



Yorkshire & Humber SEND Youth Alliance

**Regional Activity, Policy Development and
Schools White Paper Consultation Report**

January – April 2026

Amplifying SEND Young People's Voices | Shaping Policy, Practice and Inclusion

Prepared by
Yorkshire & Humber SEND Youth Alliance
Delivered through the Youth Work Unit

Yorkshire & Humber SEND Youth Alliance

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For Funders and Strategic Partners

1. Purpose and Overview

This report outlines regional SEND youth voice activity delivered by the **Yorkshire & Humber SEND Youth Alliance (YHSENDYA)** between January and April 2026. It demonstrates how SEND young people's lived experience is actively shaping:

- Preparation for the **Schools White Paper consultation**
- Development of **policy and good-practice tools** to support inclusion
- Regional strategy discussions on **anti-bullying, employment and preparation for adulthood**
- System-level improvement across education, health and local authorities

The programme moves beyond consultation towards **sustained participation and influence**, ensuring SEND young people aged 11–25 are meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives.

2. Who We Are and Our Regional Role

The Yorkshire & Humber SEND Youth Alliance, delivered through the **Youth Work Unit**, brings together SEND young people, youth workers, voluntary and community sector organisations, Local Authority teams, regional SEND leaders and national partners.

Operating across **local, sub-regional and regional spaces**, the Alliance creates structured and accessible routes for lived experience to influence:

- Local Authority SEND improvement planning and commissioning
- Regional Inclusion and Improvement Alliance (RIIA) priorities
 - Workforce development and inclusive practice
 - National policy and reform conversations

This work is **youth-led**, supported by skilled youth workers and peer researchers, and aligned with statutory participation duties and Ofsted/CQC expectations.

3. Regional Engagement, Mapping and Reach

A comprehensive **SEND youth provision mapping exercise** has been completed across all Yorkshire & Humber Local Authorities. This has enabled the Alliance to:

- Identify SEND youth groups in every Local Authority area
- Highlight gaps and inequalities in access to participation
- Reach SEND young people often excluded from traditional engagement routes

A rolling programme of **face-to-face regional visits** is underway to strengthen SEND youth voice infrastructure and relationships. Each visit uses a consistent, accessible workshop model titled “**Places Where I Belong**”, exploring inclusion, safety, belonging and barriers to participation.

Completed visits include:

- Huddersfield – Central Youth Hub SEND sessions
 - Leeds – Leeds SEND Forum (online)
- York – York SEND Forum and Post-16 groups
 - Wakefield-The Hut SEND Youth group

Ongoing and planned engagement spans: Sheffield, Barnsley, Wakefield, Bradford/Shipley, Rotherham, Hull and East Yorkshire, including outreach to military-connected SEND young people.

Strengthening Engagement Through Face-to-Face Visits

During this reporting period, the Alliance has seen a **clear increase in SEND young people joining and actively engaging from Wakefield, Bradford and Sheffield**. This growth is directly linked to **face-to-face regional visits**, which have strengthened trust, visibility and understanding of the Alliance’s work. This work is also strengthened when local workers support young people to attend these sessions. A positive example of this is in Bradford where young people from the local SEND forum Bradstarz are regularly coming along to the send collective sessions supported by their worker Lucy Cartwright.

Young people have consistently shared that meeting Alliance staff and peers in person:

- Makes participation feel safer and more accessible
 - Helps build relationships and confidence

- Demonstrates that SEND youth voice is taken seriously locally

As a result, engagement is becoming **stronger, more consistent and more representative**, with young people moving from one-off involvement into ongoing participation through SEND Collectives and regional activity.

4. What Young People Are Telling Us Regionally

Across regional visits and SEND Collectives, young people consistently describe inclusion as **relationship-led**.

They feel included when:

- Adults listen, believe them and act
- SEND and neurodiversity are understood
- Reasonable adjustments are made without resistance
 - Environments are sensory-friendly
- They are not required to repeatedly retell distressing experiences

Inclusion breaks down through:

- Poor SEND awareness and confidence
 - Inconsistent responses to bullying
- Sensory overload and inaccessible environments
 - Unsafe transport and digital spaces

These themes underpin Alliance priorities and influence activity.

5. Regional SEND Collectives: Priority Themes

The Alliance hosts a **monthly online Regional SEND Collective**, providing safe, accessible, youth-led spaces for SEND young people across Yorkshire & Humber.

Key themes raised include:

- **Anti-bullying and discrimination**, particularly ableism in schools and FE
- **Health and wellbeing**, including lack of trauma-informed and neuro-affirming practice

- **Transport**, linked to independence and access to education
- **Employment and preparation for adulthood**, focusing on transitions and post-education support

These priorities feed directly into campaigns, policy development and regional strategy discussions.

6. Developing and Sharing Good Practice: Anti-Bullying and Inclusion

In response to what young people have told us, the SEND Youth Alliance has developed a regional policy:

Ensuring Parity in Anti-Bullying Practice: Addressing Ableism in Schools and FE

The policy:

- Explicitly names ableist bullying as **identity-based harm**
- Sets out a **trauma-informed, rights-based framework**
- Aligns with the Equality Act 2010, KCSIE and the SEND Code of Practice
- Provides clear guidance on recognising, recording and responding to ableism

The Alliance now aims to work with partners to:

- Share the policy as **regional good practice**
- Support schools and FE settings to embed it into existing policies and procedures
- Strengthen inclusion and safety within **mainstream education**

7. Schools White Paper Consultation: Youth-Led Preparation

Significant work has been undertaken to ensure SEND young people can engage meaningfully with the **Schools White Paper**.

This includes:

- Youth-friendly explanations of what a White Paper is and how policy becomes law
- Balanced summaries of proposals using clear language and visuals
- Co-produced consultation activities that support informed discussion

Two regional, youth-led consultation sessions are scheduled for **16 and 27 April 2026**, ensuring SEND young people can share their views confidently and authentically.

8. Employment, Preparation for Adulthood and Transitions

Employment and preparation for adulthood have emerged as consistent regional priorities.

A dedicated SEND Collective session explored:

- Barriers to meaningful employment
- Gaps in SEND-inclusive careers advice
- Anxiety around transitions out of education
- Loss of support post-16 and post-18

Anne Hayward attended this SEND Collective session, hearing directly from young people. Their views are being fed into **regional strategy and policy discussions** on employment pathways and preparation for adulthood.

9. Events, Strategic Spaces and External Engagement

Alongside delivery activity, the Alliance has maintained a strong presence in **regional and national strategic spaces**, ensuring SEND young people's voices influence leadership and system change.

Events and spaces attended include:

- SEND Regional Leads Meeting – Yorkshire & Humber
 - Regional SEND Leadership Training
- Regional Inclusion and Improvement Alliance (RIIA) engagement
 - Meeting with Directors of Children's Services
- Inclusion Event – Bradford (representing SEND young people regionally)
 - SENDiverse Event – Bradford
- Fair Education Alliance – London (national representation)
 - East Riding Youth Work Conference
 - Monthly Regional SEND Collectives

- Schools White Paper consultation planning sessions

The Alliance has also taken part in developing **neuro-affirming podcasts with the University of Huddersfield**, supporting knowledge exchange, workforce learning and cultural change.

10. Value and Impact for Funders

Funders' support has enabled:

- Stronger, more representative regional engagement
- Increased participation from Wakefield, Bradford and Sheffield
 - Development of tangible policy and practice tools
 - Youth-led influence on strategy, leadership and reform
- Practical routes to embed inclusion into mainstream education

This work demonstrates a clear pathway from **youth voice** → **policy development** → **system change**.

11. Next Steps

Over the coming period, the Yorkshire & Humber SEND Youth Alliance will focus on consolidating learning, formalising youth influence and supporting system change. Key next steps include:

- Deliver and evaluate the **regional youth-led Schools White Paper consultation sessions**
- Analyse feedback from SEND young people and **submit a collective regional SEND youth response to the Schools White Paper consultation before the national consultation deadline**
- Share the regional response with Local Authorities, regional SEND leads, RIIA partners and national stakeholders
- Continue **face-to-face regional visits** to sustain and grow engagement, particularly in Wakefield, Bradford and Sheffield
- Work with partners to **pilot and embed the SEND Youth Alliance anti-bullying policy** as good practice in schools and FE settings

- Progress employment and **preparation for adulthood work**, ensuring young people's views continue to inform strategy and policy
- Strengthen pathways for SEND young people to influence **regional and national decision-making spaces**

“These voices underpin the priorities, recommendations and next steps outlined in this report.”

Young People's Voices

What SEND Young People Have Told Us Across the Region

The following quotes capture SEND young people's lived experiences as shared through regional visits, SEND Collectives, consultations and engagement activity across Yorkshire & Humber.

On Feeling Included

“A place feels good when I feel safe, listened to, and not judged.”

“Feeling included is about the relationships – who's there, how they treat you, and whether they actually understand SEND.”

“It makes a difference when adults take time and don't rush you.”

On What Makes Things Hard

“It's exhausting having to explain your needs over and over again.”

“People don't understand sensory overload – they just think you're being difficult.”

“Support depends too much on where you live and who you happen to get.”

On Bullying and Discrimination

“Bullying doesn't always look obvious – it's the little things that keep happening.”

“Ableism isn't always shouting or name-calling. Sometimes it's people laughing, copying, or setting you up on purpose.”

“Being told it's 'banter' makes it worse, not better.”

On Education and Support in Schools

“There need to be more staff who actually understand neurodiversity.”

“Reasonable adjustments shouldn’t feel like you’re asking for special treatment.”

“In mainstream schools, support feels inconsistent and depends on the teacher.”

On Health and Wellbeing

“Healthcare spaces don’t feel designed for people like me.”

“There isn’t enough understanding of trauma or neurodiversity in health services.”

“Getting a diagnosis feels like a postcode lottery.”

On Transport, Independence and Everyday Life

“If transport isn’t accessible, you just don’t go.”

“Being worried about getting home safely affects everything else.”

“Independence only works if the environment is actually inclusive.”

On Employment and Preparation for Adulthood

“School doesn’t really prepare you for work when you have SEND.”

“There’s a cliff edge when support suddenly drops away.”

“I want to work, but the system isn’t built with me in mind.”

On Being Listened To

“We want our voices taken seriously, not just written down.”

“It matters when you can see something change because you spoke up.”

“Having people explain things properly before asking our opinion is really important.”

Closing Youth Insight

“Inclusion isn’t about treating everyone the same – it’s about people getting what they actually need.”

Thank you for your time in reviewing this report.

We look forward to continued partnership working to strengthen inclusion, participation and outcomes for SEND young people across the region.