year 10: Crisis on school trip</li> <li>• Emergency hospital care for burn out.</li> <li>• Diagnosis only after crisis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support put in place quickly</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autism-informed mentoring</li> <li>• Classroom adjustments in place</li> <li>• Regular check-ins</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support Arrives Late</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autism specialist involved too late</li> <li>• Reasonable adjustments years after need</li> <li>• Mentoring begins but is post-crisis</li> </ul>
<p><b>EHCP Pathway</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early needs assessment</li> <li>• Prompt LA response</li> <li>• EHCP issued without battle</li> </ul>	<p><b>EHCP Battle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request rejected</li> <li>• Family forced towards tribunal</li> <li>• Support only secured via advocacy</li> </ul>
<p>Positive outcomes from <b>green</b> path</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No crisis</li> <li>• Stable education</li> <li>• Family supported</li> <li>• Child thrives socially and academically.</li> </ul>	<p>Negative Outcomes from <b>red</b> path</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trauma</li> <li>• Years of unmet need</li> <li>• Family strain</li> <li>• Understanding only after crisis</li> </ul>