

Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in School's Parent Engagement Sessions - Update for Autum Term 2025

School sessions and parent/carers reached:

	Summer Term (Q2 July-Sept 2025)	Autumn Term (Q3 Sept – Dec 2025)	Total (July – Dec 2025)
Number of engagement sessions	22	32 -Includes 8 first meetings -2 schools have had 2 meetings this term	54
Additional engagement sessions offered	0	4 -1 Book Look -1 Parents Evening (Due to no engagement at previous meetings) -2 online meetings	4
Number of parent/carers attended sessions	144	164	301
Feedback sessions with school SLTs	22 completed	32 completed	

Key Themes and Feedback from Parents and Carers of areas that need additional support

- Masking and Support for Emotional Regulation**
 Parents and carers consistently identify masking as a significant challenge within the borough, for many children, especially with girls. Many families have been keen to share their lived experiences and views with us on various points of masking. Masking has a notable impact on children's mental health, their ability to learn, and overall family life. Many parents have reported feeling unsupported or not believed by their child's school when concerns of masking are raised. While interventions such as calm clubs, end-of-day energy-release activities, movement breaks, and nurture sessions can alleviate some of this pressure, many families strongly support the development of a "masking toolkit." Such a toolkit could enable children to safely unmask within school environments and develop strategies to regulate their emotions and sensory needs more effectively.
- School Communication**
 Communication from schools has been raised as an area requiring improvement across several settings, though it is worth noting some of the boroughs schools are

said to be good with communication. Parents report a lack of clear, timely, and accurate information regarding next steps, available support, school processes, and signposting to appropriate staff or services. While some schools arrange information sessions with roles such as the SENCO, family support worker, or mental health leads, families frequently fail to receive emails or are given insufficient notice to attend. Regular yet manageable communication from class teachers is also an area where parents would welcome improvement, feedback in relation to their child, especially if there have been some challenges through the day is essential, however more positive conversations would be appreciated too. Internal communication between class teachers and the school's SENCO/inclusion teams works really well with some schools however lacks consistency across others. We have already seen PINS schools updating the SEND information on their website and adding quality SEN sections into their weekly newsletter as a really positive starting point, this has been well received by parents. Some schools have begun introducing SEN parents' evenings also by way of ensuring regular contact with parents/carers as well as having the opportunity to ensure IEPs and Pupil Passports are up to date.

- **Parental Support and Engagement**

Many parents and carers express a strong desire for regular in-school coffee mornings to create opportunities for peer support, shared learning, and community building within a safe and familiar space. When paired with informative sessions on topics such as sleep support, emotional regulation, or neurodiversity, these events could significantly enhance parental confidence and wellbeing. Advanced planning of these sessions across the school year would allow parents to arrange time off work and attend more consistently.

- **Staff Training and Consistency**

Feedback indicates considerable variation in staff knowledge and confidence regarding SEN across schools. Parents highlight that some teachers demonstrate excellent understanding, while others appear to have limited training or experience. The introduction of SEN "champion teachers," alongside regular whole-staff briefings and ongoing professional development led by highly skilled specialists, may help reduce inconsistencies and improve overall provision. The use of supply staff can have a negative impact on neurodiverse pupils – consistent implementation of simple one-page profiles and supportive handovers could ease this challenge.

- **Use of Ordinarily Available Provision, IEPs, and EHCPs**

Many parents and carers report limited awareness of the borough's needs-led approach, including how Ordinarily Available Provision should be used and when IEPs or EHCPs may be appropriate. Increased transparency and clearer guidance would help families better understand the support pathways for their children.

- **Inconsistencies in SEN Registers**

Practices around SEN registers vary widely between schools. Parents report a lack of transparency and consistency, which contributes to confusion about how children are identified and supported. This concern has been shared with Helen Jackson-Brench (WBC Area SENCO), who is currently reviewing this area.

- **Resources and Capacity**

Across PINS meetings, parents recognise that schools are working within significant constraints and that funding is a major issue. Parents recognise some schools are

using above their own budgets and initiatives to deliver what their children need e.g. extra spaces for those with SEN needs. Many believe that with additional staff and resources, children would have greater opportunities to learn, participate, and thrive.

- **Transitions Between Year Groups**

Transition arrangements differ considerably, with some schools offering minimal transition time. Transition arrangements for end of year differ considerably across the borough. Some schools have well-structured and timely processes whereas others offer very little. The latter is found to cause anxiety and uncertainty for children, particularly those who are neurodiverse. More structured, timely and consistent transition processes, including more opportunities to meet new teachers and spend more time in new classroom environment, would greatly benefit many pupils.

- **Overwhelming Classroom Environments**

Some learning environments are described as overly bright, noisy, clinical, or generally overwhelming, which can hinder engagement and learning for neurodiverse children. Unfortunately, some students are spending considerable time in school corridors, not accessing learning or inclusive practices. PINS walks are being organised in all the PINS schools to explore small, practical adjustments that could create more inclusive and supportive spaces.

- **Inclusion and Access to Opportunities**

Parents report mixed levels of inclusivity across the borough. While some schools demonstrate excellent inclusive practice, others face challenges due to limited resources or training. Concerns particularly relate to school trips, classroom support, and ensuring that all children have access to meaningful learning opportunities.

- **Lunchtime Overwhelm and Behaviour Management**

Lunchtimes are frequently identified as a point of difficulty for many children, often leading to overwhelm or emotional distress. Some schools provide quiet clubs, structured 20/20/20 lunchtime provisions, or elements of the OPAL programme to create calmer, more predictable play environments. These approaches are viewed positively and may offer examples of good practice for wider adoption.

- **Dyslexia / Dyscalculia**

Across multiple meetings, parents and carers have expressed increasing concern about the limited support and unclear processes surrounding the identification of dyslexia and dyscalculia. Families often find the pathways and responsibilities difficult to navigate, and full diagnostic assessments can be costly. While some schools provide screening, availability varies depending on OAP allocations and the screening tools in use. Strengthening signposting, consistency of information, and staff understanding around dyslexia and dyscalculia would significantly improve the experience for families and ensure pupils receive timely and appropriate support.

- **Neurodiversity Understanding**

Many parents and carers highlighted the need for clearer, accessible information about neurodiversity. Incorporating age-appropriate learning about neurodiversity and emotional regulation into the school curriculum would help build an understanding and empathetic generation of pupils. Extending this awareness to wider family networks, including grandparents, could further promote a holistic, 360-degree

approach to support. This would not only strengthen consistency for the child but also help reduce stigma, particularly among older generations who may have had limited exposure to modern understandings of neurodiversity.

- **Health support pathways**

Families continue to experience significant delays in accessing Autism and ADHD assessments through the Neurodiversity Assessment Team. While the *Right to Choose* pathway is improving overall capacity, many parents are not made aware of this option through their child's school. As a result, some families reach crisis point and feel they have no alternative but to seek private assessments. This decision is rarely taken lightly and is driven by urgent need rather than an attempt to 'skip' waiting lists. Parents and carers have also raised ongoing concerns regarding access to Speech and Language Therapy. Challenges include lengthy delays, difficulty engaging with the service, and limited communication once a child is on the caseload. These issues contribute to additional stress for families and can negatively affect children's progress. Similarly, the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) offer can be difficult for families to navigate. Vulnerable children may experience prolonged periods without direct support, and interventions often begin with parent-focused courses that do not always address the more complex mental health needs of the child. A more cohesive, timely, and clearly communicated pathway across assessment services, SALT, and MHST would help ensure that children receive early, appropriate, and effective support, while reducing the pressure experienced by families.

- **Homework**

Parents have expressed growing concern about the volume of homework assigned to young children and the resulting pressure it places on both students and their families. Even when schools communicate that homework completion is not heavily enforced, incentive or reward systems can unintentionally create additional pressure. Additionally, limited flexibility in homework tasks means that activities are often set at a single level, providing insufficient challenge for some students and inadequate support for others. To address these issues, it would be beneficial to establish clear limits on homework expectations, implement adaptable tasks that meet students at their individual learning levels, and reconsider reward systems to ensure they promote engagement without creating undue stress.

- **Choosing a Secondary School**

Selecting a secondary school is a significant decision for all families; however, for parents of children with Special Educational Needs, the process can be particularly challenging and often accompanied by heightened anxiety. Many parents begin considering secondary placement options as early as Year 3, with concerns typically intensifying in Year 5 as they start to focus on the support, provision, and transition arrangements their child will need moving into Year 7. A number of parents are unaware that they are able to attend secondary school Open Evenings while their child is in Year 5, which can be an important opportunity to gather information early. Families would benefit from clearer guidance on what questions to ask, who to speak to, and what key factors to look for when evaluating potential secondary settings. This support would help ensure that parents feel informed, prepared, and confident in making the best decision for their child.

Best Practice Across Schools

- **Transitions Between Year Groups**

A number of schools demonstrate exceptional practice for example by dedicating an entire week to transition activities or tailoring transition plans to the needs of individual children. These approaches significantly reduce anxiety for the child and the parent, promote emotional readiness, and support children to settle smoothly and confidently into their new classroom environments after the summer break.

- **Family Support and Coffee Mornings**

The project has engaged with families from schools that work tirelessly to ensure that support is relevant, timely, and genuinely helpful. These schools actively seek parent and carer feedback, provide advance notice for sessions, and create meaningful opportunities for families to engage. Many operate an 'open door' ethos, encouraging parents to reach out before difficulties escalate and reinforcing that support is available at every stage, not just at crisis point. This encourages strong, trusting relationships between home and school.

- **Communication with Parents and Pupils**

Several schools within the project stand out for their effective and proactive communication. They provide clear and accessible information, send regular reminders about events, and ensure that families feel informed and included. A particularly positive practice involves sending postcards to pupils during the holidays, one from their current teacher at the beginning and another from their new teacher before term starts, helping maintain a sense of connection and continuity, easing anxiety that many children face.

Some schools also gather detailed information through well-designed questionnaires, which inform "pupil passports" for children who may need additional support but do not yet require an IEP or placement on the SEN register. These documents, created collaboratively with the child, school staff, and parents/carers, ensure that all staff have a thorough understanding of each child's strengths, needs, preferences, and challenges. Supportive and informative documents outlining the available provisions or plans available to help their child.

- **Inclusion**

We have seen outstanding examples of inclusive practice across the borough. One school in particular embeds inclusion into all aspects of its ethos and operations, ensuring no child is excluded from classroom learning or school trips. Adjustments, additional support, or alternative arrangements are put in place to ensure every child can participate fully. Additionally, several schools demonstrate exceptionally nurturing environments where children's emotional wellbeing is prioritised, enabling them to feel safe, valued, and ready to learn.

- **Therapeutic Behaviour Policy Implementation**

While many schools in the borough follow a therapeutic behaviour policy, some implement it with remarkable effectiveness. In these schools, the atmosphere is calm and welcoming, and there is a strong sense of mutual respect between pupils and staff. Positive relationships and consistent approaches underpin the school culture, benefiting the whole community.

- **Effective Use of Available Provisions**

Many schools make excellent use of the provisions and resources available to them. Sensory circuits are used consistently to provide structure and predictability for neurodiverse children. Movement breaks, visual timetables, and other supportive strategies are often embedded across the whole school. This universal approach benefits all pupils while ensuring neurodiverse children are never singled out or made to feel different, fostering a genuinely inclusive learning environment.

Planned Activity for Spring Term

Third parent engagement and SLT feedback sessions booked for Spring Term 26.