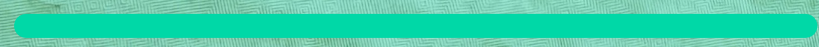


Children's Parliament Education Reform

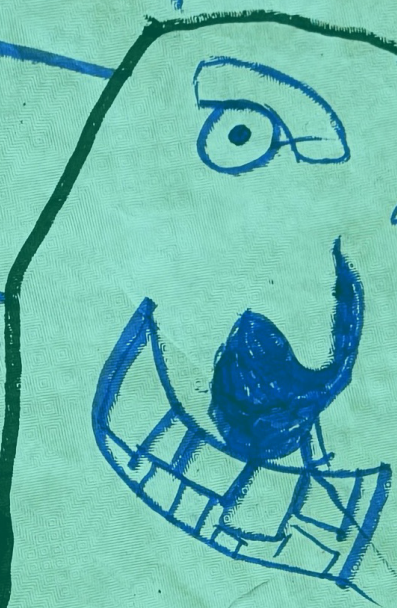
Huddle 4

Additional Support for Learning



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March 2026

 Children's
Parliament

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Introduction

“Some teachers give us different ways of doing or showing our work in case someone has dyslexia or thinks differently ”

Member of Children’s Parliament

Background

Children’s Parliament, Children in Scotland, the Scottish Youth Parliament, and Young Scot are working together to support the Scottish Government in delivering a programme of engagement with children and young people, with the aim of embedding their voices within education policy. The initial focus of this work is the education reform programme.

This partnership project will deliver a series of “huddles,” during which

children and young people will consider specific thematic areas identified by the Scottish Government. The collective views and experiences shared in each huddle will contribute to a central report highlighting common messages, priorities, and recommendations.

This summary report focuses on children’s views and experiences of inclusion, Additional Support for Learning (ASL), and the wider help and support they receive in school.

Huddle Participants

For this Huddle we engaged 30 Primary 7 children, aged 10 to 11, at Dens Road Primary School in Dundee. Children’s Parliament has previously worked with this group on a range of projects connected to dignity, anti-racism, and broader issues relating to children’s experiences at school. This existing

relationship allowed for a deeper level of consultation. The cohort included eight children with specific support needs, some of whom had previously used support plans during their time at school.

Methodology

We used a children’s rights participatory approach to gain insight into what children value about their current learning experiences and what they would like to change. Our approach focused on children’s knowledge and experience of their rights, ensuring children felt supported, listened to and cared for in the sessions and that the environment was creative, fun and responded to individual’s needs. Informed consent and the option for children to choose whether and how to share their views was embedded into the process. Observations, creative outputs, and note-taking formed the basis of the qualitative analysis.

As part of the consultation, children created a school “help desk” activity to reflect on the current support available to help them develop friendships, support their emotional and physical wellbeing, and meet their formal learning needs in class and across the school.

Children were also invited to create “success bunting,” reflecting on their personal relationship with success at school and the ways in which success is recognised and celebrated. In addition, they made models to help discuss and communicate how their school responds when children experience distress or upset.

Finally, children were asked to reflect on support plans, including how they would like these to be developed, and to share their thoughts on the possible implications of using AI systems to help children and teachers generate and organise such plans in future.

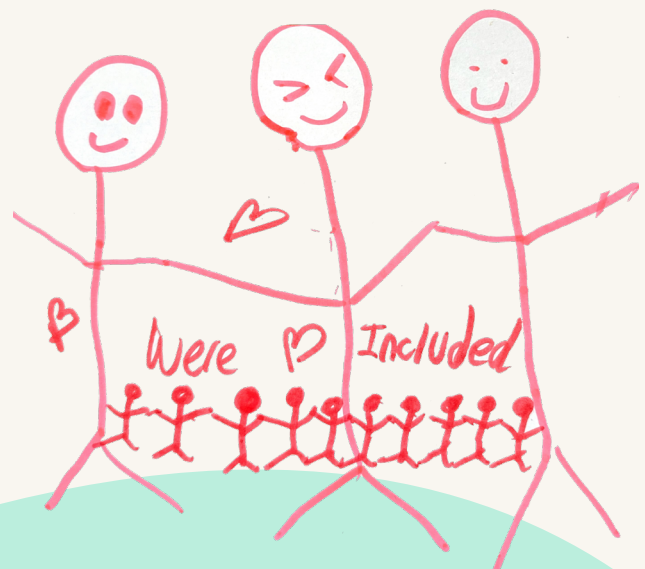


Image: Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026

Key findings

Socialising

Friendships are supported through seating plans, playground activities, clubs, sports, and shared interests. Children also wanted fair adult support when friendship difficulties arise.

Learning

Clear teaching, classroom resources, technology, and support from adults and peers help children feel confident and able to ask for help.

Preparing for the future

Children saw English, maths, practical life skills, and children's human rights as well as creative skills as important for later life.

Recognising success

Children described success as achievement, improvement, kindness, and responsibility. Success was recognised through praise, awards, and reward systems.

Being involved

Children wanted different ways to share their views and wanted adults to listen and use what they say when planning support.

Universal support and inclusion

Children valued classroom help, calm spaces, emotional support, creative activities, and peer support. They described an inclusive school as kind, fair, welcoming, and supportive of different needs.

Neurodiversity and emotional support

Many children felt teachers understand different ways of learning, though support was not always consistent. Calm spaces, trusted adults, and friends helped when children were upset, while shouting made things worse.

Technology and support planning

Children felt technology could help record their views but should not replace their direct involvement.

Reflecting on the Inclusion Ambassadors Vision Statement

Children were invited to reflect on an element of the [Scottish Government's Young Ambassadors for Inclusion vision statement for success](#), considering how their school can support all children to learn, socialise, and prepare for life beyond school by developing the

skills and knowledge they will need in the future. Across these discussions, children highlighted the importance of both practical support and positive relationships in helping them feel included, confident, and ready for what comes next.



Image: Dens Road Help Desk, 2026

Socialising

When reflecting on socialising and friendship, children described a range of ways school helps them build relationships with others. Seating arrangements, playground activities, shared interests, and clubs were all seen as important opportunities to meet people and form friendships. Classroom seating in particular was identified as helping children interact with classmates they might not usually speak to. As one child explained, “sometimes the teacher puts you next to someone random, and then you start talking and you might become friends.”

Playground activities and sports were also described as valuable opportunities to socialise. One child said that “when we play football at break time you can join in and make friends with people you don’t usually talk to.” Children also highlighted the role of shared interests in helping friendships develop explaining that “when we did presentations about our hobbies I found out someone else liked drawing like me.”

Image: *They make you sit next to people randomly*, Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026

Children raised concerns about how adults respond when friendship difficulties happen. They said they do not like it when teachers fail to listen properly, take sides, or deal with problems too quickly. Some children felt strongly that “teachers should listen to both people” and “sort it out fairly and not take sides.” They were concerned that responses such as “say sorry and move on” do not always resolve the issue and can leave children feeling unheard or upset.

Although many children felt school gives them opportunities to socialise, some were worried that not enough is done for children who struggle to make friends. They suggested that children do not like feeling left out or unsupported, and one child said there should be “more things that help people who don’t have many friends.”

“ They
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Learning

In relation to learning, children highlighted clear teaching, classroom resources, technology, and support from both adults and peers as important parts of a positive learning experience. Practical resources were especially valued when children felt unsure about their work. One child explained, “we have a help learn table where there’s lots of tools and things we might need if we’re stuck.”

Technology was also discussed as an important support for learning, particularly in maths, English, and research, although some children felt it could be used more widely. A recurring theme across this discussion was the importance of teachers explaining learning clearly and providing helpful examples in lessons. As one child put it, “the teacher helps us and speaks really clearly and slowly so we know what’s going on.” Another shared, “our teacher talks to us and makes it, so we feel safe to ask questions.”

Key messages:

- Classroom tools and displays help when children are unsure.
- iPads support learning in key areas such as maths and English.
- Clear explanations and examples help children feel more confident.
- Supportive relationships with teachers and friends make it easier to ask for help and keep learning.

Image: They tell you what's healthy,
Member of Children's Parliament, 2026



Preparing for the future

Children also reflected on how school helps prepare them for the future. In these discussions, core subjects such as literacy and numeracy were regularly linked to later life and employment, with children explaining that “English helps us read and write” and that “learning these things can help us get a job when we’re older.”

Alongside this, children highlighted the importance of learning practical life skills, including budgeting, nutrition,

health, and risk awareness. They spoke about learning relating to “drugs, vapes, cigarettes and alcohol,” as well as social responsibilities. The children linked learning about children’s human rights to health, one child noted, “we learn about rights through the UNCRC.” Creative and scientific subjects were also valued as helping children develop a broad range of knowledge and skills for later life.

Key messages:

- English and maths were viewed as important foundations for later life and work.
- School supports children to learn practical life skills and make informed choices.
- Learning about rights, citizenship and communication was seen as important.
- Creative and scientific subjects help children develop a broad range of future skills.

Children have also spoken further about this whilst reflecting on future ambitions in the following [Education Reform Huddle 3: Curriculum Improvement Cycle](#).

“Say sorry”

Image: Say sorry,
Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026

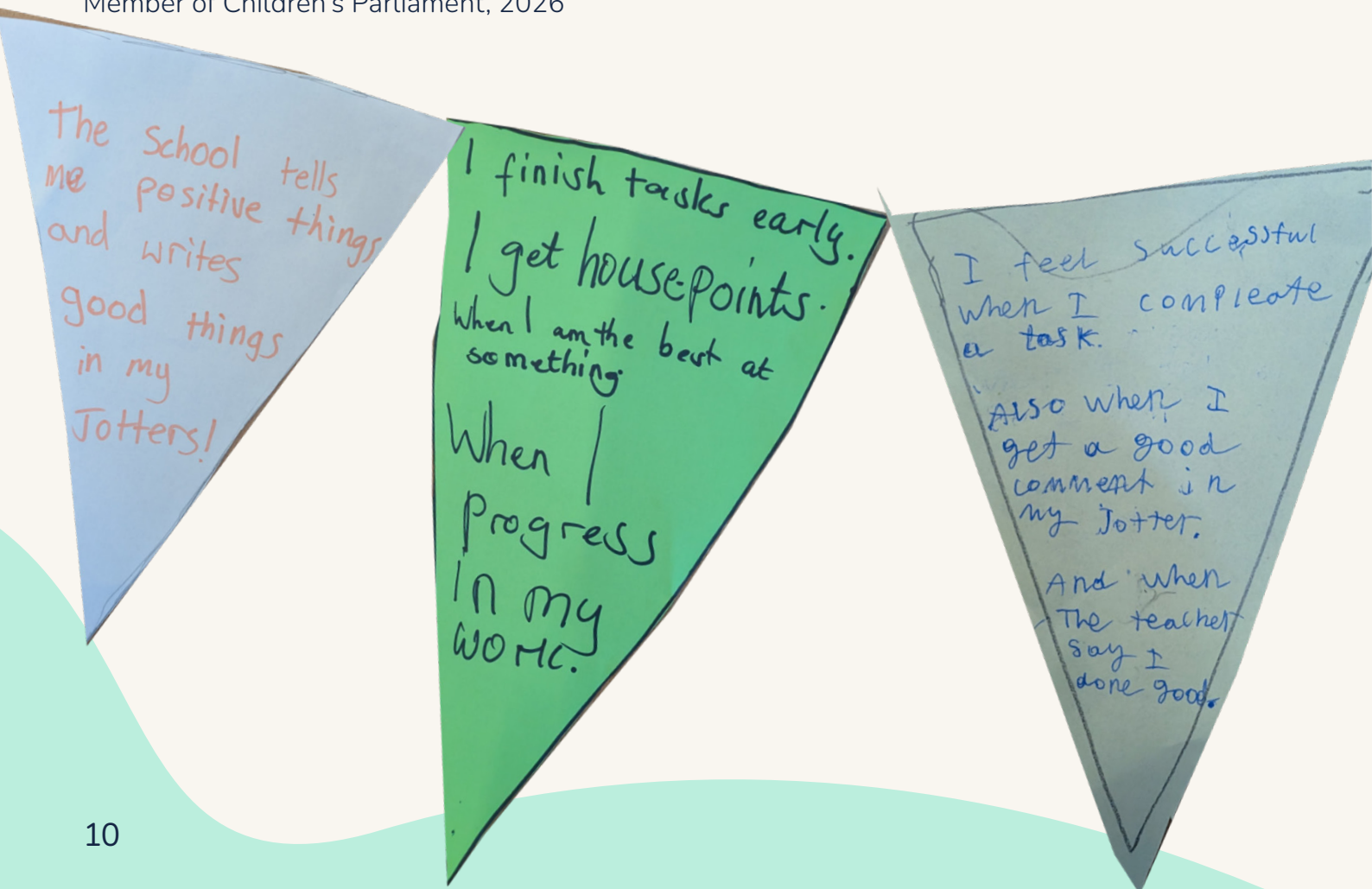
Recognising success

When discussing success, children described a range of ways it is recognised and celebrated at school. Awards, celebration assemblies, teacher praise, and smaller reward systems were all seen as ways the school acknowledges effort, behaviour, and progress. These forms of recognition helped children feel valued, motivated, and encouraged to keep trying, particularly when success was recognised publicly. As one child explained, “The school celebrates success by giving us star awards at assembly.”

Children also spoke positively about encouragement and praise from teachers, describing it as motivating and confidence-building. Other examples of recognition included house points, weekly awards, and small rewards for completing work. One child said, “Star of the week and house points when you do good things.”

However, in [other previous work on similar themes](#), some children also raised concerns about reward systems that link positive behaviour too closely to earning treats or privileges. For some, this created a sense that doing well was tied to getting something in return. As children described, “Golden time has to be earned” and “House points for respect and kindness.”

Image: Recognising success flags,
Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026

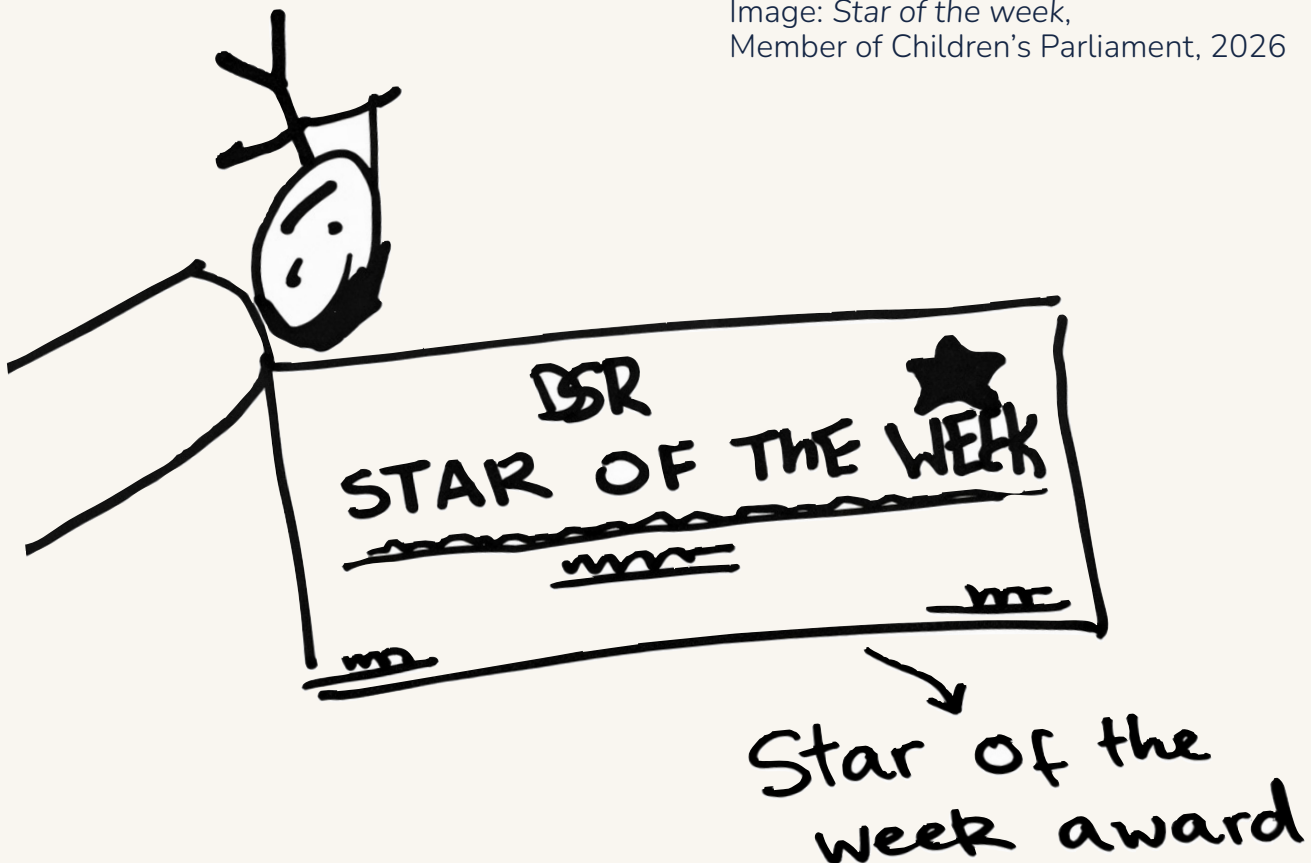


Different views of success

Children's reflections also showed that success is understood in different ways. For some, success was linked to academic achievement, such as "when I get 100% on an assessment, I feel successful." For others, success was about doing well in something they found difficult, "when I do well in something I'm not good at like maths," or about showing kindness and responsibility, such as "holding the door open, helping the teacher and being kind and respectful."

These responses suggest that children understand success in personal and varied ways, extending beyond attainment alone.

Image: Star of the week, Member of Children's Parliament, 2026



Being involved

Children raised concerns about not always being properly involved in decisions about the support they receive. They said they do not like it when adults make assumptions without first asking for their views. Some explained that teachers may think they need help because of their work, when “we might be having a bad day or find that bit tricky.” This made clear that children want adults to understand the reasons behind their difficulties rather than making quick judgements.

Children also said they want more choice in how they share their views, suggesting options such as “a menu, using your iPad, or drawing a picture.” They were concerned that without clear explanations, it can be hard to understand support decisions, with one child saying, “we need to know what the things are and what might happen because of it.” Overall, children felt most strongly that adults should:

“Just listen to us and make sure what we say is used.”

Member of Children’s Parliament

Universal support and inclusion

Children were also asked about the help they receive at school when they need support with learning. This included wider provision that can shape their experience in school, such as support for health and wellbeing, social and emotional needs, and attendance.

In these discussions, children identified a range of universal supports that make a positive difference. Alongside help in the classroom, they also referred to broader support that helps them feel calm, included, and ready to learn.

Teachers were frequently identified as an important source of support during lessons. Many children spoke positively

about teachers moving around the classroom and responding quickly when help is needed. One child explained, “I like that I don’t have to wait forever. As soon as my hand goes up, my teacher is there.” Written feedback was also valued, especially when it clearly explained what to improve.

At the same time, children also reflected on inconsistency in classroom support. Some felt that the quality of support depends on the teacher, with one child explaining, “one teacher might explain things five different ways, while another might just tell you to do what everyone else is doing.”

gives them a support staff

“gives them a place to themselves”

Image: Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026

Broader support for learning

Children also spoke about wider forms of support that help them feel settled and ready to learn, including:

Emotional wellbeing support:

Children valued calming spaces and regulation tools, saying “there is a calm corner in each class,” and “it helps us stay calm by allowing fidgets.” These supports helped them reset, as “you can take a moment before going back to work.” Children also discussed how creative activities and outdoor learning also contributed towards wellbeing explaining that “art helps show creativity,” “fun activities help express our feelings,” and “doing different things outside the classroom can make people feel better.”

Support from adults and peers:

Children described teachers and classmates as important sources of support, saying “teachers will listen to us,” “school helps by comforting you,” and “peer mediators help when people have problems.”

Talking about emotions:

Children valued opportunities to talk about feelings, saying “we can talk about how we feel,” “school helps with our feelings,” and “it helps us understand our emotions.”

Attendance:

Children said attendance is encouraged by kind teachers and friendships, explaining that, “if you are liked by the teacher and they are kind then you want to be here,” and that, “seeing your friends is one of the best parts of coming to school.” Children also said school is easier to attend when learning is “fun and interesting,” when “we can come in and get some toast in the morning,” and when “we also like doing things more slowly at the start of the day.”

Health and physical activity:

Children linked health and wellbeing with exercise, saying “we do PE two days a week” and “they make sure we’re doing fitness.”

Image: Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026



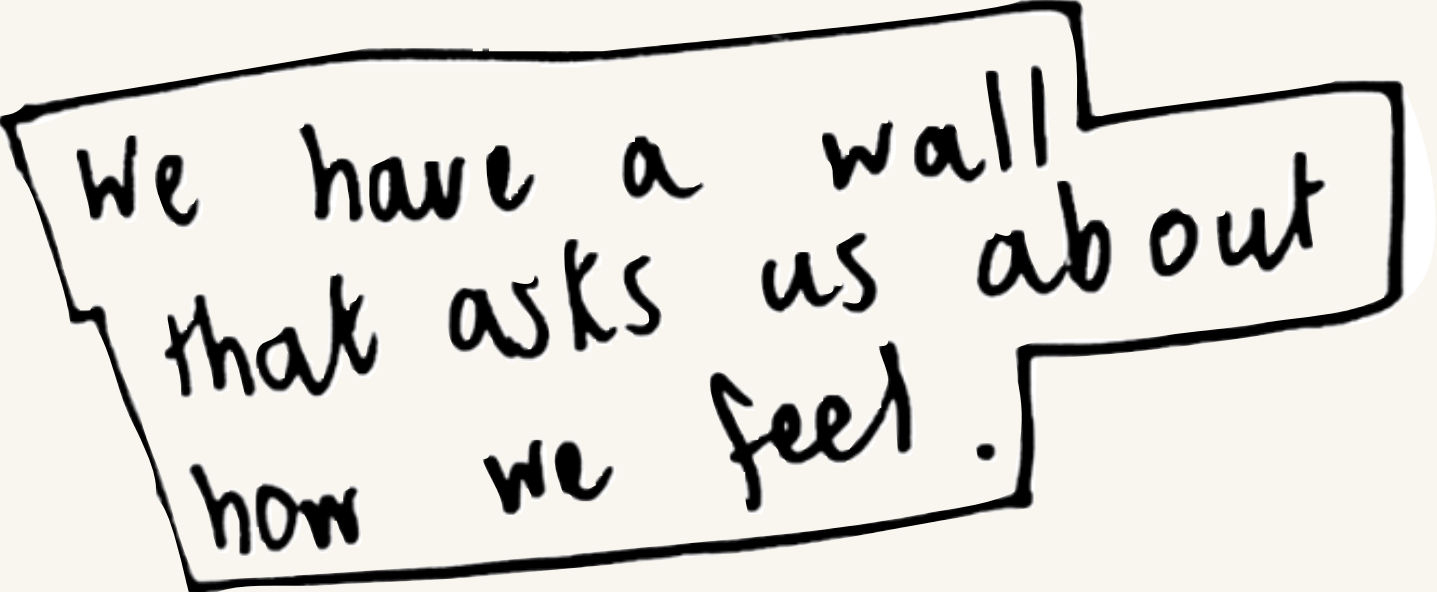
Inclusivity in school

Children were invited to reflect on two key questions: what an inclusive school environment looks like, and how staff and children's understanding of neurodiversity, disability, and different ways of thinking and learning can affect the support children receive in school. Across these discussions, inclusion was framed not only in terms of access and support, but also kindness, understanding, and everyday experiences of school life.

When reflecting on what inclusion looks like in practice, children described an inclusive school as a place where:

- Everyone feels welcomed, valued, and part of the school community, where “we celebrate everyone” and “everyone should feel included.”
- People are kind to each other, where “everyone should be treated the same,” where there is no bullying, and where “no one should be racist.”
- Teachers notice when children are upset and “try their best to help everyone.”
- Children can “learn in their own way,” including support for different languages and access to support staff.
- Everyone is included in all parts of school life, including maths, PE, and play.
- Children with physical disabilities can still access spaces, and calm or quiet spaces are available for those who feel overwhelmed.

Image: Member of
Children's Parliament,
2026



We have a wall
that asks us about
how we feel.

Neurodiversity and emotional support

Staff understanding of different ways of learning

Many children said that teachers recognise people think and learn in different ways, and that this can shape the support provided. One explained that “most teachers know that people think differently,” while another said that “some teachers explain things in different ways so people understand.”

Some also described being offered alternative ways to complete or present work. As one child put it, “some teachers give us different ways of doing or showing our work in case someone has dyslexia or something.”

Additional support was also mentioned, explaining that “sometimes children get outside help,” while another said that “they offer more support if someone needs it.”

When support does not meet everyone’s needs

Although many felt supported, some said that teaching approaches do not always work for everyone. One child commented that “some older teachers try to teach everyone the same way.” Others felt that explanations can sometimes be difficult to follow, with one saying that “sometimes teachers talk too fast,” and another adding that “they don’t break things down and we get confused and lost.”

There was also concern that difficulties with learning can sometimes be misunderstood as behaviour issues. One saying that some children “get in more trouble because they are not doing what they should,” while another added that “sometimes it’s because they don’t understand.”

Awareness of different support needs

Children recognised that some people may need different kinds of support due to conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD or autism. A range of helpful strategies were identified. These included quiet spaces to concentrate, movement breaks to support focus, and presenting information in different ways.

Peer support and inclusion

Overall, children described their peers as respectful and supportive of difference. One said that “we try to have dignity and make sure everyone else feels it too,” while another explained that “people try to include everyone.”

Support between classmates was also described as common, particularly when someone was struggling with learning. “if someone doesn’t understand we try to help them,”

Across the discussion, there was a strong sense that many pupils understand that everyone learns differently and are willing to support one another. As one put it, “everyone learns differently,” while another said that “most people help each other if we’re stuck.”

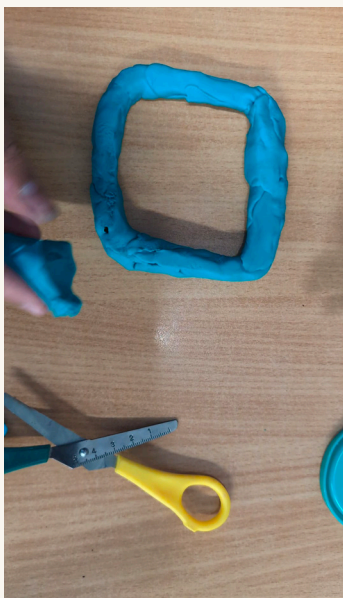


Image: *Fidget spinner model*, Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026



Image: *Toilet to go and wash your face if upset*, Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026



Image: *Teacher providing hug to child*, Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026

Physical intervention in schools

Children were asked to reflect on how their school responds when they are angry, upset, or need support. They were also asked what adults and teachers do to help them feel calm, whether they know who to speak to if they feel a teacher has not responded in the right way, and whether they feel things are

improving in their school. These discussions provide insight into children's experiences of school approaches to emotional support, the strategies adults use to help them regulate their feelings, and the extent to which they feel listened to, safe, and supported when difficulties arise.

Emotional support and regulation

When discussing what helps in moments of anger, worry, or upset, children identified several supportive responses from adults and peers.

These included:

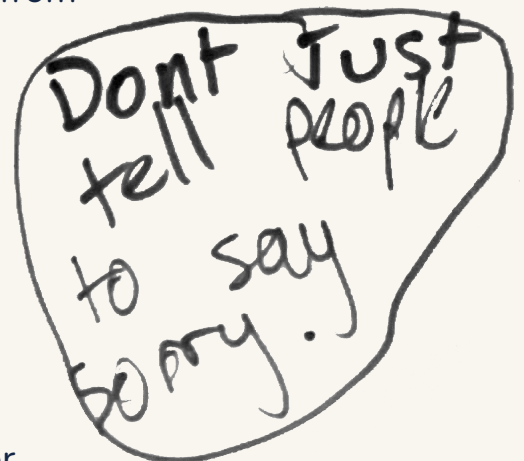
- Space or time to calm down
- Access to a calm corner or quiet area
- Talking with a teacher or other adult
- Comfort and reassurance
- Creative activities such as art
- Support from friends.

These approaches were generally described as helpful in enabling children to feel calmer and more settled. For example, one child explained that “some adults let us go and have some space in a calm corner or time on our own,” while another said that “friends can help you feel calm.”

However, children also shared examples of adult responses that do not help and may make situations worse. Concerns raised included:

- Adults shouting, “sometimes adults make the situation worse because when you're angry, they come and shout at you.”
- Being asked to explain feelings too quickly.
- Not having enough time to calm down before talking.

Similar findings on children's views on how adults respond to them in situations of heightened emotion and distress through previous engagements can be found in the children's [What We Need poster](#).



Children’s awareness of the school’s restraint and seclusion policy

Children did not show any awareness of the use of restraint and seclusion in their school.

Involvement in decisions about emotional support

Children also reflected on how much say they have in deciding what helps when they are distressed. Some spoke about already knowing what works for them, such as walking away or having time alone. Others felt they are not always asked what support works best. As one child explained, “children don’t really decide how they calm down.”

Trust emerged as an important theme in this discussion. While some children would speak to a trusted adult, others said they might prefer to talk to friends or family if they felt adults would not listen.

School improvement

Children shared mixed views about whether things are improving in school. Some felt things are mostly the same as before. Some reflected that the school felt warmer or kinder in the past. Others did not identify any clear change.



Image: Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026

Technology and support planning

Children were asked how they would like to be involved in decisions about their learning and support, what helps them feel listened to, and how technology such as the Trellis

app could support this process. Across these discussions, children highlighted that support planning should feel personal, clear, and shaped by their own views.

Involvement in support planning

When reflecting on what helps them feel listened to, children identified a number of important behaviours from adults. These included adults “looking at you and nodding” responding in ways that “show they understand,” remembering what has been said, and following things up later. Consistency also mattered, with some children noting that it helps to have “the same adult each time” or someone who “knows you well.”

Children also wanted support plans to reflect emotional wellbeing and individual circumstances, including “how we are feeling” and “what makes us happy or sad.”

Sharing ideas about support plans

A range of preferences emerged in relation to how children would like to share their views. Some preferred to talk directly with adults, while others highlighted creative approaches such as being able to “draw things.” Typing and other uses of technology were also seen as helpful ways to express thoughts and ideas. A few children also noted that they might prefer to work independently at times, especially “if you don’t trust them yet or feel like they aren’t listening.”

Receiving updates about support plans

Children highlighted that updates about support plans should be:

- Clear and easy to understand.
- Explained in simple language, as “it shouldn’t use words we don’t understand.”
- Visually engaging, for example “bright and colourful.”

What matters most in planning support

A strong message across this discussion was the importance of adults understanding each child as an individual. This included knowing their personality, understanding what they like and do not like, and recognising that “sometimes things at home affect how we feel.”

Technology and support planning

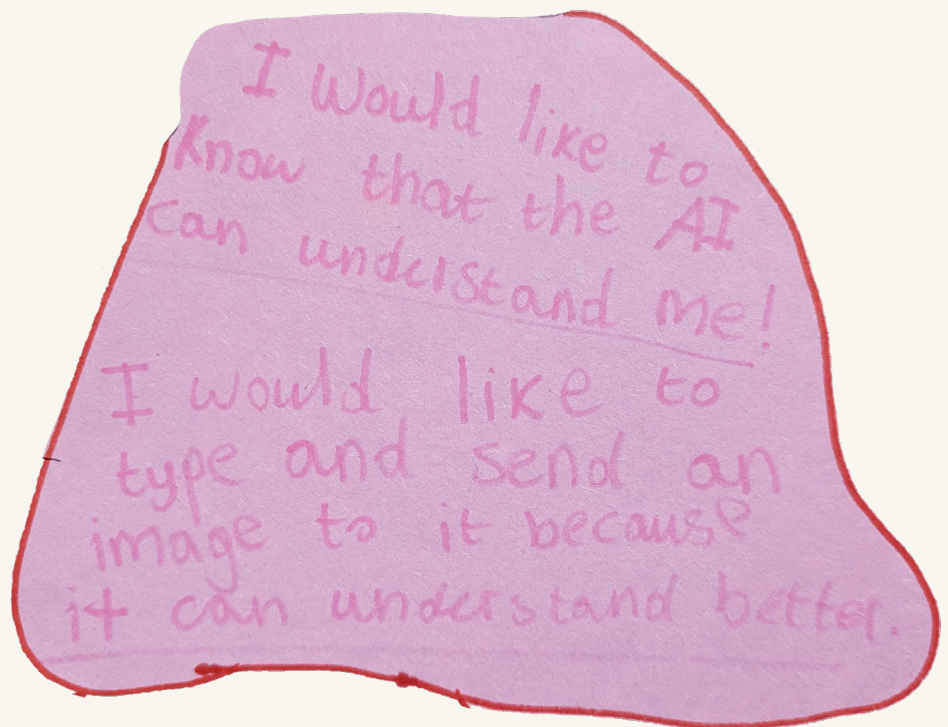
When discussing digital tools such as the Trellis app, children were clear that technology should support, rather than replace, their involvement in planning. They wanted technology to “show exactly what we said” and to “sound like how we talk so we know it’s us.”

A clear expectation throughout this discussion was that children should remain directly involved in any process where technology is used to capture or organise their views. As one child put it, “we should still be part of doing it.” This suggests that technology is seen as most useful when it helps communicate children’s views without reducing their role in decision-making.

Some children also expressed interest in being involved in the development of digital tools in future. One commented that “it might be quite cool to help make an app,” while another said they would like to “learn about coding and how apps are made.”

Children have shared wider thoughts and views on the usage of A.I in Education through the following [Calls For Action](#) as part of [Exploring Children’s Rights and A.I project](#).

Image: Member of Children’s Parliament, 2026



Links

childrensparliament.org.uk/cabinet/executive-team-takeover-2025

childrensparliament.org.uk/cabinet/cabinet-takeover-2023/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/education-reform-2025/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/education-reform/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/learner-panel/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/manor-park-parliament/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/exploring-childrens-rights-and-ai/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/feelings-inspectors/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/childrens-rights-skills-and-knowledge-framework/

childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/professionals-make-rights-real/

