



Coproduction in London: A snapshot of current practice

**A report for the London Innovation and
Improvement Alliance (LIIA)**

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

Coproduction is foundational to all our work to improve the lives of children and young people with SEND. It drives innovation, helps make best use of available resources and improves outcomes for children, young people and their families.

We asked Parent Carer Forums across London to identify shared goals to take forward regionally and coproduction quickly emerged as the highest priority for the network. As regional representatives we welcomed the opportunity to be part of this initiative to scope coproduction across London.

This report is an honest reflection of current experience of coproduction across the region and it's fair to say that there is still a long way to go. It is also the first step in an improvement journey that we'll make together with support, respect and transparency at its heart.

We are grateful to London Councils, ALDCS, LIA, NDTi and everyone who made the time to contribute to this study. At a time of uncertainty, intense pressure and competing priorities the level of engagement from SEND partners across London is evidence of our shared commitment to getting coproduction right.

We look forward to taking the next steps with you.

Claire Richmond and Rosalind Luff, NNPCF Directors for London

Executive summary

This report, commissioned by the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA), explores the current position of coproduction with parent carers across London's 33 Local Areas in the context of statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice.

During the period that this work was being carried out, the Government published the Schools' White Paper, *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* and the SEND Reforms consultation *Putting Children and Young People First*. The proposed changes to the SEND system are built on seven key pillars. The first pillar is coproduction with parent carers and children and young people, thus indicating that coproduction remains a priority for Government. Local authorities have been required to complete a maturity matrix as a baseline of current practice. This work has informed the completion of SEND Reform Plans, which require a report on coproduction arrangements and their plans going forward. This has been made a priority for all Regional Innovation and Improvement Alliances (RIIAs) as part of core delivery of SEND improvement.

Between February and April 2026, NDTi held 25 Borough-specific focus groups and a further two sessions which were attended by five local authorities who had not been able to attend on their borough specific date, as well as a small number of people who had not joined their borough specific date with other colleagues but still wanted to feed in their experiences. One local area contributed a written response. Only two local areas could not attend a focus group. In total, 80 people participated across local authorities, health partners, parent carers and the voluntary sector representing 31 local areas. NDTi also completed a desktop review of all 33 Local Offers to identify the extent to which coproduction is understood, embedded and experienced in practice, and to surface examples of what is working.

Although the focus of this piece of work has been coproduction with parent/carers, NDTi did seek to interview young people. Two online focus group sessions for young people were arranged with information about these being widely circulated to participation leads across local areas. Attendance was very low, mainly because of short notice and not enough time to prepare young people. NDTi therefore organised three in-person meetings and met 24 young people. Some of the young people understood what coproduction means and some did not, but all were able to speak (and draw) about their experiences of giving their views and feeling involved in decisions about their lives.

Headline findings

The overwhelming majority of people interviewed were committed to coproduction, but acknowledged that pressures on the system have prevented it becoming embedded practice. Experiences vary significantly between (and within) Boroughs, services and levels (strategic, service and individual). There were pockets of good practice found rather than coproduction being an embedded system and cultural norm.

Coproduction is valued, but not yet resilient to pressure, staff turnover or financial constraints. There is a clear challenge from this research as to how we can better link up commitment to coproduction with changes in experience for families.

Too often, coproduction is conflated with consultation. Many examples offered were late-stage review of near-final documents, surveys or “you said, we did” communications. These are valuable but not equivalent to coproduction from the outset.

Relationships and trust are decisive factors. Where coproduction is experienced as meaningful, it is underpinned by transparent communication and mature, often long-standing relationships. Where trust has broken down, coproduction becomes fragile, adversarial and more dependent on individuals.

Lack of feedback loops and transparency erodes confidence. Parent carers described consultation fatigue when there is limited clarity on what changed because of their involvement, or when projects “go quiet”. Increased transparency around constraints and feasibility are essential to build trust.

Capacity constraints are critical on both sides. PCFs are often sustained by small volunteer groups with limited capacity, administrative support and resource, while local authorities face significant workload pressures and staff churn, especially in the current climate of reforms. Coproduction is frequently deprioritised when budgets tighten or operational pressure rises.

Representation remains uneven and is undermined by limited family capacity to engage. PCFs reported strong engagement overall. Forums work tirelessly to engage families, with representation being very good in many areas. Inevitably not all parents can or want to be involved at that level. Parents who are not engaged strategically still benefit from the information provided by the forums. Persistent gaps in terms of involvement include families whose children do not have education, health and care plans (EHCPs), early years families and some minoritised communities whose voices are often underrepresented in public discourse; this though is not a consistent picture, many PCFs feel they are very representative of the local area, some feel they are less so. Although it is often a relatively small number of families that attend panels and stakeholder meetings, those who do, are representing a much wider range of voices.

Strategic involvement does not reliably translate to improved individual experience. Even where governance participation is strong, parent carers reported that individual experiences (for example, navigating EHCP processes) can remain adversarial, which undermines willingness to engage strategically.

Examples of stronger practice were most reported in co-producing borough-level outputs and improvement activity (for example, local strategies, coproduction charters, Local Offers, and events). Fewer examples were provided of sustained coproduction reshaping frontline service delivery.

Recommendations

- 1. Establish a pan-London coproduction working group of system partners.** This should develop a shared London-wide approach and learning community, supporting clearer, more consistent practice at individual, service and strategic levels, including how cultural change, and the barriers to achieve it might be best overcome.
- 2. Consider with system partners how coproduction could be better promoted within schools alongside Local Authorities and Integrated Care Systems.** This could build on some of the progress of programmes like Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS), led by PCFs in some schools in London.
- 3. Develop a pan-London approach to gaining the voices of young people with SEND.** Build on existing borough youth forums and Pan-London work in the NHS to strengthen coproduction and amplify voices, including young people with the highest support needs and other minoritised voices.
- 4. For LIIA and system partners, by request to provide, tailored, facilitated support to local areas where trust has broken down.** LIIA, alongside system partners including the NNPCF, should offer practical space and learning support, where requested, to help local partnerships reflect on what is driving deep-rooted relationship breakdown where this has occurred and agree locally owned ways to reset and move forward.
- 5. Strengthen leadership for coproduction through a codesigned, codelivered programme.** Focus on embedding coproduction as culture and practice across organisational hierarchies, reducing reliance on individual champions – this may be work that is embedded in other streams, or that exists as a standalone stream dependent on partnership input.
- 6. Support consistent recognition and dedicated resources for parent carer involvement.** Promote locally agreed approaches that remove barriers to participation (for example, expenses and access support) and reduce over-reliance on unpaid goodwill.

What did parents tell us enables good coproduction?	What might that look like?
Long-term investment and commitment	• Resourcing for PCFs • Dedicated LA coproduction champions in LAs, ICBs and Providers, including lead roles in some instances • Strategic leadership • Clear feedback loops
Shared values and understanding of coproduction	• Coproduction charter • Staff training/upskilling • Culture change • Understanding of coproduction and consultation
Deliberate addressing of power dynamics	• Naming and returning to power dynamics • Reimbursing parents for involvement • Ensuring diverse participation and valuing lived experience
Respectful and flexible communication	• Early engagement • Opportunities outside of working hours • WhatsApp communication
Transparency	• Openness about available resources, constraints and likelihood of delivery • Clear timelines and feedback loops • Parameters of coproduction versus consultation • Acknowledgement of pressures on people across the system

Introduction

As part of the London SEND Improvement Plan commissioned and sponsored by ALDCS and the Department for Education (DfE), the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) were tasked to explore what good coproduction could look like in London. LIIA commissioned NDTi to support this by facilitating conversations across all 33 London Boroughs into the current state of coproduction with parent carers and to understand the extent to which London local authorities are implementing the statutory requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 to involve parents in all aspects of the SEND system. Parent Carer Forums (PCFs), the main collective interface with local authorities, have increasingly reported that coproduction is not taking place in London in the way set out in the Code of Practice. This research will support LIIA to understand the barriers to coproduction, identify examples where it is working well and develop an approach to improving coproduction across the capital.

This work was carried out between February and April 2026 during a turbulent time within the SEND system. Resource, staff churn and relationships have been put under immense pressure with local authorities, health colleagues and parent carers anxiously anticipating the publication of the Schools White Paper, ‘Every Child Achieving and Thriving’¹ and the need to develop SEND reform plans which came out in the middle of this commission.

There has been a lot of social media “noise” that the sector is having to grapple with alongside the SEND Reform consultation and the expectations placed on local authorities, which have stretched resources even further, as well as placing greater strain on relationships.

NDTi have been grateful for the time that participants across the sector have been able to give us, alongside their honesty on what is currently working and what needs to improve around coproduction, with the White Paper and the SEND reforms in mind.

What do we mean by coproduction?

Coproduction is recognised as a critical component of effective and responsive public services but is much more far-reaching than that. There are varying definitions of what coproduction is, but broadly it describes working collaboratively with all relevant partners and stakeholders so that everyone's voice, perspective and views are equally valued, heard and acted upon (see Box 1). In public services, this looks like partnership with people who draw on care and support.² It is values-driven and built on the principle

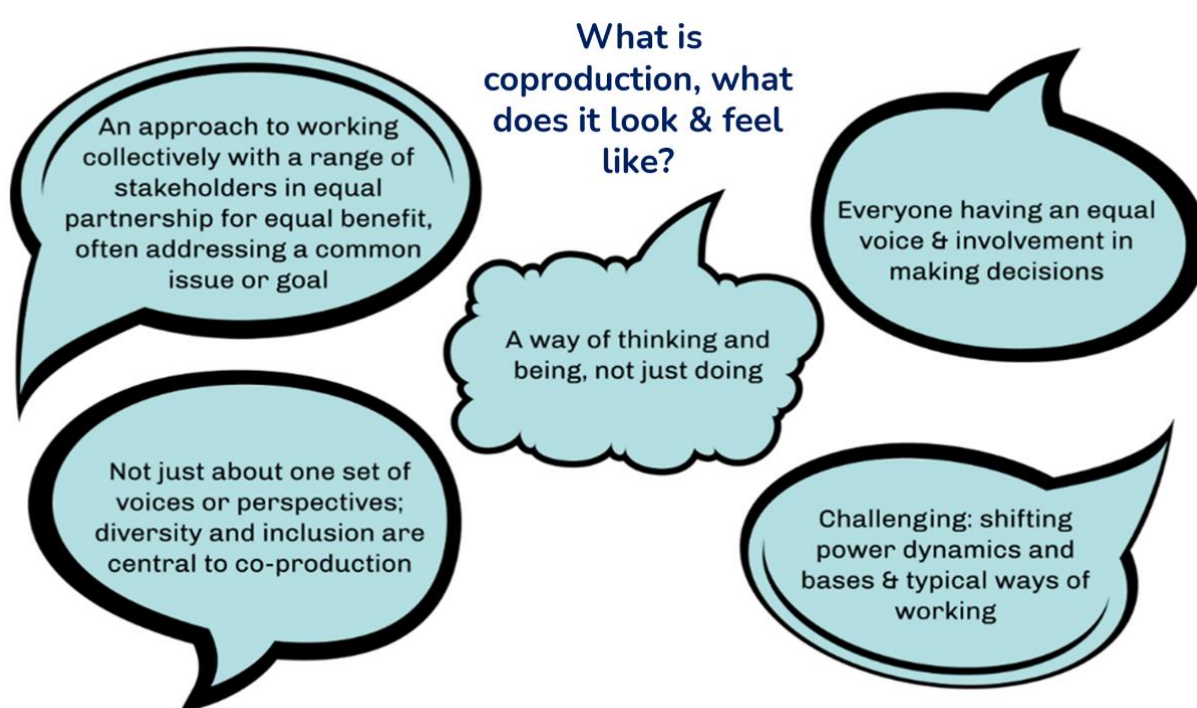
¹ Department for Education, 2026. Every child achieving and thriving, Policy Paper. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving>

² Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2022. Coproduction: what it is and how to do it. Available at: <https://www.scie.org.uk/coproduction/what-how/#whatis>

that those affected by a service are best placed to help design it.³ Coproduction emphasises shared power, mutual respect and valuing different forms of knowledge.

Coproduction means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change.⁴

Box 1. Dimensions of coproduction



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Coproduction can be understood to operate across different interconnected levels:

- **Individual:** personal planning and decision making
- **Service:** working collaboratively with people who use services to improve and develop those services
- **Strategic:** strategies and policies directly relating to what matters to the people who they are for.

³ Involve. Coproduction. Available at: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resource/coproduction>

⁴ Boyle, D. and Harris, H., 2009. The Challenge of Coproduction: how equal partnerships between professionals and the public are crucial to improving public services.

Coproduction is transformational: a truly co-produced service is codesigned with full involvement of people who use it and their families, from the blank sheet of paper stage.

- **Space:** creating safe and inclusive opportunities for individuals to express their views.
- **Voice:** supporting individuals to communicate those views in ways that work for them.
- **Audience:** ensuring that individuals' views are listened to by someone who can make change happen.
- **Influence:** ensuring that contributions are taken seriously and have a real impact on decisions.

Within the SEND system, coproduction became a prominent concept following the 2014 SEND reforms. Section 19 of the [2014 Children and Families Act](#) makes it clear that local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN), must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents/carers.
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions.

The 2015 SEND Code of Practice⁵ uses the term 'coproduction' only once but there are numerous references to working with parents and young people in all sorts of ways (see Box 2). The Code makes it clear that coproduction improves outcomes when applied effectively to supporting children and young people with SEND.

A model of coproduction is also outlined by the NHS⁶:

⁵ Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, 2014. SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years, Statutory Guidance. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

⁶ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/always-events/coproduction/>

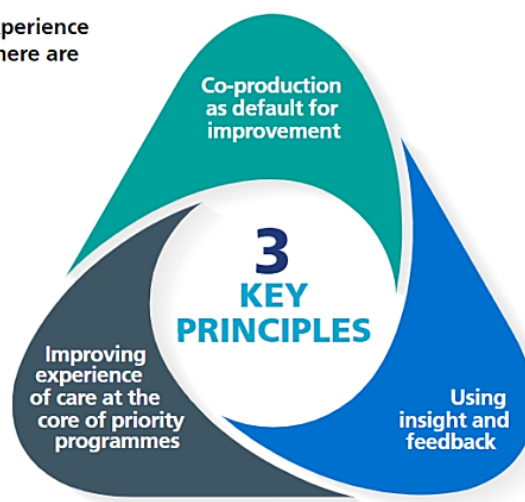
Coproduction is a way of working that involves people who use health and care services, carers and communities in equal partnership; and which engages groups of people at the earliest stages of service design, development and evaluation.

Coproduction acknowledges that people with ‘lived experience’ of a particular condition are often best placed to advise on what support and services will make a positive difference to their lives. Done well, coproduction helps to ground discussions in reality, and to maintain a person-centred perspective. Coproduction is part of a range of approaches that includes citizen involvement, participation, engagement & consultation.

With a national commitment to how relevant lived experience (both of those who live with health conditions and work in relevant fields) will be more at the centre of decision making.

Delivering the best possible experience of care in systems: **Key principles**

When planning for the delivery of the best possible experience across a health and care system or within a provider, there are 3 key principles that should always be considered:



Box 2. Coproduction in the SEND Code of Practice

The 2015 SEND Code of Practice clearly sets out what the statutory requirements mean in practice around coproduction for all providers and services. Local authorities and health services must:

- ensure the child's parents or the young person are fully included in the **EHCP needs assessment process** from the start.
- consult children and young people with SEN or disabilities, and their parents, when reviewing **local educational, training and social care provision** as well as preparing and reviewing the **Local Offer**.
- children have a right to **receive and impart information, to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account** in any matters affecting them from the early years. Their views should be given due weight according to their age, maturity and capability (Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- ensure that children, young people and parents are provided with the information, advice and support necessary to enable them to **participate in discussions and decisions** about their support. This should include information on their rights and entitlements in accessible formats and time to prepare for discussions and meetings.
- engage children and young people with SEN and disabilities and children's parents in **commissioning decisions**, to give useful insights into how to improve services and outcomes shaped by users' experiences, ambitions and expectations.

Context

Recent research commissioned by the RISE partnership highlighted several challenges nationally on the state of coproduction in SEND services, including time and budget limitations, tokenism, poor accessibility and over-reliance on certain voices and groups.⁷

Recent reforms and policy changes continue to centre the importance of coproduction. The DfE's 2026 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'⁸ White Paper sets out a 10-year plan to reform schools and SEND provision across England. Whilst the term 'coproduction' does not directly feature, the white paper explicitly talks about mending the "broken social contract" with parents and the need to view "families as partners". The accompanying guidance sent out to all local areas instructs them to put in place *'the system conditions for leadership and governance across the local area to ensure that changes are based on coproduction across partners, including the voices of children, young people, and their parents and carers'*.

Coproduction is also the first pillar in the 'maturity matrix' that each Local Area is required to complete as part of the SEND reform process. These reforms, instigated through the 2023 SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan⁹, position early and on-going coproduction as a core principle of the reforms and essential to rebuilding trust between parents and the system.

The SEND and AP partnership should ensure that parents, carers, children and young people are central and equal partners, and that local partnerships give regard to the importance of them participating as fully as possible in decisions and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions. We would expect the local partnership to engage families through parent carer forums (PCF), young people's forums and other local groups in order to shape and support improvement to practices and provide improved parent carer engagement across all services.

Maturity matrix Assessment Guidance

⁷ Currie, G. and Bajwa-Patel, M., 2025. What does good look and feel like in coproduction in SEND services? A report commissioned by the RISE partnership on behalf of the Department for Education.

⁸ Department for Education, 2026. Every child achieving and thriving, Policy Paper. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving>

⁹ Department for Education, 2023. SEND and alternative provision improvement plan, Policy paper. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan>

These concepts however are not new, the plan for parental engagement was identified in the 2011 White Paper 'Support and Aspiration' and then in the codified 2014 Children and Families Act and the 2015 Code of Practice. Stakeholders nationally, and indeed in these interviews, feel that these concepts have not come to fruition within the current system.

Since the 2014 reforms, Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) have become established across England, and have increasingly formalised from grassroots community groups, partly through funding from the DfE which is administered through Contact. Concerns were raised in the interviews that the reissued guidance issued to PCFs from Contact¹⁰ on the White Paper reforms could jeopardise the impartiality of PCFs by prohibiting forum leaders from engaging in public campaigning or lobbying in their personal lives. This could risk silencing parent voice in the SEND system and, by forcing neutrality, drive out the most experienced volunteers who often balance PCF work with grassroots activism. At the same time, funding to PCFs remains limited and there continues to be an over-reliance on a small group of parent representatives to do a considerable amount of work.

Since 2023 Ofsted SEND Area Inspections¹¹ also now report on coproduction with parents and young people, based on:

- **Active engagement:** leaders must actively involve children, young people, and families in planning, evaluating, and developing the SEND system.
- **Strategic impact:** coproduction is not consultation; it is about weaving families' views into the fabric of new initiatives and strategic decisions.
- **Evidence of change:** inspectors want to see how parent feedback leads to tangible improvements, such as better child-friendly spaces or new payment pathways.
- **Accurate understanding:** leaders' understanding of local needs must align with the lived experiences of families.

A report by Ofsted following two years of SEND Area Inspections in July 2025 highlighted the following common weaknesses and areas for improvement:¹²

¹⁰ Contact, 2026. Parent Carer Forums and campaigning or Lobbying Activity. Available at: <https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/parent-carer-participation/parent-carer-forum-handbook/forums-the-basics/parent-carer-forums-and-campaigning-2/>

¹¹ Care Quality Commission, Updated 2025. Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-send-framework-and-handbook/area-send-inspections-framework-and-handbook>

¹² Care Quality Commission and Ofsted, 2025. Area SEND review: what we heard and how we are improving. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-send-review-what-we-heard-and-how-we-are-improving>

- **Lack of partnership:** defective coproduction and weak relationships with parents/carers are common significant weaknesses, leading to mandatory improvement plans.
- **Poor quality and timeliness:** weak partnerships often result in poor quality EHCPs, slow processes, and inadequate annual reviews, especially for PfA.
- **Inconsistent practice:** variability in support and outcomes between different schools or services within the same area suggests a breakdown in effective

The Ofsted picture across London is varied, and there are differing views; with some observing that inspections have generally shown a more positive trajectory of coproduction in the capital in comparison to some other regions, and some stakeholders observing that they feel negative findings on coproduction are only found “in-extremis” – where there have been serious relationship breakdowns with parent groups, especially PCFs. As the newer inspection framework becomes more embedded, we may see more in the way of findings that guide practice over the coming years leading up to the reforms.

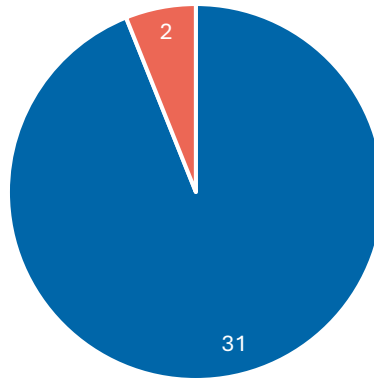
Methodology

The aim of this research was to understand the current state of coproduction in London with parent carers and to identify good practice that can be shared across London, as well as the challenges. We adopted a mixed methods approach combining focus groups with desktop analysis of Local Offers.

Focus groups

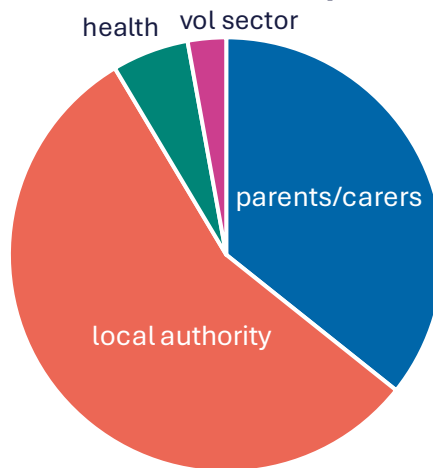
We invited all 33 London Boroughs to take part in an online focus group discussion at Borough-level, bringing together staff from local authorities, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and parent carers. It was felt that despite the potential sensitivities and power dynamics, there was a strong value in NDTi brokering these discussions and facilitating an honest, open and safe space to share concerns and ideas around the current state of coproduction and how it could be improved. Flyers promoting the meetings with information on how to sign-up were shared with each Local Authority and PCF through NDTi’s network and by the LIIA. In total, we spoke with 80 participants. This was made up of 35 parent carers (predominantly PCF representatives), 39 staff from local authorities (this included heads of SEND, coproduction leads and voice/participation staff), four health staff and two participants from the voluntary sector. One Borough was unable to attend a virtual meeting and provided written input. This accounted for participation from 31 Boroughs.

Representation from London Boroughs



■ London Boroughs that engaged ■ London Boroughs we did not interview

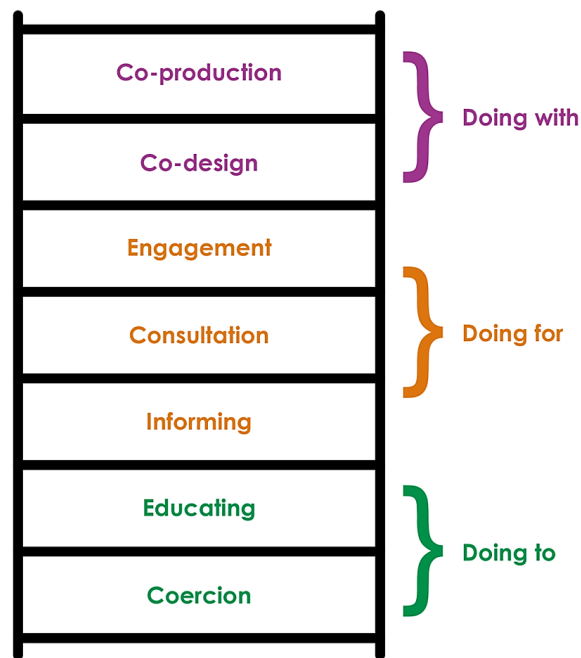
Breakdown of Focus Group Participants



■ parents/carers ■ local authority ■ health ■ vol sector

The focus group discussions were semi-structured and focused on:

- perceptions of where participants felt their Borough was on the 'ladder of coproduction'.



- PCF models, reach and representation.
- type and strength of the engagement and relationships between parent carers, local authorities and ICBs.
- examples of what has changed as a result of strong coproduction and where the key challenges lie.

Review of Local Offers

We conducted a desktop review of all 33 London Borough Local Offers with a focus on coproduction. This included mapping and reviewing coproduction materials, including coproduction charters (where they exist), findings around coproduction from Local Area SEND inspections and the quality of materials and resources for parent carers and young people.

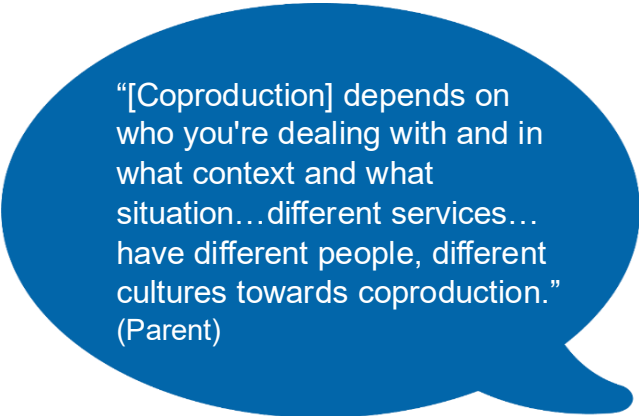
Limitations

The timeframes for this project were very tight and came at a time of intense pressure for local authorities, with SEND reforms underway and the launch of the government's White Paper part way through our research (end of February 2026). This meant that in several Boroughs, parent carers and local authority staff were not available at the same time and discussions had to be conducted separately. We also conducted a final meeting for participants across different Boroughs who had been unable to attend their own meeting, but who still wanted to participate. In total, only two Boroughs were not represented in this work, although information from their local offers is represented in the report.

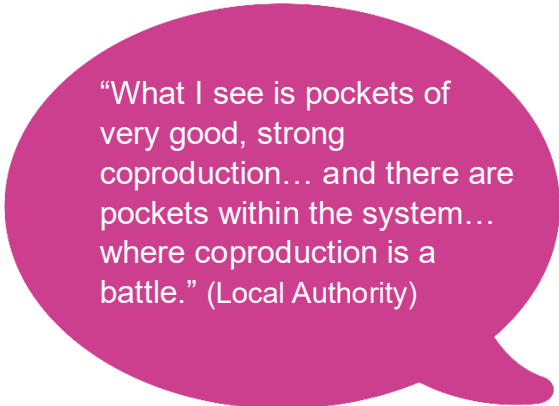
Current status of coproduction

A fragile and inconsistent picture

Our research found there is huge variation in the quality of coproduction with parent carers between, and within, different London boroughs. Nearly everyone we spoke with reported that the level of meaningful coproduction depended on both the issue or service being explored, the level of engagement (strategic, service, individual) and the part of the system being interacted with. The team heard the full spectrum of experiences, from mature, positive “critical friend” relationships between the PCF and local authority, to situations where relationships have completely broken down. Most examples of coproduction shared were outputs, documents or strategies, rather than services and support. However, the experience of being involved in producing these outputs was overall positive and important for developing relationships, mutual understanding of different perspectives, and building trust.

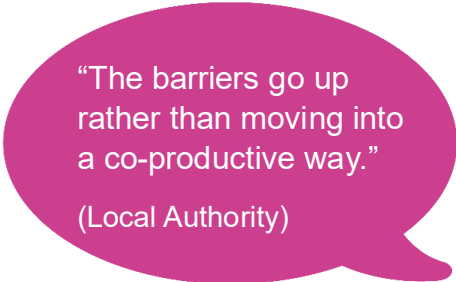


“[Coproduction] depends on who you're dealing with and in what context and what situation...different services... have different people, different cultures towards coproduction.”
(Parent)



“What I see is pockets of very good, strong coproduction... and there are pockets within the system... where coproduction is a battle.” (Local Authority)

There is a sense of frustration that despite pockets of good practice, coproduction remains inconsistent, fragile and highly dependent on individuals. This is because coproduction practices and arrangements are not generally embedded, sustained or systematically applied. In some cases, it is seen as an additional ‘nice to have’ if there are resources and capacity available. As one local authority said, when agreement cannot be reached, often because of budget constraints, practice quickly falls from ‘doing with’ to ‘doing to’, “because we are unable to deliver what they would like... it is dropping down towards informing.”



“The barriers go up rather than moving into a co-productive way.”
(Local Authority)



“If there's no money to do it... all the other things that are nice to have, get pushed away.”
(Local Authority)

Several Local Authorities are on an improvement journey with coproduction: There are signs of improvement from a low baseline, illustrated by the maturity matrix levels of ‘emerging’, ‘developing’ and ‘maturing’. In several cases, the catalyst for change was an Ofsted SEND report which identified coproduction as a significant weakness. Some spoke about a negative inspection providing the opportunity to reset, forcing recognition and action to address longstanding issues around coproduction, trust and culture. For one parent, while recent changes have been felt in terms of greater access to key staff, this has not yet translated into meaningful partnership working: “people are beginning to understand things better... [but] collaboration, not so much.” For another, the increasingly constrained resource environment means that coproduction is going backwards, and as the financial narrative surrounding public services has become more

dominant and pessimistic, the extent to which people can feel energised or ‘buy-in’ to the potential of coproduction has been impacted.

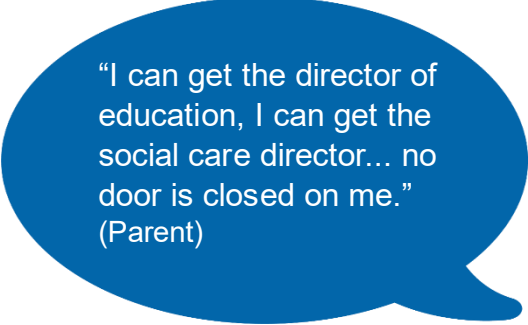


“Within the last few years, we've made some really massive improvements about the how the way in which we co-produce a lot of what we do.” (Local Authority)

Box 3. How do PCFs engage with local authorities?

- **Formal participation in regular governance structures:** This includes various forums, strategic boards, steering groups as well as direct regular meetings with the Head of SEND. For example, SEND Strategic Partnership Boards, Preparing for Adulthood forums, Employment Forums and thematic workstreams/working groups. Only one Borough includes PCF representatives on statutory SEND panels. Several commented this was an area that had been explored but issues around confidentiality and conflict of interest prohibited any developments.
- **Project-based work:** This includes established programmes such as the partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools (PINS) programme or one-off projects, such as PCFs sitting on interview panels or working groups developing specific strategies or services.
- **Informal work:** This includes ad hoc consultation and discussion and is heavily driven by relationships.

The level of influence parents feel they have greatly varies. Even when there is strong formal inclusion of parent voices in strategic spaces, the extent to which this attendance leads to influence and power-sharing differs. As one PCF representative said, while the forum is invited to attend strategic council meetings, “they don't have any influence whatsoever.” Often this is down to who is “in the room”. This dependence on individuals undermines real power sharing and reinforces the uneven and fragile state of coproduction in some places. In other places, the level of perceived influence was more positive.



“I can get the director of education, I can get the social care director... no door is closed on me.”
(Parent)



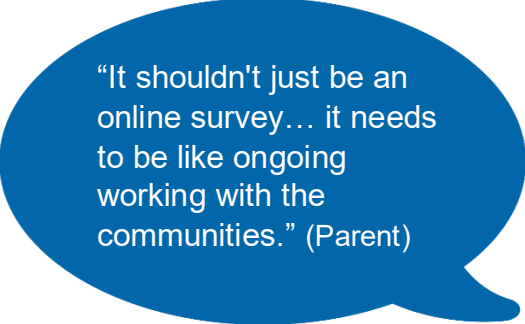
“The PCF] is... represented at all levels of governance.”
(Local Authority)



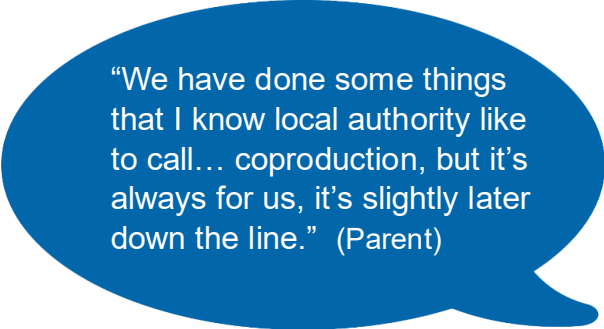
“Just attending a board meeting... if you're not listening to that voice... that is not coproduction.”
(Local Authority)

Mixed understanding and implementation

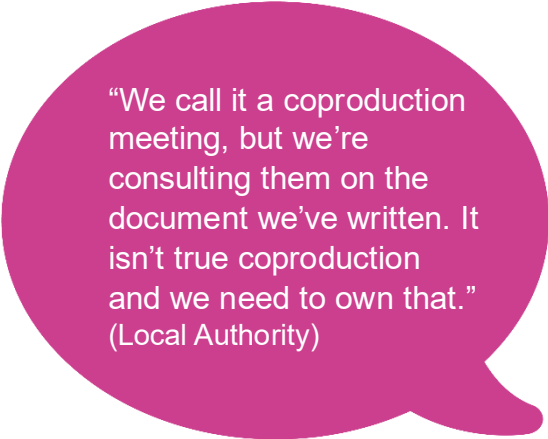
Overall, there is an appetite to do, and understand more about, coproduction, but for many it is unclear what good looks like, or how to achieve this. The most cited priority for change by participants was a need to better embed an understanding of coproduction across all aspects of the SEND system. Several participants reflected that while the language of coproduction is often used, genuine involvement from the beginning of projects is rare. Consultation and coproduction are commonly conflated. The team heard several examples of local authorities sharing near-final documents with parents for review as being examples of coproduction. This is reinforced by findings from several Local Area SEND Inspections which found consultation being confused with coproduction. There was also some push back to the idea that everything can, or should be, co-produced and there is a need for greater transparency around where the parameters are for what can be genuinely co-produced.



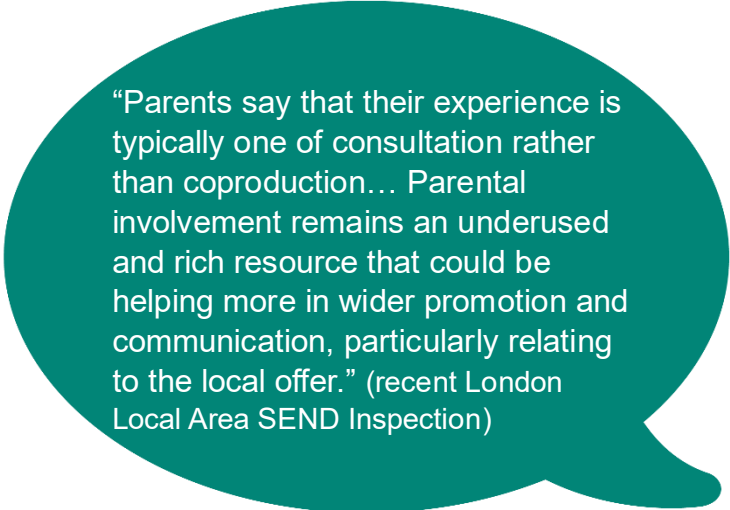
“It shouldn't just be an online survey... it needs to be like ongoing working with the communities.” (Parent)



“We have done some things that I know local authority like to call... coproduction, but it's always for us, it's slightly later down the line.” (Parent)

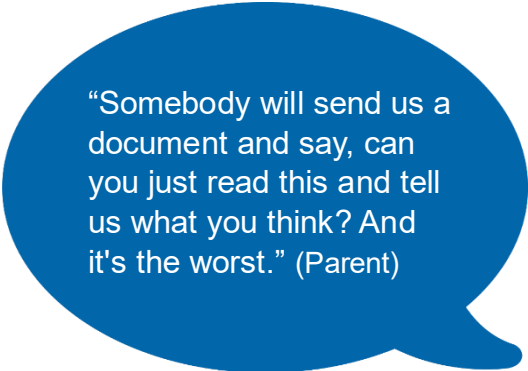


"We call it a coproduction meeting, but we're consulting them on the document we've written. It isn't true coproduction and we need to own that."
(Local Authority)

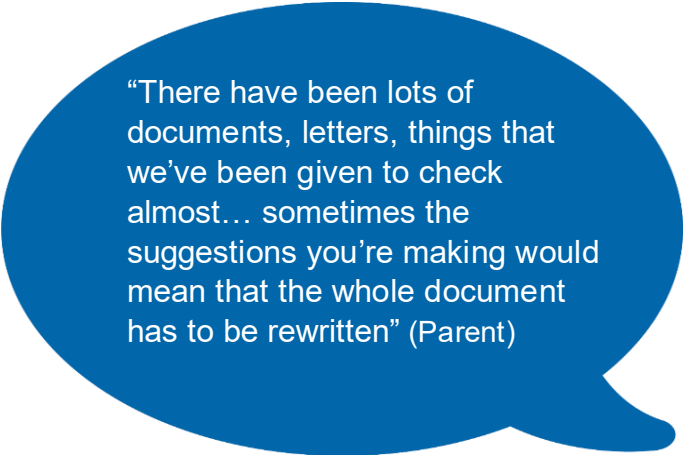


"Parents say that their experience is typically one of consultation rather than coproduction... Parental involvement remains an underused and rich resource that could be helping more in wider promotion and communication, particularly relating to the local offer." (recent London Local Area SEND Inspection)

Parents are clear that involving them from the outset is fundamental to genuine coproduction; early engagement may prevent later frustration. Several parents emphasised the reactive nature of engagement with local authorities, often triggered by strong parental advocacy or crisis. Others spoke to the recurring frustration of being asked to comment on work at a late stage. Parents are clear that earlier involvement before decisions have been made would increase efficiency and outcomes.



"Somebody will send us a document and say, can you just read this and tell us what you think? And it's the worst." (Parent)

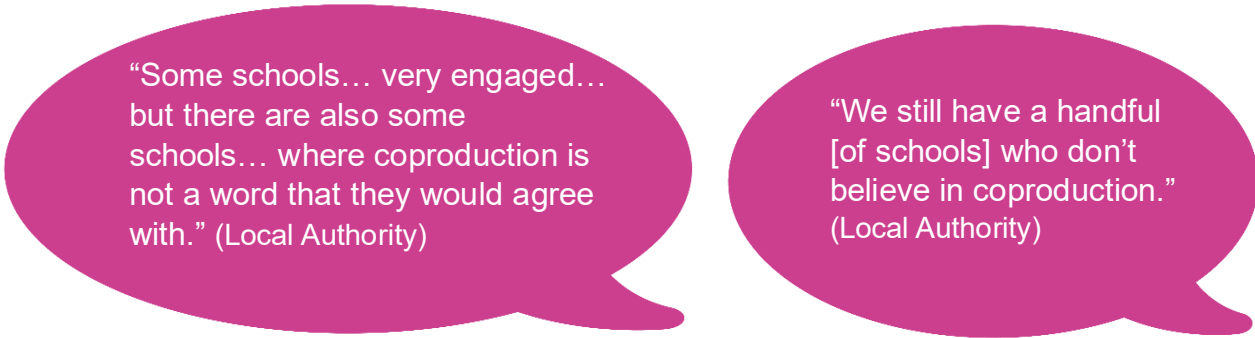


"There have been lots of documents, letters, things that we've been given to check almost... sometimes the suggestions you're making would mean that the whole document has to be rewritten" (Parent)

Some parts of the system were highlighted as being further ahead in terms of doing coproduction well than others. Social care and health, including CAMHS was seen as lagging behind LA education departments. London regional NHS England carried out significant work between 2021 and 2025 to develop guidance and tools to support coproduction with young people. The team who led this work are keen to work together

with LIA going forward to have a strategic approach to coproduction with children, young people and families across London.¹³

Schools were highlighted as having the most varied record on coproduction, with secondary schools highlighted as a particular gap in engagement. Furthermore, several local authorities reported that while there is a good understanding of the concept and benefits of coproduction at a senior leadership level, this is not always cascaded through middle management.



“Some schools... very engaged... but there are also some schools... where coproduction is not a word that they would agree with.” (Local Authority)

“We still have a handful [of schools] who don’t believe in coproduction.” (Local Authority)

Local authorities spoke about coproduction with young people, including young people with SEND, and felt that in some ways it is stronger than with parents. We did arrange online focus groups with young people and coproduction leads, but unfortunately attendance was low. We then arranged some face-to-face meetings and there are some examples in the section of this report on the experience of young people. Several local authorities had worked with youth forums to reflect on what coproduction means to them and on different participation models, with several producing videos and other outputs. Despite this, youth voice was flagged by a few participants as being missing in SEND structures and for some local authorities engaging with young people directly was particularly challenging.

Overall, there is a disconnect between coproduction with parents around strategic developments and the individual experiences of parents and families. Quality strategic coproduction is not always filtering down to the individual level, for example on families’ experiences of the EHCP process, annual reviews and the SEND system more generally. This has a significant knock-on effect: it is hard to engage people with coproduction at a strategic level when their experience at the individual and service levels are not in coproduction. If you cannot access support for your child, or your experience of the ‘system’ is adversarial, you will likely avoid engaging with it beyond the minimum necessary.

¹³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/london/london-clinical-networks/our-networks/london-babies-children-and-young-peoples-transformation-team/youth-engagement-and-voice/youth-led-decision-making-campaign>

Box 4. Local Offer review: coproduction charters

“If we don’t pull together some type of coproduction framework... we will run the risk of falling into that ‘doing to’ rather than ‘doing with.’” – Local authority

Most London Borough Local Offers’ do not have an easy to find coproduction charter. Only seven had an obvious charter: [Barking and Dagenham](#), [Hammersmith and Fulham](#), [Haringey](#), [Havering](#), [Hounslow](#), [Tower Hamlets](#) and [Islington](#). Hammersmith and Fulham have a dedicated page which also links to the Mayor of London’s approach to coproduction. Bromley have a SEND [Communications Charter](#) and a 2026 [report](#) on their coproduction approach. These charters help to set out a clear, shared understanding of the values of coproduction. A review of Local Offers reveals that several Local Authorities confuse consultation and a “you said, we did” approach with coproduction.

Hackney co-produced their SEND strategy and have [a page dedicated to this](#) on their Local Offer. Enfield have a [Working Together Framework](#) which cuts across all council services, Kingston have a [commitment to coproduction](#), though no charter, and Islington have a [‘concordat’](#) and coordinate this through a SEND coproduction group.

A few referenced the [Rotherham Genuine Partnership’s](#) approach to coproduction. The Local Offers that have resources available for parent carers and young people tend to be those that have a local offer charter or something similar, for example [Barking and Dagenham](#). It is worth noting that the next CQC and Ofsted thematic review on the area SEND inspections will be on Local Offers.

Example: Islington’s [coproduction concordat](#):

We work together as equals to develop policy and services and support each other so each of us can give the best we can offer.

We will do this by:

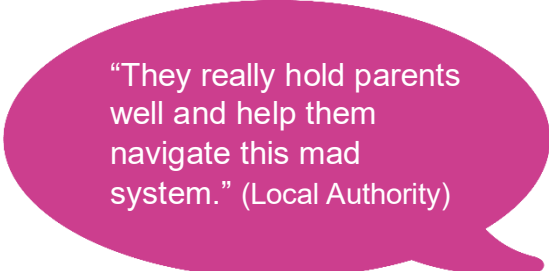
- Sharing power more equally
- Being honest about what is possible
- Developing person centred policies and services, rather than systems or process led approaches
- Empowering people to make changes to the system
- Acknowledging the skills, knowledge, experience and interests people have and using these for mutual advantage in pursuit of a common aim Taking positive action to include all groups
- Valuing equally what everybody brings
- Respecting people's views and wishes - making sure people are listened to
- Making language, information and meetings accessible to all
- Making it reciprocal - giving and getting something back

Reality of Parent Carer Forums

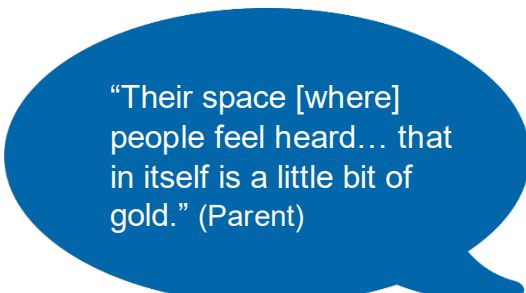
Structure and resourcing

The structure, resourcing and therefore capacity of PCFs is varied across London.

Most PCFs are independent organisations, ranging from small, informal, volunteer-run community groups to incorporated organisations and Community Interest Companies. Several are hosted by, or commissioned through, an external organisation. Host models provide benefits in terms of administrative support as well as the ability to reach new parents engaged in other activities carried out by the host organisation. As well as strategic engagement with the Borough, PCFs offer regular spaces for parents to meet and connect, for example through coffee mornings, events and workshops with speakers and themed discussions, and dedicated small groups. We heard examples of a girls' autism group and a Bangladeshi parents' group. In addition, PCFs provide space for peer support and more informal, relational support. Some have dedicated family support workers to help with individual casework. These broader activities are important for wider parental engagement and credibility and to garner and represent a wider range of views and experiences.

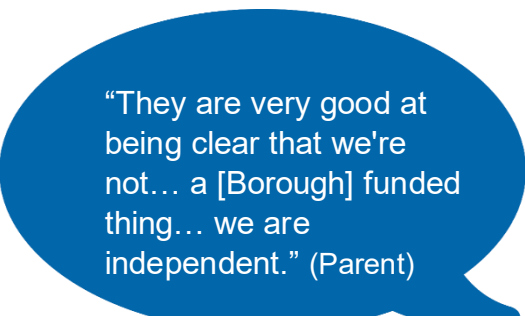


"They really hold parents well and help them navigate this mad system." (Local Authority)



"Their space [where] people feel heard... that in itself is a little bit of gold." (Parent)

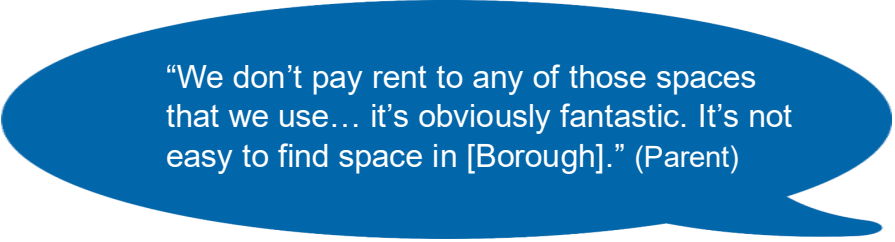
Beyond the DfE national PCF grant (£17,500 per year), six PCFs we spoke with received additional funding from the local authority. Several were careful to reinforce the independence of the PCF despite receiving additional funding from the Borough, as one parent commented "if we accept a large sum of money from the LA, then it looks like we're working for it." Support from local authorities to PCFs is mainly in-kind, for example providing meeting and event space, or practical administrative support in terms of arranging meetings and taking notes. This lack of additional funding clearly puts on a strain on many PCFs, with several participants reporting how they lack funding to support paid roles, overheads and back-office functions.



"They are very good at being clear that we're not... a [Borough] funded thing... we are independent." (Parent)



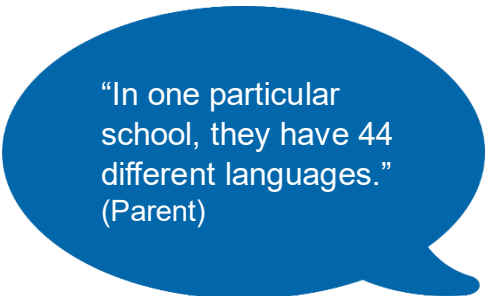
"We're completely independent. We're an association... we're looking to turn into a CIC." (Parent)



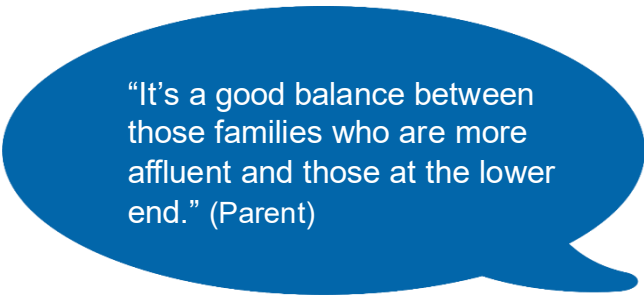
“We don’t pay rent to any of those spaces that we use... it’s obviously fantastic. It’s not easy to find space in [Borough].” (Parent)

Reach and representation

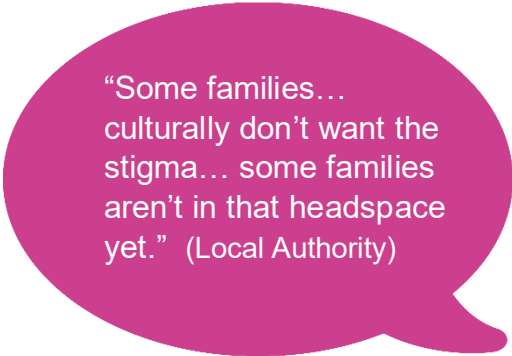
On the whole, PCFs report good representation and involvement of families in their Borough. While acknowledging the difficulties, several shared examples of initiatives to reach out to under-represented groups, for example through translating resources, operating outside of working hours, ensuring a diverse steering group embedded in different community groups and targeted outreach to specific minority community groups. However, some groups continue to be underrepresented, including those families without an EHCP, families who home school or who are not connected to schools, early years parents and some minoritised communities – which may be slightly different in each Local Authority area and may intersect with particular community stigmas around disability. Many Boroughs in London are highly transient, which also means engagement can fluctuate over the year.



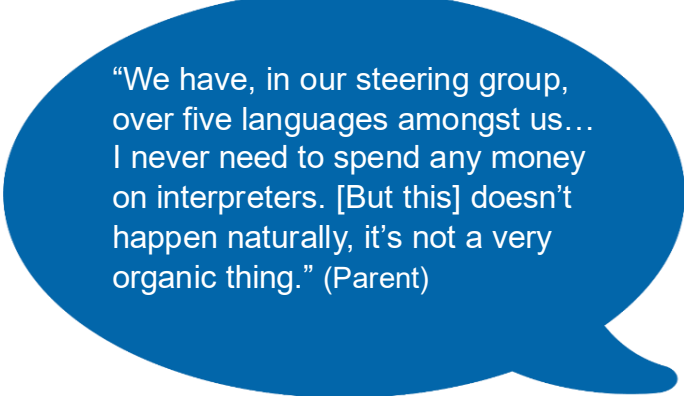
“In one particular school, they have 44 different languages.” (Parent)



“It’s a good balance between those families who are more affluent and those at the lower end.” (Parent)



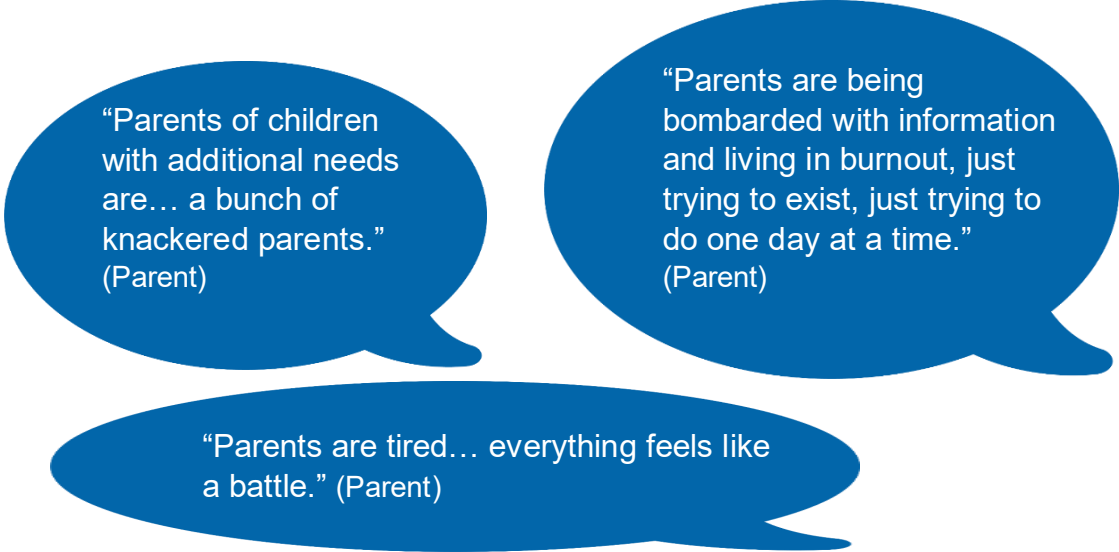
“Some families... culturally don’t want the stigma... some families aren’t in that headspace yet.” (Local Authority)



“We have, in our steering group, over five languages amongst us... I never need to spend any money on interpreters. [But this] doesn’t happen naturally, it’s not a very organic thing.” (Parent)

More generally, reach and engagement is impacted by parent capacity and resources. Many parent carers are exhausted and have no, or extremely limited, capacity to engage in anything beyond day-to-day survival. Their priority is getting good (or any) support for their child. In some Boroughs, some people felt that there is so little available, or what is available is inaccessible, that they do not see how things will change or that they will be listened to, which limits their engagement in the forums. The

cost-of-living crisis was also emphasised by several participants as limiting parental involvement in the PCF, for example because they are no longer able to attend sessions due to needing to take on additional paid work.



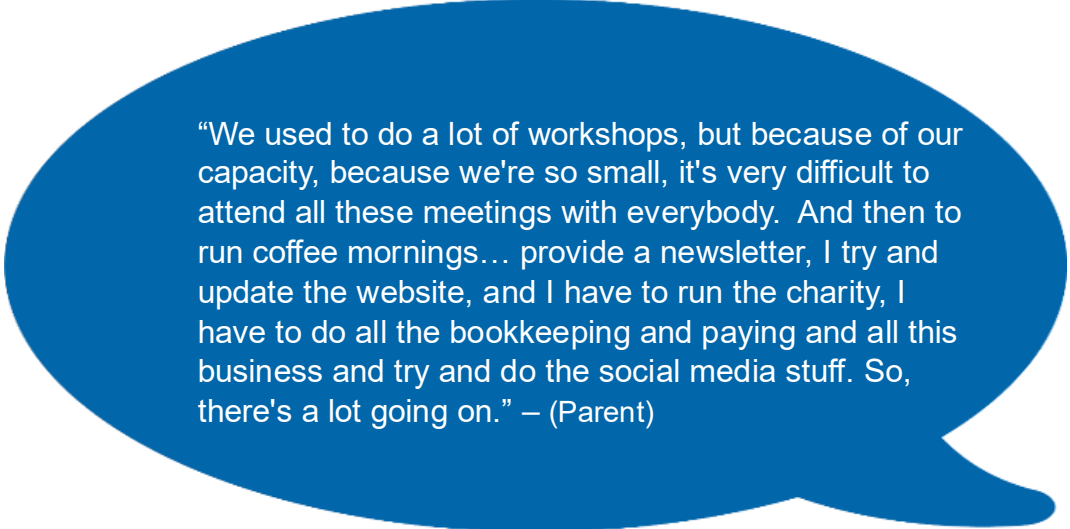
"Parents of children with additional needs are... a bunch of knackered parents."
(Parent)

"Parents are being bombarded with information and living in burnout, just trying to exist, just trying to do one day at a time."
(Parent)

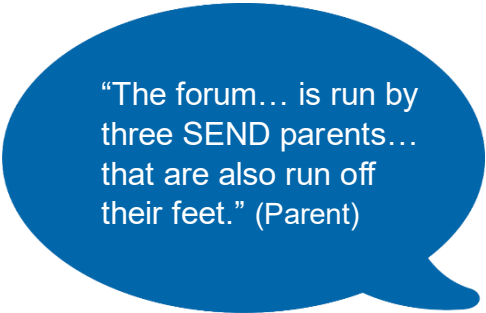
"Parents are tired... everything feels like a battle."
(Parent)

Capacity

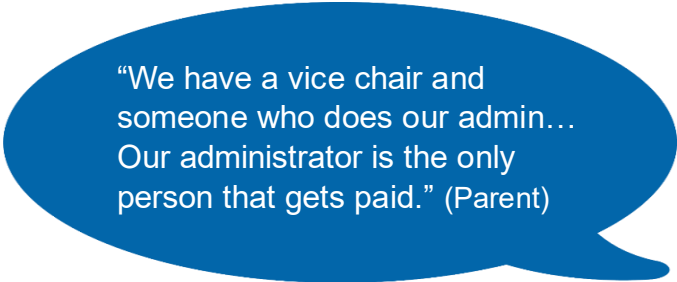
Significant concerns were raised in many of the discussions around the capacity and sustainability of the PCFs. Many PCFs are highly dependent on volunteers with small steering groups. With few PCFs having resourcing to support back-office functions, individual steering group members reported juggling varied administrative responsibilities with intense weekly time commitments; one PCF representative told us they sit on 24 different boards. Parents described both the practical and emotional toll this level of unpaid work creates, alongside their day-to-day caring responsibilities and navigating the SEND system for their own child.



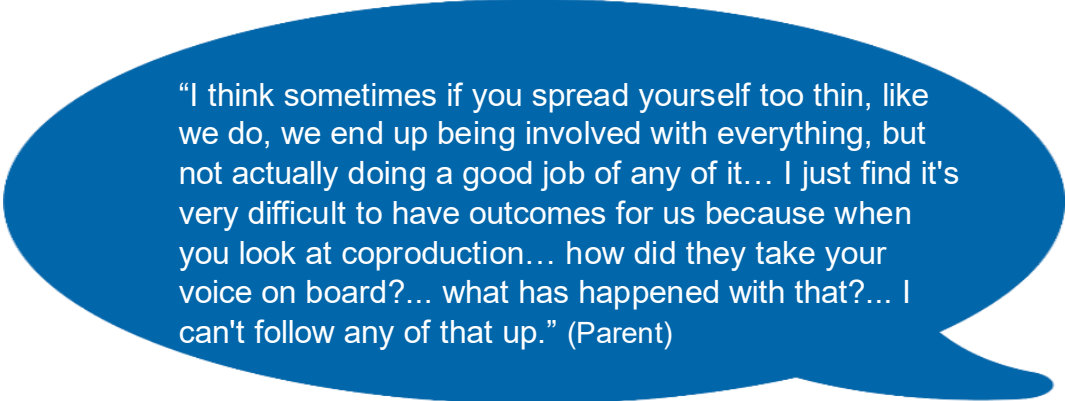
"We used to do a lot of workshops, but because of our capacity, because we're so small, it's very difficult to attend all these meetings with everybody. And then to run coffee mornings... provide a newsletter, I try and update the website, and I have to run the charity, I have to do all the bookkeeping and paying and all this business and try and do the social media stuff. So, there's a lot going on." – (Parent)



"The forum... is run by three SEND parents... that are also run off their feet." (Parent)

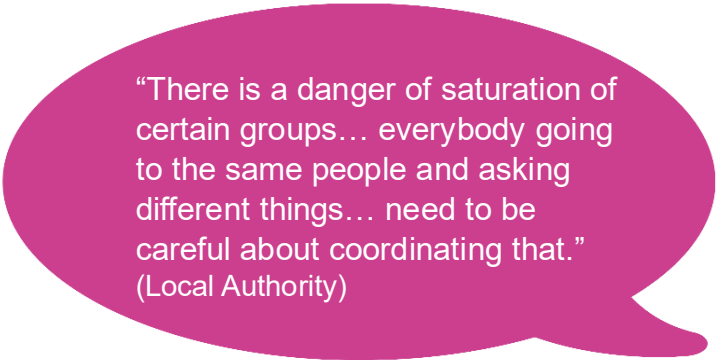


"We have a vice chair and someone who does our admin... Our administrator is the only person that gets paid." (Parent)

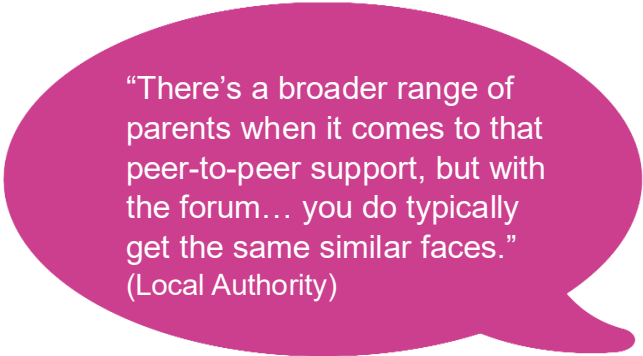


"I think sometimes if you spread yourself too thin, like we do, we end up being involved with everything, but not actually doing a good job of any of it... I just find it's very difficult to have outcomes for us because when you look at coproduction... how did they take your voice on board?... what has happened with that?... I can't follow any of that up." (Parent)

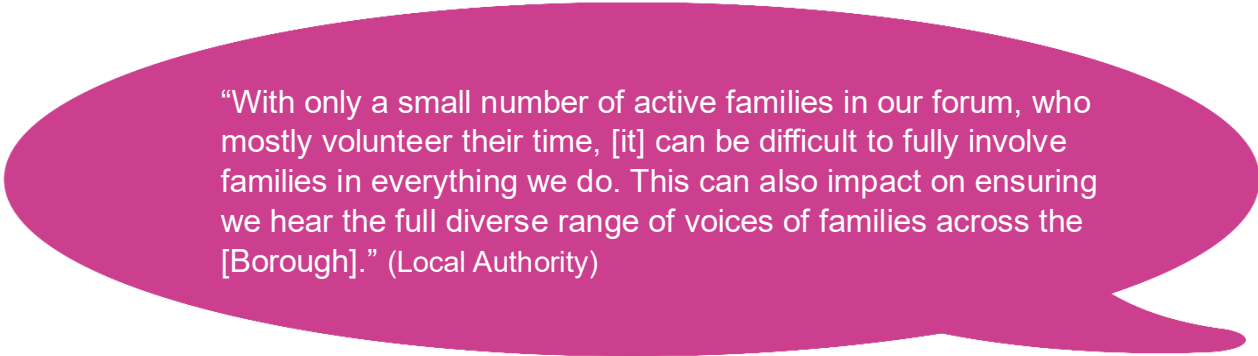
Limited PCF capacity may also limit representation from a broader range of parents in strategic spaces. Several participants highlighted how it may be difficult for newer families to engage when it can be the same people consistently engaging in strategic spaces, which may in turn limit the range of voices.



"There is a danger of saturation of certain groups... everybody going to the same people and asking different things... need to be careful about coordinating that." (Local Authority)



"There's a broader range of parents when it comes to that peer-to-peer support, but with the forum... you do typically get the same similar faces." (Local Authority)



"With only a small number of active families in our forum, who mostly volunteer their time, [it] can be difficult to fully involve families in everything we do. This can also impact on ensuring we hear the full diverse range of voices of families across the [Borough]." (Local Authority)

Coproduction key enablers and barriers

Relationships and trust

Strong, trusting relationships between parents and local authorities, underpinned by shared vision and values, were repeatedly highlighted as critical to meaningful coproduction. Relationships described as “open”, “longstanding” and “mature” were key to positive experiences and strong examples shared with the team. Close working relationships, good communication and rapid access to decision makers was emphasised by several participants, one local authority describing their PCF as having them “on speed dial”. In some Boroughs there is a huge amount to do to repair broken relationships at all levels including at more strategic levels between PCFs and statutory agencies.

“There's a big lack of trust... I think there is an attitude of us and them, unfortunately.”
(Parent)

“Trust is a currency, and that trust has been lost and eroded in [Borough].”
(Parent)

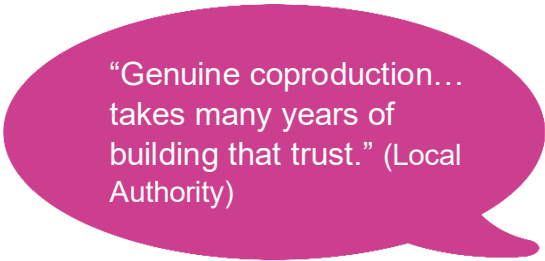
“We are all here to deliver the same thing. And that's support for our families out there.” (Local Authority)

“We've built our credibility... they know it's not just a bunch of mummies whinging.” (Parent)

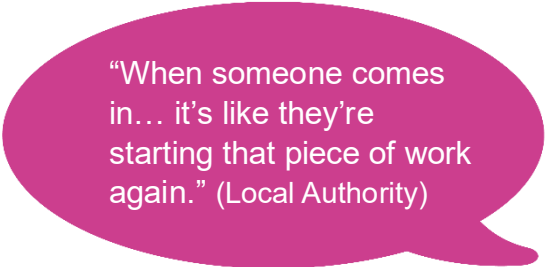
“We have the warriors, if you like, every forum does, the people who want to come to fight... this is not the best environment for positive coproduction. If you want proper codesign, you want people to be excited and looking forward for improvement.” (Parent)

Trust is partly built through continuity of staff and long-term investment. Many participants highlighted the importance of building relationships with a stable group of people over time and that there needs to be strategic long-term investment in resources, learning and capacity to embed coproduction meaningfully. Staff turnover and organisational restructuring were repeatedly highlighted as a barrier to coproduction and this partly reflects how coproduction is not embedded in processes

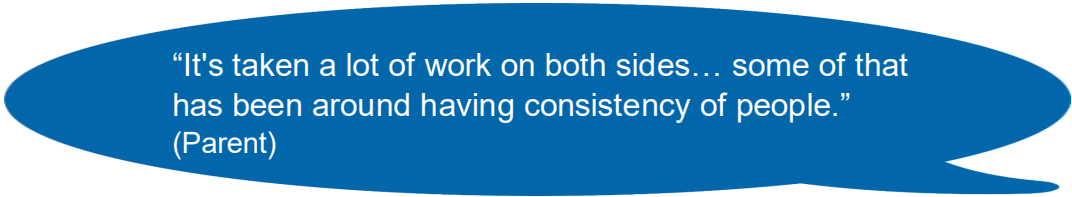
and culture and is often dependent on individual champions. One local authority gave the example of how the loss of a dedicated SEND coproduction consultant had a long-term impact, with coproduction activity quickly becoming fragmented and reactive. Others emphasised the importance of senior leadership in systematically embedding principles of coproduction in organisational culture.



"Genuine coproduction... takes many years of building that trust." (Local Authority)

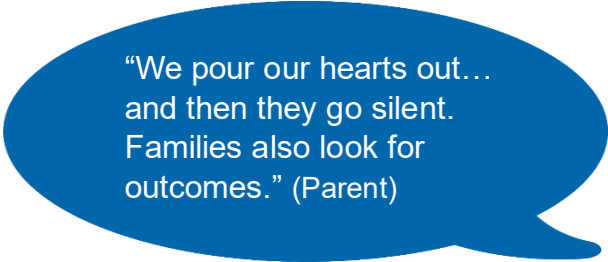


"When someone comes in... it's like they're starting that piece of work again." (Local Authority)

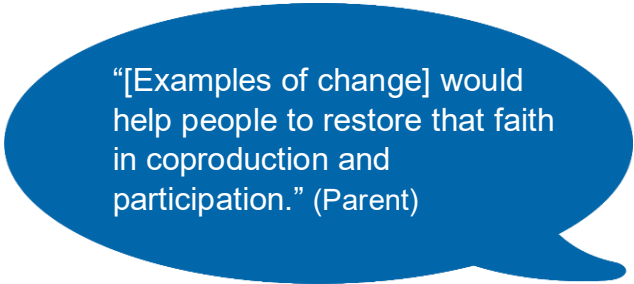


"It's taken a lot of work on both sides... some of that has been around having consistency of people." (Parent)

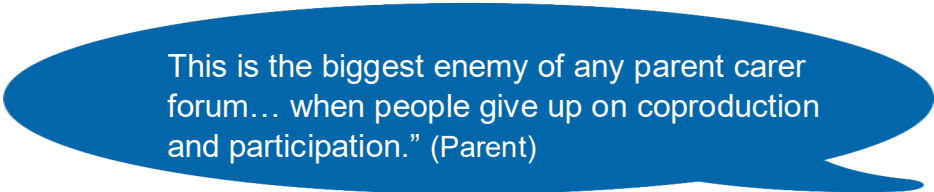
A significant barrier to building trusted relationships is when there is no evidence of change or feedback loops. Without appropriate outcome measures and reporting, including 'you said, we did' feedback, parents lose faith in the process when they are not clear on what is being done differently as a result of their engagement. Several parents gave examples of work that started well in terms of coproduction but either went quiet without conclusion or their engagement ended after the initial set-up, limiting parents' sense that their involvement led to tangible outcomes. This can lead to consultation fatigue and loss of trust, one parent describing it as "soul destroying", especially when it limits young people's willingness to engage.



"We pour our hearts out... and then they go silent. Families also look for outcomes." (Parent)



"[Examples of change] would help people to restore that faith in coproduction and participation." (Parent)



This is the biggest enemy of any parent carer forum... when people give up on coproduction and participation." (Parent)

Therefore, it is essential that feedback loops aimed at what parents want to know are regularly used in an attempt to build up trust.

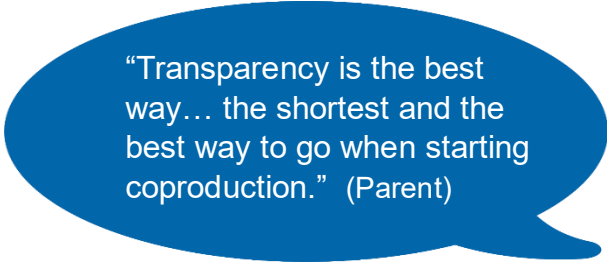
Similarly, parents called for increased transparency from local authorities, particularly around what is feasible financially before starting a co-produced piece of work or being open when things go wrong. One local authority described their increased transparency around data with parents, including EHCP timeliness, complaints data and tribunal numbers, as having the effect of strengthening their relationship. Many parent carers acknowledged the enormous pressures that local authorities are also under and the importance of coproduction to help reduce conflict and build trust: “even if we just manage to lower the temperature and normalise a conversation.” They also challenged the stereotype around parents’ expectations, one PCF representative highlighting that in most cases, parents also want to find the more effective and efficient way of doing things.



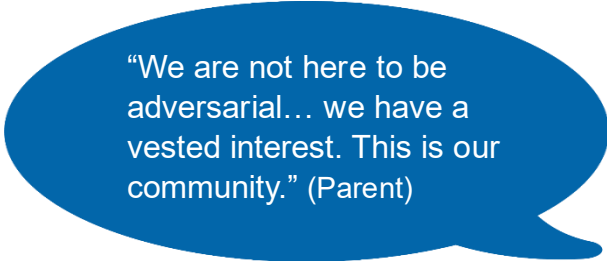
“Transparency has really helped build open relationships.” (Local Authority)



“If we can only do engagement, we need to be honest and call it engagement.” (Local Authority)

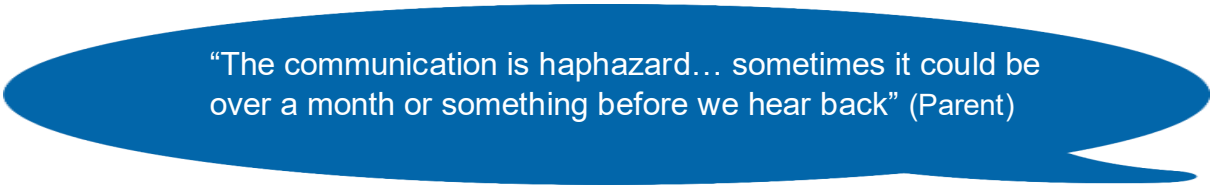


“Transparency is the best way... the shortest and the best way to go when starting coproduction.” (Parent)



“We are not here to be adversarial... we have a vested interest. This is our community.” (Parent)

Strong (and at times informal) communication was also highlighted as a key enabler for good relationships and therefore good coproduction. Participants emphasised the importance of informal communication, e.g., WhatsApp, ad hoc coffees, as well as through more formal structures that model respectful communication.



“The communication is haphazard... sometimes it could be over a month or something before we hear back” (Parent)

Culture, power and inclusivity

The principles of coproduction are generally not consistently applied or understood across organisational cultures.

Several participants emphasised how there is no shared understanding or definition of what coproduction is and can offer, especially at the middle management level. For some, recognition of the role and value of the PCF is inconsistent, especially with new staff.

“It’s not a thing you do.
It’s a way of being.”
(Local Authority)

“Every new person that
meets us will ask, ‘who are
you, why are you here?’...
after seven years.” (Parent)

“If I could change anything, I would make it
that everyone knew what [coproduction]
was and everybody knew how to get
involved in it.” (Local Authority)

This reinforces existing power imbalances. Where coproduction was seen to be stronger, participants were open about the willingness to have uncomfortable conversations. One Borough described widespread fear among parents to put their heads above the parapet in case it affected their own individual case. Barriers are also shaped through previous negative experiences of engaging with statutory bodies.

“It is a David and Goliath
relationship... 99% of the time
I’m simply mum.” (Parent)

“Parents are scared to speak
to the Borough... in case it
affects any sort of formal
process.” (Parent)

“There are barriers of language, there are barriers of
perception, there are experiences that have shaped their
perception.” (recent London Local Area SEND Inspection)

Families of children with more complex and medical needs need more representation. One parent reflected that for those families of children with more complex needs, “our voices are not really there at the coproduction level”. Another commented that the system is hyper-focused on the “trendy three”: autism, ADHD and learning disability, whereas “other disabilities feel very invisible”, such as children with epilepsy or complex and rare medical needs.

“Inclusion should
be needs led, not
diagnosis driven.”
(Parent)

Capacity and resourcing

A lack of capacity on the side of both local authorities and parent carers was highlighted as a key barrier to coproduction. The PCF role and remit is vital but, as noted above, capacity for engagement at different levels (and leadership) is limited due to an over-reliance on a small number of under-resourced PCF representatives. At the same time, local authorities are dealing with financial challenges and intense pressures, both from above – with reforms and restructures – and below – for example, dealing with the day-to-day backlog of EHCPs. Several parents mentioned that there is often a perception from the local authority staff that parents are all paid, when often their attendance at strategic meetings is voluntary.

“Parents are under enormous pressure... but the professionals are too.”
(Parent)

“You really do need that dedicated time resource... it can't just be an add on.”
(Local Authority)

“You don't want the parent forum to be the only partner who's not paid on that table.” (Parent)

Sustained resourcing and capacity are clearly critical to facilitating coproduction.

Sustainable funding for PCFs was one of the most cited priorities to help improve coproduction, including resource for dedicated coproduction roles and facilitation capacity. A lack of time and money has a direct bearing on ability and willingness to prioritise and do coproduction well. One participant commented that resourcing coproduction “is an increasing battle”.

“Coproduction is expensive and takes time.” (Local Authority)

“I think capacity is the biggest barrier on both sides... if there's no money to do it... all the other things that are nice to have, get pushed away.” (PCF rep)

“You can't expect someone to be at that table for nothing when everyone else around the table is being paid.” (Local Authority)

What did parents tell us enables good coproduction?	What parents said this might look like.
Long-term investment and commitment	• Resourcing (financial and in-kind) for PCFs • Dedicated LA coproduction champions with the remit to meaningfully make a difference in their system, which may be a lead role • Strategic leadership buy-in and promotion of a culture of coproduction that means there is less reliance on individual champions • Follow-through, sustained involvement and clear feedback loops
Shared values and understanding of coproduction	• Coproduction charter • Staff training/upskilling • Culture change throughout organisational hierarchies • Clear distinction between coproduction and consultation
Deliberate addressing of power dynamics	• Naming and returning to power dynamics and how these can be addressed • Reimbursing parents for involvement in meetings • Ensuring diverse participation and valuing lived experience
Respectful and flexible communication	• Engagement opportunities outside of working hours • WhatsApp communication • Early engagement
Transparency	• LA being up-front about available resources, constraints and likelihood of delivery • Clear timelines and feedback loops • Being clear about parameters of what can be co-produced and what can only be consulted • Fostering a shared understanding of system pressures with staff, parents and young people.

Examples of coproduction

Navigating the system

Participants gave many examples of co-producing resources to help parent carers to navigate the SEND system when asked for examples of what Boroughs had been able to co-produce with families, and how things have changed as a result.

- Events: This included both recurring and one-off Local Offer events, SEND roadshows, employment forums and various Preparing for Adulthood events which were successfully co-produced with parent carers (e.g., Enfield [‘Moving on Up’ events](#), Bexley [Local Offer Live events](#), Haringey [Voices Day](#), Hounslow SEND Summit, Tower Hamlets ‘Sensory Station’, Havering [SEND Roadshows](#), Lambeth PfA event, City marketplace events with SENDIASS, and Newham [Local Offer events](#))
- Information: Many of the examples given were of co-producing guidance, information sheets and Local Offer websites to ensure they are useful, clear and approachable for parents navigating the SEND system. This included guidance on topics such as post-16 transition, EBSA, general parent carer SEND guidance and overview of the system, Preparing for Adulthood, health, universal and ordinarily available provision guidance). Kingston PCF independently developed a [Guide to SEND and Inclusion in Kingston schools](#) for parents, which is also widely used by schools.
- Paperwork: Several Boroughs have examples of the PCF reviewing and commenting on revised paperwork such as annual review and EHCP templates.

Strategic level

The next most common example given of coproduction was at the strategic level.

- Strategies: Several participants gave examples of strategies which had been co-produced with parent carers, for example Hounslow’s [All-age Autism Strategy](#), Havering’s [SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy](#), and SEND Strategies in [Lewisham](#), [Kensington and Chelsea](#), [Lambeth](#) and [Merton](#).
- Approaches to coproduction: This included coproduction charters which set out shared principles, approaches and practical frameworks to inclusive and collaborative working (see [Box 4](#)). For example, Haringey’s [Working Together Charter](#), Tower Hamlet’s [SEND coproduction charter](#), Havering’s [Working Together Promise](#) and Kingston’s [coproduction agreement](#).
- Local Offers: Several gave the coproduction of Local Offer, including both the content and presentation of information, as given by several as good examples of coproduction, including [Harrow](#), [Havering](#), [Hounslow](#), [Ealing](#) and [Lambeth](#).

- Monitoring and learning frameworks: Examples of co-produced monitoring systems given included Havering's outcomes framework and Kensington and Chelsea's [quality assurance framework](#).
- Strategic recruitment: Several Boroughs (including Newham, Redbridge and Kensington and Chelsea) gave examples of how PCF representatives are invited to join recruitment panels for strategic posts – though it wasn't clear if they were involved earlier in the job specification or role requirements.

Service level

At the service level, examples were given both of coproduction and of services being changed or developed as a result of feedback.

- Coproduction of services: For example, several Boroughs have co-produced short breaks offers ([Hounslow](#), [Ealing](#), [Kensington and Chelsea](#) and [Westminster](#)). Others, including Lewisham, gave the roll-out of the national Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme as an example of a programme being well co-produced. Other examples of co-produced services include Haringey's ADHD assessment 'Waiting Well' workshops and EBSA work, Westminster's [Confident Communicators programme](#), the design and review of City's SEND Sports programme and City and Hackney's joint educational psychologist service.
- Development of new services as a result of advocacy/feedback: For example, parent feedback led to the creation of a new SEND youth club in Enfield, a new phlebotomy service in Lambeth, an incontinence service in Harrow, a wheelchair swing in Havering and new youth provision in Kensington and Chelsea. There were also examples of changes as a result of youth advocacy, including a scheme to reduce dog fouling near schools in Bexley and improved park safety and lighting in Merton.

Given the pitch and format of the discussions, participants provided fewer examples of what's changed at an individual level as the result of effective coproduction. There were some examples provided, including parent carer representatives sitting on decision-making panels and new EHCP processes.

The experience of young people

NDTi has coproduction as a core value, and the Children and Young People's Team has co-produced and delivers its programmes with young people. Our approach is very much aligned to the Lundy model of participation¹⁴ which provides a useful framework for understanding how to make coproduction meaningful and effective for children and young people. The model was developed by Professor Laura Lundy at Queen's University Belfast and is designed to operationalise Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which guarantees children the right to express their views and have them taken seriously in decision-making processes. The key elements of the approach are:

Space – Children must be given a safe, inclusive, and accessible environment to express their views. This includes ensuring venues are welcoming, staff are trained, and participation is voluntary

Voice – Children need the opportunity and support to articulate their opinions. This involves providing clear information, using creative methods to facilitate expression, and ensuring all children, regardless of age or ability, can participate

Audience – There must be a clear mechanism for children's views to reach the relevant decision-makers. This ensures that their input is not only collected but also communicated to those with the authority to act on it.

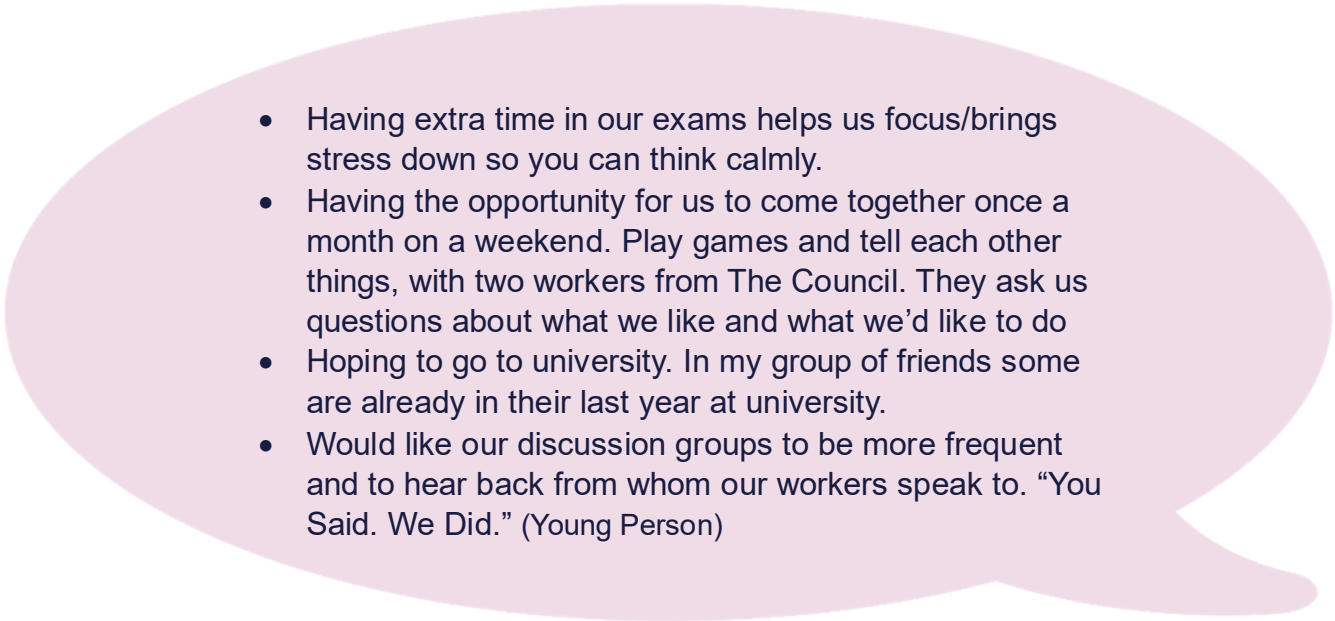
Influence – Children's views must be considered and given due weight in the decision-making process. Feedback should be provided to participants about how their contributions have impacted outcomes, reinforcing accountability and transparency

Meetings with young people

Two online focus group sessions for young people were arranged, with information about these being widely circulated to participation leads across local areas. Attendance was very low, and we were advised that this was mainly because of short notice and not enough time to prepare young people. NDTi therefore organised three in-person meetings and met 24 young people. Some of the young people understood what coproduction means and some did not, but all were able to speak (and draw) about their experiences of giving their views and feeling involved in decisions about their lives.

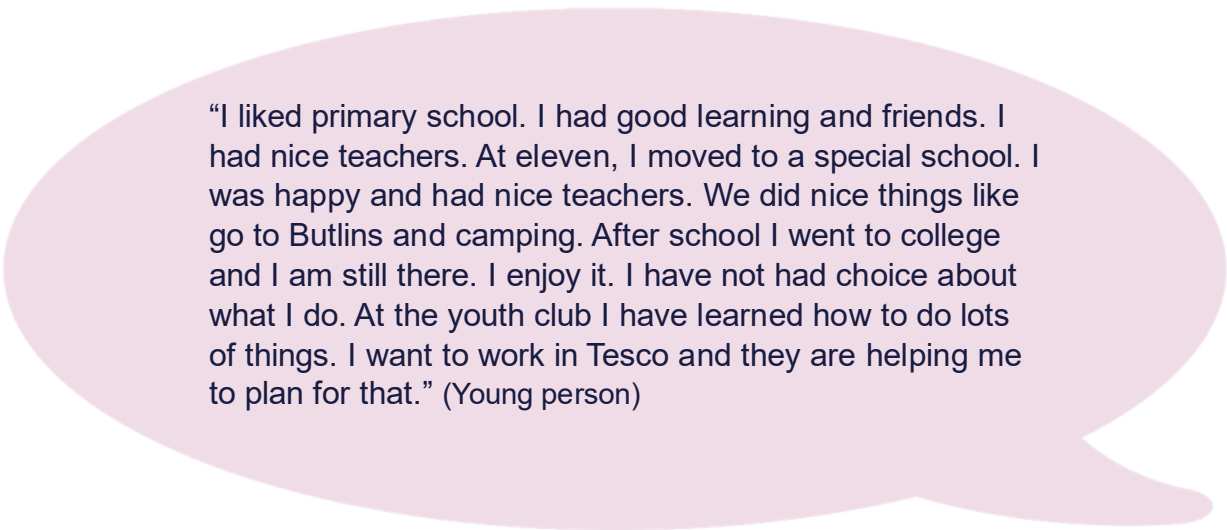
One young man who attended one of the online sessions spoke about the benefits of the group he attends:

¹⁴ Lundy, L., 2007. Voice is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, British Educational Research Journal. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>

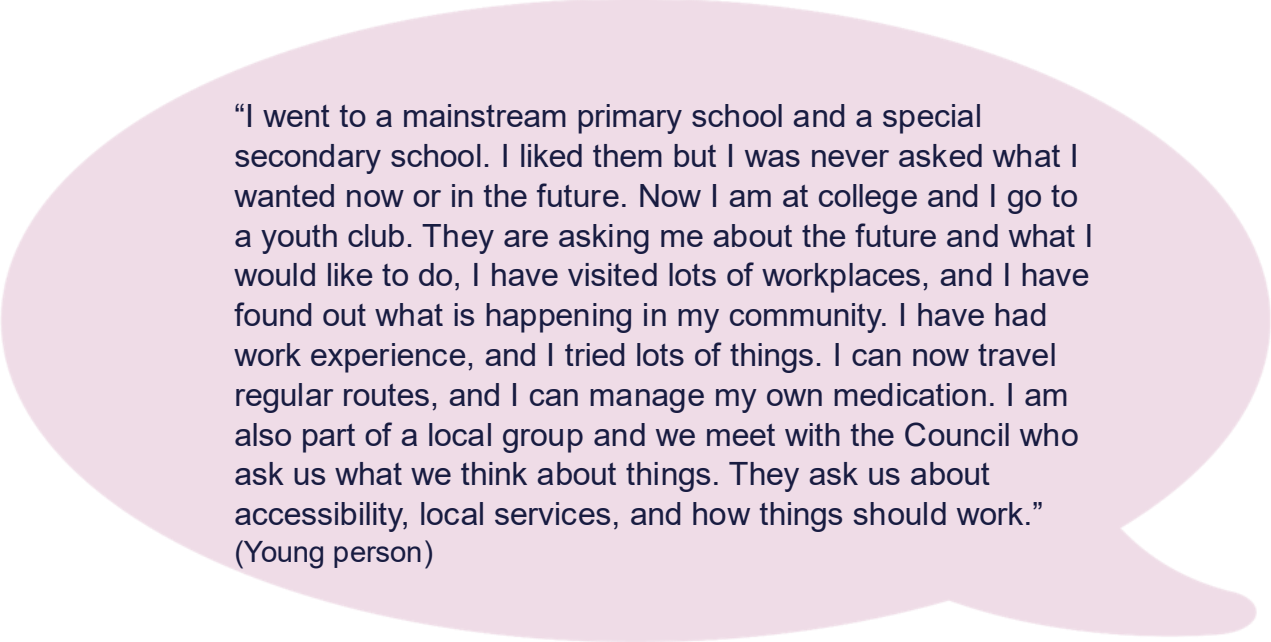
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- Having extra time in our exams helps us focus/brings stress down so you can think calmly.
 - Having the opportunity for us to come together once a month on a weekend. Play games and tell each other things, with two workers from The Council. They ask us questions about what we like and what we'd like to do
 - Hoping to go to university. In my group of friends some are already in their last year at university.
 - Would like our discussion groups to be more frequent and to hear back from whom our workers speak to. "You Said. We Did." (Young Person)

Three in-person sessions were held with young people with a wide range of disabilities and support needs. We acknowledge that this was not necessarily a robust representative sample of young people in London. Generally speaking, the young people did not feel their views had been sought and acted upon until much later in their education journeys. However, when their views and aspirations were heard, they experienced significant changes in their life.

Two young people attending an inclusive youth club shared the following;

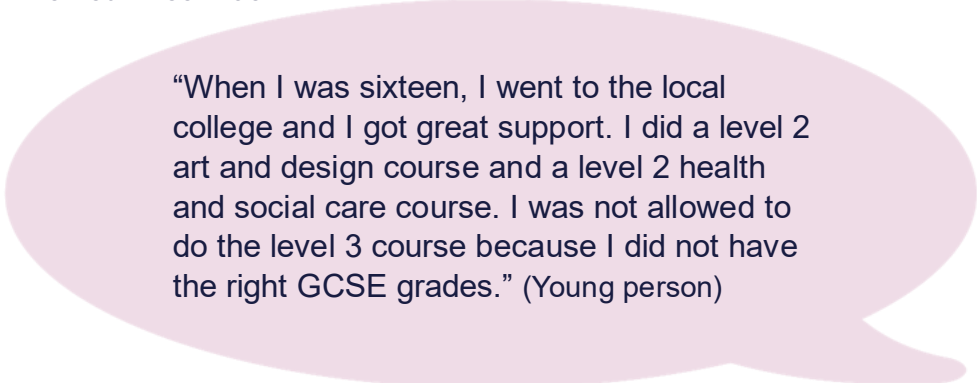


"I liked primary school. I had good learning and friends. I had nice teachers. At eleven, I moved to a special school. I was happy and had nice teachers. We did nice things like go to Butlins and camping. After school I went to college and I am still there. I enjoy it. I have not had choice about what I do. At the youth club I have learned how to do lots of things. I want to work in Tesco and they are helping me to plan for that." (Young person)

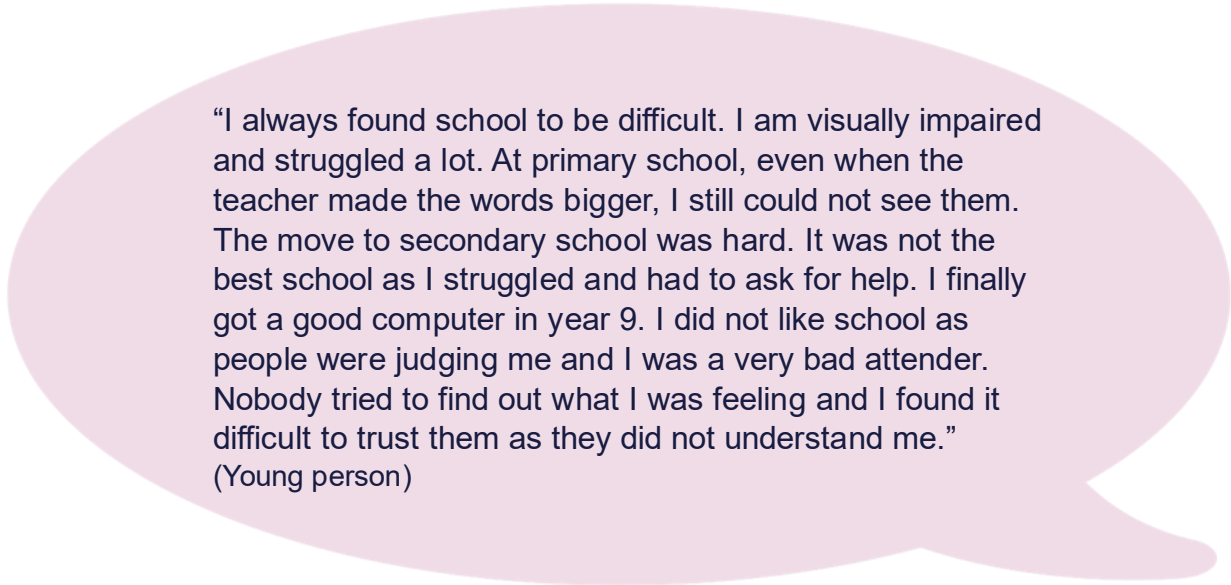


"I went to a mainstream primary school and a special secondary school. I liked them but I was never asked what I wanted now or in the future. Now I am at college and I go to a youth club. They are asking me about the future and what I would like to do, I have visited lots of workplaces, and I have found out what is happening in my community. I have had work experience, and I tried lots of things. I can now travel regular routes, and I can manage my own medication. I am also part of a local group and we meet with the Council who ask us what we think about things. They ask us about accessibility, local services, and how things should work."
(Young person)

A group of young women who were part of a supported internship study programme at a hospital and doing well, were clear that their voices had not been properly heard at school or within the health service.



"When I was sixteen, I went to the local college and I got great support. I did a level 2 art and design course and a level 2 health and social care course. I was not allowed to do the level 3 course because I did not have the right GCSE grades."
(Young person)



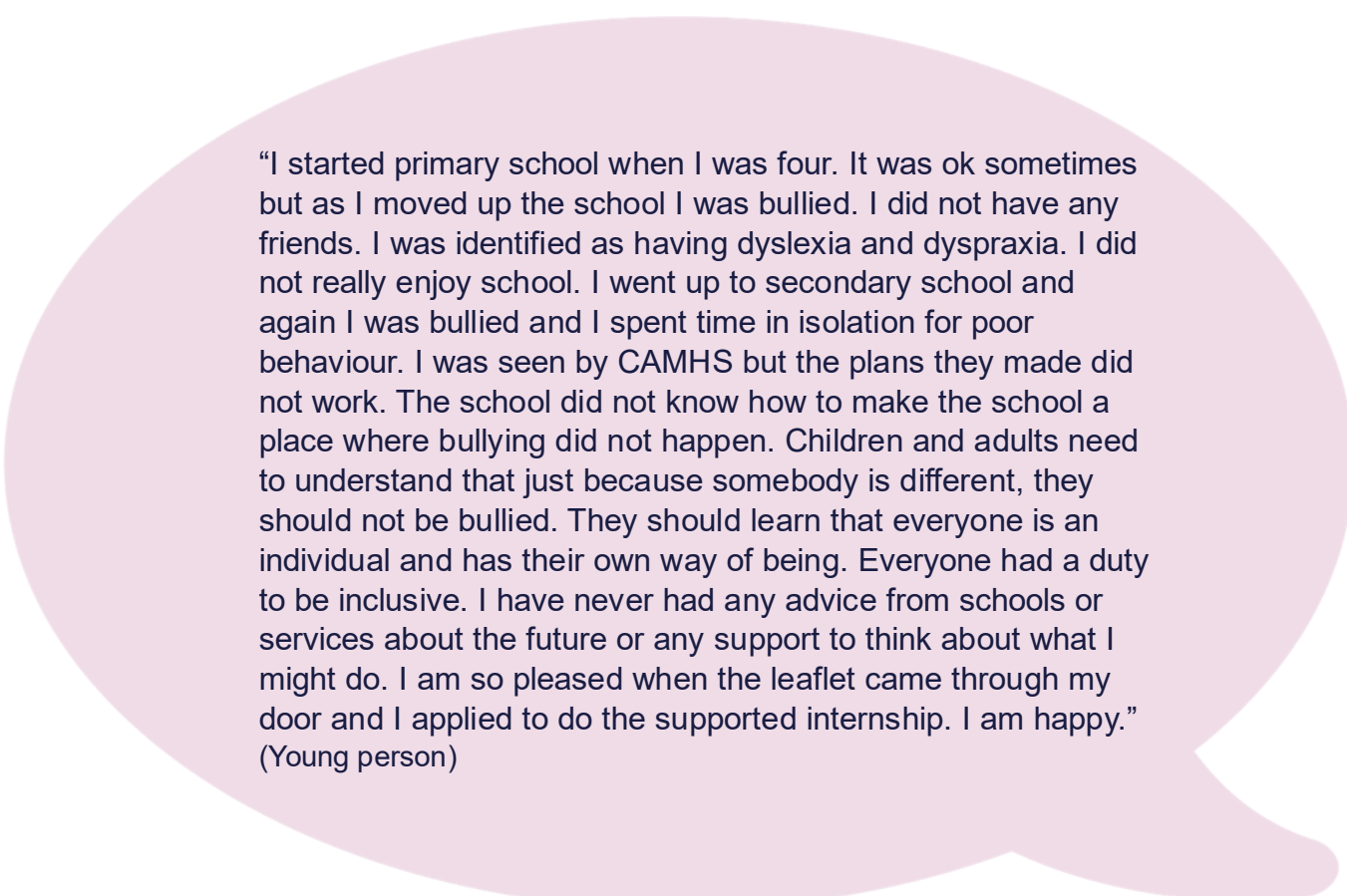
"I always found school to be difficult. I am visually impaired and struggled a lot. At primary school, even when the teacher made the words bigger, I still could not see them. The move to secondary school was hard. It was not the best school as I struggled and had to ask for help. I finally got a good computer in year 9. I did not like school as people were judging me and I was a very bad attender. Nobody tried to find out what I was feeling and I found it difficult to trust them as they did not understand me."
(Young person)



“The careers adviser at college told me about the supported internship programme and helped me to apply. I was successful and started last September. I have enjoyed this experience so much. The people here are so nice, helpful and supportive.” (Young person)



“I remember not really wanting to go to school. I found everything about it overwhelming. Looking back on it, I did not get the support I needed. I was made to feel bad. I refused to go to secondary school and when I did go, I was labelled as naughty and spent more time in the corridor than in the classroom. I found the school rules hard. The behaviour in my school was not particularly good but other children were not treated like me. I was seen as different and treated differently. I had no friends and I was bullied. I did not intend to be naughty. I started at the local college and I completed a two-year health and social care course at level three. The college was ok but they were only interested in pushing everyone to apply for university. They were not interested if we did not want that. I am part of a local autism organisation. They give me good support and told me about the supported internship programme. I applied and here I am. It has been fantastic. I have friends here.” (Young person)



“I started primary school when I was four. It was ok sometimes but as I moved up the school I was bullied. I did not have any friends. I was identified as having dyslexia and dyspraxia. I did not really enjoy school. I went up to secondary school and again I was bullied and I spent time in isolation for poor behaviour. I was seen by CAMHS but the plans they made did not work. The school did not know how to make the school a place where bullying did not happen. Children and adults need to understand that just because somebody is different, they should not be bullied. They should learn that everyone is an individual and has their own way of being. Everyone had a duty to be inclusive. I have never had any advice from schools or services about the future or any support to think about what I might do. I am so pleased when the leaflet came through my door and I applied to do the supported internship. I am happy.”
(Young person)

While this group of young people was a small group – we hear similar messages nationally when services engage with young people¹⁵, considering how we better ensure that children’s voices are as present in London’s SEND work going forward is an area for clear consideration and development.

¹⁵ <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/blog/experiences-of-children-with-send/>

Conclusion and recommendations

The SEND system in London is complex and under pressure. This research report sets out the evidence we found around the current state of coproduction in London, based on the lived experiences of parents, young people and professionals.

Coproduction is a simple idea. It's about individuals, communities and organisations having the skills, knowledge and ability to work together, create opportunities and solve problems. While the intention to co-produce appears to be present, meaningful coproduction with parent carers is not yet consistently embedded in London's SEND system, in



"Coproduction is a feeling. It's a way things are done. It's not a product that you sit on a shelf." (Local Authority)

governance, day-to-day practice, or organisational culture. This reflects our experience of challenges to coproduction across England. Across the focus groups, there was clear commitment from both parent carers and professionals, but this is being undermined by uneven understanding of what good coproduction looks like, fragile relationships, and significant capacity constraints. As a result, progress remains patchy and dependent on individual champions, with pockets of good practice that can sometimes exist in isolation.

The pace of new reforms and wider uncertainty are placing additional strain on local authorities, while many parent carers are exhausted and have limited capacity to engage beyond immediate, individual needs. Without sustained investment and a commitment to culture change, supported by transparent communication and feedback loops, coproduction risks being squeezed out when pressures rise.

To support LIA as they develop their SEND strategic plans, and wider partners, we have identified a small number of recommendations which would be most impactful to focus on. These recommendations set out the key actions needed to move from isolated examples of coproduction to a more consistent, resilient approach across London. To be most impactful, these recommendations need to be jointly unpacked, owned and driven forward. The LIA coproduction conference, which will be informed by this research provides a practical opportunity to do this.

1. Establish a pan-London coproduction working group of system partners. This group, made up of PCFs, children's voice reps, local authorities and health representatives would be mandated to develop a London-wide strategy on coproduction. It would also facilitate a pan-London learning community and best practice exchange that draws on the diversity of London. The London-wide strategy on coproduction should include the following elements:

- Individual level: Training across the whole system to reinforce the fundamentals of what coproduction is, what good looks like and person-centred planning approaches. The aim of this training is to embed and support organisation-wide culture change around coproduction.¹⁶
- Service level: Providing support to specific services (including educational psychologist teams, EHCP case offices, speech and language teams etc.) around what embedding coproduction in services looks like. This includes embedding feedback loops and mechanisms.
- Strategic level: Support to local areas on how to co-produce policies and strategies that ensure representation from a broad range of parents and moves beyond tokenistic involvement of PCFs.

2. Consider with system partners how coproduction could be better promoted within schools alongside Local Authorities and Integrated Care Systems.

Coproduction is becoming a more recognised concept in Local Area Partnerships and in Health, Social Care and Education. Parents particularly note that schools aren't as aware of coproduction and, given their role in the upcoming proposed SEND reforms, this is something they will likely need support with. This could build on some of the progress of programmes like Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS), led by PCFs in some schools in London.

3. Develop a pan-London approach to gaining the voices of young people with SEND. Currently many Boroughs have youth forums for young people with SEND, though this is not universally available. London should build on existing SEND youth forums and Pan-London work in the NHS to strengthen consistency and amplify voices, including minoritised voices. This could for instance lead to a Pan-London forum of some sort, but this may, or may not be one of many solutions. It is important that any approaches are specifically designed to include young people with the highest support needs, including those with significant communication needs.

¹⁶ For example, building on the approach of organisations such as [Genuine Partnerships](#).

- 4. For LIIA and system partners, by request to provide, tailored, facilitated support to local areas where trust has broken down.** LIIA, alongside system partners including the NNPCF, should offer practical space and learning support, where requested, to help local partnerships reflect on what is driving deep-rooted relationship breakdown where this has occurred and agree locally owned ways to reset and move forward. This could include support for independent facilitation. Stakeholders are keen to ensure that support offered leads to meaningful change and perhaps longer-term support, rather than being a one-off event.
- 5. Strengthen leadership for coproduction through a codesigned, codelivered programme.** Leadership around coproduction is critical. There needs to be a focus on fostering a different kind of leadership, to ensure coproduction happens and is enshrined in local systems, culture and practice. There needs to be a focus on embedding coproduction as culture and practice across organisational hierarchies, reducing reliance on individual champions. This may be work that is embedded in other streams, or that exists as a standalone stream dependent on partnership input.
- 6. Support consistent recognition and dedicated resources for parent carer involvement.** LIIA should help local areas consider how to value parent carer time locally, including approaches to payment and practical support that remove barriers to involvement (for example, covering expenses, childcare and access needs, and offering development opportunities), rather than relying on unpaid goodwill; however also carefully balancing the perception of the PCF working ‘for’ the local authority as may be