



# Collective Get T★gether

Friday 7th August 2026

## Full report

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We would like to thank the following people and organisations for their ongoing support:

- Kids
- Kids Advisory Panel
- Young people from across The Collective
- Staff from various organisations who supported young people to attend and share their ideas and experiences
- Department for Education
- Georgia Gould, minister for school standards, and her team



Department  
for Education



# Collective Get T★gether

## Executive Summary

The Collective Get Together took place in London on 7th August 2026 and brought together young people from across the country to share their experiences, influence national developments, and shape the future of youth voice. A number of young people also joined online during the morning session to contribute to discussions on the National Standards for Inclusion. Throughout the day, participants engaged in a range of interactive and creative activities, alongside opportunities to connect with peers, share lived experiences and celebrate the impact of youth voice. Young people enjoyed a shared lunch and refreshments, helping to create a welcoming and inclusive environment that encouraged participation and relationship building.

A highlight of the day was a visit from **Georgia Gould, Minister for School Inclusion and Department for Education officers**, who spent time listening to young people and engaging directly with their views and experiences. The Ministers' genuine interest, approachable style, and meaningful engagement were greatly valued by participants, reinforcing the importance of young people's voices in shaping education policy and practice.



The event focused on three key themes: **inclusive education, meaningful participation, and the future of youth voice.**

The first session explored the **Principles of Inclusion**, previously co-produced through *The Collective Power Hour*. Young people considered what these principles mean in practice and identified the minimum standards and expectations needed to create truly inclusive educational environments. Through discussion and creative activities, participants described what inclusion should look, feel, and sound like in schools, highlighting the actions, behaviours and systems required to ensure all children and young people, particularly those with SEND<sup>1</sup>, can participate, learn, and thrive.

The second session focused on **the future of youth voice and The Collective**. Using a nautical-themed activity, young people reflected on the strengths that currently support youth voice, the barriers that continue to limit participation, and their aspirations for the future. They identified the "wind in the sails" that enables meaningful engagement, the "anchors and rocks" that create challenges, and the "treasure island" representing success. The activity generated valuable insight into what young people believe is needed to strengthen youth participation and ensure their voices continue to influence decision-making at local, regional, and national levels.

The third session, **Flying the Flag for Youth Voice**, provided an opportunity for participants to celebrate the many ways young people contribute to change. Through creative reflection, young people shared examples of when they had felt listened to, valued and able to influence decisions. The session highlighted the importance of trust, accessibility, strong relationships, and visible outcomes in creating meaningful participation opportunities.

Throughout the day, learning from each session was brought together through a collaborative plenary activity centred around a **giant tree**, symbolising growth, inclusion, and participation. Young people contributed leaves, flowers, storm clouds, and sun rays, creating a visual representation of their collective experiences, priorities and aspirations. The tree captured the actions needed to make education more inclusive, the factors that support successful youth participation, and the barriers and opportunities that will shape the future of youth voice.

Overall, the Collective Get Together provided a powerful platform for young people to share their experiences, influence national conversations, and collectively identify positive actions for improving inclusion and participation. The event demonstrated the value of creating spaces where young people's voices are heard, respected and acted upon, while generating rich insight to inform future development of both the National Standards for Inclusion and The Collective itself.

<sup>1</sup> SEND – Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities



# Collective Get T★gether

## P★wer Hour – National Standards for Inclusion in Schools

### Session Overview

This session introduced young people to the core **Principles of Inclusion** that were co-produced during *The Collective Power Hour*. The aim was to explore what these principles mean in practice and begin identifying the **minimum standards and expectations** needed to make inclusive education a reality for all children and young people.

The session focused on moving from abstract concepts to practical actions by helping young people define what inclusion should **look, feel and sound like** in schools. Through discussion and creative activities, participants identified the actions, behaviours, and systems that schools, teachers and wider services should put in place to ensure all young people can participate, learn, and thrive.

To support discussions, the following definitions were used:

- **Principles:** Ideas and beliefs that form the basis of how we think and act.
- **Inclusion:** Being able to fully participate and access opportunities.
- **Standards:** Expectations that help people understand what good practice looks like and how improvement can be achieved.

### Prioritising the Principles

Young people revisited the Principles of Inclusion that had been co-produced in June and ranked in order of importance. This generated thoughtful discussion, with participants recognising that all principles are interconnected and collectively contribute to a genuinely inclusive education system.

The ranking exercise resulted in the following priorities:

#### Joint First Place

- Everyone is different, and everyone gets what they need to be treated fairly and with respect.
- All services work together to support young people to do their best.

### Joint Second Place

- We listen to young people and their families, helping them have a say and be part of decisions about their lives and learning.
- We adapt teaching and remove barriers so everyone can take part and succeed in their learning.

### Joint Third Place

- Everyone belongs here. We help all young people join in and be part of school life.
- A space that works for all to be ready and able to learn.
- Everyone working in places of education has training on SEND.
- We keep improving what we do to ensure the best outcomes for all, supported by strong leadership.

### Interactive Activity: Building Bridges to Inclusion

The session was designed to be highly interactive and engaging. Seven small groups were each assigned one of the inclusion principles to explore in greater depth (with the principle relating to continuous improvement and leadership not covered during this session).

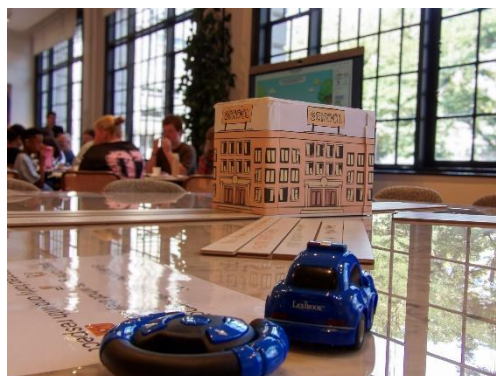
Young people considered:

- What schools could do differently.
- How teachers and staff could behave.
- What practical support should be available.
- What would help inclusion become visible in everyday school life.

Each group identified their **top five actions or requirements** needed to bring their assigned principle to life and wrote these onto wooden "planks".

The planks were used to create symbolic **bridges** connecting the inclusion principle to a model school.

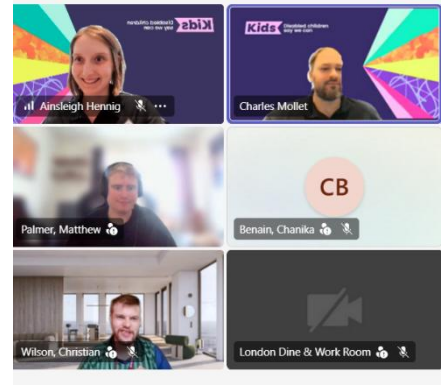
To bring the concept to life, a remote-controlled car represented a young person travelling towards the school. The activity demonstrated that the more inclusive practices and supports that were in place, the easier it became for the young person to access and engage with education.



This visual, hands-on approach showed participants that inclusion is not achieved through one action alone; it depends on multiple elements working together to remove barriers and create a clear pathway to success.

### Online activity: Building Bridges to Inclusion

A similar session online via Microsoft Teams allowed those who were unable to engage in person to still contribute. During this, young people used a combination of methods (including voice, written and AAC devices) to explore the principles in greater depth, share minimum requirements to make the principles real, and what those look and feel like in practice.



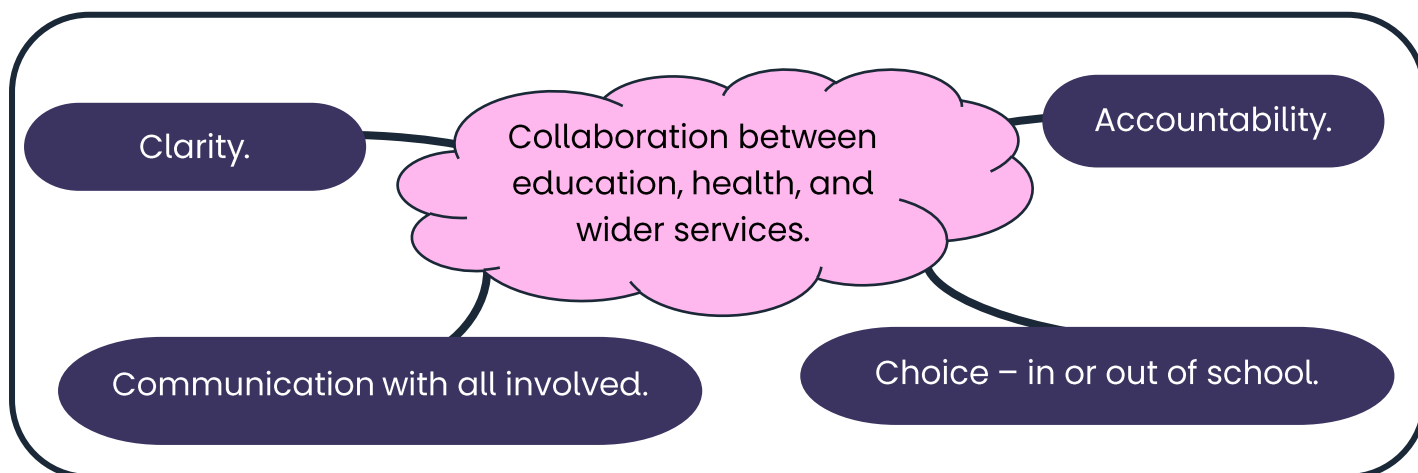
Young people had the option of engaging in a privately hosted online game, where they were able to label virtual building materials, and in cooperation with other young people, built a bridge to support a ball rolling across a gap.

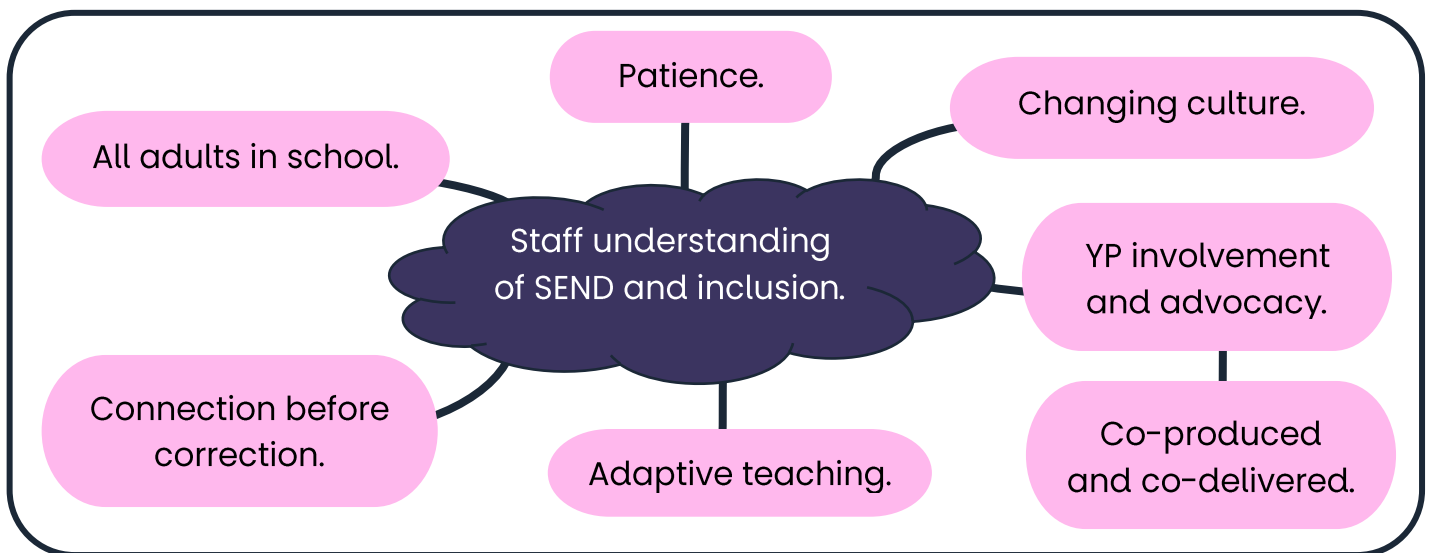


### Key Reflections

The activities generated rich discussion and enabled young people to clearly articulate what meaningful inclusion looks like from their perspective. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of the following:







The creative bridge-building activity helped demonstrate the cumulative impact of inclusive practices and reinforced the message that every action taken by schools contributes to a young person's ability to access education and achieve positive outcomes.

### Impact and Next Steps

The insights gathered during this session provide valuable youth-led evidence to support the Department for Education's work on the development of **National Standards for Inclusion**.

The ideas generated by participants will help inform thinking around:

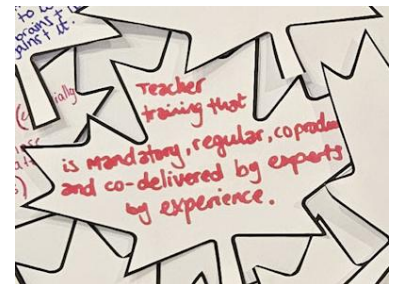
- The development of a **universal inclusion offer** that all schools should provide.

- The identification of core expectations and minimum standards for inclusive practice.
- Consideration of how additional, targeted support could be layered on top of universal provision to further improve inclusion and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

The session demonstrated the value of meaningful co-production, ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of young people directly inform the design of future inclusion standards. The creative, interactive formats enabled participants to engage with complex policy concepts in an accessible and enjoyable way, while generating practical recommendations that can support system-wide improvement.

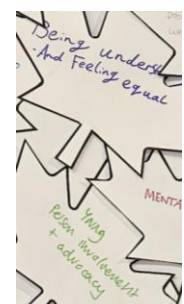
To close the session, young people were asked to name one action schools should take to make education more inclusive for children and young people with SEND. Their ideas were written on leaves and added to the tree, symbolising the actions and commitments needed for inclusion to flourish in education settings. Although a wide range of suggestions were shared, several clear themes emerged.

The strongest message was the need for **high-quality SEND training for all education staff**. Young people consistently highlighted the importance of regular, meaningful training that helps teachers understand different needs, mental health, communication differences and how to provide effective support. Participants felt that training should be co-produced and co-delivered with people who have lived experience of SEND.



Young people also emphasised the importance of **respect, understanding and positive relationships**. They wanted teachers and school staff to avoid making assumptions, recognise individual strengths, and work with young people rather than against them. Many highlighted the need to feel understood, listened to and treated as equals, with relationships based on mutual respect.

Another key theme was **meaningful involvement of young people and families in decision-making**. Participants called for greater co-production, stronger advocacy opportunities and improved communication with families, ensuring that support plans are developed collaboratively and that young people have a genuine voice in decisions affecting their education.





Young people also stressed the importance of creating **inclusive school cultures and environments**. This included ensuring access to the full curriculum and school activities, providing reasonable adjustments, supporting mental health and wellbeing, creating calm learning environments, and fostering a culture where everyone feels they belong.

Overall, young people's contributions highlighted that successful inclusion is about more than individual adjustments. It requires a culture of understanding, respect, participation, and accountability, supported by well-trained staff and a whole-school commitment to ensuring every child and young person can thrive.

## Appendix – Collated actions or requirements

### **Principle: Everyone is different, and everyone gets what they need to be treated fairly and with respect**

#### **Online**

- Young people highlighted conditions that would need to be in place to achieve this principle including:
  - Tolerance: Everyone should feel comfortable contributing to their school community; for those who need extra support, staff should make suggestions of what young people could try to contribute meaningfully.
  - Equity
  - Flexibility
- Strong relationships between schools and people with SEND help to make sure everyone gets what they need.
  - Young people recommended a consistent presence – a few trusted people who help young people to feel safe and relaxed to engage with curriculum. This could be a one-to-one TA or another specialist member of staff. One young person, who has graduated from secondary school, noted that he still has strong relationships with his teachers and TAs and keeps in touch with them even after he has left school.
  - Build and maintain strategies over time: Strategies should adapt and evolve over time based on the young person's needs but should not be taken away as soon as the young person starts to make progress.
  - School should be a safe space to test and learn. Staff should work closely with young people to trial new forms of support, discuss whether it is working, and make changes based on the young person's needs.
  - Young people's feelings must be considered and consulted when deciding any support.
  - Young people want to be valued and included: they should be consulted in decisions and should be given opportunities to



demonstrate their capabilities without fear of staff making assumptions about their abilities.

- Schools should make adaptations to ensure meaningful inclusion of pupils with SEND. For example, in PE, teachers should adapt the lesson to allow pupils with disabilities to be meaningfully involved – not just sitting on the sidelines.

### **In person**

- Have more visuals and pictures
- More activities like games and sports
- More playing
- More teacher training – or conditions and needs
- Mental health support

### **Principle: All services work together to support young people to do their best**

#### **Online**

- Young people listed some of the support they received in school:
  - Physiotherapy
  - One-to-one support from TAs
  - Paediatrician
  - Occupational therapy
  - Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) – specifically, an iPad with Speak Unique
- Multiagency communication
  - During a needs assessment, there must be regular communication between the school and NHS teams who are doing the diagnostic.
  - Professionals must feed back to the young person too – making sure they understand what's going on and are not surprised by sudden changes or new people observing them.
  - The process of securing a diagnosis can be scary, with lots of strange people coming in to observe, or being taken away from their normal routine. Clear communication of the diagnostic process (and subsequent next steps) can help to reduce anxiety and support engagement with the process.
  - Professionals should explain why something is happening. One young person gave an example of when they were taken out of lessons to receive occupational therapy. In the long term, the therapy greatly improved their fine and gross motor skills, but at the time, they were not aware of why they

were being removed from lessons to attend therapy, which was leading to falling behind in some lessons. Clear communication on the purpose of interventions, both with the family and the young person, can help to build buy-in.

- In-school communication – between teachers, SENCo, TAs etc is also important to make sure support is consistent in all parts of the school experience.



### In person

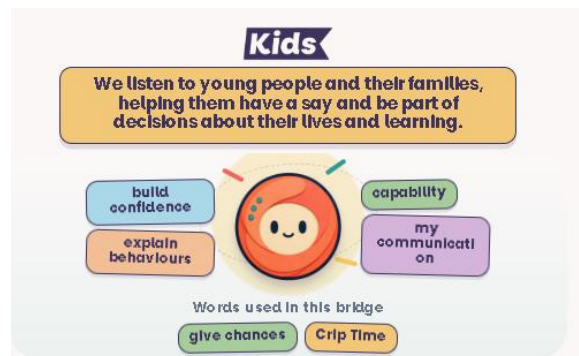
- Make sure each service is doing what it is supposed to (accountability)
- Clarity of the role of each service
- Involved teachers in different services interventions
- Having the option to receive services independently of school

**Principle: We listen to young people and their families, helping them have a say and be part of decisions about their lives and learning.**

### Online

- One young person noted that when she was younger, her mum would speak for her when working with consultants. As she got older, the young person preferred to speak for herself. She eventually felt valued and included in conversations. She said: "Disabilities mean we're human. Never judge a disability, always look at the capability and always give a person a chance." She gave an example of secondary school work experience, where the school planned to place her in the school library. She instead found herself a placement at a local charity shop, where she subsequently found long-term paid employment. While the school initially underestimated her capability, she was able to advocate for herself and find a meaningful placement.

- Another young person gave an example from primary school, when he refused to work because of fear of failure or judgement. Initially, teachers didn't stop to think about the causes of this behaviour. He highlighted the importance of listening to the young person and their family to understand whether there might be something happening under the surface that could be impacting behaviour.
- Another young person who uses adaptive communication gave a personal example of professionals failing to listen to his voice.



"In my own experience, I have faced many difficult and sometimes frustrating situations. The most frustrating of which must be, when people first communicate with me, they assume that I'm deaf! Which isn't an issue in the slightest, but it's just annoying. The most frustrating thing for me is when people especially practitioners don't know how to communicate with me. Often practitioners used to refer to my mother while communicating with me especially during appointments. This had got better over time since I've had my iPad with my Speak Unique accent on it. In terms of me communicating using my iPad, the challenges I face centre around one issue really; the amount of time it takes me to type out my responses. This is an example of what is known as Crip Time."

## In person

- Regular meetings with parent carers and follow up meetings.
- Opportunities for co-production
- Holistic support for young carers and families
- Written feedback and timelines
- Inviting and calm meeting spaces and opportunities for casual conversations
- Communication and listening
- Space for lived experience
- Family support groups
- Calm, chilled space, where you can belong, informal – proactive not reactive
- More support for parents like the support for parents like the support for young carers. – More work can be done for young carers
- Holistic support
- SENCO's for SEND but everyone should have 1:1 support – things are being missed where needs appear to be lower.

- SENCO's need consistent policy, more opportunity for casual conversations around support, both for young people and parents.
- Co-production in the community helped understanding and being heard, this opportunity wasn't offered through school.
- Young voice panels in schools – making a difference.
- Shouldn't always feel like a fight – hard to build trust
- Written feedback from every meeting – accountability – timelines for feedback and next steps – preferably a week.
- Attendance is when they felt listened to 'why does it have to get that bad'

## **Principle: We adapt teaching and remove barriers so everyone can take part and succeed in their learning**

### **Online**

- One young person highlighted a lack of adaptability in support, particularly in university. He noted that support was taken away as he made progress, even though the support was what made progress possible, and was still necessary to allow him to continue to progress. Support must be sustained over time.
- One young person highlighted the need flexibility in assessment to demonstrate learning/understanding in the way that is best for you – for example, in a presentation instead of in writing.
- Teachers can learn from their students. One young person, who uses adaptive communication, said "There's a lot of ignorance, when it comes to the disabled experience. I have always thought that teachers can learn from their students, in the same way students can learn from teachers. In my experience, teachers have learnt so much from me! It's so important you have a constructive but productive relationship!"
- Some young people received special tools and adaptations to help them to access lessons, including special scissors, a pen with a grip, magnifying screens, and sitting at the front of the class.



- **Essential changes:**

1. Strong relationships
2. Adaptive assessments



## **In person**

- Teacher training that is mandatory, regular, coproduced and Co delivered by experts by experience
- Regular reviews
- Reasonable adjustments. Like overlays
- Integrated movement breaks
- Specialist support tutors

## **Principle: Everyone belongs here we help all young people join in and be part of school life**

- Stop putting me in isolation
- Ensure pupils in internal provisions access whole school curriculum and events
- Teachers speak and engage with students respectfully! There are no teachers' pets
- Cleaner toilets and if broken fix them.
- Don't be strict with toilets unless in dire need
- If students don't have stuff, try to raise money to get some things
- Don't target young people in care or SEND
- Some teachers to be nicer to students, no teachers pets
- Respect students and they'll respect you
- More mental health support where needed.
- Teachers to speak and engage with students respectfully.
- The behaviour system – isolation
- Access to assemblies, curriculum – GCSE's – reward events – extra curricular activities (sports day)

## **Principle: Everyone working in places of education has training on send**

- All adults! Not just teachers
- Patience
- Conversational and reflective
- Changing cultures
- Young person involvement and advocacy
- Include – Conditions such as cerebral palsy, FM – How to support remote learning
- Disparity for teacher how much they do know and much they say they know. – confidence as a barrier to learning.
- SEND based behaviours – sensory based needs – regulation needs
- Segregation on Ofsted visit – challenging kids
- Good – different education skills – adaptive teaching.
  - Include YP in the training

- Restorative
- Non-verbal – include other adults
- Connection before correction – inclusive.
- Training for YP on Send

**Principle: A space that works for all to be ready and able to learn**

- Adapted uniform and food
- Calm environment
- Less physical barriers – lifts ramps etc
- Smaller class sizes
- Easier to navigate environment
- Calmer environment
- Less physical barriers – lift, ramp etc...
- Break out room
- Calm space indoors / outdoors
- Less angry, more understanding, clear communication
- Sensory friendly
- Appropriate changing spaces
- Calm spaces
- Sensory garden
- Smaller class sizes
- Easier to navigate environment
- Wellbeing animals
- Adapted uniforms / foods
- Clean environment

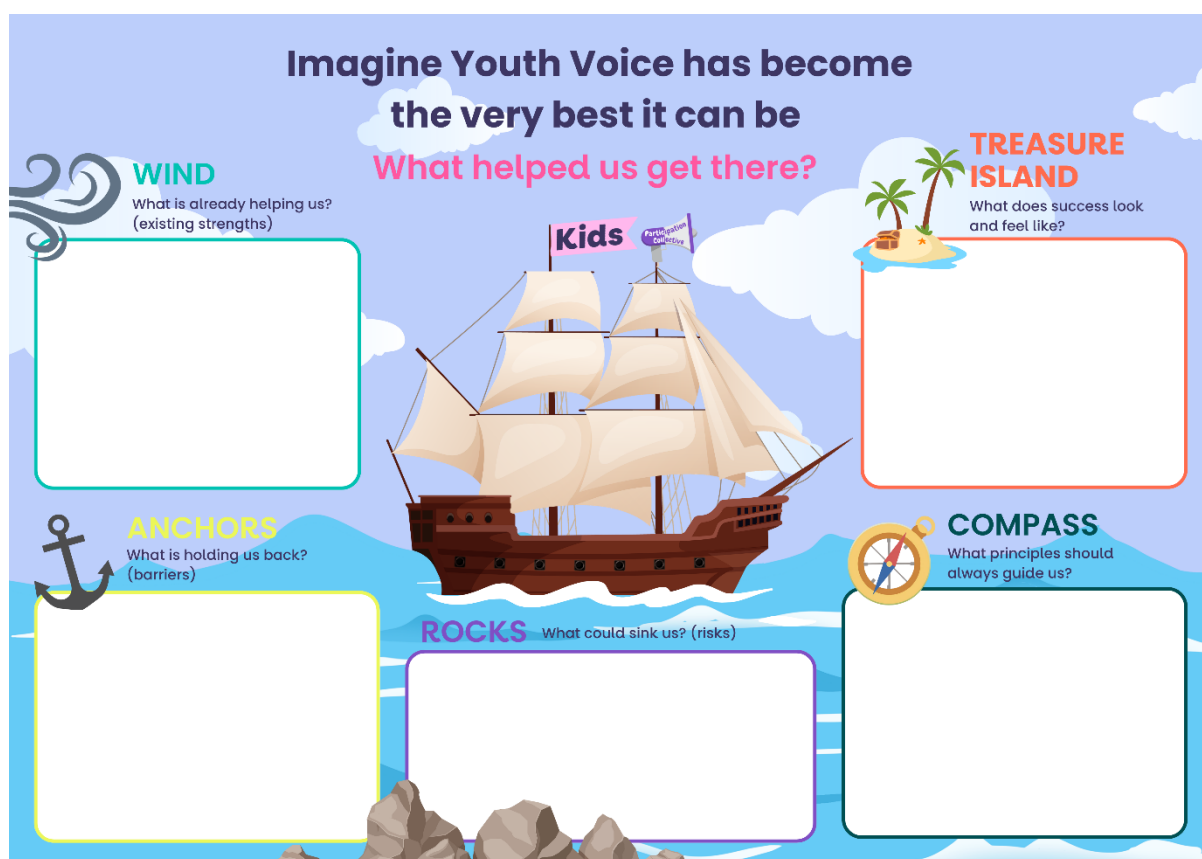


# Collective Get T★gether

## The Future of Youth Voice

### Session overview

This activity explored young people's views on the future of youth voice and The Collective. Through a creative, nautical-themed workshop, participants reflected on the current strengths that help youth voice thrive, the barriers that can hold it back, and their vision of what success looks and feels like. Using the analogy of a ship's journey, strengths were identified as the wind in the sails, challenges as rocks and anchors, success as reaching a treasure island, and shared values and ways of working together as a guiding compass. The session provided valuable insight into young people's aspirations, priorities, and recommendations for shaping the future direction of The Collective.



### What Young People Identified as the Strengths of Youth Voice and The Collective

When asked about the strengths of Youth Voice and The Collective, young people consistently highlighted several key themes that demonstrate the impact of meaningful participation and co-production.

## **1. Amplifying Young People's Voices and Increasing Representation**

Young people valued The Collective's ability to ensure that the views and experiences of children and young people are heard at local, regional and national levels. They recognised the importance of ambassadors and representatives feeding into wider forums and decision-making structures, helping to bring the voices of a diverse range of young people to the table.

Participants highlighted:

- Young people representing and speaking on behalf of others.
- Existing ambassador programmes linking local and national discussions.
- Representation on local authority boards and engagement with the Department for Education.
- Opportunities to share views through forums, groups and participation activities.
- Good representation from across England.

This demonstrates that young people see The Collective as an effective mechanism for influencing decision-makers and ensuring lived experience informs policy and practice.

## **2. Inclusivity, Diversity and Accessibility**

A recurring theme was the importance of inclusion. Young people described The Collective as a space that welcomes individuals from different backgrounds, experiences and disabilities, recognising that no two young people have the same needs.

Young people particularly valued:

- The diversity of participants and experiences represented.
- Efforts to reach different communities and groups.
- The ability to participate both online and in person.
- Opportunities for everyone to contribute and have their voice heard.

These responses suggest that accessibility and inclusivity are viewed as fundamental strengths of the programme.

## **3. Strong Relationships and Trusted Adults**

Young people repeatedly emphasised the importance of supportive, approachable adults who listen, engage and work alongside them. Specific staff members, youth workers, teachers and senior leaders were recognised for their commitment to listening to young people and championing their views.

Young people highlighted:

- Approachable and supportive staff.
- Positive relationships with youth workers and professionals.
- Engagement from senior leaders within local authorities.
- Adults who actively create opportunities for young people to contribute.

This reflects the value young people place on trusted relationships and meaningful partnership working between young people and professionals.

#### 4. Collaboration and Co-production

Young people viewed The Collective as a genuinely collaborative network where solutions are developed together. They valued opportunities to co-design services, programmes and activities rather than simply being consulted.

Key strengths identified included:

- Co-design of youth-led programmes.
- Working in partnership with other groups and organisations.
- Professionals engaging constructively with young people.
- Young people being involved in identifying solutions to challenges.

Young people's feedback suggests they value being active partners in decision-making and service development.



#### 5. Communication and Peer Engagement

Communication emerged as one of the strongest themes throughout the discussion. Young people recognised the importance of creating spaces where conversations can happen openly and where peers can challenge, share experiences and learn from each other.

Examples included:

- Regular communication between members.
- "Time to Talk". Local forums and discussion opportunities.

- Young people reaching out to other groups to gather views.
- Creating opportunities for open and honest conversations.

This highlights the role of Youth Voice activity in building confidence, dialogue and peer-to-peer engagement.

## **6. Community, Belonging and Enjoyment**

Alongside influencing change, young people emphasised that The Collective provides a sense of belonging. Participants described it as fun, engaging and community-focused.

Young people valued:

- Collective Get Togethers and social opportunities.
- Youth clubs and community activities.
- Feeling connected to others with shared experiences.
- Enjoyable and engaging participation opportunities.

This suggests that creating positive social experiences is an important element of sustaining meaningful youth participation.

## **7. Connections to Services and Wider Support Networks**

Young people recognised the benefit of links with wider support systems and services, including mental health services, youth provision and community organisations.

Examples included:

- Connections with CAMHS, Mind and mental health support services.
- Free clubs and activities for different age groups.
- Partnerships with a range of organisations and networks.

These connections were seen as strengthening support for young people while increasing opportunities for participation and influence.

## **Overall Message from Young People**

Overall, young people described The Collective as an inclusive, youth-led and solution-focused network that empowers children and young people with SEND to influence decisions, connect with peers, work alongside professionals, and shape services at local and national levels. They particularly valued the opportunities for genuine co-production, strong relationships with trusted

adults, diverse representation, and the sense of community created through participation activities.

This feedback demonstrates that young people see The Collective not simply as a consultation mechanism, but as a platform for meaningful influence, belonging and positive change.

### **What Young People Told Us is Holding Youth Voice Back**

When asked what is preventing young people with SEND from fully participating in Youth Voice activities and influencing decision-making, several consistent themes emerged. Young people described a range of practical, systemic and personal barriers that can prevent participation and meaningful engagement.

#### **1. Unequal Access and a "Postcode Lottery" of Opportunity**

The strongest theme was that opportunities for participation are not available equally across the country.

Young people reported:

- Not all areas offer participation opportunities or youth forums.
- A lack of local groups and activities.
- Significant differences in available resources and support depending on where young people live.
- Concerns about funding limitations, particularly outside London.
- Local authorities not always working together to create opportunities.

Young people felt that access to Youth Voice should not depend on geography and that all young people should have equal opportunities to participate and influence decisions.

**Key message:** Opportunities for Youth Voice remain inconsistent, creating unequal access for young people with SEND across England

#### **2. Funding and Resources**

Funding was consistently identified as a major challenge affecting both participation opportunities and the ability of organisations to listen and respond effectively.

Young people highlighted:

- Reductions in funding for youth services and participation activities.
- Limited resources available to support engagement.

- Concerns about long-term sustainability.
- The costs associated with attending activities, including expenses and transport.

**Key message:** Young people recognise that meaningful participation requires investment and that funding pressures can limit opportunities for engagement.

### 3. Accessibility and Practical Barriers

Many young people identified accessibility issues as a significant obstacle to participation.

Challenges included:

- Transport difficulties and travel costs.
- Communication barriers.
- Locations that are difficult to access.
- Digital exclusion, with recognition that online participation is not always the answer.
- A lack of appropriate support to enable participation.



Young people stressed that accessibility extends beyond physical access and includes communication, financial and practical considerations.

**key message:** Participation opportunities need to be designed with accessibility in mind from the outset to ensure all young people can take part.

### 4. Lack of Awareness and Poor Communication

Young people reported that many children and young people simply do not know opportunities exist.

Participants identified:

- Low awareness of Youth Voice groups and forums.
- Difficulties spreading information in schools.
- Poor communication about available opportunities.
- Limited promotion and outreach.

They also highlighted the importance of receiving feedback after sharing their views.

One recurring message was:

“ Tell us why you made that decision ”

Young people want to understand how their views have influenced outcomes and what happened as a result of their involvement.

**Key message:** Better communication is needed both to promote opportunities and to demonstrate the impact of young people's contributions.

## 5. Feeling Unheard and Tokenistic Engagement

Many young people expressed frustration when they feel their views are not genuinely considered.

They spoke about:

- Adults assuming young people do not have a voice.
- Experiences of being ignored.
- Participation feeling tokenistic.
- Decision-makers not always listening to young people.
- A perception of "them and us" between young people and professionals.

Young people warned that when participation feels tokenistic, they become less likely to engage in the future.

**Key message:** Young people want authentic partnership and evidence that their participation leads to meaningful influence and change.

## 6. Confidence, Anxiety and Emotional Barriers

Young people recognised that personal factors could make participation difficult.

These included:

- Lack of confidence.
- Fear of conflict or confrontation.
- Stress and pressure.
- Anxiety and worry.
- Mental health challenges.
- Difficult circumstances at home or within families.

First meetings were described as particularly intimidating, and many young people felt that everyone needs support to feel comfortable participating.

**Key message:** Emotional wellbeing and confidence-building support are essential for enabling participation.

## 7. Inclusion, Diversity and Representation

Young people felt there is still more work to do to ensure all voices are represented.

Participants highlighted:

- A lack of diversity in some participation spaces.
- Inequalities experienced by young people with different disabilities.
- The need to hear quieter voices.
- Under-representation of younger children and young people.
- Concerns about subconscious bias and misunderstanding.

**Key message:** participation should reflect the full diversity of the SEND community

## 8. Culture, Language and Safe Spaces

Young people also raised concerns about the culture surrounding participation and engagement.

Issues included:

- Formal or "robotic" language that can feel inaccessible.
- Rigid ways of thinking that limit innovation and participation.
- A lack of safe spaces where young people feel comfortable speaking openly.
- Limited opportunities for social connection and relationship-building.

Young people wanted participation environments that feel welcoming, relatable and youth-friendly.

**Key message:** Participation is most effective when young people feel safe, respected and able to communicate in ways that work for them.

## Overall Message from Young People

The overall message from young people was that the biggest barriers to Youth Voice are not a lack of willingness to participate, but a combination of **unequal opportunities, insufficient funding, accessibility challenges, poor communication, lack of awareness, and experiences of not being genuinely heard.**

Young people want:

- More opportunities to take part.
- Better accessibility and transport support.
- Greater awareness of Youth Voice opportunities.
- Diverse and inclusive representation.
- Safe, welcoming participation spaces.
- Clear feedback about how their views have influenced decisions.
- Genuine co-production rather than tokenistic consultation.

Most importantly, young people want decision-makers to **listen, act and demonstrate the impact of participation**, ensuring that every young person with SEND feels valued, included and able to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

### **What Young People Told Us Success Looks and Feels Like in Youth Voice**

When asked what success looks and feels like in Youth Voice, young people described a vision that goes far beyond simply being consulted. Success was defined as feeling valued, making a difference, building confidence, and seeing real change happen as a result of their involvement.

#### **Success Means Personal Growth and Empowerment**

The strongest message from young people was that successful participation creates positive personal change.

Young people described success as feeling:

- Proud of themselves and their achievements.
- More confident in sharing their views and experiences.
- Happy, positive and optimistic.
- A sense of achievement and accomplishment.
- Excitement and pride when they have done something meaningful.
- "Over the moon" when their efforts have made a difference.

Youth Voice was seen as a vehicle for helping young people recognise their strengths, develop new skills and realise their potential.

“ **Being proud when you have made an achievement or done something special** ”

### **Success Means Seeing Real Change**

Young people were clear that participation must lead to action.

Success was described as:

- The changes young people ask for actually happening.
- Effective improvements that meet the needs of children and young people.
- Young people's views influencing decisions and services.
- Maintaining momentum and achieving outcomes within meaningful timeframes.

While many recognised that change can take time, they emphasised the importance of seeing progress and understanding how their contribution has influenced decision-making.

**“ The change happens ”**

### **Success Means Every Voice Being Heard**

Young people consistently described success as creating opportunities for all voices to be included.

They highlighted the importance of:

- Hearing as many voices as possible.
- Expanding reach and engaging young people from diverse backgrounds and experiences.
- Building strong networks of young people across different communities.
- Ensuring everyone has an opportunity to contribute and be listened to.

Success was not viewed as representing a small number of individuals, but as creating a system where participation is open, accessible and inclusive.

**“ Everyone has a voice and everyone is listened to ”**

### **Success Means Genuine Co-production**

Young people emphasised that successful participation is built on partnership, not consultation alone.

They wanted:

- Young people to be involved from the beginning of decision-making processes.
- Genuine co-production between young people and professionals.
- Decisions to be shaped with young people, not presented to them after they have already been made.
- Positive and respectful partnership working.

This reflects a desire for young people to be recognised as equal partners in designing solutions and shaping services.

**“Involving young people from the start of a process and not just using us for justifying the decision you have made already”**

### **Success Means Belonging and Connection**

Many young people described success as the relationships and sense of community created through Youth Voice activity.

Success was associated with:

- Meeting new people.
- Developing supportive peer networks.
- Feeling a sense of belonging.
- Building connections with others who share similar experiences.
- Being part of something bigger than themselves.

Young people highlighted that participation is most powerful when it creates both influence and connection.

### **Success Means Communication and Accountability**

Young people stressed the importance of communication throughout the participation process.

They described success as:

- Receiving regular updates.
- Being kept informed, even when there is little progress to report.
- Closing the feedback loop.
- Understanding how decisions have been made and what has happened as a result of their involvement.
- Maintaining engagement over time.

Young people want transparency and ongoing communication as evidence that their contributions are valued.

### **Success Requires Sustainable Investment**

Young people recognised that meaningful participation needs appropriate support and resources.

They identified success as:

- Having sufficient funding for participation and co-production.
- Opportunities to meet regularly.
- Local authority investment in Youth Voice groups.
- Effective promotion and visibility of opportunities through local offers and other channels.

This demonstrates an understanding that meaningful engagement requires long-term commitment and infrastructure.

### **Overall Message from Young People**

The message from young people was clear:

**Success in Youth Voice is when young people feel confident, valued and connected; when every voice has the opportunity to be heard; when young people and professionals work together as equal partners; and when participation leads to visible, meaningful change.**

For young people, successful Youth Voice is not simply about being consulted. It is about belonging, empowerment, genuine co-production and seeing their experiences translated into action. Above all, success is knowing that their voice has been listened to, respected and acted upon.

### **What Young People Told Us About the Principles and Ways of Working That Matter Most**

When discussing the values and approaches that should guide Youth Voice and co-production, young people consistently highlighted the importance of respect, inclusion, communication, accountability and meaningful partnership. Their feedback demonstrates that effective participation is not only about creating opportunities to contribute, but also about how young people are engaged throughout the process.

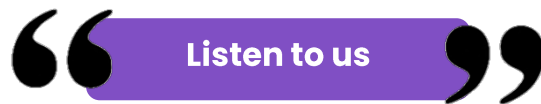
## 1. Listening Must Be at the Heart of Participation

The most common message from young people was simple and powerful: **listen to us.**

Young people emphasised the importance of:

- Listening to all views and experiences.
- Creating opportunities for everyone to be heard.
- Taking young people's contributions seriously.
- Demonstrating that feedback has been considered and acted upon.

Young people want participation to be built on genuine listening, where their voices influence decisions rather than simply being collected.



## 2. Respect, Kindness and Inclusion Are Non-Negotiable

Young people consistently identified respect and kindness as essential foundations for effective Youth Voice.

They highlighted:

- Being respectful to everyone.
- Treating all participants with kindness.
- Valuing different opinions and experiences.
- Creating welcoming environments where people feel comfortable contributing.

Young people believe participation works best when everyone feels valued, respected and included.

## 3. Safe Spaces Enable Honest Conversations

Creating safe and supportive environments was another key theme.

Young people said participation should:

- Provide safe spaces for discussion.
- Help young people feel comfortable sharing their views.

- Encourage contribution without fear of judgement.
- Support young people to speak openly about issues that matter to them.

This demonstrates the importance of emotional safety as a foundation for meaningful engagement.

#### **4. Young People Should Be Involved From the Start**

Young people were clear that they want to help shape decisions from the beginning, not simply be consulted at the end of a process.

They highlighted:

- Including young people from the earliest stages of planning.
- Involving young people in designing solutions.
- Working in partnership throughout the process.

Young people described this as a key principle of genuine co-production.

**“Include young people from the start”**

#### **5. Transparency and Accountability Build Trust**

A strong theme throughout the discussion was the need for organisations to be open about decisions and demonstrate accountability.

Young people valued:

- Integrity, honesty and openness.
- Clear explanations about decisions.
- Transparency about progress and outcomes.
- Mechanisms that track progress and demonstrate accountability.

They wanted organisations to provide clear answers to questions such as:

**“Tell us why”**

Young people feel that transparency helps build trust and confidence in participation processes.

## 6. Closing the Feedback Loop Is Essential

Young people repeatedly stressed the importance of hearing what happens after they have shared their views.

They highlighted:

- Providing feedback on actions taken.
- Demonstrating impact.
- Sharing updates throughout projects.
- Communicating outcomes in a timely way.

The principle most frequently referenced was:

**“ You said, we did ”**

Young people want evidence that their voices have made a difference and that participation has influenced decision-making.

## 7. Regular Communication and Ongoing Engagement Matter

Young people emphasised that engagement should not be a one-off event.

They wanted:

- Regular opportunities to contribute.
- Consistent communication.
- Frequent updates on progress.
- Ongoing relationships rather than occasional consultation exercises.

This reflects a desire for participation to be embedded within organisational culture rather than treated as a standalone activity.

## 8. Recognition, Encouragement and Celebration of Impact

Young people highlighted the importance of recognising contributions and celebrating achievements.

They suggested:

- Encouragement for participants.
- Acknowledging when young people have helped create change.

- Appropriate rewards and incentives.
- Celebrating progress and achievements within realistic timeframes.

Young people felt that recognising contribution helps maintain engagement and demonstrates the value placed on Youth Voice.

## 9. Flexible and Accessible Participation Is Essential

Young people recognised that different people engage in different ways.

They advocated for:

- Hybrid participation opportunities.
- A choice of face-to-face and online engagement.
- Flexible approaches that meet individual needs.
- Reducing barriers to participation wherever possible.

This reflects the importance of designing participation around young people's needs rather than expecting young people to fit existing systems.

### Overall Message from Young People

The message from young people was clear:

**Effective Youth Voice is built on listening, respect, kindness, safety, honesty and genuine partnership. Young people want to be involved from the start, kept informed throughout the process and shown how their contributions have influenced outcomes.**

Young people's guiding principles for participation can be summarised as:

- |                                    |                                                |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| • <b>Listen to us</b>              | • <b>Show us what has changed</b>              |
| • <b>Respect everyone</b>          | • <b>Communicate regularly</b>                 |
| • <b>Be kind</b>                   | • <b>Recognise our contributions</b>           |
| • <b>Create safe spaces</b>        | • <b>Make participation accessible for all</b> |
| • <b>Include us from the start</b> |                                                |
| • <b>Be honest and transparent</b> |                                                |

These principles provide a clear framework for meaningful Youth Voice and co-production and represent what young people believe good participation should look like in practice.

## Conclusion

As part of the future of youth voice plenary activity, young people reflected on both the barriers that can prevent meaningful participation and the factors that enable youth voice to thrive. These were captured visually through **storm clouds** representing challenges and **sun rays** representing success



factors and aspirations for the future. This encouraged reflection on what can make it difficult for young people to have their voices heard, as well as what helps participation to thrive.

## Barriers to Participation

Young people identified several challenges that can make it difficult for them to share their views and influence decisions. A key concern was the feeling that too much attention is often placed on professionals, policymakers and organisations, while not enough attention is given to the experiences and perspectives of young people themselves.

Participants also highlighted a lack of awareness about existing participation opportunities, with many young people not knowing what groups are available or not having a local group where they can share their views. Accessibility was another significant theme, particularly around transport, the need for support from family members to attend activities, and practical barriers such as time, confidence and availability.

Concerns were also raised about funding pressures, with young people recognising that limited resources can affect the availability of participation groups, workshops, activities and opportunities. Some participants shared experiences of feeling ignored or not being heard, highlighting the need for cultural change to ensure young people's voices are consistently valued.

## What Success Looks Like

When discussing the future of youth voice, young people were clear about the factors that help participation succeed. Central to this was the importance of **safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces** where young people can speak openly without fear of judgement or stigma. Trusting relationships, strong communication and opportunities to connect with peers who have similar experiences were all considered essential.

Young people wanted participation opportunities to be accessible, flexible and community-based, with enough time for meaningful discussion and relationship-building. Free activities, local groups, youth clubs and events were highlighted as important ways of ensuring that more young people can get involved.

The strongest message was the importance of seeing that participation leads to **real change**. Young people want clear evidence that their views are being heard, taken seriously and acted upon. They called for genuine co-production, visible outcomes and an end to tokenistic engagement. Participants emphasised that young people should be involved as equal partners in decision-making and that their contributions should help shape services, systems and policies from the outset.

Overall, young people's vision for the future is one where participation is inclusive, accessible and impactful. They want opportunities to share their views in trusted environments, alongside clear evidence that their voices are making a meaningful difference to the decisions that affect their lives and communities.

## Appendix – Youth Voice Future

### Wind – Strengths and things that help us

- The Collective Get Together.
- Kids are open and challenge.
- Kids travel the country and include all.
- How kids bring other young people's voices to the table.
- Kids team going out there to groups.
- Already having ambassadors from local Co-production groups feeding into national groups.
- Communication.
- Approachable staff.
- Fun.
- Engaging
- Community
- Professionals. Engaging with youth.
- Time to talk forum.
- The Collective and DfE engagement
- Staff like Becca. Wendy, head of SEN. Steven Director of children's services. And other youth workers, Jane / Chris, teachers and members of staff.
- Youth clubs.
- Mental health support. Cams. Mind.
- Free clubs for all ages.
- Kids working with us.
- The support and backing of the local authority senior leader teams.
- Representation at local authority boards.
- Proactivity – We knock on doors and give solutions. We are solution focused.
- Communication – We talk a lot.
- Everyone has an opportunity.
- Partnerships. Part of other groups.
- Having the availability To share our voices through groups and forums.
- Different types of people. Not all disabilities are the same. We are very diverse.
- Co design of youth LED programmes.
- Good representation from across England.
- Having both in person and online.

### Anchors – things that holds us back

- Not everyone offers participation in their area.
- Not asking for help.
- It is harder to spread a message at school.
- Not enough support.
- Assuming you don't have a voice.
- Confidence. Conflict. Confrontation.
- Post code lottery.
- Funding the commitment to listen.
- Bad politics. Not listening to young people. And ministers changing too much.
- Funding, especially outside of London, for youth voice.
- Transport not being able to reach activities. Local authorities not working together.
- Resources. Like money.
- Lack of diversity and need of more diverse representation.
- Breaking rigid thinking.
- First meetings are intimidating.
- Hearing quieter voices.
- Location, location location. Online isn't always the answer.
- Tell us why you made that decision.
- Being tokenistic - Then don't want to take part.
- Them and us.
- Young people want to know their barriers.
- Not being known.
- Lack of awareness that these groups exist.
- Lack of groups.
- Lack of understanding.
- Money.
- Accessibility
- Time
- Poor communication.

#### Rocks - things that stop youth voice

- Accessibility. Including transport and communication barriers.
- Expenses.
- Lack of confidence.
- Lack of awareness.
- Time and pressure.
- Everyone needs support to feel comfortable.
- Age - not enough 'young' young people.

- Robotic formal use of language. Think about who government are speaking with.
- £££ being cut.
- Lack of modern opportunities.
- Lack of equality when it comes to different disabilities.
- There is no middle ground at the moment when it comes to socialisation.
- Not protecting safe spaces for young people to speak.
- Subconscious bias and ignorance.
- Pressure.
- Mental health.
- Something bad happening in the family.
- Stress.
- People ignoring us.
- Conflict.
- No help.
- Worry.
- Because I am special and have autism

#### Tresure island – what success looks and feels like

- Proud of yourself.
- More confident.
- Amazing.
- Happy person.
- Feel good about yourself.
- Being proud when you have made an achievement or done something special.
- The change happens.
- Meeting new people.
- Dream of your goals, big and small. Close your eyes and make it feel real.
- Success looks upward to the next big thing.
- Strong network of diverse voices.
- Hear as many voices as possible.
- It feels very bittersweet. It takes a long time. With as much support that is given.
- Success of Unified and streamlined networks streamlined by visualisation.
- Effective change that meets young people's needs.
- Flexibility – expand reach need to hear all the voices.

- Amazing.
- Feels like achievement.
- Over the moon.
- Relief.
- Meeting young people where they want to be heard.
- Great partnership working between young people and professionals.
- Updates even if there are no updates. Ongoing communication.
- A belonging.
- A drive of passion.
- Involving young people from the start of a process and not just using us for justifying the decision you have made already.
- Genuine Co production.
- Everyone has a voice and everyone is listened to.
- Closing the feedback loop.
- Everything is done within a time frame and maintaining engagement.
- Having enough funding to meet more regularly.
- Having participation and Co production groups funded by local authorities.
- Local offer advertising.

#### Compass – guiding principles and ways of working

- Listening.
- Engaging.
- Be kind.
- Be respectful to everyone.
- Listening.
- Kindness.
- Comfort
- Respect
- Safe.
- Listen to everyone's views
- Respecting everyone.
- Making sure everyone has a safe space.
- Include young people from the start.
- Listen to us.
- You said we did.
- Tell us why.
- Integrity, honesty and openness.
- Open communication.

- Rewards and incentives. Realising young people making a difference within appropriate timeframes.
- Progress tracker for accountability.
- Regular engagement.
- Encouragement.
- You said we did. - Timely manner - Updating us as soon as complete.
- Hybrid options face-to-face or online



# Collective Get T★gether

## Flying the Flag for Youth Voice

### Session Overview

As part of the Collective Get Together, young people participated in a creative engagement activity called "**Flying the Flag for Youth Voice**". The activity was designed to create a visual celebration of youth voice and showcase the many ways young people influence decisions at local, regional and national levels.

The session aimed to explore young people's experiences of sharing their views, ideas and lived experiences, and to understand what happens when they speak up about issues that matter to them. It also provided an opportunity to recognise and celebrate examples of meaningful participation, where young people felt listened to and understood.

### The Activity

Each young person was given a flag to personalise. Using words, drawings, symbols and decorations, participants captured their experiences of youth voice and participation.

Young people were encouraged to reflect on several key questions:

### Who were they with?

Young people shared whether they had spoken up:

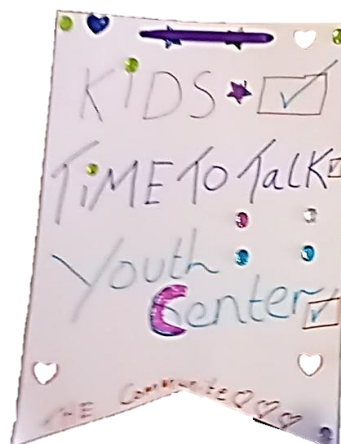
- Independently
- As part of a school or education setting
- Through a youth voice group
- Alongside friends or other young people



### Who listened to them?

Participants reflected on the adults or groups they had shared their views and experiences with, including:

- Parents and carers
- Social workers
- Teachers and education staff
- School leadership teams
- Council staff
- Health professionals
- Charity and support workers
- Other young people



## What did they share?



Young people described the issues, experiences and ideas they had raised, including:

- Things that were not working well
- Areas where support needed to be easier to access
- Situations that felt unfair
- New ideas and suggestions
- Changes they wanted services or adults to make
- Solutions that could help both themselves and others

## What happened next?

The activity also explored the impact of young people's contributions. Participants shared a range of outcomes, including:

- Changes being made as a result of their feedback
- Alternative solutions being introduced
- Receiving an explanation when a change could not be made
- Being asked further questions about their experiences
- Feeling better understood by adults and professionals
- Being invited to join additional meetings, groups or participation opportunities



## How did it feel?

Young people reflected on how it felt to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences. Discussions highlighted the importance of feeling listened to, respected and taken seriously. Many recognised that confidence can grow when young people see that their views have value and can help influence decisions.

## Key Messages

The completed flags created a powerful visual display demonstrating the breadth of youth voice activity taking place across education, health, social care and community settings.

The activity highlighted that young people are already contributing valuable insights and solutions to improve services and experiences for themselves and others. It also reinforced the importance of creating opportunities for participation that are meaningful, accessible and inclusive.

Young people identified that effective youth voice is not only about being given opportunities to speak, but also about receiving feedback, seeing action taken where possible and understanding how their contributions have influenced decision-making.

## Impact and Next Steps

The flags will form part of a wider visual representation of youth voice across The Collective, celebrating the contribution that young people make to shaping services, policies and practice.

To ensure the activity captured as wide a range of experiences as possible, contributions were also gathered from young people and organisations who were unable to attend the Collective Get Together in person. This included young people with a range of health conditions and SEND, as well as specialist organisations such as the **Challenging Behaviour Foundation**, which supports children and young people with more complex needs. Their personalised flags were added to the display alongside those created on the day, helping to ensure that a broader range of perspectives and lived experiences were represented. This approach enabled more young people's voices to be heard and reflected the Collective's commitment to inclusive and accessible participation for all.



The feedback gathered will help strengthen understanding of what meaningful participation looks like from a young person's perspective. It will also provide valuable insight for the Department for Education and partner organisations about how young people can be supported to share their views and influence change.

The activity demonstrated that young people want opportunities to contribute, and that when they are listened to and involved in decision-making, they can play a vital role in improving outcomes for themselves and their peers.

As part of the session round up, young people used flowers to identify the factors that make participation meaningful, accessible and successful. These were placed on the tree to be referred back to during the plenary activity. Their reflections highlighted that effective youth voice is built on strong relationships, trust and seeing that contributions lead to action.

The most common theme was the importance of **being listened to, understood and respected.**

Young people valued adults who took the time to listen, communicate well, and create opportunities for honest conversations. Trusting relationships with supportive adults, advocates and professionals were seen as essential in helping young people feel confident to share their views and experiences.

Participants also highlighted the importance of **feeling safe and supported**.

Examples included having trusted adults, calm and comfortable spaces, access to advocacy, and practical support such as pre-visits, preparation, personalised schedules and reasonable adjustments. These approaches helped young people feel less overwhelmed and more able to participate fully.

Another key message was the need for **inclusive communication and accessibility**.

Young people emphasised the value of clear communication, visual ways of learning, additional support where needed, and staff who understand how to meet diverse needs. Training and awareness were viewed as critical in ensuring that young people receive the right support and are able to contribute on an equal basis.

Young people were clear that participation is most meaningful when **it leads to action and visible change**.

Whether a change is large or small, participants wanted evidence that their views had been heard and considered. They stressed that young people should be involved from the beginning of decision-making processes, rather than being consulted after decisions have already been made.

Participants highlighted the importance of a **positive and proactive culture**.

Kindness, perseverance, courage, a "can-do" attitude, and recognising the strengths and achievements of disabled young people were all identified as important contributors to successful participation. Young people wanted adults, organisations and systems to move beyond doing the minimum and instead actively collaborate with them to create positive change.

Overall, the feedback demonstrated that successful youth voice depends on building trusting relationships, creating accessible opportunities to participate, valuing young people's contributions, and ensuring that their voices lead to meaningful influence and change.



# Collective Get T★gether

## Plenary

Throughout the Collective Get Together, young people took part in three core sessions that explored inclusion, participation and the future of youth voice. Each session concluded with a creative activity that contributed to a shared plenary display, bringing together the key messages and priorities identified by participants throughout the day.



The display took the form of a **giant tree**, symbolising the growth of inclusive practice and meaningful youth participation. As young people moved through the sessions, they added different elements to the tree to represent their ideas, experiences and hopes for the future.

### Building the Tree

#### Session 1: National Standards for Inclusion

As part of the National Standards for Inclusion session, young people were asked to identify one thing that schools should be doing to make education more inclusive for children and young people with SEND. These ideas were written on leaves and added to the tree, representing the actions and commitments needed to help inclusion flourish within education settings. While a wide range of ideas were shared, several clear themes emerged.

The strongest message was the need for **high-quality SEND training for all education staff**. Young people consistently highlighted the importance of regular, meaningful training that helps teachers understand different needs, mental health, communication differences and how to provide effective support. Participants felt that training should be co-produced and co-delivered with people who have lived experience of SEND.

Young people also emphasised the importance of **respect, understanding and positive relationships**. They wanted teachers and school staff to avoid making assumptions, recognise individual strengths, and work with young people rather than

against them. Many highlighted the need to feel understood, listened to and treated as equals, with relationships based on mutual respect.

Another key theme was **meaningful involvement of young people and families in decision-making**. Participants called for greater co-production, stronger advocacy opportunities and improved communication with families, ensuring that support plans are developed collaboratively and that young people have a genuine voice in decisions affecting their education.

Young people also stressed the importance of creating **inclusive school cultures and environments**. This included ensuring access to the full curriculum and school activities, providing reasonable adjustments, supporting mental health and wellbeing, creating calm learning environments, and fostering a culture where everyone feels they belong.

Overall, young people's contributions highlighted that successful inclusion is about more than individual adjustments. It requires a culture of understanding, respect, participation and accountability, supported by well-trained staff and a whole-school commitment to ensuring every child and young person can thrive.

## Session 2: Flying the Flag for Youth Voice

As part of the *Flying the Flag for Youth Voice* session, young people used flowers to identify factors that make participation meaningful, accessible and successful. Their reflections highlighted that effective youth voice is built on strong relationships, trust & seeing contributions lead to action.



The most common theme was the importance of **being listened to, understood and respected**. Young people valued adults who took the time to listen, communicate well, and create opportunities for honest conversations. Trusting relationships with supportive adults, advocates and professionals were seen as essential in helping young people feel confident to share their views and experiences.

Participants also highlighted the importance of **feeling safe and supported**. Examples included having trusted adults, calm and comfortable spaces, access to advocacy, and practical support such as pre-visits, preparation, personalised

schedules and reasonable adjustments. These approaches helped young people feel less overwhelmed and more able to participate fully.

Another key message was the need for **inclusive communication and accessibility**. Young people emphasised the value of clear communication, visual ways of learning, additional support where needed, and staff who understand how to meet different needs. Training and awareness were viewed as critical in ensuring that young people receive the right support and are able to contribute on an equal basis.

Young people were clear that participation is most meaningful when it leads to **action and visible change**. Whether a change is large or small, participants wanted evidence that their views had been heard and considered. They stressed that young people should be involved from the beginning of decision-making processes, rather than being consulted after decisions have already been made.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of a **positive and proactive culture**. Kindness, perseverance, courage, a "can-do" attitude, and recognising the strengths and achievements of disabled young people were all identified as important contributors to successful participation. Young people wanted adults, organisations and systems to move beyond doing the minimum and instead actively work alongside them to create positive change.

Overall, the feedback demonstrated that successful youth voice depends on building trusting relationships, creating accessible opportunities to participate, valuing young people's contributions, and ensuring that their voices lead to meaningful influence and change.

### Session 3: Future of Youth Voice

As part of the future of youth voice plenary activity, young people reflected on both the barriers that can prevent meaningful participation and the factors that enable youth voice to thrive. These were captured visually through **storm clouds** representing challenges and **sun rays** representing success factors and aspirations for the future. This encouraged reflection on what can make it difficult for young people to have their voices heard, as well as what helps participation to thrive.



## Barriers to Participation

Young people identified several challenges that can make it difficult for them to share their views and influence decisions. A key concern was the feeling that too much attention is often placed on professionals, policymakers and organisations, while not enough attention is given to the experiences and perspectives of young people themselves.

Participants also highlighted a lack of awareness about existing participation opportunities, with many young people not knowing what groups are available or not having a local group where they can share their views. Accessibility was another significant theme, particularly around transport, the need for support from family members to attend activities, and practical barriers such as time, confidence and availability.

Concerns were also raised about funding pressures, with young people recognising that limited resources can affect the availability of participation groups, workshops, activities and opportunities. Some participants shared experiences of feeling ignored or not being heard, highlighting the need for cultural change to ensure young people's voices are consistently valued.

## What Success Looks Like

When discussing the future of youth voice, young people were clear about the factors that help participation succeed. Central to this was the importance of **safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces** where young people can speak openly without fear of judgement or stigma. Trusting relationships, strong communication and opportunities to connect with peers who have similar experiences were all considered essential.

Young people wanted participation opportunities to be accessible, flexible and community-based, with enough time for meaningful discussion and relationship-building. Free activities, local groups, youth clubs and events were highlighted as important ways of ensuring that more young people can get involved.

The strongest message was the importance of seeing that participation leads to **real change**. Young people want clear evidence that their views are being heard, taken seriously and acted upon. They called for genuine co-production, visible outcomes and

an end to tokenistic engagement. Participants emphasised that young people should be involved as equal partners in decision-making and that their contributions should help shape services, systems and policies from the outset.

Overall, young people's vision for the future is one where participation is inclusive, accessible and impactful. They want opportunities to share their views in trusted environments, alongside clear evidence that their voices are making a meaningful difference to the decisions that affect their lives and communities.

## Plenary Discussion

During the closing plenary, members of the **Kids Advisory Panel** guided participants through the completed display and facilitated discussion around the key themes that had emerged throughout the day.

The group reflected on:

- The most important actions schools can take to improve inclusion.
- The positive participation experiences that appeared most often across the flowers.
- The barriers and concerns represented by the storm clouds.
- What youth voice success looks and feels like helping the tree to grow.

The activity provided a powerful visual representation of young people's collective views and experiences. It enabled participants to see how their individual contributions are connected to wider themes around inclusion, participation and system change.

## Key Impact

The completed tree captured both the strengths and challenges identified by young people and demonstrated the strong connection between inclusive practice and meaningful youth voice. It highlighted that when young people are listened to, involved in decision-making and supported to participate, they can provide valuable insights into how services, schools and organisations can improve.

The plenary brought together the learning from all three sessions and ensured that the day concluded with a collective reflection on what is already working well, what still needs to change, and how young people's voices can continue to shape the future of inclusive education and participation.

## Appendix

### **National Standards for Inclusion: Changes to be made - Leaves**

- Don't underestimate us. Teachers should work with all young people to work with their brains and not against us.
- Teachers have real SEND training
- Training for SEND (especially for those who can't communicate for themselves)
- Teachers have real SEND training.
- Young person involvement and advocacy
- Teacher training that is mandatory, regular, coproduced and co-delivered by experts by experience.
- Better training on mental health and how to help young people.
- Training for YP on SEND.
- Co-production
- RESPECT between Teacher and Student.
- Not making assumptions that over stimulated people are aggressive.
- Treat student how you would have wanted to be treated as a student but maybe couldn't have. If you show respect then students show respect back to you hopefully.
- Changing teaching culture
- Making sure a timeline is put in place to help parents finding out what would be put in place to help their child mentally and And physically to make sure they don't feel isolated or alone
- More teacher training for all conditions and needs.
- Changing cultures
- changing culture
- Inclusive to everyone
- Social education and rest.
- Support that isn't aimed at individual people instead a whole group
- Patience Paying attention to mental health
- Young person involvement and advocacy
- Mental health
- Ensure that YP and internal provisions have access to the whole school curriculum and events
- reasonable adjustments overlay
- calm environment
- Teachers being respectful to students
- Being understood and feeling equal
- Having support in general English as an additional language/ in care, for all young children and young people.

## **Future of Youth Voice Barriers and Challenges - Clouds**

- Lack of advertisement
- Pay much attention on policymakers and staff only and not enough attention on young people and service users themselves
- Lack of knowledge to what groups are out there
- Under pressure money/funding management
- Funding
- Being ignored
- Culture
- You're all young people's voices are being heard
- Lack of funding for participating groups/ travel activities workshops what's it called
- Do not have a group to go for my voice to even get heard
- I need my mum to bring me [ if she could not bring me I couldn't go as I need support out in the community ] to my participation group -North Tyneside SEND Youth Fareham
- -money - time- confident
- Lack of money/ not having time
- Helping other people doing more of this.

## **Future of Youth Voice Successes – Sun Rays**

- Flexible, connection first communication
- The right to share your voice in a safe space,- safe from stigma
- Good communication within the group
- time to talk
- Meetings with people like me
- Having a safe space and someone I trust to talk to
- Success-diverse group of strong ,passionate advocates for positive change
- seen change of transport like a bus routes
- It about 5 minutes to drive [if it was further I wouldn't be able to go]
- Time management within the participating group to get projects done
- The community/ communication
- Our local authority isn't too bad so I'm happy with that
- Looking forward to new relationships and new topics
- Events across the country
- Youth clubs-trips-free clubs
- Affecting meaningful change
- Being heard and taken seriously
- proof That what we say makes a difference in society
- That it's free

- The change is visible
- no tokenism be like Norman Lamb MP
- The change actually getting made
- time to talk forum
- amazing
- Sustain industrial change by design
- Co-production
- Money
- Time
- Confident
- Help others

### **Flying the flag for youth voice: good practice principles - Flowers**

- Trust people
- communicating at time to talk/its helped me/ its made me feel I wasn't alone/I felt cared for/helping me through my dark times/Becca help me feel calm/helping me find ways/listening to me/it's calmed me
- Not being in school for a while and going back to school and getting more support/a advocator/ a trusted person/ support/ schedule/ pre visits/ pre preparation/space to go when I'm overwhelmed/if need help with spelling and maths
- Solving the problem
- Good communication
- Kindness
- Bing listen to
- Respect
- Being on time
- Learning
- Time
- Visual ways of learning
- Understanding
- Extra help at uni lectures
- Acknowledge disabled joy
- Change the culture around disability
- We in government need to show we heard
- Big conversation /advocacy, talking to councillors /listen/ better timings/ good communications
- Comfortable space
- Kindness

- Perseverance
- Good problem solutions
- Good communications
- Ensuring young people's voices are included as equals from the start and not when decisions have already made
- Reasonable adjustments passion and development
- At impact I feel listened to. To enable this adults need to put effort in to build relationships and build trust with children
- Someone I trust
- advocate/ trusted adult
- courage we need adults and practitioners to stand up and change systems
- I can't do attitude instead of doing the bare minimum
- Show us
- Seeing change no matter how small or big.
- In school I was in art. My head teacher was always good. She was firm but fair, she kept me calm, she helped me behave, she was soft, she explains things through, she always gave me time, I always felt safe
- Staff training, if staff are trained, they know how to help me the best to get me to my best self and ability.
- A can-do attitude instead of doing the bare minimum.
- My class staff and tutor listen to my problems from the start.