



Accessing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision for Black and mixed Black heritage children:

Lived experiences from parents and professionals living in South London

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All children deserve the opportunity to realise their potential. The chance to harness their greatness. The right to learn in an environment that recognises their strengths, that nurtures their talents and that champions their achievements.

However, children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) (that is, children whose needs call for educational provision beyond that available to their peers) are disproportionately and negatively impacted by education practices in the UK: they experience higher rates of exclusion (1), and parents have to navigate complex processes to obtain appropriate SEND support (2), often faced with extensive waiting times or delays to support (3).



The picture is further complicated by the intersectionality of SEND with other factors, namely poverty, race and ethnicity. Research from as long ago as the 1980s indicated that Black Caribbean students in the UK, particularly boys, were over-represented for SEND (4). Today, the pattern remains unchanged (5).

Despite more frequently being identified as having SEND, Black children are less likely to receive adequate support for their needs (6).

There are a number of factors that work together to perpetuate the racial disadvantages faced by Black children with SEND, including:

- a heavy reliance on the involvement of parents in the process of securing appropriate support,
- links between low-income indicators such as eligibility for free school meals and educational attainment (7), and
- racial bias amongst teaching staff and authorities (8, 9).

Together, these influence:

- the interpretation of Black children's behaviour (as deviant or pathological instead of as an indication of need (10)),
- the timeliness of appropriate responses or support for additional needs,
- the sanctions received in school and within the criminal justice system.

Black and mixed Black heritage children are:



more likely to be permanently excluded from school



more likely to be identified as having a SEND



more likely to enter the youth offending service with unaddressed SEND

The trajectory for Black children's education is, therefore, quite clearly one where the odds are stacked against them.

At Global Black Maternal Health, we are concerned with how families of Black children with SEND living in South London obtain appropriate support for their children and the impact of this experience on children and parents.

Black Child SEND is the first project (of which we are aware) to focus exclusively on the perspective of parents and professionals in South London who have engaged with statutory services to access SEND support for Black or mixed Black heritage children in Key stage 1 and 2.



We wanted to find out what is working well and where improvement is needed.



What did we do?



Interviews with parents of Black and mixed Black heritage children living in South London who have accessed SEND support for their child.



Surveys of parents of Black and mixed Black heritage children living in South London who have accessed SEND support for their child.



Interviews with professionals (teachers, doctors, barristers) working in South London who have supported parents of Black and mixed Black heritage children to access SEND support for their child.

10

interviews with parents

46

surveys from parents

19

interviews with professionals

What did we find from our survey with parents?

76%

of reported SEND referred to boys

72%

reported their child has autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

67%

of reported SEND was identified under 3 years old



20%

of parents stated that they had a learning disability themselves



43%

rated their experience of working with their child's school as **good** or **excellent**

"My GP and the school have played a big role in the ease in which we have obtained SEND support".



23%

found working with the SENCo to be **below average** or **poor**

"I have had a very terrible experience with the SENCo...I would email and they would literally not reply to me".

Parent experiences of the SEND process:

45%



felt their child's SEND plan had got them the right support

47%



felt the SEND plan had improved their child's experience of education

29%



felt professionals worked well together



59%

had found it difficult to start the SEND support process

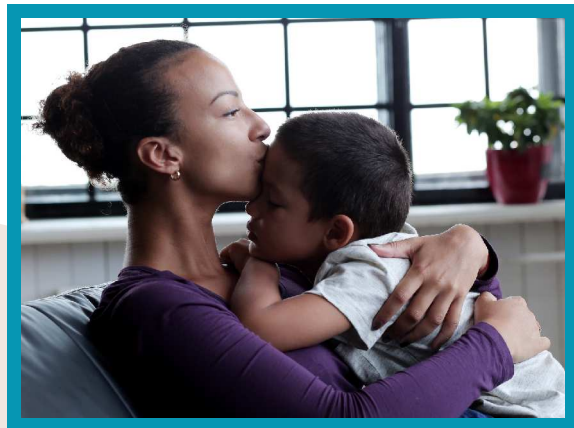


53%

were dissatisfied with the SEND support process



What did we find from our interviews with parents?



The fight for SEND support

Parents described the process as combat

"I've had a rough time trying to access the right support for my daughter...It's now been over a year and **I'm still fighting to find my child a school place.** She finally has an EHCP but is yet to receive any support."

Professionals not working together

Professionals across different agencies did not communicate with each other

"The funny thing is, **they're all in the same building. You would have thought it would have been easier...**It's like I have to let the appointments team know what the paediatrician said..."

Support networks

Family and friends sometimes don't understand SEND

"I suppose **there's a thing of people thinking that he's odd or weird, or that he's naughty because of the way that he reacts** and the way that he has meltdowns without actually understanding autism and I've had many comments from family and stuff like 'you need to be strict with him. You shouldn't let him get away with stuff'."

Professional perceptions vs. parent experiences

Parents felt a disconnect between professional views of their child's needs and their own experiences.

"The head of my local authority said they hadn't received any complaints about SEND support. I don't think these professionals realised there were parents in the group".

Parental time and priorities

Parents were heavily involved in the process of obtaining SEND support

"I've had to sacrifice a lot: My life, my personality, everything, my friendships, family. **There's been so many different sacrifices along this journey** in order to advocate for my son and try and keep him alive."

Grief and hope

Parents grieved the life they had expected to live but were hopeful for the future

"I've had people ask me, you know, would I give them up and **I think they are a blessing, they are the reason why I wake up in the morning...** And they will see that every single one of them was made with love."

What did we find from our interviews with professionals?

Understanding about SEND

“Behaviour problems like ADHD, **you know for some it's like 'No, there's nothing wrong, he's naughty...he needs discipline'**. So, do you know what? They will send them to the Caribbean or to Africa for the summer...Because there they say 'it's more strict, the teachers here are not doing what they need to do'.”

Discriminatory attitudes

“Sometimes **professionals who don't share the same kind of cultural identity, they don't get it**. I've got into many kind of confrontations with colleagues because of how judgmental they are about parents.”

Lack of funding

“There is not enough money. Unfortunately, **SEND is not a need that the Government seems to think is important enough** to spend enough money on, cause it doesn't.”

Not enough SEND-trained teachers

“It's not working because the **teachers are largely not trained** to identify what, you know, they don't know what's indicative of that. They don't know what to look for.”

Early support is necessary

“Having that **support earlier on helps those children be able to manage and regulate their behaviour**...it keeps them in school. It keeps them engaged.”

Religion, faith, and culture

“What we've found is a lot of our Caribbean and West African community...we find that sometimes the acceptance of the diagnosis is a real issue. So, **religion is very heavily tied to the diagnosis** and sort of praying things away.”



SEND viewed as bad behaviour

“...**autism does not look the same for a white child as it does for a Black child**. I've had Black boys being excluded for being disruptive because they were stimming by beatboxing to regulate themselves, and it's been noted by teachers that they have been spitting at other people and aggressively banging.”

Building relationships and trustworthiness

“I think representation is very, very important. And that is the reason why, **when I work with a lot of these Black boys, I want them to see that you've got a man from the ends**. That actually you can be something, that you don't have to be pigeonholed.”

Takeaways from this work:

The voices of Black people are often not included in research studies. This project provided a unique opportunity for parents of Black children and professionals working with Black families in South London to share their experiences and be included in an area of SEND work that is under-researched.

The findings from this study raise a number of points for continued consideration.



We acknowledge the wellbeing of parents and children with SEND

Parents are required to play a central role in their child's SEND support journey, but careful consideration must be given to the consequences of this responsibility on parents' physical and mental health, as well as the wellbeing of their child. We need to identify how the efforts and energy of parents can be used more effectively as part of the SEND process.

We reflect on developing avenues of support

Parents reported that their experiences of accessing SEND support were rarely straightforward. There is a need, therefore, to improve this process. Provision of advocacy as a statutory service for parents of children with SEND could be an option, as is the case for Looked After Children.

We consider the sustainability of an under-resourced system

Legislative changes could improve the experiences and outcomes for parent and children. However, as historic issues regarding funding within education and cross-agency working continue, we must consider the feasibility of such changes when capacity and resources are being cut.

We note the system vs. the individual

There are issues with the administration of SEND support that go against the power of individual professionals to make an impact. We need to discover what is needed to support both parties to achieve the shared goal of accessing SEND support.

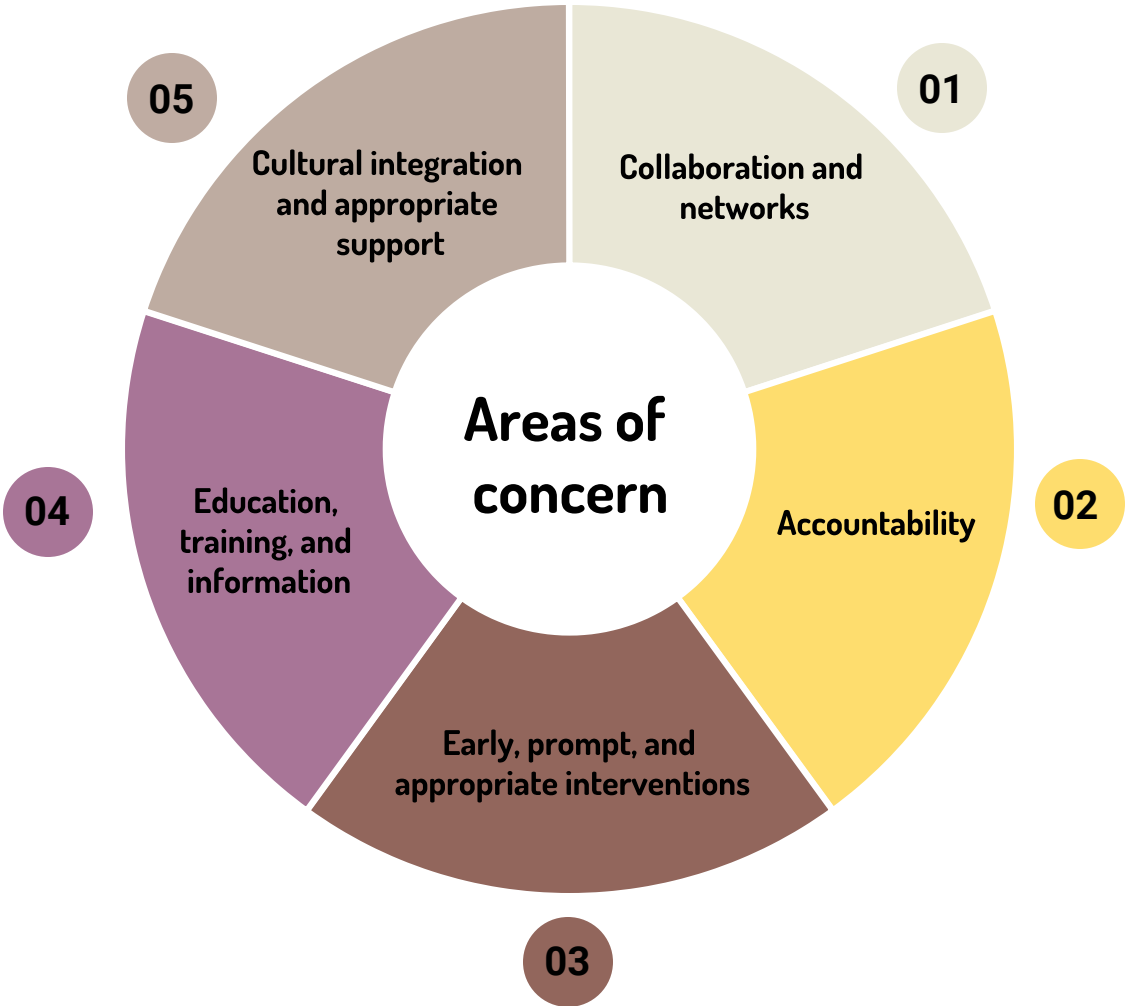
Global Black Maternal Health + coproduction

Through collaboration with parents of Black and mixed Black heritage children with SEND, we have developed a set of recommendations to improve the process of accessing SEND support for parents and professionals. Though our findings reflect the experiences of parents and professionals residing and working in South London, our hope is that our recommendation will be implemented more widely.

All recommendations are centred around the virtues that are fundamental to the ethos of Global Black Maternal Health: Amplify, Discover, Educate, Empower.

Recommendations

Our recommendations fall under five key areas of concern and focus on the issues that parents of Black children with SEND have told us would most effectively improve their families’ experience.



Area of concern	Recommendation	Responsible parties
<p>01</p> <p>Collaboration and networks</p>	<p>1. Outline and embed the cross-agency working practices and expectations for all professionals and services working with children with SEND.</p>	<p>Education settings</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Policy Makers</p>

Area of concern	Recommendation	Responsible parties
	<p>2. Adopt and integrate transparent and communicative cross-agency working methods in the EHC assessment, planning and review process (such as the ‘team around the child/ family’ approach) to foster and improve collaborative working and network solutions.</p> <p>3. All children receiving SEND support whether coordinated and delivered by their educational setting or formalised in an EHC plan should have a named lead/ responsible professional for the coordination of their support (such as a SENCo or EHCP Coordinator).</p>	<p>Education settings</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Policy makers</p>
	<p>4. Develop London-wide practices and procedural expectations of cross-agency and network working that consider the impact of poor or low-level cross-agency working, taking key learnings from the London Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance.</p>	<p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Policy makers</p> <p>Greater London Authority</p>
	<p>5. Establish and embed a caring, child-focussed and family-centred culture across services working with children with SEND and their families.</p>	<p>Education settings</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Individual Professionals</p>




Area of concern	Recommendation	Responsible parties
	<p>6. Take active steps to improve the experience of parents accessing SEND support and the EHC process by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing relationships between individual professionals or services and families. • Centring the practice of collaborative and rapport focussed working styles. • Ensuring that work with parents considers their financial and emotional resources and personal commitment. 	<p>Education settings</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Individual professionals</p>
<p>02</p> <p>Accountability</p>	<p>7. Provide all parents engaging with or seeking SEND support with clear information on the formal appeals and complaints processes at the start of working together. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to prepare for tribunals. • How to complain to independent bodies, such as OFSTED and the Local Government Ombudsman. • Explanation of the right to make formal representations. 	<p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Policy makers</p> <p>Greater London Authority</p>
	<p>8. Clearly outline the opportunities parents have to engage in regular feedback loops.</p> <p>This should be done for all local authority funded professionals and services providing statutory and non-statutory SEND support to children at the start of working together.</p>	<p>Local Authorities</p>



Area of concern	Recommendation	Responsible parties
<p style="text-align: center;">03</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Early, prompt and appropriate interventions</p>	<p>9. Improve accurate early identification and appropriate interventions for Black children with SEND by increasing the awareness and training about SEND amongst professionals in the early years, primary school, healthcare and community services.</p>	<p>Education settings</p> <p>Health and social care services</p> <p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Charities and non-statutory community support services</p>
	<p>10. Ongoing review of how financial resources for SEND can be best used to meet the varying needs of families and children with SEND from different ethnic backgrounds.</p>	<p>Local Authorities</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">04</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Education, training and information</p>	<p>11. Increase awareness of and access to Independent Supporters for families undergoing the EHC needs assessment and plan development process.</p>	<p>Local Authorities</p>
	<p>12. Expand access to independent support, advice and guidance by offering independent advocates to all families of children identified with SEND.</p>	<p>Local Authorities</p> <p>Policy makers</p>
	<p>13. Improve the knowledge of SEND, interventions and the appropriate processes by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework to address gaps in SEND knowledge and teaching practice. • Mandating high level teaching on SEND for qualifying teachers. • Requiring all current teaching staff to undertake SEND awareness training. 	<p>Education settings</p> <p>Department for Education</p>



Area of concern	Recommendation	Responsible parties
	14. Improve the dissemination of information to families of children with SEND children on SEND processes, rights, and entitlements, made available in a variety of mediums, including collaborating with cultural and grassroots organisations and digital groups.	Local Authorities
	15. Improve the awareness and understanding of socio-cultural difference in SEND for Black communities and other groups experiencing poorer educational outcomes among teaching, health and social care professionals.	Department for Education Local Authorities Charities and non-statutory organisations Global Black Maternal Health
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>05</p> </div> <p>Cultural integration and appropriate support</p>	16. Design and develop a SEND Advice Bureau serving families who are impacted by the injustice of racial and socio-economic predictors of poorer outcomes.	Global Black Maternal Health Local Authorities Charities and non-statutory organisations
	17. Raise awareness among communities impacted by insufficient knowledge and awareness of SEND by developing local SEND advocates. This should be done through collaboration with parents and families of SEND children from the relevant racial and ethnic groups and knowledgeable professionals and practitioners.	Local Authorities Education settings



Area of concern	Recommendation	Responsible parties
	18. Include routes to SEND-specific and culturally appropriate mental health support for SEND parents and children requiring additional support – which may be delivered local, voluntary and charity sector organisations.	Local Authorities Health and social care services Policy makers
	19. Demonstrate a commitment to cultural competency for SEND children from non-white British backgrounds through ongoing training and development of professionals working with children with SEND.	Local Authorities

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