UKRI-RSA Rethinking Public Dialogue

Enhancing Public Dialogue about Inclusion in School Education: A Citizens' Panel Pilot

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Preface

This pilot was developed out of the work of the Special Educational Needs Policy Research Forum.[1] The Forum aims to promote debate, deliberations and inform about policy and practice in the field. It has 30 years' experience of arranging policy seminars about Special educational needs and disabilities (SEN/D) and inclusion involving educators, health professionals, parents/carers, voluntary and advocacy organisations, researchers and policy-makers. These seminars, as a type of public dialogue, are organised around key policy questions, which are addressed by invited expert presenters and followed by participant discussion in small groups. An analysis of these deliberations is written up as open access policy papers and distributed through the Forum network.

Authorship and acknowledgements

The project was led by two members of the Forum's Lead Group (Brahm Norwich, University of Exeter and Rob Webster, University of Portsmouth). The project partners included the Involve and Sortition Foundations. Dr Paula Black and Sarah Castell from Involve – a leading public participation charity that develops and supports new ways to involve people in decisions that affect their lives – led on the design and facilitation of the Citizens' Panel. Colleagues from Involve facilitated group discussion at the Citizens' Panel events, and provided operational support. Nick Gill from Sortition – an organisation that offers bespoke selection and stratification services for a range of deliberative events – oversaw the process of selecting participants for the Panel. Both organisations advised on recruitment. Dr Jen McAnuff, a clinical academic and occupational therapist, led on the inclusion of the young people with SEN/D throughout the project. Dr Sophie Hall (University of Portsmouth) led the process evaluation of the Citizens' Panel and provided operational support throughout the project.

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Executive summary

Public dialogue gives members of the public opportunities to learn about and debate important issues in a safe and respectful space. The discussions produce practical recommendations to share with the people that make the decisions that affect their lives.

Events such as Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Panels are groups that get together to think about and debate important matters. They are sometimes designed to be inclusive of people with physical disabilities, but few tend to accommodate the communication, emotional, and processing needs of many people with additional needs and disabilities. This matters because, compared to people without these needs, they may find it harder to relate to fast-moving conversations and make themselves heard. As a result, they are at risk of being excluded from the discussion and decision-making.

This public dialogue pilot project was based on the principle that young people with SEN/D have a right to express their views on public policy that affects their lives, such as how schools are designed. They should not just be included in public dialogue, but actively involved in its design. This project generated new learning about how public dialogues processes can be adapted so that their voices are heard and included in decisions.

The project involved running a Citizens' Panel with 28 people: six young people with SEN/D; four young people without SEN/D; 13 parents/carers; and five education professionals, including teachers. It was preceded by an extensive preparatory phase, in which the young people with SEN/D were consulted on how to make the Citizens' Panel as inclusive, engaging, and productive as possible.

The question the Panel was asked to address was: 'How do we make schools more inclusive for children and young people with SEN/D?' The Panel heard evidence from experts, debated aspects of school life (from curriculum to uniform), and then made recommendations about what needs to happen to ensure those with SEN/D feel welcome and can thrive in school.

The Panel's ideas for making schools more inclusive for young people with SEN/D

The Panel generated a set of ideas, most of which involved making changes that would benefit all young people, not just those with SEN/D, while also offering dignified and inclusive specialist provision. Many of the ideas related to general changes; for example, promoting wellbeing, changes to the curriculum and teaching, adapting the environment, and management of the school. Some of these general changes, such as promoting wellbeing and what young people learn, had no SEN/D specific aspects, but had benefits for all, including those with SEN/D. While others had a specific SEN/D aspect; for example, training in SEN/D as part of teachers' general professional education and development.

Panellists' experiences of taking part in the Citizen Panel

Organising a Citizens' Panel on school inclusion focused attention on the importance of inclusion in the organisation and delivery of the Panel itself. From onboarding participants to the design and delivery of the discussion activities, much of the success of the project was put down to thorough planning and preparation. At every step, the needs of the young people with SEN/D were carefully considered, with efforts made to reduce the emotional and cognitive load that would have limited the Panel's accessibility.

Managing and mitigating the anxiety produced by meeting new people in an unfamiliar context and environment was key to maximising the comfort, confidence, and contribution of the young people. However, the differentiated approach that was necessary for enhancing the participation of those with SEN/D bumped up against the disruptive elements that often characterise good public dialogue. Trade-offs were required, some of which affected the experience of the other participants; for example, the slower pace of the discussions and limited mixing up of the discussion groups.

Overall, this project was successful in achieving its aim of enhancing the effective participation of young people with SEN/D in public dialogue. Participants reported generally that taking part in the Citizens' Panel was a positive and worthwhile experience, and that they developed empathy and insight into the lives of young people with SEN/D.

The adjustments made to the Citizens' Panel process were successful for the six young people with SEN/D who took part. This project produced broad, transferable guidance that can be applied to other public dialogues involving a different group of young people with different needs. A key conclusion from this project is that the design and delivery of each new type of deliberative public dialogue involving young people with SEN/D must be appropriately differentiated and responsive to their individual and collective needs, if it is to be as productive, meaningful, and authentically inclusive as possible.

Introduction

Background to the project

Whether it is working out how to respond to major societal changes, or resolving local issues that impact communities, systems of decision-making shut people out, leaving them feeling unheard and ignored. Disenfranchisement from politics and disillusionment with policy-making produces the conditions in which populism thrives. Yet as recent events worldwide demonstrate, once in power, populist leaders show little enthusiasm for addressing the democratic deficit, side-lining the citizenry and degrading trust in and connectedness with institutions.

Public engagement innovations, like Citizens' Assemblies and Citizens' Panels, however, reinstate people at the heart of the decision-making that affects their lives. Public dialogue describes deliberative processes that involve bringing together people from diverse backgrounds to learn about and debate a topic or issue. Through a process of compromise and consensus-building, participants discuss and agree actionable insights, which can be shared with policy-makers and other decision-makers.

This public dialogue project was based on the principle that people with SEN/D have a right to express their views on public policy that touches on their lives. This principle is captured in the slogan used by disability activists: 'nothing about us without us'. A key aim of this pilot was to go beyond simply including young people with SEN/D in public dialogue by actively involving them in the design process.

Reviews of school education (e.g. the 2022 Times Education Commission; the Children Commissioners for England's Big Ask survey 2021) use stakeholder consultations involving children and young people. However, these are, more often than not, non-deliberative processes. A key objective of this pilot was, therefore, to obtain knowledge about how to design and modify a public dialogue process to enhance the effective participation of young people with SEN/D. These findings are reported in Part 3.

A small scale Citizens' Panel was chosen as the format for the pilot. The aim was to determine the extent to which a Citizens' Panel results in more nuanced and grounded policy formulations about inclusion in education than found in recent English school education policy and practice. This would provide insight into what works well, what does not work well, and to identify what needs to change in order to make the school system more inclusive.

Inclusion is a contested concept, so for expediency, it was defined in the context of this project in sufficiently uncontentious and broad-based terms as a model of education where pupils with SEN/D are taught for all or most of the time in classes alongside their peers in their local mainstream school. In this reading, inclusion is the act or the process of ensuring that the experience pupils with SEN/D have of education, again broadly construed, is closely aligned with that of 'mainstream' pupils who do not have SEN/D.

While public dialogue events are often designed to be inclusive of people with disabilities, in terms of physical accessibility to buildings and spaces, it is not typical for them to be designed with the specific needs that people with SEN/D can have with communication and engagement. This matters, because a considerable proportion of people with SEN/D experience difficulty with making themselves heard and keeping pace with a fast-moving conversation involving multiple participants. Consequently, events that aim to increase the diversity of participants are at risk of marginalising those in the SEN/D community, as they do not make sufficient accommodations for their particular needs (e.g. related to processing information, communication, emotional wellbeing, etc).

A key aim of this project was to trial a modified approach to deliberative public dialogue, designed with, for and about young people with SEN/D. We hypothesised that making adaptations and adjustments to the processes involved in a public dialogue would improve the participation and engagement of young people with SEN/D.

The project ran over the 2023/23 academic year. The Citizens' Panel was convened in March 2023; first online, then in-person. The aim was to select 30 panellists: 12 young people with and without SEN/D, their parents/carers (12), and six education professionals. While a Citizens' Assembly was beyond the resourcing allocated to this pilot, the advantage of holding a small Citizens' Panel meant that the social, emotional and cognitive demands on young people with SEN/D could be planned more sensitively, compared with a larger scale format.

The Citizens' Panel events were preceded by an extensive preparatory phase. This consisted of preliminary (online) meetings in which the young people with SEN/D, who were selected to take part in the project, were consulted on how to make the events as inclusive, as engaging, and as productive as possible. This phase of the project recognised that their input was central to achieving the main aim of the project. This was about how the dialogue process needed to be modified or augmented in order for them to contribute to the discussion and deliberations, and what would help them prepare for the experience of taking part in a public dialogue.

The calling question of the Citizens' Panel was: "How do we make schools more inclusive for children and young people with SEN/D?"[2] The framing of the question gave primacy to provision for, and the lived experiences of, children and young people with SEN/D. It provided a lens for exploring how inclusion could be made integral to the general purposes and objectives of schooling. The Panellists heard evidence from experts, debated and deliberated, and then made recommendations about what needs to happen to ensure children and young people with SEN/D feel welcome in school and can succeed and thrive in these environments.

2 As the four nations of the UK have divergent school policies, the Citizens' Panel focussed only on the system in England.

Project objectives and outcomes

In this project, what was discussed and decided in the Citizens' Panel was considered to be as important as the methods. The objectives of the pilot are listed below in order of priority:

1. To design, pilot, evaluate and share approaches to including young people with SEN/D in the design and delivery of deliberative public dialogue; designed and delivered around their communication and participation needs.
2. To identify how and in what ways approaches to participation in public dialogue activities and processes must be adapted and expanded to effectively include young people with SEN/D and allow their voices to be heard.
3. To provide insight into the extent to which the design of the current school education system in England supports the inclusion of children and young people with SEN/D, and to identify, from their perspectives, what is working well, what is not, and what needs to change in order to make schools more inclusive.
4. To communicate and engage stakeholders about the process and outcomes of the project, locally (i.e. where the pilot is conducted) and nationally: to parent/carer groups, voluntary and professional organisations, and policy-makers.

The objectives led to two key outcomes were identified from these objectives for this pilot:

1. To obtain information about how to modify a Citizens' Panel process to enhance the effective participation of young people with SEN/DP with SEN/disabilities.
2. To generate, via the modified Citizens' Panel process, more nuanced, grounded and integrated policy ideas about inclusion in school education than current policy.

These outcomes are captured in a logic model, presented in Appendix 1, which informed the design and evaluation of the project.

The organisation of this report

This report is presented in four parts. Part 1 describes the methods and procedures, and the steps taken to design and deliver the Citizens' Panel on school inclusion. Part 2 sets out the results and outcomes of the Citizens' Panel, and summaries participants' collective responses to the calling question: how do we make schools more inclusive for young people with SEN/D? Part 3 covers the process evaluation, and describes how, and how successfully, the Citizens' Panel process was modified and augmented to enhance the effective participation of young people with SEN/D. The report concludes with Part 4, which provides a discussion of the project overall and summarises the key lessons learned.

01 A Citizens' Panel on school inclusion: Methods and procedures

Part One

Recruitment and selection

The process of recruiting participants

The process of identifying the population and recruitment targets was more challenging compared with the process for most public dialogues. The commitment to hold at least one in-person Citizens' Panel event informed the decision to recruit participants from a defined geographical area: Portsmouth and the surrounding county of Hampshire.. Recruitment involved members of the project team asking their contacts in the education department of the unitary (Portsmouth) and county (Hampshire) authorities to email headteachers with a request to forward an online expression of interest form and information sheet to pupils' parents/carers and school staff. The team also emailed a number of local advocacy groups and associations that work with schools and/or families of children and young people with SEN/D asking them to share the expression of interest with their members, clients and contacts. Recruitment was, therefore, a two-step process. Information about the Citizens' Panel was sent to parents/carers via a third party.

The standard way of recruiting participants for a public dialogue is to target households and individuals directly by email and/or post. This systematic approach makes it possible to collect data on how many prospective participants received and responded to the invitation to participate. The drawback of the recruitment process deployed in this pilot meant that the project team were unable to track responses to the expression of interest, and so cannot know the extent to which there were systematic differences between those who did and not choose to respond. The interviews with some of the participants conducted for the project evaluation confirmed that most of them were made aware of the Citizens' Panel via school and/or local authority communications.

A total of 76 expressions of interest were received, which seemed low, given the potential for the sign-up information to have been shared with and seen by parents/carers and practitioners in over 700 schools. The two-step recruitment process very likely affected the overall response rate. While local authorities posted information about the Citizens' Panel in their weekly email newsletter sent to school staff, the recruitment of parents/carers was dependent on headteachers sending out the sign-up information. It is likely that there were headteachers who did not notice the email about the pilot project among the dozens (if not hundreds) of communications they receive each day; or that a personal administrator who screens and triages their inbox did not flag it for their attention; or that they did see it, but given the busyness of their day, forgot to action it. Also, the window for recruitment took place amid one of the busiest periods in the school calendar – the weeks leading up to the school Christmas holiday – and so this may well have compounded the situation.

Selecting participants for the Citizens' Panel

Of the 76 expressions of interest received, 54 were from parents/carers (34 had a child with SEN/D; 20 had a child without SEN/D) and 22 were from education professionals. The Citizens' Panel was to be made up of 30 people:

- 8 young people (aged 12-16) with SEN/D
- 4 young people (aged 12-16) without SEN/D
- 8 parents/carers of the young people with SEN/D
- 4 parents/carers of the young people without SEN/D
- 6 education professionals (i.e. teachers, school leaders)

As the Citizens' Panel's had a focus on inclusion, young people with SEN/D to young people without SEN/D were overrepresented in the Panel's composition (see above: 8 to 4 or 2 to 1. In the national school population, there are about 7 pupils without SEN/D for each with a SEN/D. The Sortition Foundation was commissioned to support the process of representative sampling and selecting participants for the Citizens' Panel. This ensured that the selection of participants was also made independently of the core project delivery team.

Prior to selection, the young people were stratified according to criteria collected as part of the expression of interest. This was to ensure proportional representation of young people across key characteristics. These were: gender; ethnicity; eligibility for free school meals (FSM). Additional criteria were applied for the young people with SEN/D. These were: type of school attended (e.g. mainstream or special); the level[3] of SEN/D; and type of SEN/D.[4]

It was not possible to represent the full range of SEN/D on the Citizens' Panel. Some types of need were not represented among the expression of interest responses. These were: moderate learning difficulties; severe learning difficulties; profound and multiple learning difficulties; and sensory impairment. Also, no expressions of interest were received from parents/carers of young people who attended a non-mainstream setting (e.g. a special school or alternative provision). The reasons for this were unclear, but are likely to mirror those above explaining the low response rate to the expression of interest. A description of the 12 young people who were selected for the Citizens' Panel can be seen in Table 1.

The education professionals were also stratified before selection according to their role (e.g. classroom teacher; school leader; SEN/D specialist) and the setting in which they worked (e.g. primary or secondary; mainstream or special school). We received expressions of interest from education professionals in a variety of roles and settings. Only four respondents (18%) identified themselves as either a class teacher or a senior leader. The limited number of places for practitioners overall meant that it was not possible to represent the full range of roles and settings on the Citizens' Panel. Of the six education professionals who were selected to take part, three worked in schools, two people who worked for a third sector organisation, and a trainee educational psychologist. All of these participants were female.

An additional condition regarding the selection of participants was added to mitigate the outside chance of a young person and a teacher (or other professional) from the same school being chosen for the Citizens' Panel. This was deemed important, as it could have inhibited young people from talking about their school experience in the presence of someone who worked at their school. Postcode data collected as part of the expression of interest were used to avoid this situation.

3 There are two levels of need in the English system. The majority of children and young people with SEN/D are on SEN/D Support, and around a fifth of those with the most complex SEN/D have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

4 Parents/carers of young people with SEN/D were asked to identify up to four types of need from the following: autistic spectrum disorder; speech, language and communications need; social, emotional and mental health; moderate learning difficulty; specific learning difficulty; severe learning difficulty; profound and multiple learning difficulties; physical disability; hearing impairment; visual impairment; multi-sensory impairment; other difficulty/disability. These terms are used by the Department for Education, and reflect medical diagnostic categories. The authors recognise that many/most autistic people prefer neurodivergence-affirming language (i.e. 'autistic person' rather than 'person with autism').

Table 1. Young people selected for the Citizens' Panel

Sex	Type of SEN/D	Level of SEN/D	School attended	Ethnicity	FSM eligible
Female	SEMH; PD; Other	SEN/D support	Mainstream	White British/Irish	No
Female	ASD; SEMH; SPLD	EHCP	Mainstream	White British/Irish	Yes
Female	ASD; SEMH; Other	Not recorded	Mainstream	White British/Irish	No
Male	ASD; SLCN; SPLD	EHCP	Mainstream	Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	No
Male	ASD; SLCN; MSI	EHCP	Mainstream	White British/Irish	Yes
Male	Other	SEN/D support	Mainstream	White British/Irish	No
*Male	PD	EHCP	Unit attached to mainstream school	White British/Irish	No
*Male	ASD; SLCN; SPLD	EHCP	Unit attached to mainstream school	White British/Irish	Yes
Female	N/A	N/A	Mainstream	White British/Irish	No
Female	N/A	N/A	Mainstream	Black/African/ Caribbean/Black British	No
Male	N/A	N/A	Mainstream	White British/Irish	No
†Male	N/A	N/A	Mainstream	White Other	Yes

ASD Autistic spectrum disorder
MSI Multi-sensory impairment
PD Physical disability
SEMH Social, emotional and mental health
SLCN Speech, language and communications need
SPLD Specific learning difficulty
Other Other difficulty/disability

* Withdrew and did not take part in the Citizens' Panel
† Withdrew and replaced at short notice by sibling of one of the young people with SEN/D

In the weeks prior to the first Citizens' Panel event, seven participants withdrew from the project. Given the late stage at which this occurred, the project team took a necessarily pragmatic approach to identifying and replacing participants. Two young people with SEN/D (both of whom attended a unit attached to mainstream school), and by extension their parents/carers, withdrew in the week leading up to the first preparatory event. In one case, the family found that they could no longer attend the Citizens' Panel dates due to ill health or other commitments. In the other case, the parent/carer explained that their child felt that the experience of taking part in an unfamiliar process with strangers would be too anxiety-inducing, and so opted to withdraw.

With too little time to onboard two more young people with SEN/D, the project team chose not to replace these young people, but were able to recruit at short notice two parents/carers of children with SLCN and MSI; ASD, SEMH and moderate learning difficulties) who were interested in joining the panel without their child. A parent/carer and their child who did not have SEN/D also withdrew, and were replaced like-for-like. An education professional who withdrew was replaced with a parent/carer of a child without SEN/D. With two places unfilled, the final Citizen Panel had 28 participants:

- 6 young people with SEN/D
- 4 young people without SEN/D
- 13 parents/carers (11 females; 2 males)
- 5 education professionals

All participants attended both Citizen Panel events, with the exception of one young person without SEN/D who only attended the second in-person event.

Panel diversity

Given the limitations and challenges associated with the recruitment process for this particular project, the overall aim of the selection procedure was to be representative (in terms of the prior criteria selected; see above). However, given the recruitment process and the limited number of people who registered to take part, not all criteria were met. The composition of the Citizens' Panel was therefore diverse, rather than representative.

It is worth noting that, while acceptable in the context of this pilot, the principle of a deliberative process is to select a representative sample of citizens. In a public dialogue on school inclusion, this should extend to a wider range of professional roles in education, and selection on the basis of views about inclusion (i.e. for, against and undecided). In the case of this pilot, it is highly likely that there was self-selection bias: those signing up for the Citizens' Panel had a greater-than-average interest in inclusion, and were very likely to be in favour of it.

MIND MAP

Planning and designing the Citizens' Panel

Onboarding participants

Following the selection of participants, the project entered the onboarding phase. This involved providing participants with information about the Citizens' Panel. Onboarding participants for public dialogue events typically follows a standardised approach, where all participants receive the same information in the same way. All participants, except the young people with SEN/D, received information outlining the purpose and agenda for the Citizens' Panel events, including logistical details (venue, times, etc).

The young people with SEN/D and their parents/carers received the same instructions; however, the nature of the young people's needs meant that they required additional information, and so a more detailed approach to on-boarding these families was required.

The onboarding process for young people with SEN/D was more incremental and informal than is usually the case in a public dialogue event. It was also more personalised, interactive, and highly responsive, involving a greater number of contacts. Acting as the single point of contact, a member of the team with extensive experience of working with young people with SEN/D and their families scheduled introductory video calls to meet with and get to know these participants. Onboarding incorporated ongoing communications by text, which meant that parents/carers of the young people with SEN/D could ask and receive answers to questions about the Citizens' Panel.

The process of onboarding the young people with SEN/D had a dual function in terms of enabling the team to begin building a picture of their capabilities and preferences. This information was critical to informing the strengths-based approach to designing the Citizens' Panel events and activities.

Preliminary sessions to inform design

Two preliminary sessions were convened in order to elicit more information from the young people with SEN/D on how to design an inclusive Citizens' Panel and maximise their participation, in line with our strengths-based approach. Both sessions lasted three hours and were hosted via Zoom on a Saturday morning. The sessions had a deliberately friendly and informal feel in order to maximise accessibility and reduce anxiety. Parents/carers also attended and provided support where required.

The session activities were designed to test the accessibility principles that were designed to give the young people a taster experience of the first Citizens' Panel session. They practised using an online voting app called Menti to anonymously respond to questions, and listen to and critique a short presentation from an expert.

The first preliminary session was held in February 2023, four weeks before the first Citizens' Panel event. The purpose of this session was to:

- Build relationships and trust between the participants and the project delivery team (e.g. via ice-breaker activities).
- Provide a basic orientation to the RSA's Rethinking Public Dialogue project, and the Citizens' Panel process and their role in it.
- Familiarise participants with the key concepts to be explored in the Citizens' Panel.
- Obtain information on how to ensure that young people with SEN/D can fully participate in and engage with the Citizens' Panel activities.
- To discuss and refine the Citizens' Panel calling question regarding school inclusion.

The second preliminary session was held two weeks after the first session, and two weeks before the first Citizens' Panel event.
The purpose of this session was to:

- Continue the relationship building and trust building.
- Provide a detailed orientation to the Citizens' Panel, including going through the draft agenda and taking part in test activities, such as engaging with an expert talk.
- Obtain information about the young people's experiences of and views about school, and consider how these could be integrated into the Citizens' Panel delivery plan.
- Canvas ideas on content and topics to cover regarding school inclusion.
- Obtain detailed information about what was needed to ensure the young people could access, and feel comfortable at, the face-to-face Citizens' Panel event. These included: adjustments to the physical environment; food preferences for lunch; the pacing of the day; methods of communication and participation (e.g. materials); and what other Citizens' Panel participants needed to know in order to contribute to a successful and inclusive event (e.g. agreeing some 'golden rules' for participation).
- Answering questions and providing clarity on what the Citizens' Panel involved and the roles and expectations of the various participants, including the delivery team.

A key principle and purpose of the preliminary sessions, and part of the trust building, was to ensure that the ideas and views of young people with SEN/D were fed forwards into, and were explicitly evident in, the Citizens' Panel design. The aim was to demonstrate that the project team had listened and responded to the young people's ideas about: (i) which topics and issues the Citizens' Panel should prioritise; and (ii) how the day and the environment should be structured and adapted to their needs and requirements, thereby ensuring that the events were authentically inclusive.

The Citizens' Panel on school inclusion

While the project proposal envisaged four Citizens' Panel sessions, the eventual number and format of the events for this pilot were determined by the available budget. The Citizens' Panel consisted of two events. The first was held online to reduce hosting costs (venue hire, etc), and the second was held in-person. One event to bring everybody together in one place was considered important to generating a sense of togetherness and action.

The purpose of the first event was to contextualise the calling question, to understand the problem, to hear from experts and discuss ideas with them in small, facilitated groups, and to set out the scope of work that the panellists had been invited to undertake. The second session focused on working towards and making decisions about producing practical recommendations, and imagining and presenting a vision for more inclusive schools.

The first Citizens' Panel event was held on a Saturday. It was a 4.5 hour session, hosted via Zoom. The foundational objective of this event was to create the psychologically safe conditions for the different groups of participants, which are needed to run a good public dialogue. Participants were arranged into small, carefully chosen groups of five or six participants. Within breakout spaces, they took part in an informal ice-breaker activity and an informal facilitated discussion to share their lived experience of school and their thoughts about education and inclusion. Two experts (one academic and one professional/trainer) gave a short presentation on a topic that outlined a key debate within/about school inclusion. This was followed by another round of small group discussion, with the experts dropping into the breakout spaces to respond to questions or clarify points from their talk. The event concluded with a full briefing on the second in-person Citizens' Panel event, and an introduction to the calling question: how do we make schools more inclusive for young people with SEN/D?

The second Citizens' Panel event was also held on a Saturday, two weeks after the first event. It was a day-long, in-person event, hosted at a hotel in central Portsmouth. The day was structured around three activities, which were conducted in small, carefully chosen groups of five or six participants, and facilitated by a member of the project delivery team.

The first activity was a broad-based discussion about the purpose of a school. The participants were provided with some possible purposes to stimulate discussion. These were based on a wide range of proposed purposes related to personal and social aims, which were obtained via the preliminary session activities.

Activity 2 asked participants to consider what an inclusive school would be like, and what trade-offs and compromises would be involved in creating it? Each group were given some prompt cards and asked to discuss a few particular aspects of the inclusive school. These were:

- How we do things: what pupils wear; how pupils are grouped; where pupils sit.
- Learning: the curriculum; what everyone learns, and why.
- Relationships and communication: between parents/carers, community and pupils.
- Teaching and support: adapting to pupils' different needs; attitudes; special skills.
- School environment: design of the site/buildings; moving around the school site.
- Bullying, rules and behaviour: dealing with bullying; following rules; rule flexibility.
- Outside relationships: the school as part of the community; support from parents/carers; learning from other schools.

The final activity of the day involved building on and prioritising the ideas about the purpose of a school (activity 1) and the compromises identified from activity 2, in order to create and capture the Panel's vision of the inclusive school.

Figure 1 (below) summarises the methods and procedures outlined above in terms of the steps taken to design and deliver the Citizens' Panel on school inclusion.

Figure 1. Steps to design and deliver the Citizens' Panel on school inclusion

Step 1: Choose location
- Portsmouth and wider Hampshire area
- ERIC local educational network helped recruitment
- Working in single area made in person working more feasible

Step 2: Advertise and recruit
- 2 local authorities sent online information pack to head teachers
- Head teachers sent pack to Parents and educational professionals
- Local advocacy groups sent information to parents
- 76 responses; 34 parents of young people with SEN/ disability (SEN/D); 20 parents of young people without SEN/D; 27 educational professionals

Step 3: Select participants
- Sortition Foundation selected 30 participants
- For young people this took account of national incidence of SEN/D types, level of support, gender, ethnicity and free school meal eligibility and school type
- 7 participants dropped out with 5 of these being replaced; 28 took part

Step 4: Meet young people
- Initial phone and video calls with parents and young people with SEN/D
- Gathered information about young peoples' interests' strengths, preferences and needs
- Provided information about project and identified technical needs (wifi etc.)
- Build familiarity and trust; answered questions and gained informed consent
- Set up ongoing dialogue via text/email

Step 5: Online preparation – workshop 1
- 6 young people with SEN/D, ages 12-16
- Parents nearby to support as needed
- Create safe, respectful environment
- Build relationships of trust and mutual understanding
- Explore citizen panel activities through activities (Quizzes, breakout groups)
- Listened to young peoples' feedback/evaluations

Step 6: Online preparation, workshop 2
- Further explored young peoples' perspectives on citizen panel topic
- Built confidence/skills by focusing on parts of the citizen panel process
- Made decisions about the citizen panel event design
- Invited young people to choose how to contribute to citizen panel
- Ensure young people felt ready to take part

Step 7: Citizen Panel online event
- 28 participants: 6 young people with SEN/D, 4 young people without SEN/D, 13 parents, 5 educational professionals
- Got to know how citizen panel process works
- Explored ideas from online workshops in small groups with young people and adults mixed
- Expert presentations and group discussions with experts in groups

Step 8: Citizen panel in person event
- Ensured young people familiar with environment, agenda and facilities
- Explored in groups what schools are for and challenges in school, with areas of disagreement highlighted
- Final discussion across all citizen panel groups

02 A Citizens' Panel on school inclusion: Results and outcomes

Part Two

Introduction

This presentation of Citizens' Panel results summarises the analyses of the 3 activities completed in the Portsmouth in person citizen panel meeting, shown in event 2 in figure 1 below. The results of the first online event about the features of inclusive schools were used in designing the second of the 3 activities in event 2. These covered these broad areas:

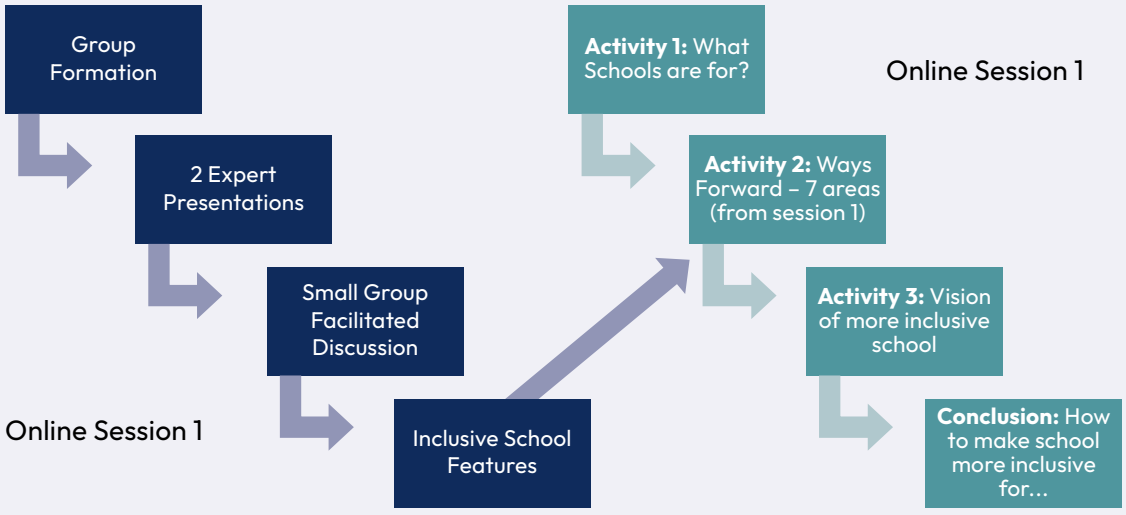
1. Teaching and support
2. Grouping students
3. Relationships and communication
4. Outside relationships and national; context
5. How schools in local area are managed
6. How schools are led and managed

As figure 2 shows the 3 activities were designed as follows:

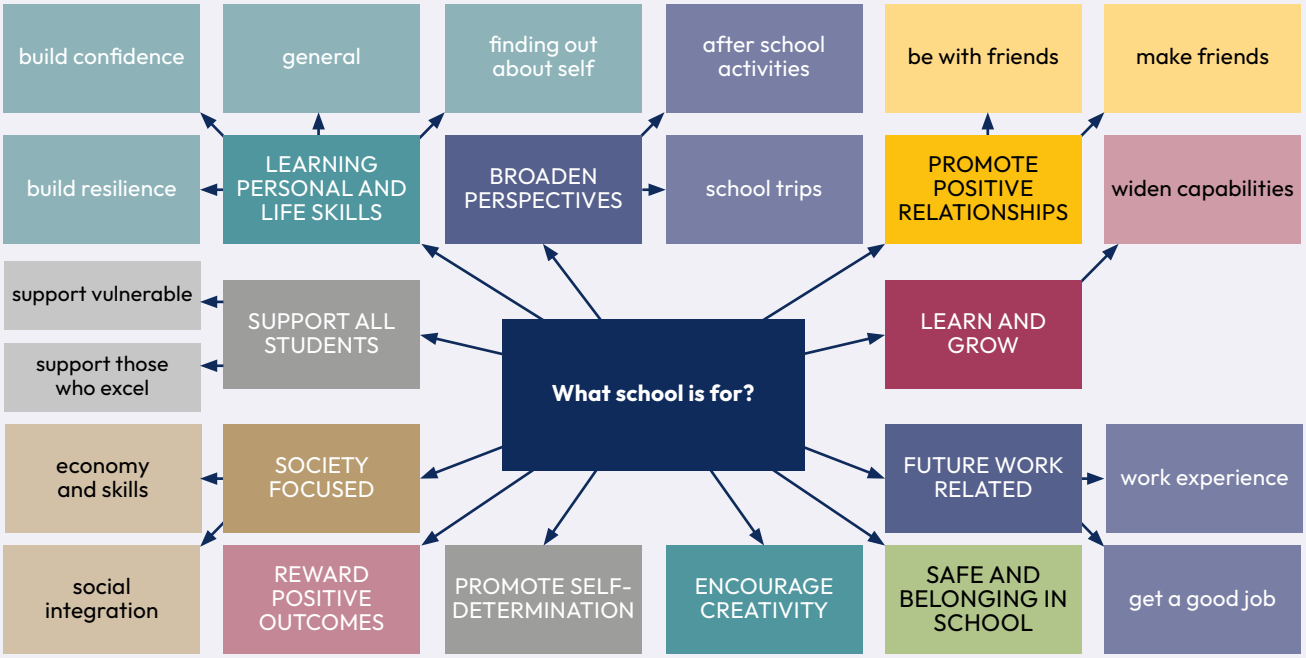
- Activity 1 was to *identify what is school for?*: presented with starting stimulus set of purposes.
- Activity 2 was about *ways forward for several challenges to inclusive schools* (based on 6 broad features listed above): in the form of what the Panel had said before (in event 1) and some possible challenges, to find ways forward.
- Activity 3 was about the *vision of a more inclusive school*: drawing on previous activities and discussions.

The activities were done in groups and the records from the groups were recorded on flip charts and then transcribed for thematic analysis using NVIVO software. The details of these analyses are available from the project team in a Results Appendix document.

Figure 2. Citizen Panel process: phase 2



Activity 1: What school is for?



High level themes in CAPITALS; specific themes in lower case. 11 broad themes with more to less references: starting at 10 o'clock clockwise at LEARNING PERSONAL/LIKE SKILLS (most) to REWARD POSITIVE OUTCOMES, SOCIETY FOCUSED and SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS (least).

Figure 3. Thematic analysis of 'what school is for' activity

There were 11 themes which had more than one transcript excerpt; these are shown in capital letters in figure 1. Seven of these had one or more sub-themes and these are in lower case and in related colours in Figure 3.

The most referenced theme (learning personal and life skills) is highlighted in red in figure 3 and has the most sub-themes. They then go in clockwise from the most to least referenced.

The most referenced themes for what a school is for were about learning personal and life skills, personal relationships and broaden perspectives compared to the other presented ones. These 11 themes cover broadly the same areas as the starting presented stimulus list at the start of the activity, as listed below:

a. To learn skills and knowledge to live a good life.

b. To get good exam results; to get a good job.

c. To learn how to get on with, understand and respect others.

d. To improve understanding and relationships between diverse people.

e. To become a confident and independent person.

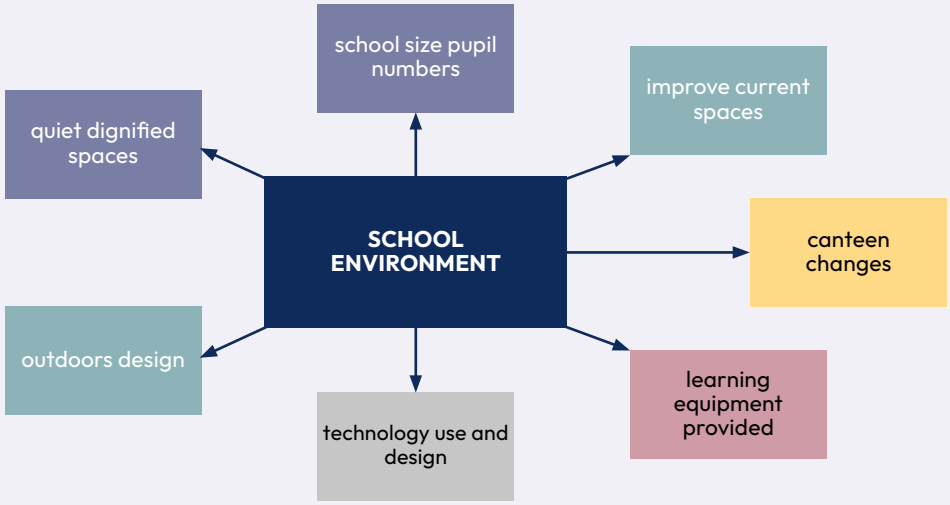
f. To help students become more creative.

But, it is clear that the emphasis of this Citizen Panel was clearly more towards (personal and social skills; purposes c and e in the above list) than to knowledge skills and exam results (purposes a and b above). Society-focused purposes were recognised; both social and economic (with the latter not in starting ideas), but the *social integration* sub-theme did not quite capture the purpose of *improving understanding and relationships between diverse people* (d in the list); which might have been expected given the focus of this Citizen Panel.

Activity 2: Ways forward under 7 areas

Each of the 7 areas were thematically analysed and follow below.

1. School Environment



Sub-themes in lower case.

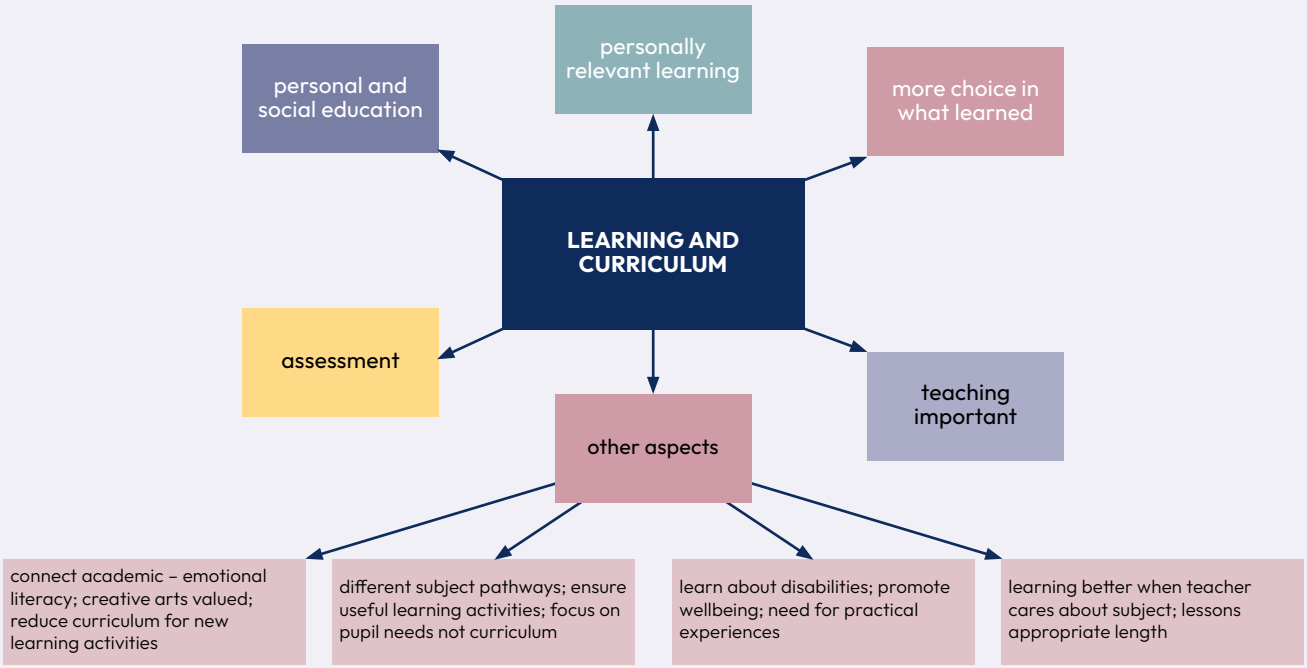
Figure 4. Ways forward in school environment area

In figure 4 the *Improve current spaces* and *quiet dignified spaces* sub-themes were the most frequently referenced themes. The *Improve current spaces* one links with making spaces less busy and easier to move through, which associates with *school size/pupil numbers* sub-theme.

The *quiet dignified spaces sub-theme* reflects the recognition for the need for separate spaces for some, but used in positive and supportive (not stigmatising and punitive) ways, that links to other ways forward discussed below. The sub-theme is highlighted as it related directly to SEN/disability matters.

The *canteen changes, learning equipment provided, technology use and design* and elements of elements of *Improve current spaces* sub-themes all indicate that participants saw the physical design of a school as important for inclusion.

2. Learning – Curriculum



Sub-themes in lower case. Other aspects: individual references only.

Figure 5. Ways forward in learning – curriculum area

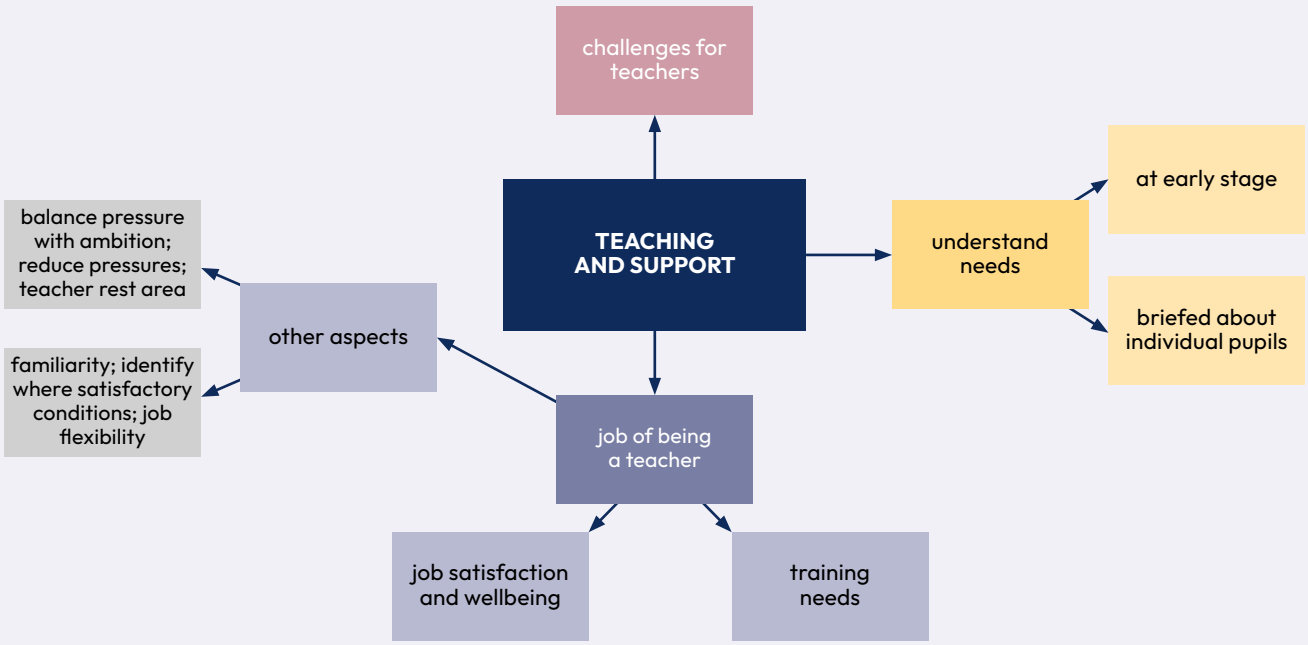
None of the 5 sub-themes about ways forward for the *learning – curriculum* challenges had a high frequency of references compared to sub-themes in the other broad areas in figure 5. However, there were in addition a large number of individual references that did not come under any of these sub-themes.

For this Citizen Panel what is to be learned is about personal relevance and needs, personal, social and life skills and to involve personal choice (3 of the main sub-themes), with a few references to traditional ideas about knowledge and understanding (e.g. one reference to connecting academic - emotional literacy; another to having different subject pathways). This links with the similar emphasis shown in the results of Activity 1 above.

Assessment was also framed as personally relevant and continuous, with national testing seen to take time away from other activities. There was on reference to a SEN/disability aspect in the reference to the need for l*earning about disabilities*.

There were no reference to sharing a common curriculum, despite stimulus materials making such references.

3. Teaching and Support



Sub-themes in lower case. Other aspects: individual references only.

Figure 6. Ways forward in teaching and support area

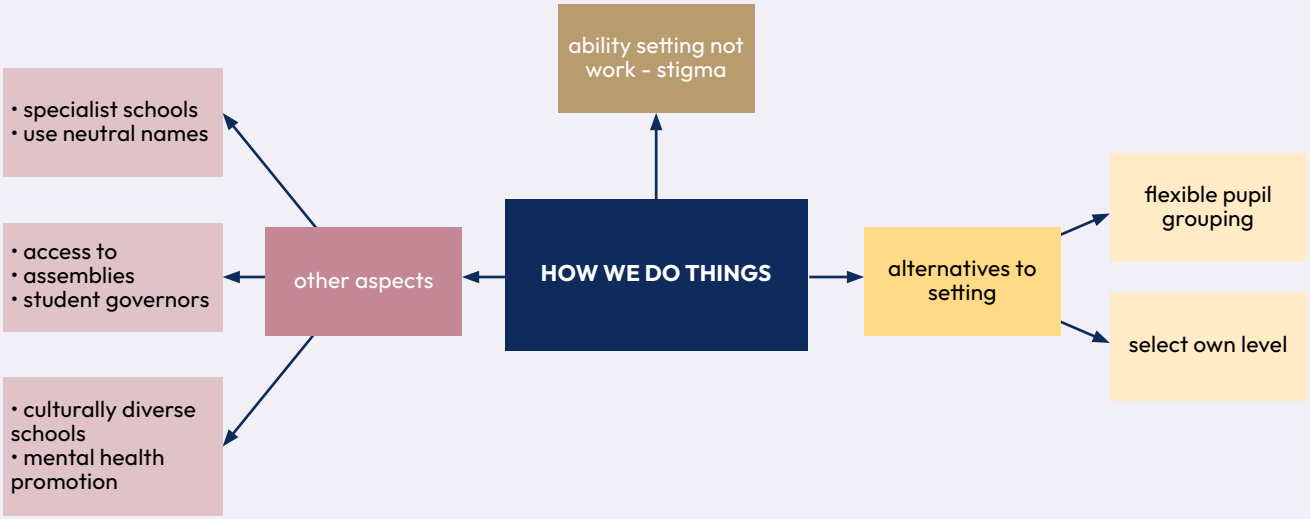
None of the 3 sub-themes in figure 6 had a high frequency of reference, but 2 had lower level themes.

Understanding needs, one of the main themes, which is a SEN/disability aspect, was seen to involve doing so early (versus later and reactively) and having relevant information about needs.

This is related to the *challenges for teachers, another sub-theme*, which was framed as teachers being short of time and training, not as uncaring. This links to references to pressures on teachers.

The other main theme about the *job of being a teacher* involved having their training needs met and the importance of job satisfaction and wellbeing. There are references to having the satisfactory working conditions and job flexibilities.

4. How We Do Things



Sub-themes in lower case. Other aspects: individual references only.

Figure 7. Ways forward in how we do things area

In figure 7 one of the main sub-themes *ability setting did not work* is linked to the other sub-theme alternatives to setting presented as a way of dealing with this issue.

This *ability setting not work* theme was about stigma and poorer quality learning opportunities; the alternatives to setting were about using flexible groupings, allowing pupils with SEN to choose the level of their own learning and to avoid them 'standing out'. There was a recognition that learning can have progressive levels, with the implications that stigma needs to be prevented/managed by trying some alternative arrangements.

Of the other aspects of *how we do things* one was about *specialist schools and use neutral names*. Like the ones mentioned above this has SEN/disability aspects of this theme.

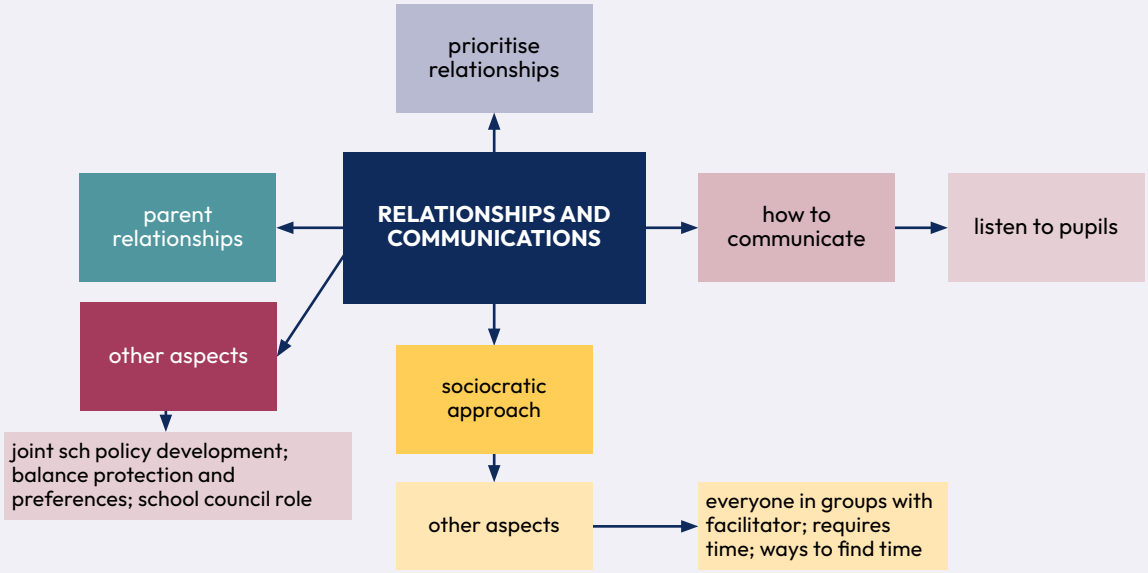
5. Outside Relationships

Sub-themes in lower case. Other aspects: individual references only.

Figure 8. Ways forward in outside relationships area

There was only one sub-theme in figure 8, *school connect to community*, which was about the school connecting with its local community in various ways; acting as a community centre and provider in some ways. The other aspects were about individual references relevant to this general area. None of them related to specific SEN/disability aspects.

6. Relationships and Communications



Sub-themes in lower case. Other aspects: individual references only.

Figure 9. Ways forward in relationships and communications area

Of the four sub-themes in this area in figure 9, 2 had 2 sub-themes (how communicate and sociocratic approach) and the other 2 did not (parent relationship and prioritise relationships). The centrality of relationship comes through in all the themes and other aspects in this area, even though none had a high frequency of reference. The relationships between learners, teachers and parents involved:

- Listening to others, disagreeing respectfully, facilitated small groups, using golden rules were the communication approaches mentioned.
- Some reference is also made to joint policy development and school council roles.

But, none of them related to specific SEN/disability aspects.

7. Rules, Bullying and Behaviour

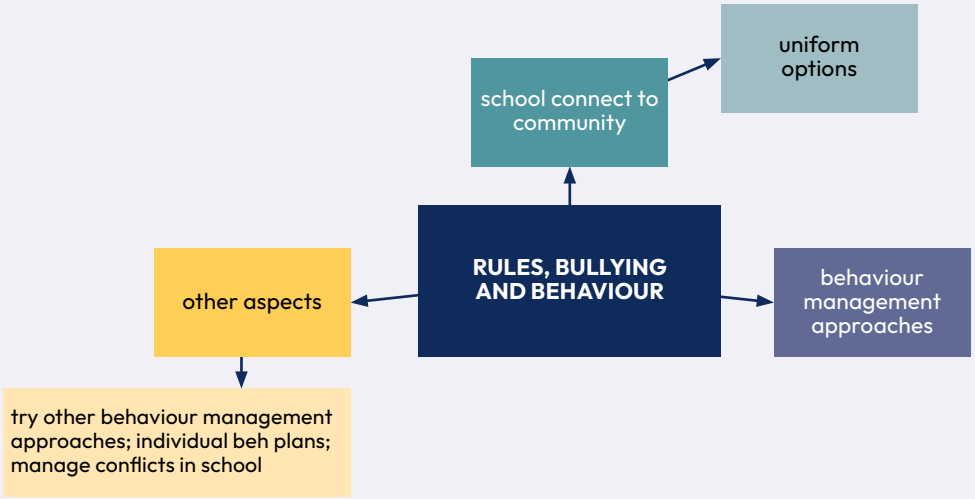
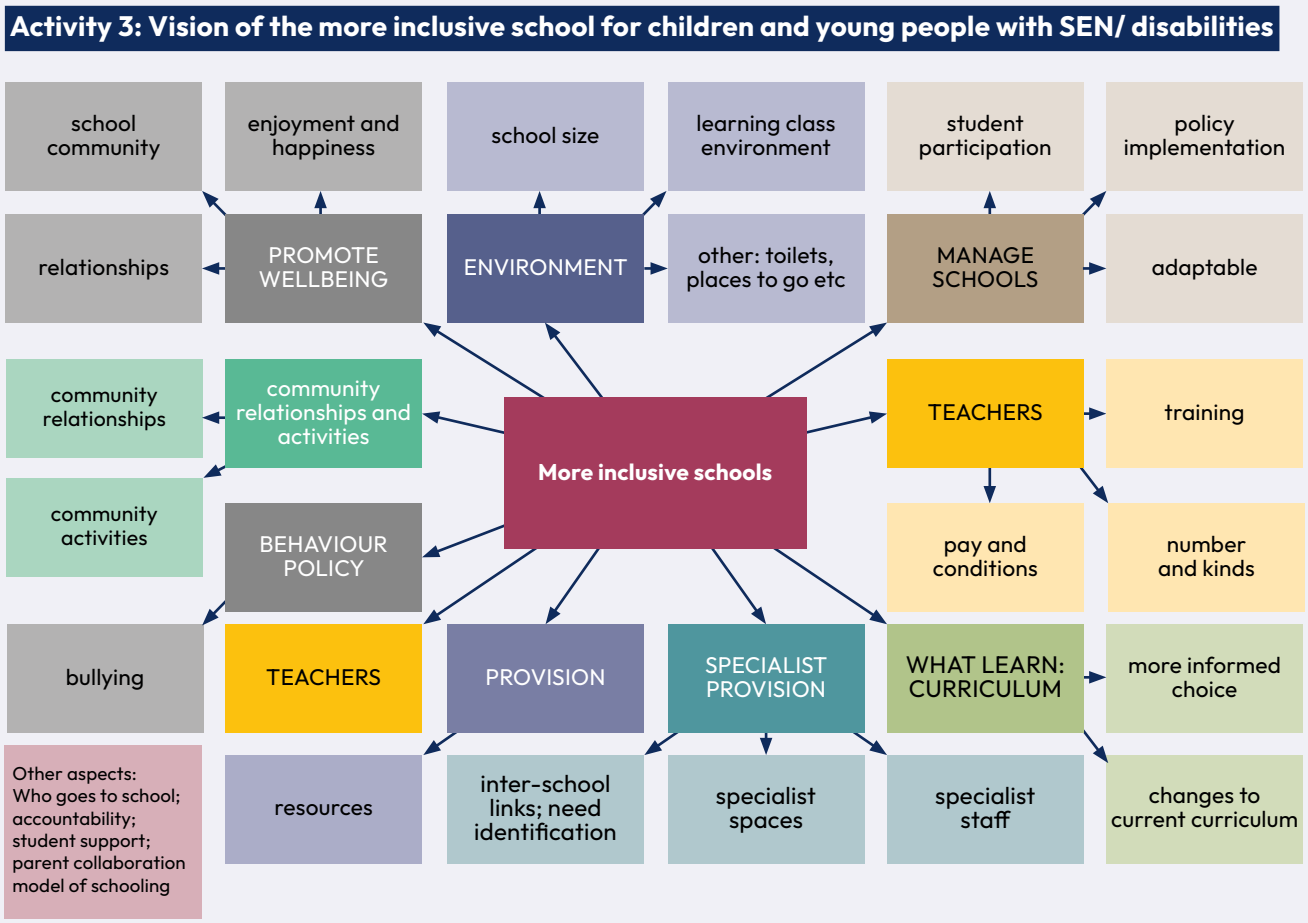


Figure 10. Ways forward in rules, bullying and behaviour area

This final area, in figure 10, had one theme (pupils have more independence) with a sub-theme, and another with just the theme: behaviour management approaches. There were several individual references under other aspects. Both these sub-themes involve more agency/activity by children and young people; e.g. in uniform options, doing things without permission and co-producing behaviour management approaches. Also evident were conflict management, restorative, innovative and personalised approaches. Again, none of them related to specific SEN/disability aspects



High level themes in CAPITALS; specific themes in lower case. 10 broad themes with more to less references: starting at 10 o'clock clockwise at Promote well being.

Figure 11. Themes making up more inclusive schools

High Level Theme	General Lower-Level Theme	SEN/D Specific Lower-Level Theme	
Promote positive wellbeing	Enjoy and happiness; school community, relationships		General improvements for all
What learn	More informed choice, changes to current curriculum		
Behaviour policy	Bullying		
Community relations and activities	Community relations, community activities		
Teachers	Training, number and kinds, pay and conditions	Training: all staff trained in SEN/D and neurodiversity	General improvements for all
Provision	Resources	Resources: resources labelled but available to all	
Manage school	Student participation, adaptable, policy implementation	Time to build relationships, adapt curriculum, recognise needs	Some features specific to SEN/D
Teaching		Use communication system, eg. PECS, social stories	
Environment	School size, learning class environment, toilet, places to go	easy accessibility, ramps, lifts	
Specialist provision		Specialist staff, specialist spaces, inter-school links; need identification	Specific to SEN/D

Figure 12. Relationship between general and SEN/D specific themes and sub-themes

In figures 11 and 12, only 1 of the 10 main themes for a more inclusive school refers to specialist provision for children and young people with SEN/disabilities (specialist provision) and this refers to specialist staff, specialist spaces, inter-school links and needs identification.

The other 9 themes are of general relevance to school improvement, but as figure 12 shows 5 of them have some reference to specialist SEN/disability relevant features:

- **Teachers** – training: all staff trained in SEN/D and neurodiversity.
- **Provision** – resources: resources labelled but available to all.
- **Manage school** – time to build relationships, adapt curriculum and recognise needs.
- **Teaching** – use communication system, e.g. PECS, social stories.
- **Environment** – easy accessibility, ramps, lifts.

Comparison of themes across activities

Activity 1 and 3: comparison of what schools for themes with more inclusive schools themes.

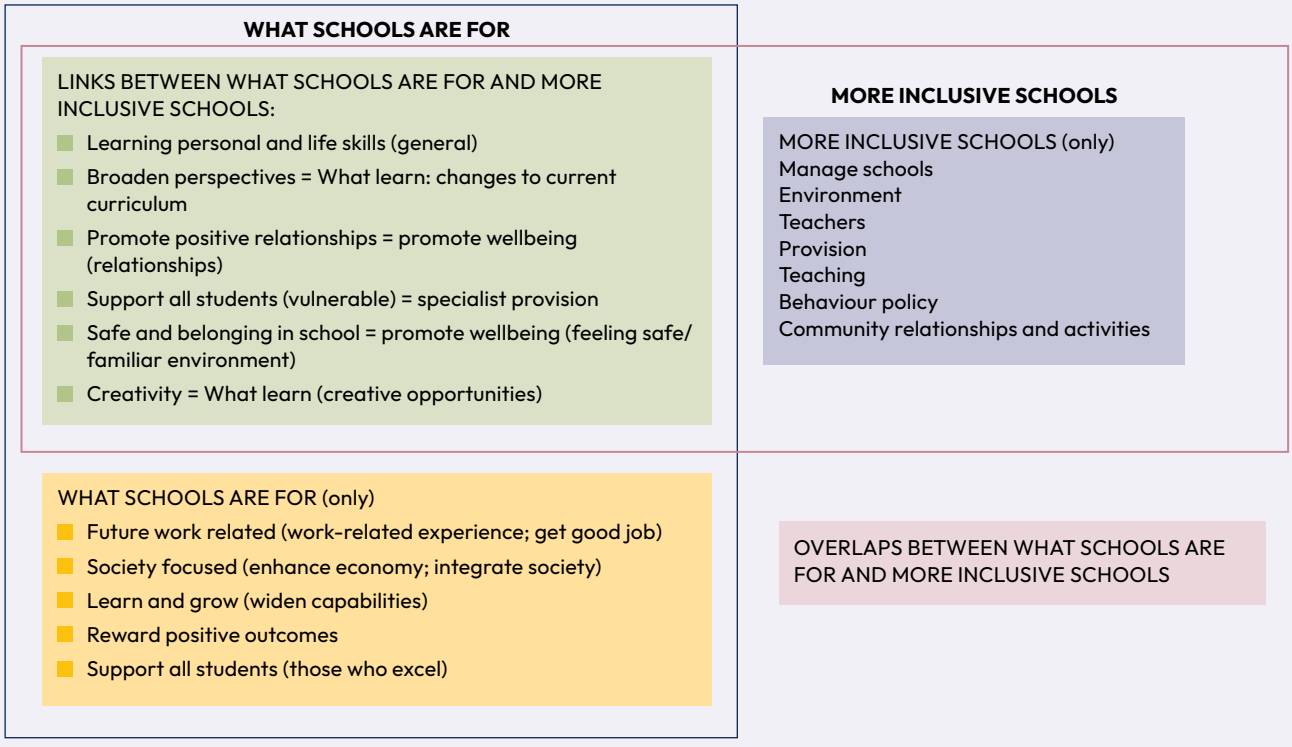


Figure 13. Links between themes from Activities 1 and 3

Analysis showed clear connections, in figure 13, between *more inclusive schools* and *what schools are for* in 6 areas, covering the most referenced school purpose themes (green box in figure 13). These are about personal & life skills, relationships, broadening perspectives, positive relationships, being safe and belonging, opportunities for creativity and support for vulnerable.

School purposes that were not connected to *more inclusive schools* (yellow box) in 4 areas covering work, societal, learn/grow and support those who excel purposes.

There were 7 of the *more inclusive schools* themes that were not linked to *what schools are for* themes (blue box in figure 13). These were more about the means / methods relevant to more inclusive schools than to purposes/ends of more inclusive schools. These were about managing schools, the school environment, teachers, provision, teaching and behaviour policy.

Figure 14. Activity 2 and Activity 3: comparison more inclusive school with ways forward for several challenges to inclusive schools

Activity 3 themes *more inclusive school*	**Activity 2 sub-themes** *ways forward for several challenges to inclusive schools*
Promote positive well being	Prioritise relationships; how communicate; parent relationships; sociocratic approach
↕	Personal and social education
What learn	More choice in what learned; personally relevant learning
Environment	School size, pupil numbers; improve current spaces, canteen changes; outdoors design;
Specialist provision	Quiet dignified spaces; learn about disabilities; understanding needs; use neutral names, specialist schools
↕	Ability setting not work, stigma; alternatives to setting
Teaching	Teaching important; assessment
Teachers	Challenges for teachers; job of being teacher
Provision	Learning equipment provided; Technology use and design
Behaviour policy	Behaviour management approaches
↕	Pupils more independence
Management	
Community relationships & activities	School connect to community; use community spaces

The table above (figure 14) shows strong links between the sub-themes from the Activity 2 about addressing challenges to inclusive schools activity and the more inclusive schools themes (Activity 3).

Some of the Activity 2 sub-themes connected with two of the more inclusive school themes and these are shown by the arrows between these themes in the table. Overall, this shows consistency in the themes between these activity outputs.

03 Process evaluation

Part Three

Methods and procedures

The evaluation described and assessed the effectiveness of the planning, design and delivery of a public dialogue event involving young people with SEN/D. The main purpose was to provide information on how and in what ways approaches to participation in public dialogue activities and processes can be adapted and expanded to effectively include people with SEN/D and maximise their contribution to a deliberative process.

The main source of data informing the evaluation were obtained via semi-structured interviews, and supplemented with data obtained via observations, post-event feedback forms, documentation (e.g. detailed minutes of meetings involving the project team; agendas and materials generated for/during the Citizens' Panel sessions) and researchers' overall impressions obtained from a deep immersion in the project, from start to finish.

At the second Citizens' Panel event, the project delivery team explained the purpose and process of the project evaluation, and invited participants to take part in a voluntary interview to share their insights on the experience of the Citizens' Panel. Interviews were conducted in the three weeks following the second event, and took place via Zoom. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. A transcript of each interview was generated using Zoom's transcription function. These were then coded and analysed, and where necessary, checked against an audio recording of the interview.

The interview schedule, which is presented in Appendix 2, was designed to walk interviewees through the key phases of the project chronologically, with questions and prompts eliciting their views about what worked well, what did not, and what improvements could be made for a future Citizens' Panel. There was a specific emphasis on the role, effectiveness and impact of the accessibility principles; that is, the design, provisions and adjustments put in place to maximise the inclusion, engagement and participation of young people with SEN/D. These included: pacing; clarity; the usefulness of supporting materials; and the extent to which participants had opportunities to contribute. Interviewees were also invited to sum up their view on the extent to which the pilot achieved its principal purpose – testing innovative ways for young people with SEN/D to be fully included and participate in public dialogue – and more broadly, on the overall effectiveness and value of the Citizens' Panel as a model for exploring and discussing important issues in society.

Interviews were conducted with 19 people who were involved with the project, either as a member of the Citizens' Panel or a member of the project delivery team. Table 2 shows the breakdown of interviewees by group.

Table 2. Citizens' Panel project evaluation interviewees

Young people with SEN/D	1
Young people without SEN/D	1
Parents/carers of children with SEN/D	4
Parents/carers of children without SEN/D	4
Education professionals	4
Members of the project delivery team	5
Total participants	**19**

Findings

The presentation of findings is arranged in terms of four themes. The first theme concerns the essential need to differentiate the processes and approaches to public dialogue in non-standard ways, so that young people with SEN/D are demonstrably and qualitatively included. The second theme addresses the role and impact of a particular design feature of the Citizens' Panel: the accessibility principles that underpin a meaningfully inclusive experience of public dialogue for young people with SEN/D. The third theme covers wider aspects of organising a public dialogue for and with young people with SEN/D, and the way in which the calling question on school inclusion provided a check and balance on the inclusiveness of the processes and procedures of the Citizens' Panel itself. And the fourth theme summarises participants' views regarding the experience and impact of taking part in the Citizens' Panel, and the extent to which the project was successful in achieving its principal aim of meaningfully including young people with SEN/D in a public dialogue.

Theme 1. Differentiation and design

The initial phases of the project focussed exclusively on understanding the needs and requirements of the young people with SEN/D, and factoring this information into the design of the Citizens' Panel. Much was revealed through this stage about the need to, and impact of, differentiating routine public dialogue processes and approaches for young people with SEN/D, in order to maximise the participation and contribution to proceedings.

Differentiated onboarding

A clear and early success of the pilot was the differentiated onboarding process. The purpose was to bring the young people with SEN/D, some of whom had mental health difficulties and/or a negative experience of school, into an unfamiliar process in a gentle and supportive way.

"If you're bringing them into this kind of process, then you've got to start creating the right environment and the right tone and that feeling of being listened to and being safe."
Member of project delivery team

The parents/carers of the young people with SEN/D commented on the thoroughness and value of the individualised approach to onboarding, which was central to building trust and confidence, and to providing timely information about taking part in the Citizens' Panel. They also remarked that having a single point of contact was not only highly practical, given the busyness of their lives, but this also helped to personalise and make personable both the project and the unfamiliar process of a public dialogue.

"The communication from (member of project delivery team) was great, and they were really lovely, really friendly, really accommodating throughout. (They were) very careful to make sure that (young person) was happy and comfortable, and everything worked for them."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

"We had a really brief FaceTime call with (member of project delivery team) a few days before the very first (preliminary session). It was really nice to just break the ice... I think it's just a comforting thing to know that there's someone (young person) had spoken to that was friendly."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

Anticipating that onboarding the SEN/D families would require more time than the onboarding of the non- SEN/D families and the education professionals, the team initiated the differentiated process several weeks before the onboarding of the other participants.

While this ensured that the overall onboarding phase would be concluded at the same time (two weeks from the first Citizens' Panel event), from other participants' perspective, it meant that there was a longer than gap than is perhaps usual in public dialogue events between being notified of their selection and onboarding. This, though, was accepted and understood as a feature of the trial.

Preliminary design sessions

The differentiated onboarding process set up and segued into the preliminary design sessions, which continued the rapport building in a small group environment. This phase of the project – delivered in two three-hour sessions via Zoom – was the principal means through which the team obtained detailed information about the needs of the young people with SEN/D and their experiences of school. Both sets of information were crucial to informing the design of the Citizens' Panel, in terms of its content and delivery.

While there are trade-offs involved in holding events online vs. in-person, there was a sense that the choice to hold the preliminary sessions on Zoom was consistent with the graded approach to familiarising the young people with the form and format of a public dialogue.

"I think online worked really well... You're (young people with SEN/D) in your own home, with all of your own things around. You don't need to go anywhere. It's not too long. You don't have to be around new people and new places with new sights and smells."
Member of project delivery team

The feedback from the parents/carers of the young people with SEN/D, who were also present, reported that the preliminary sessions were enjoyable, informative, accessible, and appropriate overall in terms of length and pace. The sessions were another essential step in building the relationship and trust between the team and participants, and on which the success of the Citizens' Panel depended.

"By the end of those two sessions I think the relationships were really there (and) we'd learned a huge amount. I think (the young people's) confidence was up. I think the principle of doing the preliminary sessions was great, and just worked so well. No way could we have just gone into a Citizens panel without that groundwork being laid."
Member of project delivery team

Theme 2. Accessibility

An authentic and meaningfully inclusive Citizens' Panel must be structured around core principles of accessibility that are attuned to the requirements of young people with SEN/D. This involved finding the appropriate balance in terms of pace, clarity and engagingness of the coverage and its presentation, so that all participants could access, contribute to, and importantly, enjoy the process. The trade-offs made in terms of the design and delivery of the events and activities resulted in different groups of participants having slightly different experiences of the Citizens' Panel.

Pace

While most participants reported that the pace of the Citizens' Panel events acceptable, some participants with and without additional needs found it a little slow and the event overall too long, particularly the one delivered online. One potential reason for this was the number and frequency of scheduled breaks, which were added to the agenda to manage screentime and concentration.

"It was just difficult, especially after a while of (young person) sitting there. They just lost focus... It's a lot for children with special educational needs. It's not too bad if you're interacting with other people, but (young person) wasn't really feeling like it and decided not to have their camera on."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

Again, the online format seemed to affect experiences of working in the breakout space activities. A few participants reported that conversations felt 'quiet' or 'awkward'. It was suggested that allocating more time at the beginning of the events for 'getting to know you' activities, before starting the main activities could have facilitated more natural and freer flowing conversations.

Overall, the pace of the in-person Citizens' Panel event was well received. However, several participants interviewed for the evaluation felt that the time allocated to the final plenary activity, in which groups fed back their ideas to the room, was insufficient.

"It was a shame not to hear from more of the groups on what we were thinking and sharing, especially because we hadn't had that interactivity at other points. Obviously what people were saying (in the plenary session) prompted other questions or conversations... and there just wasn't the time for that."
Education professional

Clarity

There was strong agreement across the participants that the overall content presented at the Citizens' Panel events was clear and comprehensible. The deliberate use of simplified language, avoiding jargon (and explaining it when used) and regular checks for understanding ensured that everyone could keep pace with proceedings.

One feature of the online event in which clarity was an issue, however, was the expert presentations. A university academic and a senior SEN/D professional shared short presentations of their work and insights on designing inclusive schools. While elements of these presentations were highly effective (i.e. the use of visual diagrams to convey complex ideas), the suitability of style and tone were described by some participants as 'very academic' and 'a bit alienating'. Some participants suggested a more discursive approach could have been worked better than the didactic method.

Engagement

Participants interviewed for the evaluation reported that the content covered in the Citizens' Panel was, overall, interesting and engaging. While the materials used to guide participants through activities in a conventional public dialogue tend to be text-based, the opposite was the case in this pilot. PowerPoint slides, for example, featured relatable images and recognisable symbols[5] in alongside or in place of text to make the content more accessible to the young people with SEN/D. While this approach was broadly successful, there were suggestions that the resources that supported the presentations could have been simplified further to help the young people's understanding and used by facilitators to support their participation in conversations.

5 Visual symbols from the Picture Exchange Communication System, which is commonly used in SEN/D settings as an augmentative and alternative communication strategy.

"We found that although we had to watch (a presentation) and then discuss it, there were no actual bullet points put up that we could use to prompt discussion... (young person's) memory just goes... So, although you were expected to say what you thought about certain points, I couldn't remember and they couldn't remember what we'd talked about. It would have been easier if somebody started the conversation or had visual prompts."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

While participants overall preferred the in-person format, the various features to maximise participation and engagement in the online event, received positive attention from those interviewed for the evaluation. There was a sense in the comments that the role and style of the facilitator guiding the small breakout groups was key to the participant experience.

"I liked the interactive polls... I thought that was pretty engaging, and quite an instant way to get results."
Education professional

"I think the breakout rooms were really good... They were quite small as well... and that was good because everyone was sharing in the group. There was equal participation... The facilitators were very skilled in not letting one person dominate, and just following through each point people were making and asking to clarify things."
Education professional

Allowing participants to decide whether they had their camera on or off for the online event was introduced as part of the accessibly arrangements, as insistence on having cameras on could have made some young people more anxious. The data suggest that most young people chose to have their camera off for at least some part of the proceedings. Where this was the case, it seemed to add to the mild sense of disconnection that tends to accompany online events.

"We were one of those who pretty much stayed off camera... (young person) was happier sitting with the camera off and just typing their answers."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

"It was quite long and daunting, and I guess being on computers made it a bit boring... When you're online, there's a lack of emotion to it."
Young person without SEN/D

Theme 3. Organisation

The question of balance that had to be factored into design decisions about the accessibility of the coverage and its presentation had implications for the broader organisation of the Citizens' Panel events. Once again, the task of prioritising an authentically inclusive public dialogue involved trade-offs that affect individuals' experience. The interviews additionally revealed how, despite the high attention to detail paid to planning and preparation, there are often unforeseen logistical issues that can pose threats to the smooth running of a public dialogue.

Group composition

Public dialogue involves a representative cohort of people exploring and discussing an issue in groups, and periodically mixing these groups, so that participants are exposed to a range of different views and experiences of people from diverse backgrounds. The objective is that exposure to the views and experiences informs and enriches the overall debate and the products and outputs.

"Our job is to disrupt... so (participants) do get into conversations that might be a bit difficult for them."
Member of project delivery team

During the preliminary phase, the young people with SEN/D told the project delivery team that working with the same small group of people (which included their parent/carer) throughout the Citizens' Panel would give them the comfort and confidence they needed to actively participate. However, providing this consistency and familiarity for them had the effect of limiting opportunities for mixing up participants in other groups. They too had to work with one another for most of the Citizens' Panel, when they might otherwise have had the chance to interact with some of the younger panellists.

Indeed, some adult participants said that they would have liked more variation in the groupings in order to hear a wider range of perspectives and ideas. Several parents/carers reported that an interest in working with the education professionals, so that they could gain insights from those working in schools. However, there was a general appreciation of why the groups were mostly fixed.

"You could argue whether it would have been more beneficial to mix the groups up so that you have different opinions meeting different opinions, instead of just bumping up against the same opinion. I could have disagreed potentially with the people in my group, but in a different group I could have found others that were on my page, and I don't know whether that'd be a benefit. It's a tough one, because you could argue that the familiarity of being with the people you were with before is good because you relax and you get a bit more confident."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

Interestingly, the education professionals interviewed for the evaluation had reservations about mixing the groups, but for a different reason. They were concerned that they might have been viewed by parents/carers as representatives of, for example, the local authority. They wanted to avoid finding themselves in the unwelcome position of having to justify policies, processes or decisions outside their sphere of influence.

"We're not the lawmakers. We're not the system. We're just working the other side of it. So, yeah, I think that definitely people need to be kept apart."
Education professional

This reticence to engage in the disruptive process of public dialogue perhaps suggests that more could have been done to prepare the education professionals for their role in a public dialogue, as citizens as well as informed practitioners.

For some activities at the in-person event, some young people and their parents/carers worked in separate groups. While the intention was to provide an alternative context in which the quieter young people could express themselves, it had the opposite effect. Although there was a marked decrease in verbal engagement in the young people groups, those with SEN/D still participated using post-it notes and sharing them with their group.

"People were talking a lot when their parents were there. But I thought at the end, when you took the parents away, the young people were basically quiet. They were way more talkative to each other when the parents were there... They didn't want to say anything out loud, they were writing on the post-it notes and sticking them onto paper."
Young person without SEN/D

Detailed planning and preparation

Much of the overall success of the Citizens' Panel could be attributed to the thorough and thoughtful planning that went into designing and carrying out each event, particularly the in-person event.

"What was really important is the level of detailed planning... with the room and the hotel and the post-it notes and the blu-tack... the tea and toilets... People only notice if it's not done properly. So, I think it was just absolutely invaluable."
Member of project delivery team

"The location was fine. I thought the hotel was good. The space was good. It was really nice to have spaces to be able to disappear off to during the breaks. You could pick and choose. There were lots of options. You could be on your own, you could be with others... The food was good, the sweets were great. The kids come away happy that they'd been looked after. So, it just ticked all the practical boxes."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

While careful preparation is essential to any public dialogue, what was striking about this project was how even seemingly minor details played a major part in creating the authentically inclusive environment and conditions for discussion and deliberation. Much of the information the project team obtained via the onboarding and preliminary design phases spoke to the importance of logistics and housekeeping issues to SEN/D families.

For example, finding accessible car parking facilities is frequent challenge, and so providing detailed information about parking at/near the hotel ahead of the in-person was necessary, not merely desirable. Similarly, most of the young people with SEN/D had particular food preferences; certain tastes and textures could be problematic. Therefore, close liaison with the hotel to ensure that their requirements for plainer foods were accommodated as part of the lunchtime menu. There was a good natured, but nonetheless serious, request that a particular brand of tomato ketchup was available.

Despite the project team's careful efforts to ensure all dietary needs were meet, the sweets station kindly provided by the hotel throughout the day (and which was very popular with the younger participants) did not include any halal/vegetarian/vegan options.

"What caught me out was the sweets... In the list of the ingredients was pork gelatine. I thought because I had already specified my dietary preference as Halal, they would be okay and that kind of clouded my judgement."
Parent/carer

Another misstep that emerged in the evaluation phase pertained to the honorarium payments to participants. It transpired that the team's communication regarding when these would be paid was insufficiently clear. Once this was brought to the team's attention, however, it was swiftly resolved and an apology issued.

"I think this is partly why we got the pushback on the issue with the payments, because I don't think (the young people) feel like they're passive recipients. They had to come along to an event and it was work... The process was empowering and when you seek to empower people, that's what you get."
Member of project delivery team

Thankfully, errors and missed details were minimal, and where they occurred did not threaten to capsize the project or irreparably damage the project team's relationship with participants. These incidences, though, reveal how essential it is to guard against complacency. A notable product of organising a public dialogue on the topic of inclusion is that inclusion is a valid lens through which the organisation and operationalisation of the public dialogue can be assessed. The presence and effect of elements that are not inclusive could, therefore, undermine the participant experience, if not the whole endeavour, in ways that are less obvious or have less serious consequences in most other public dialogues.

Theme 4. Reflections

Comments from participants reveal that the overall experience and impact of participating in public dialogue was positive and worthwhile. They valued and derived a lot from the opportunity to learn about and discuss school inclusion with people from different backgrounds. There was broad consensus that the pilot had been successful in achieving its aim of meaningfully including young people with SEN/D in a public dialogue.

A safe space for respectful debate

Participants express consistently positive views about the experience of taking part in the Citizens' Panel. Comments from feedback forms completed at the end of each Citizens' Panel event were echoed in the evaluation interviews, with the consensus emerging that it was a useful and meaningful exercise, and the project overall had been a success.

"We just came away from that day, and just thought that it was really, really good. We all thought it was a really positive good experience."
Parent/carer of young person without SEN/D

"We've really enjoyed the whole process, and it's nice to have a voice,"
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

General comments on the feedback forms spoke to the value of 'hearing about other people's experiences', 'listening to other people's points of view', and in particular 'hearing the voice of young people and their ideas of positive change'. The 'good atmosphere' and the purposeful and collaborative approach to public dialogue deployed in this project created the conditions for participants, especially the young people, to 'feel confident enough to speak up' and 'feel heard' (more on this below). The Citizens' Panel format allowed for an open, respectful and non-judgemental space in which participants 'feel safe to say what I was thinking' and to 'agree to disagree' with one another.

The evaluation interviews allowed for more nuanced views to emerge in relation to the 'active ingredients' of a good public dialogue. Three key elements emerged. Firstly, agreeing and maintaining the terms of engagement in order to allow a range of experiences and views to be shared and, crucially, heard. Framing the process as constructive and respectful, which included outlining the golden rules at the start, was key to creating the optimal conditions for civil and productive discussion, and helping everyone to, as one participant put it, 'feel emotionally safe to contribute honestly'.

Secondly, the activities the participants undertook. These were designed to emphasise compromise and consensus building, in order to produce actionable insights and practical recommendations to improve school inclusion.

"I feel in a group, people will be more respectful of each other's opinion and feelings (and) it gives people room to hear another point of view. (The Citizens' Panel process) could help me to be more understanding and more welcoming, and find compromises or a middle ground."
Parent/carer of young person without SEN/D

The third important element of a good public dialogue was the role of skilled facilitators, whose role also involved maintaining the emotional safety of the small group working space through sensitive mediation.

"You need a good facilitator who was really on it to keep everybody in, draw everybody in and hold some people back."
Education professional

Empathy and insight

As is implicit in the comments above, another strong theme to emerge from the evaluation interviews was the way in which participants developed empathy and insight into the lives of others. At one level, there was a particular value in the Citizens' Panel taking place in a city with a majority White British ethnic culture[6]. A few participants emphasised the value of being able to engage with people from minority groups, and to hear how, for example, their culture or religious beliefs inform their view of the world.

"We had very different opinions on various different things, and could see where the other person was coming from and had more of an understanding... I think that is great on a community level."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

With regard to the specific focus of the Citizens' Panel (SEN/D and inclusion), one parent/carer described obtaining new recognition for and appreciation of how the seemingly small, and perhaps taken for granted, act of contributing to a group discussion can be a 'big thing' for/to a young person with SEN/D.

"Seeing that child in person, I was really impressed... I saw (parent/carer) trying to reassure (them) a lot... I thought (they were) not even going to contribute in the session at all. But (they) got up and did it. Even though it's just the one thing he managed to do, I feel we should sort of reward things like that."
Parent/carer of young person without SEN/D

It is worth mentioning here that some of the education professionals offered what they saw as an intuitive comparison between the Citizens' Panel process and the co-production process in SEN/D. They noticed that in the Citizens' Panel events, there were little or no attempts by parents/carers to speak for young people with SEN/D. They were pleased to see this, given the tendency, as they saw it, of adults to speak on behalf of young people in discussion about their education and provision.

The theme of empathy and insight into the lives of people that participants encountered less frequently in their everyday lives, and the value of learning from them and their experiences and worldview, extended to the young people. In several cases, it transpired that some of the young people involved in the Citizens' Panel attended the same school. The parents/carers of children without SEN/D reported how their children had, as a result of this project, begun to view their peers with SEN/D in a new and positive light.

"(Young person without SEN/D) is at school with (young person with SEN/D), and I don't think they'd have ever spoken to them. But now they've said: '(They're) really funny and really sweet, and I'm going to say, hello if I see them in the corridor now'."
Parent/carer of young person without SEN/D

"One of the (young people with SEN/D) on our table goes to (young person without SEN/D's) school. (They) never recognised (them). I think (the Citizens' Panel) has opened (my child's) eyes to just how other children cope in that school environment."
Parent/carer of young person without SEN/D

6 According to data from the 2021 Census, 84% of Portsmouth residents identify as White British. Interestingly, 25% of the school-aged population are of a non-White British ethnicity.

Impact

Evident in participants' reflections reported above about empathy, insight and understanding is a sense that participating in a deliberative dialogue process resulted in collective and personal learning. The Citizens' Panel was, therefore, broadly successful in terms of delivering an experience consistent with effective public dialogue. A key indicator of whether the project achieved its specific aim of meaningfully including young people with SEN/D in a public dialogue is the extent to which these participants felt empowered and able to contribute to events as equals. The consensus among the people interviewed for the evaluation echoed the broad points captured in the post-event feedback forms, which suggested that the project had been successful in this regard – and not just for the young people with SEN/D.

"You did a good job of giving them a space to be heard, definitely. It was good for them to feel heard, and I was really proud of (young person with SEN/D) to have the courage to feed back to the whole group on what their young group had discussed. That's not an easy thing to do."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

"I've always thought (young person without SEN/D) could be quite shy, but she was really opinionated, and had lots of thoughts, and was not afraid to speak up. As a parent, that was just really brilliant to see."
Parent/carer of young person without SEN/D

Involving the young people with SEN/D in the design of the Citizens' Panel was identified as a key contributor to the sense of ownership and avoiding the perception that they were 'there in a symbolic capacity'; 'they were massively involved in setting the agenda'.

The other main aim of the project was to produce insights and recommendations about how to make schools more inclusive for young people with SEN/D. Participants clearly valued the opportunity to contribute to a process that aimed to change things for young people, but the question about whether the Citizens' Panel will have an impact in schools was consistently raised at each session and event.

The project team were careful to manage expectations on this from the start, but by the end of the process, the slight frustration that some participants expressed about real-world impact was offset by a recognition that they saw the considerable value to be gained from public dialogue. This observation suggests that public dialogue offers a much-needed response to the sense of impotence that citizens can experience in relation to their voice and their role in democratic processes.

"I realise this is not going to affect systemic change... it takes years and years and years for things to emerge anyway. But it felt more meaningful than I thought it might do."
Education professional

"You can go and vote for your local councillor, but you still don't have any direct impact... As a process and as a means for people to be heard and have some input, it's really quite nice. It feels quite positive."
Parent/carer of young person with SEN/D

Summary of key findings

The evaluation of the Citizens' Panel pilot set out to identify the essential ingredients of a successful public dialogue designed with and involving young people with SEN/D. The analysis of data collected for the evaluation can be distilled into four overarching findings. The first key finding talks to the overall success of the pilot. Key findings two and three capture the broad and specific significance of attention to detail and the need for a differentiated approach for public dialogues involving young people with SEN/D. The fourth key finding recognises how these differentiated approaches involve trade-offs that are not typical of public dialogue events, and which can affect the experience of participants who do not have SEN/D.

Key finding 1. A positive and worthwhile experience

There was a broad consensus across everyone involved in the project (panellists and the delivery team) that the Citizens' Panel was successful in achieving its aim of meaningfully including young people with SEN/D in a public dialogue. For panel participants, participating in a deliberative dialogue process was positive and worthwhile experience, and resulted in collective and personal learning. The Citizens' Panel format provided a safe space for respectful and constructive dialogue. Panellists valued the opportunity to talk with, listen to and learn from people that they encountered infrequently in their everyday lives, which led to them developing empathy and obtaining new insights.

Key finding 2. Little things matter a lot

Much of the positive reaction to the Citizens' Panel expressed in Theme 4 is attributable to the meticulous planning and preparation that went into each stage of the process and each event. The phrase 'little things matter a lot' became a mantra among members of the project team. While creating a safe and comfortable environment for people who are new to one another to engage in constructive discussion is an essential part of any public dialogue, it was especially salient in the context of this project for two specific reasons.

Firstly, this pilot involved a level of attention to identifying and addressing housekeeping issues that may be routine or unnecessary for most public dialogue, but were unique and critical to the success of one involving people with SEN/D. A useful illustration of this is the way in which it was important for the young people with SEN/D to see the lunchtime menu for the in-person event in advance. Certain tastes and textures can be problematic for people with sensory needs, and a source of anxiety for those with autism. Knowing that there would be plain food that they could eat was important to ensuring that they were not distracted during the morning by thoughts or feelings about what was available for lunch.

Relatedly, ensuring that there is a nearby quiet space to which the young people with SEN/D could retreat at any point during the day was another strategy to help free up cognitive space and reduce the emotional load that might have otherwise affected their focus and engagement in the work of addressing the calling question. While taking part in deliberative processes can be overwhelming for some people who do not have SEN/D, those with SEN/D are more likely to experience a sense of being overwhelmed a much heightened form, and be less adept at reregulating in a busy space surrounded by strangers.

As described in Theme 3, many of the issues that could have affected the comfort and participation of the young people with SEN/D were identified or anticipated and mitigated in advance, including working with the hotel on the lunchtime menu. However, there were a few that the project team did not foresee or over which they had less control. The second reason why missing these little things mattered in the context of this pilot was because they drew attention to telling aspects of social exclusion, which had the potential to play badly with the purpose of convening the Citizens' Panel: to discuss matters of inclusion. One example from the interview data was how, unbeknownst to the project team, the hotel had laid out jars of sweets for the participants, but (as one could tell from the ingredients cards) there were no halal/vegetarian/vegan options.

Another relevant example, though not drawn from the evaluation data, was instructive in highlighting the things that are less foreseeable or over which a project team has less control. On a reconnaissance visit to the hotel ahead of the in-person event, members of the project team immediately noticed a refuse skip positioned in one of four disabled parking bays directly outside the hotel entrance. While the skip had been removed before the day of the event, the prospect of parents/carers who hold a Blue Badge[7] being greeted with this sight on arriving at an event to discuss how societal institutions include and exclude people with disabilities could have posed a non-trivial threat to the integrity of the Citizens' Panel's work and invited questions about the project team's judgement when selecting a suitable location.

Key finding 3. A differentiated approach

A key feature of the detailed planning and operationalisation of the Citizens' Panel was the differentiated and strengths-based approach to design. The emphasis was on enhancing, and not unsettling or limiting, the participation and contribution of the young people with SEN/D, according to what they said would work best from them. From onboarding to delivery, a clear success of the pilot was the way in which the accessibility and engagement needs of the young people with SEN/D was given the highest priority. This was crucial to making Citizens' Panel fully inclusive, but is somewhat non-standard in a typical public dialogue.

It is important to note that the adjustments and accommodations made to the Citizens' Panel process were successful for the six young people with SEN/D who took part. Young people with SEN/D are not a homogenous group, so this somewhat limits the generalisability of the findings on effective accessibility practices. However, this pilot has emphasised how the design and delivery of each new public dialogue involving young people with SEN/D must be appropriately differentiated and responsive to their individual and collective needs, if it is to be meaningfully and authentically inclusive.

7 A UK parking permit for a person or family member with a disability.

Key finding 4. Trade-offs

While the differentiated approach was essential to the successful delivery of this pilot from the perspective of the young people with SEN/D, the decision to prioritise their needs and preferences in its design were not without consequence for other participants. Some of the organisational decisions bumped up against the more disruptive and unpredictable elements of what makes for a good public dialogue.

In a typical public dialogue, the psychological effect of challenging participants' thinking and rotating discussion groups, so that they are exposed to a range of different views and experiences of people from diverse backgrounds in order to inform and enrich the overall debate, are benign. However, for some young people with SEN/D, the combination of the social anxiety produced from exposure to lots of new people in fairly rapid succession, and the cognitive fatigue exerted by the challenging of preconceptions, can be overwhelming.

Managing and mitigating this was key to maximising the participation and contribution of our younger participants, but it necessitated making trade-offs to the design and delivery, which, though accepted and understood by the other panellists, effected their experience. The two ways in which this was most noticeable was in the pace of the day and the composition of groups.

On reflection, the project team could have prepared these young people for the experience of mixing with others at the in-person event. However, the overall strategy was to be somewhat risk adverse, and to limit the potential for and impact of unintended consequences. Further testing and trialling of differentiated approaches and the trade-offs these might incur is required.

04 Discussion and conclusions

Part Four

Introduction

This project set out to achieve several objectives, which can be broadly arranged into two groups. The first set of objectives relate to designing, piloting, and evaluating the implementation and impact of innovative approaches to including young people with SEN/D in a deliberative public dialogue, designed and delivered around their communication and participation needs. The aim here was to produce new information about how approaches to participation in public dialogue – in this case a Citizens' Panel – needs to be adapted and expanded to effectively include young people with SEN/D for wider sharing with stakeholders. The second objective concerns the subject of the Citizens' Panel at the centre of this project: to provide insight into the extent to which the design of the current school education system in England supports the inclusion of children and young people with SEN/D, and to identify, from their perspectives, what is working well, what is not, and what needs to change in order to make the system to be more inclusive.

These objectives led to two key outcomes: i) to obtain information about how to modify a Citizens' Panel process to enhance the participation of young people with SEN/D; and ii) to generate, via this process, more nuanced, grounded and integrated policy ideas about inclusion in school education than current policy. The final section of this report begins with an assessment of the strengths and limitations of the pilot, before reflecting on the extent to which the key outcomes were achieved these. The implications for further development work and future public dialogue projects are highlighted throughout. This section ends with an explanation on how the pilot outcomes are being communicated locally and nationally.

Strengths and limitations

A clear strength of this pilot was the composition of the project team, and the specific expertise and knowledge relating to sampling, recruiting, planning and delivering public dialogue, inclusion and SEN/D, and working directly with young people with SEN/D and their families. The latter was critical to the overall success of the pilot, and suggests that organisations that commission and/or deliver public dialogue would benefit from practical training and support on how to engage, recruit and onboard people from this constituency in future projects.

The central limitation of the pilot concerned its narrow funding, which put constraints on various elements of its design. The decision, for example, to conduct the majority of events online was a decision driven by reality that hosting events in-person incurred costs relating to venue hire, catering, covering travel, etc. Some of the participants' criticisms of the project, therefore, ought to be viewed in the context of a pragmatic response to careful resource allocation. That said, the learning obtained from using an online delivery format is valuable for informing future projects.

The decision to recruit participants via local networks reflected the fact that the resourcing could not extend to the kind of sampling and recruitment approach typically used in public dialogue projects (i.e. targeted, direct mailing to households). However, the somewhat less formal approach used in this pilot was perhaps more consistent with the context of a trial. The greater emphasis was on innovating methods and procedures in deliberative formats, and less on the processes which ensure representation. In this sense, the project was completed with the 11 month timeframe specified by the funder.

In the context of this pilot, which sought to identify and recruit sufficient numbers of young people with SEN/D, the standard sampling and recruitment approach would likely have taken longer than is typical, and put a time pressure on its delivery.

Another consequence of the sampling strategy used in this pilot is that the group of young people with SEN/D did not include those who attended a special school, alternative provision, or a SEN/D unit attached to a mainstream school. Two participants that attended a unit were selected to take part in the Citizens' Panel, but they withdrew. There was, therefore, some narrowness to this subsample, and so a clear aim for further trialling is the inclusion of young people with SEN/D who are educated outside of mainstream settings.

Finally, the results of Citizens' Panel were based on an analysis of contemporaneous notes made on flipchart paper, which captured the essence of, and key points from, the small group discussions during the in-person event. It is possible that some important aspects of these deliberations, such as points of agreement and dispute, conclusions and decisions, are missing, and therefore, not reflected in the analysis reported in Part 2. However, the notes that were captured were coherent and consistent across the groups and the discussion activities. This suggests that the reader can have a good degree of confidence in the results of the analysis, as the underlying data provide a fair and reliable reflection of the discussions that took place.

A Citizens' Panel process to enhance the participation of young people with SEN/D

The adjustments and accommodations made to the Citizens' Panel process were successful for the six young people with SEN/D who took part in this pilot. The comments from participants, reported in Part 3, attest to the impact of the differentiated approach, in terms of leading to an experience being authentically included in, and meaningfully contributing to, a public dialogue. The adaptations and augmentations to the standardised methods and procedures of public dialogue design and delivery trialled in this pilot are relatively straightforward to operationalise, and can be transferred and applied to other models of public dialogue

This pilot has contributed to learning on both the potential and the limits of inclusive methods and procedures in the public dialogue. Further trialling and piloting of new and modified techniques with different groups of young people, and indeed younger children and adults, with different profiles of need, will broaden the palette of strategies and exemplar approaches on which the public dialogue community can draw. Researchers and experts in public dialogue will need to pay attention to the trade-offs involved in the development of differentiated practices, and the ways in which these affect the experiences and involvement of all participants in deliberative processes.

More nuanced, grounded and integrated policy ideas about inclusion

Policy significance of modified Citizens' Panel results

The qualitative thematic analyses of the Citizens' Panel deliberations and positions illustrated the panel participants' perspectives in broad terms. Though there were no final questionnaires in the phase 2 Citizens' Panel to assess the balance of participants' beliefs and attitudes, this analysis had points of reference to gauge the general directions of participants' positions. This was shown in the comparison between the themes arising from the what school is for activity and the final *vision of more inclusive school activity*. This showed that the more inclusive school themes could be broadly separated into those which were about school purposes and others that were more about how to move towards more inclusive schools for children and young people with SEN/disabilities.

This indicates perspectives that focus on the interplay between means and ends, and not just some idealised purposes. This analysis also revealed that there were some school purposes which did not connect with ideas about more inclusive schools. These were the less frequently referenced school purposes about the social and economic aims of schools, support for those who excel and about widening capabilities. It is difficult to draw confident conclusions about this particular group of volunteer participants from this part of the analysis. But it raises questions about disability inclusive schools in connection with basic questions about the personal and social purposes of schools, which need further examination.

Promote positive wellbeing	General improvements for all
What learn: Curriculum	
Behaviour policy	
Community relations and activities	
Teachers – training: all staff trained in SEN/D and neurodiversity	General improvements for all – some features specific to SEN/D
Provision – resources: resources labelled but available to all	
Manage school – time to build relationships, adapt curriculum, recognise needs	
Teaching – use communication system, eg. PECS, social stories	
Environment – easy accessibility, ramps, lifts	
Specialist provision	

Figure 15. Continuum of SEN/Disability elements in inclusive schools

One of the main insights from the thematic analysis of this Citizens' Panel's perspectives on how to make school more inclusive for children and young people with SEN/disabilities was that almost all the themes were about general school changes. Promoting wellbeing, changes to the school environment and its management were for example, the most referenced. However, some of the general changes also involved some specific SEN/disabilities aspects, e.g. SEN/disability training as part of general professional training, as shown in Figure 15. Only one of the themes was SEN/disability specific. This can be seen as a continuum of SEN/disability elements in the various dimensions of the vision of inclusive schools.

This way of thinking about disability inclusive schools reflects quite well developed ideas about the purposes of more inclusive schooling and how these purposes can be realised for all, that are assumed to benefit those with SEN/disabilities too. This integration of SEN/disability into the inclusive school dimensions differs from some well-known current ideas about inclusion. This concept of a SEN/disability continuum is unlike that of the historic but still influential *continuum of provision*, which is about the placement of a child with SEN/disability at various degrees of separation from general mainstream classes. It is also unlike the ideas about inclusive schooling in the widely circulated Inclusion Index (CSIE, 2010), which are about increasing participation in the school culture, curriculum and policies. It is a framework that has no place for a SEN/disability labelled element or dimension as emerged in the Citizens' Panel themes. In this respect the Citizens' Panel themes reflect what Cigman (2007) called *moderate inclusion* by contrast to *universal inclusion*, which assumes that any separation, differentiation or specialisation is stigmatising and devaluing (as in the ideas represented in the Inclusion Index).

In recognising most specialist elements in general provision and some specialist provision, these Citizens' Panel ideas also recognised that these elements needed to be presented in a sensitive and dignified ways, labels to be used in a neutral ways and separate settings in inclusive schools open to all. However, there were a few references in the Citizens' Panel transcripts to a positive role for specialist SEN/disability special schools, but not enough to form a theme. That this important topic was not examined further might be due to time limitations in the Citizens' Panel process and/or it being overlooked during the facilitation process.

This careful approach to specialist provision in the Citizens' Panel perspectives is represented in Figure 15, as one way to summarise the key ideas about more inclusive schools for SEN/disability. The 3 blue boxes – small scale and humane, adaptable and innovative, person-centre and co-productive - represent the general features and the *less obvious* and *dignified* specialist provision (beige box), the SEN/disability specific ones (less obvious and dignified were terms used by participants). In the right hand panel of that figure this specialist provision high level theme has been removed. The 3 remaining high level themes could be framed as like other value-based descriptions of schools, in this case community or Rights-Respecting Schools (see note 1; Sebba and Robinson, 2010). This brings out links between more inclusive schools and rights-respecting schools, an unexpected insight from the project that could be pursued further.

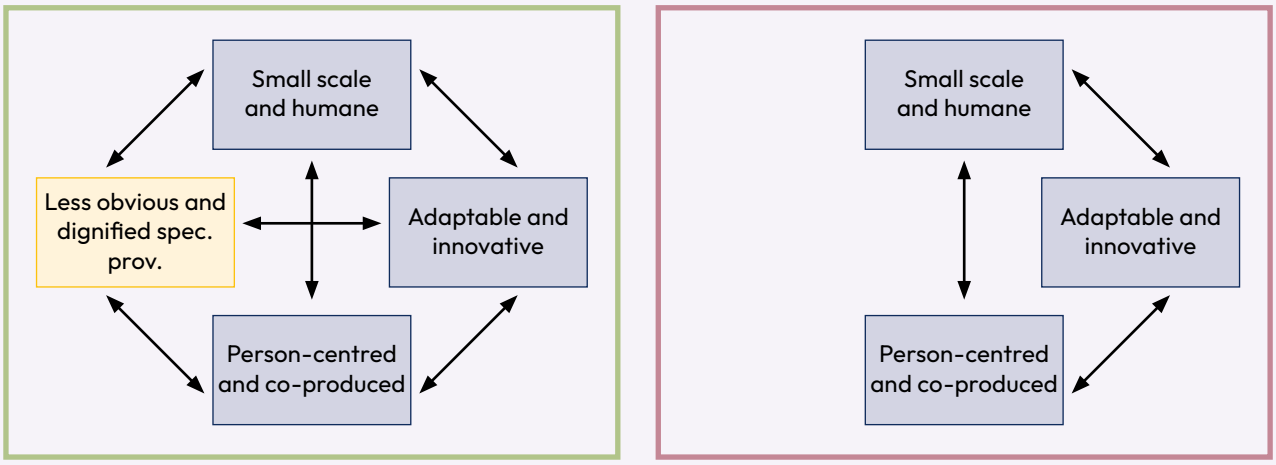


Figure 15. Difference between more inclusive schools for disability and rights respecting schools

This section is concluded by describing briefly the current state of school policy about SEN/disability provision in English schools. This is to enable the reader to consider whether what has emerged from this local citizen panel process has led to more or less nuanced, grounded and integrated policy ideas about inclusion in school education than current policy; one of the main outcomes to be tested in the project.

Since 2011 Government schools policy about inclusion for SEN/disability assumed that there had been a 'bias to inclusion' (DfE, 2011) as a counter to the previous Labour Government's adoption of inclusive oriented policies. With some legislative change to the SEN/disability framework in 2014/15, there were increasing pressures to review policy and practice with calls to define that school policy recognised and implemented: 'the principle of inclusion and right to mainstream schooling' (House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2019: see note 2). Inclusion has eventually come to be recognised in the most recent SEN/disability national plans (DfE, 2023; page 7) in terms of a more inclusive society. But, there has been no reference to inclusive schools and how to define them, as such. The plans are about designing a national set of standards for the ' SEN/D and alternative provision system' over several years. This is to improve early identification of needs and intervention, and clear expectations for the types of support that should be ordinarily available in mainstream settings. But, there has been little detail. In a recent policy seminar about these new national plans, the consensus from the policy seminar discussion groups comprising well-informed professionals, parents, researchers and voluntary sector workers was that:

'The need for clarification of key terms was called for; what we mean by inclusion, do we all understand the terms 'specialist provision', 'alternative provision' and the myriad of other terms'
SENPRF, 2023

Alongside the SEN/D Green Paper issued in 2022 (DfE, 2022b), that led to these 2023 SEN/D plans was a Schools White Paper (DfE, 2022a) that focussed on the general school system. Though the publication of the 2023 SEN/D plans state that the White Paper 'sets clear expectations about what high-quality and inclusive mainstream provision entails' (DfE, 2023), this was not the view of SENPRF policy seminar discussion groups, which concluded that:

....the Green Paper and Improvement Plan avoids the 'big questions' and pretends that problems with 'ordinary provision' do not exist, e.g. tensions between the White Paper and Government guidance on behaviour and discipline'
SENPRF, 2023

It is notable that the national system splits the review and plans for the general schools (White Paper) from the review and plans of SEN/D system (Green Paper and plans). This contrasts with how this local Citizen Panel framed more inclusive schools; in terms of a continuum of SEN/disability elements in the various dimensions of the vision of more inclusive general schools.

This is the policy context of this local citizen panel process; it is for readers to assess the policy ideas from the Citizens' Panel process in terms of being nuanced, grounded and integrated compared to the current plans for English schools, as summarised above.

Dissemination and communication

The plans are to disseminate the findings of the project initially through a designed pamphlet that summarises this longer report for wider distribution; to participants in the panel, to various people who have shown an interest in the project, through the project advisory group, to organisations and services in the locality of the project in Portsmouth and Hampshire, through the members of the SEN Policy Research Forum and its blog. There will also be communications via social media and direct communications with local government policy makers and their representatives, e.g. Local Government Associations (LGA) as well as voluntary organisations with SEN/disability interests. Articles will also be written for education media and for educational research journals.

Final thoughts

Overall, the project has been successful in achieving its twin aims: first, of enhancing the effective participation of young people with SEN/D in public dialogue; and second, that the modified Citizens' Panel process results in more nuanced, grounded and integrated policy ideas about inclusion in school education than current policy. Lessons have been learned about timing, panel recruitment, deliberative programme design and enactment. These have been identified and discussed in this report and will be carried forward in future work using this deliberative public dialogue approach.

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Note 1: Rights respecting schools: **www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools**

Note 2: **committees.parliament.uk/work/35/support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities/publications/**

Appendix 1. Logic model

Context

- A local school system that promotes parent, teacher and student consultations
- Quality of working relationship between project team and partners
- A culture of partnership and co-production between teachers, students and parents/carers
- Parents, teachers and students' understanding of the Citizens' Panel process
- Parents, teachers and students' commitment to the Citizens' Panel process

Citizen Panel (CP) activity Programme

Participant recruitment

- Advised and supported by P recruitment specialists

Preliminary activity:

- Recruit 15 young people(12-17 years old) with diverse SEN / disabilities (diverse socio-economic backgrounds, gender, ethnicity) phase 2 (n=30)a
- Recruit equal numbers of young people and adults (parents / teachers); with and without SEN
- Maximise diversity of other participants (backgrounds, gender, ethnicity)

Preparation and support

- Project leads, SEN specialist and Citizens' Panel specialists plan jointly taking account of topic and participant needs and additional needs

Phase 1

- Opportunity for YP with SEN to:
  - express own needs to enable participation in phase 2
  - consider & decide how to express perspectives in phase 2

Phase 2

- Brief presentations by diverse range of experts (knowledge and experience based) to participants: the learning stage of Citizens' Panel
- Facilitation of deliberation and decision stages of Citizens' Panel process

Mechanisms of change

Participant recruitment

- Optimise diversity of participants to meet diversity criteria
- Welcoming and specific communications to participants

Phase 1

- Facilitators have engaging and responsive relationships with young people with SEN
- Provision of relevant support and resources to enable group communication
- Adaptations to modes of communication and terms of engagements

Phase 2

- Purposes and rules of engagement clearly communicated
- Opportunities to challenge and question diverse expert views
- Fair opportunities to communicate perspectives; between adults/young people & those with and without SEN/ disabilities
- Adequate time for deliberation and decision making
- Participants develop trust in. facilitators and Citizens' Panel process
- Participants understand the significance of project and how the outcomes will be used

Outcomes

Primary Outcomes

Young people with SEN/disabilities

- Knowledge about how to modify a Citizens' Panel process to enhance the effective participation of YP with SEN/disabilities

Policy development

- The modified Citizens' Panel process results in more nuanced, grounded and integrated policy decisions e.g. about inclusion in school education

Secondary Outcomes

YP in general and other participants

- Knowledge about how young people in general can participate effectively in a Citizens' Panel process e.g. with adults about school education

- All participants have enhanced knowledge and understanding about topic of the Citizens' Panel, e.g. inclusion in school education

Appendix 2. Process evaluation interview schedule

1. **How did you hear about the Citizens' Panel?**
2. **Recruitment and onboarding (e.g. preparation for each event)**
    A. what worked well
    B. what did not
    C. what improvements could we make for next time

3. **Preliminary design sessions (young people with SEND only)**

We are interested in knowing about accessibility principles:

- Pacing and breaks
- Clarity and reducing jargon
- Usefulness of materials (i.e. slides with visuals)
- Enough opportunities to ask questions, challenge others, make your points
- Did you feel heard by the Citizens' Panel team, and that they listened/responded?

    A. what worked well
    B. what did not
    C. what improvements could we make for next time

4. **Citizens' Panel Session 1 (online)**

    We are interested in knowing about accessibility principles (as above)

    A. what worked well
    B. what did not
    C. what improvements could we make for next time

5. **Citizens' Panel Session 2 (in-person)**

   We are interested in knowing about accessibility principles (as above), plus thoughts on in-person vs. online format

   A. what worked well

   B. what did not

   C. what improvements could we make for next time

6. **A key aim of the Citizens' Panel project has been to test ways in which young people with SEND can be fully included and participate in a public dialogue event.**

   A. To what extent do you think this aim was achieved?

   B. Is there anything specific that could be done to improve the inclusion of young people with SEND in future events?

7. **To what extent do you think Citizens' Panels are an effective way of exploring and having discussions about important topics in our society?**

8. **Are there any topics you think would be good to explore via a Citizens' Panel? These could be about schools/education or something different.**

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