

ACCESSABILITY – 2025 – 2026



'A short report based on survey results from young people involved in the Eastern Region, SEND network, Voices Of The East (VOTE)'.

Introduction

This report is based on findings from a small sample of young people with SEND across 11 local authorities, attending 16 different local area provisions, including special schools and mainstream primary/secondary schools.

Accesibility was voted in as the most pressing issue for young people in this group back in 2026. They would like this short report to open up the conversation about young people's access needs, both in schools and their local communities. As a local leader, what can you do?

What did the survey focus on?



**These questions were chosen specifically by young people involved in VOTE.*

What did we find out?

What's working well – Young people spoke about the importance of having access to **fidget tools** rather than 'toys'. **Sensory rooms** were another important aspect that young people felt really support their varied needs. Ensuring there are enough **magnifiers** in educational settings was also important as well as the need for **e-tech devices** such as I-Pads and Dictaphones, with staff who are comfortable to use them.

With a focus on schools much of it came back to having **dedicated spaces** that can support different SEND needs. These spaces can of course be *sensory rooms* but may also be open spaces that include equipment like swings and trampolines.

Within these spaces there must be enough **adult support**. Making sure young people have access to different forms of **Therapy** was also highlighted, particularly play and hydro. Having other equipment available such as ear defenders, easy readers and larger font sizes was important. Young people should also have enough space to easily use their **canes**. Finally, **seating** was also listed, this could be in relation to rocking chairs and wobble cushions, as well as enough space.

Local travel – Overall **50%** of young people involved felt their local area's travel infrastructure was accessible. There were positive examples of available lifts, ramps, bus stops that say, 'mind the gap', and tactile pavements,

The other **50%** who didn't find their local areas accessible raised concerns such as access does not support electric wheelchairs, not enough drop-down curbs, cars blocking accessible pathways and not enough lifts at train stations. Over **25%** of young people in this section also felt they lacked the independence skills to access local travel options.

Local parks – **65%** of young people said that their local area parks were not accessible. The main issue was the fact that these parks were not accessible for wheelchairs. Other issues included poor upkeep, bad surfaces and a lack of signage for those with visual impairments.

Those that did find parks accessible spoke about their enjoyment, how this aided social skills and got them outside in the first place.

Braille – **50%** of those involved said they found Braille freely available in their setting.

Deaf and blind awareness – Here is a list of recommendations from the survey:

- Talk about how difficult it can be for people who can't see or hear someone and the anxiety this can cause.
- More awareness about why people use canes.
- Explain what specialist equipment does.
- Explain that we are still human beings.
- Training for staff on what makes a safe environment.
- Teach us about how we can include more people.
- Provide advice from those with lived experience.
- Make sign language compulsory in every environment.
- More awareness about hearing aids.
- Talk about noise sensitivity.

Disability awareness – Overall **65%** of young people felt that there was still not enough awareness about different disabilities in 2026. Young people described it as

an **'after thought'**, how it is still described as a **'problem'** and people look at it as if they must **'fix something'**.

Within those that felt there was good awareness, they spoke about **schools helping** to do this and how **lived experience** was being taken more seriously.

Local signs – 25% of those involved did find signs in their local areas accessible. What helped here was colour coding or bright colours to make things stand out.

A much higher percentage felt that local signs were not accessible. This was due to signs not being **big enough**, a lack of signs with **braille**, signs that had **faded** or were too **dirty**, and signs being too **complicated**.

Lifts and ramps – For this area **90%** of young people gave examples of where lifts and ramps weren't available making some places inaccessible. The most common places included:

1. Café's
2. Restaurants
3. Parks
4. Historical places
5. Car parks
6. Train stations

Meeting needs – Overall, young people gave some more recommendations on what they believe may help make things more accessible:

- Having more lived experience within the system
- More symbol communication boards in public spaces
- Those working in the public sector to have more visual and audio communication aids
- More opportunities to speak up about your needs
- Audio buttons

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ OUR REPORT. NOW YOUR CHALLENGE IS TO TAKE THIS REPORT TO YOUR LOCAL AREAS AND EVALUATE HOW YOU COMPARE TO THE INFORMATION GATHERD ABOVE.

To get in touch please email kierran.pearce@essex.gov.uk .