

Our Voice



Our Voice report on
experiences of parents when
selecting secondary schools for
children with SEND
September to November 2021

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Overview



This survey looked at experiences of parents visiting secondary schools during the autumn of 2021. 32 replies were received in total, covering 9 different mainstream schools and 4 special schools within the Borough. There were an additional 10 responses relating to schools out of the Borough, which is relatively high and might suggest parents finding it challenging to meet their child's needs within Borough.

We compared the key results with our previous survey on the same topic undertaken over the period 2017 – 2018, which had 21 responses. There was some overlap in the schools commented on.

It should be noted that the sample size is relatively small and there may be some anomalies.

We have included comments on individual schools to highlight both examples of good practice and where improvements might be needed. Some parents commented on specific SENCOs but of course this needs to be viewed in the context of the overall environment and support within the school which will impact on SENCOs ability to deliver.

- 59% of parents said they were confident that their child would be welcomed and their needs met at the school they visited. This is a slight improvement on 52% in 17-18 but still indicates that there is some way to go.
- Only 53% of responses said that the schools had tried to understand what their child's needs were (50% including out of borough and special schools). Although this is an improvement on the overall figure of 43% in our previous survey, there is clearly significant room for improvement.
- Almost all the children had an opportunity to visit the school (93%).
- Comments suggested that when attending mainstream schools it was often difficult to find out about special needs provision. We seem to have made some progress in that none of this year's in-Borough responses reported that SENCOs did not attend open events (though this was the case in 17/18 and in some out-of-Borough schools). However in some cases the SENCOs were too busy for a proper discussion. Two parents suggested that it would be beneficial to have separate open day events for SEND.
- There was a varied range of comments, both positive and negative. Overall, there seems to have been a small improvement since our 2017-18 survey, and some of the most negative comments this year applied to out-of-borough schools.

Key statistics and comparisons

	1) 21 mainstream in borough	2) 21 overall	3) 17-18 overall
Felt child would be welcomed and included	59%	59%	52%
School tried to understand child's needs	53%	50%	43%
Made aware of support practices and policies	59%	56%	52%
Child had an opportunity to visit school	93%	69%	62%

- 1) 2021 survey mainstream schools within LBE
- 2) 2021 survey all schools in survey including special and out-of-borough
- 3) Comparative figures from survey in 2017 – 2018 all schools in survey including special and out-of-borough

Recommendations

- SENCOs should always be present at all open evenings and give consideration to how they can ensure they can talk to everyone who needs them.
- Other members of staff should be briefed about support for children with SEND, and children conducting tours should be given tools to respond to any such questions.
- Whilst it is understandable that schools will tend to showcase the best examples of work, they should be aware that this could work against inclusion and give consideration to giving a broader perspective.
- Schools should be mindful of the impact when they place stress on how 'academic' they are, and the fact that they may be perceived as elitist, which can raise anxiety for parents, who may feel their child will struggle and be put under stress to achieve the schools' attainment goals.

Recommendations continued

- Some parents would welcome separate open evenings focusing specifically on SEND. One parent *said 'It would be great if mainstream schools open days for parents/children could have specific days to SEND parents/children as then we could direct our questions at the right staff, feel heard, reduce frustrations and feel like we can make informed choices/have options for schools that would be right for our children'*
- All schools should be wheelchair accessible
- Schools need to ensure that they place enough focus on pastoral care rather than just academic results, as this is an important issue for many parents (including but not limited to parents of children with SEND).
- Schools should ensure that families of children with SEND are able to visit in year 5, even if this option isn't normally available to all families.

Positive comments

Amongst all the schools reported on, Chace Community and Winchmore School stood out as particularly welcoming and inclusive.

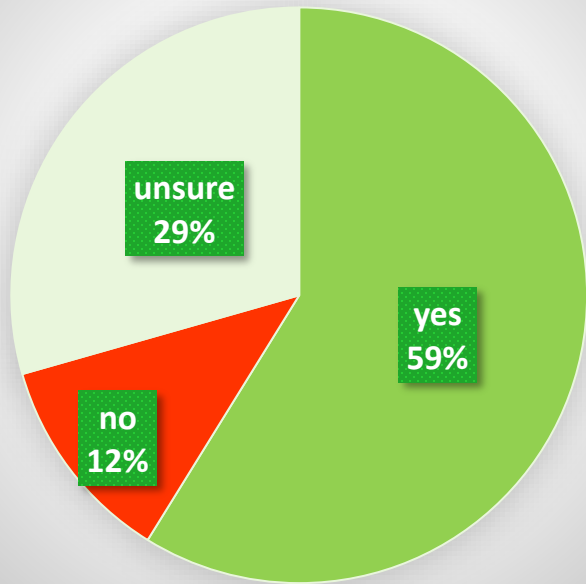
- *'Really felt that the SENCO was on the ball, she answered all our questions, we felt really confident that our daughter could do well at the school and we were told we could contact the SENCO at any time if we needed advice and support'*
- *'The SENCO was very accommodating and answered all my questions and we will arrange a meeting'.*
- *'They are very accommodating and gave me such confidence that my daughter's needs would be fulfilled. They gave me scenarios that would happen or could happen. Every question was answered and adapted for my daughter's needs'.*
- *'I would recommend as I felt like it was so friendly and a family feel'.*
- *'Very warm welcome by the staff'*
- *'I feel she would be welcomed by the school which seemed like a very kind, caring and nurturing environment'*
- *'I would recommend the school because they do have good pastoral care and a caring ethos'.*

Negative comments

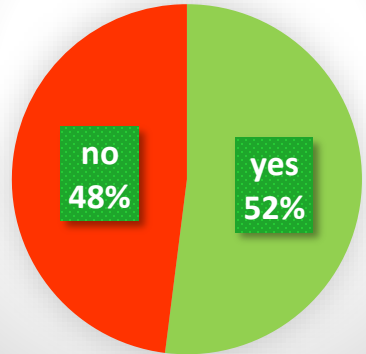
- *The SENCO was very frank about how the school struggles with SEN resources, how she struggles to get some of the teachers to differentiate the curriculum for children with EHCP and how they are not given enough money to cover the cost of 1-2-1 TA's (despite it being stated in the Childs EHCP). It was not clear if my child would get the support that is outlined in her EHCP.*
- *Lack of wheelchair access was a significant barrier for several schools 'this is one of many schools local to us which is not wheelchair accessible. Under the Equality Act ... I feel that all schools should be accessible for all'*
- *We had no opportunity to speak to staff from school about her SEND needs*
- *Parent said they had been warned against the school by another parent 'as they felt judged and by school staff and comments made them feel they would exclude child as they cannot be bothered to find ways to adapt to child's needs' and others reported schools as being 'elitist' and 'only for the bright'*
- *The deputy head wasn't able to answer any questions..... The SENCo didn't seem to have a very good knowledge.*
- *The department says they are under funded and over stretched so can't guarantee support and the headmaster is new and is now taking the school in a more academic direction- so probably now just for those kids that can get past exam factory.*
- *It didn't look like the school supported the children much and they were basically left to it. Children with needs only supported in core subjects... there doesn't seem to be any regular support.*
- *The SEN Staff were busy so was unable to properly discuss if her need could be met.*
- *The Inclusion manager was very unfriendly, rude and did not make us feel welcome to visit the school. Furthermore her behaviour was hostile and it made me question if this school was at all friendly to children with SEN*
- *The whole process is very stressful and raised anxiety in both parents and children*

Overall did you feel your child would be welcomed to join the school and their needs met?

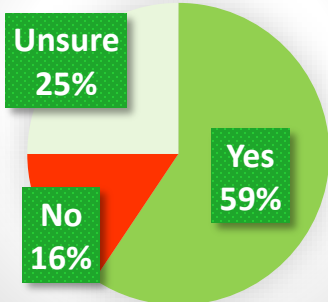
mainstream in Borough



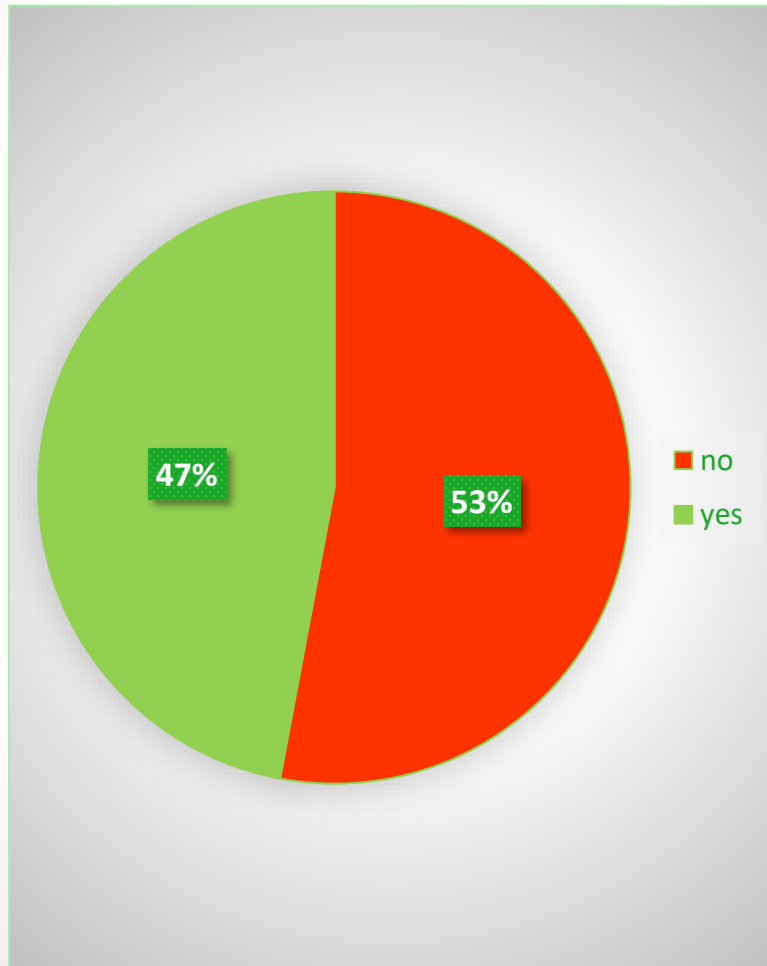
Comparison from 2017 – 2018 (all schools)



All schools



Did the school try to understand your child's needs?



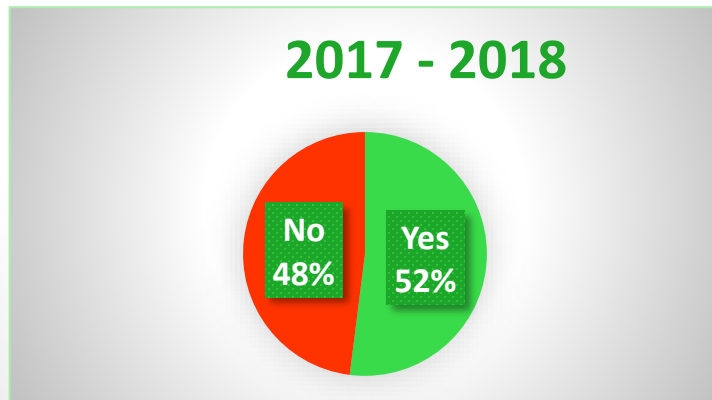
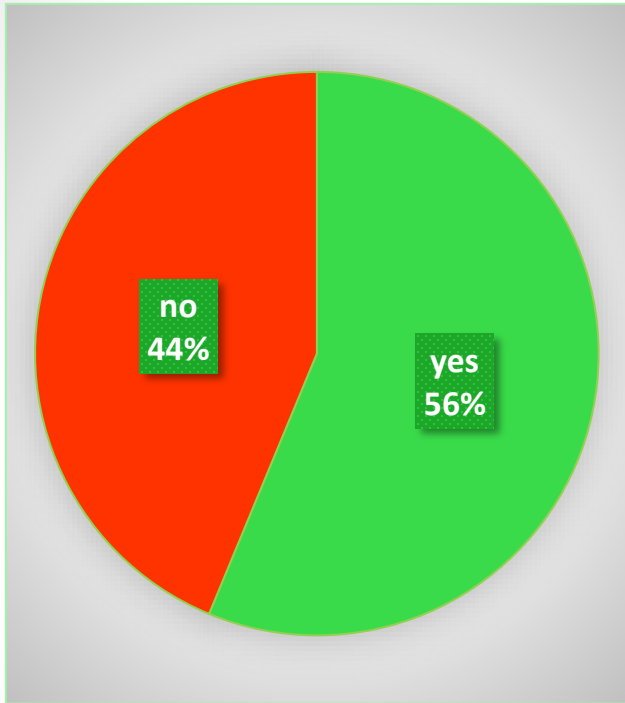
This data relates to mainstream in Borough schools.

Overall the figure was 50% yes and 50% no.

This represents a slight improvement on the figures for 2017-18 where 57% said the school had not tried to understand their child's needs.

However the figure remains lower than we would have hoped.

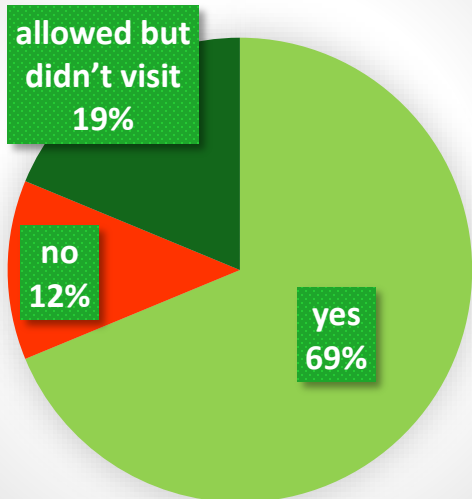
Were you made aware of targeted practices to support children with SEND?



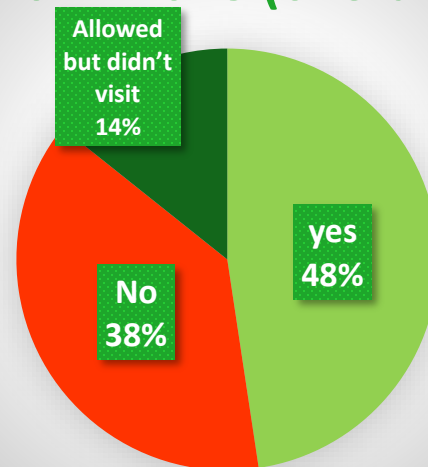
- Within mainstream schools in the Borough the figures were very slightly improved with 59% being made aware.
- This shows a small improvement compared to the 2017-18 figure of 52%
- For special schools only 2 out of 5 said that they had been made aware of support – but this may be because this is considered as standard within these settings.
- Examples quoted ‘Friendship groups, homework support Quiet time/area Buddies to help move around the school. Group support workshops’

Did your child have the opportunity to visit the school with you?

overall



2017-2018 (overall)



allowed but didn't visit 14%

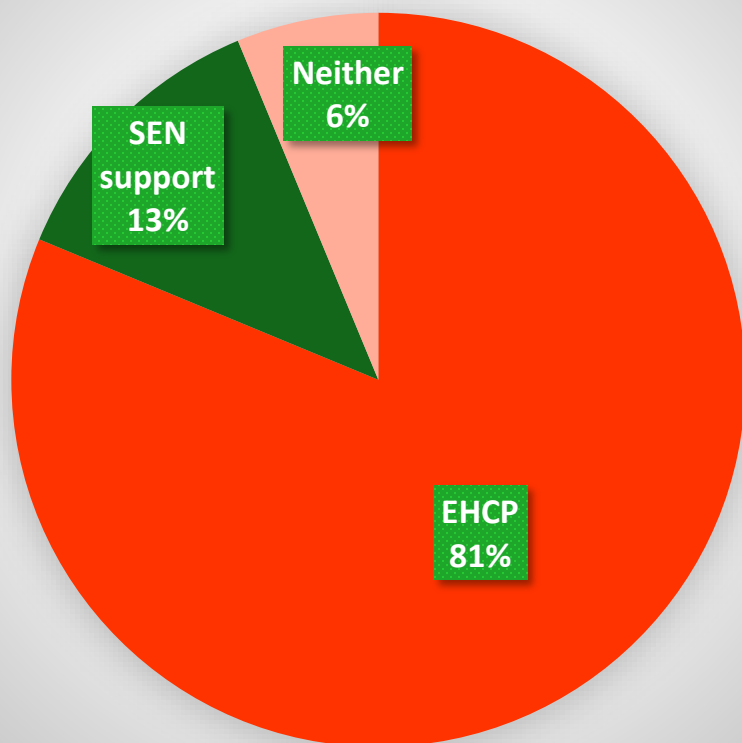
no 7%

yes 79%

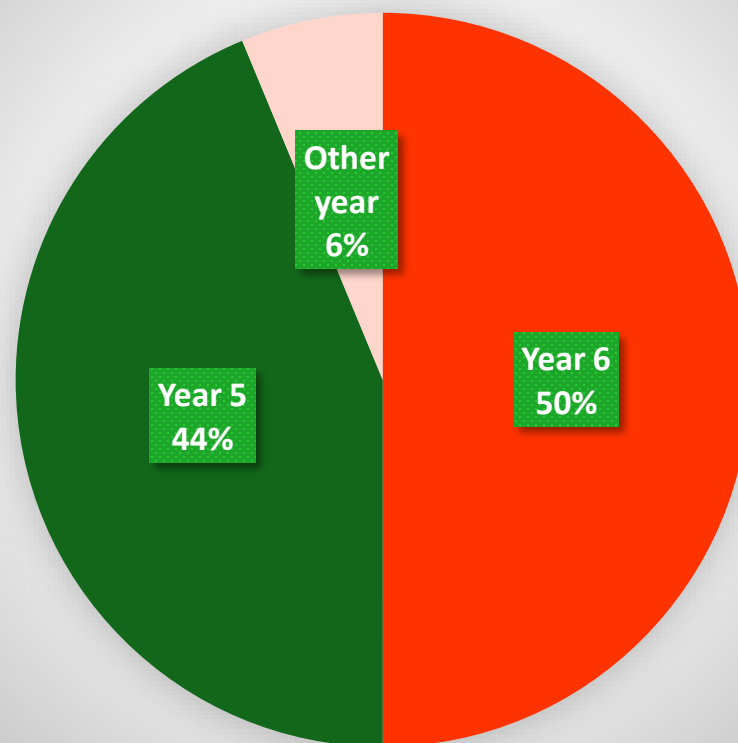
Mainstream in
Borough

Information about child

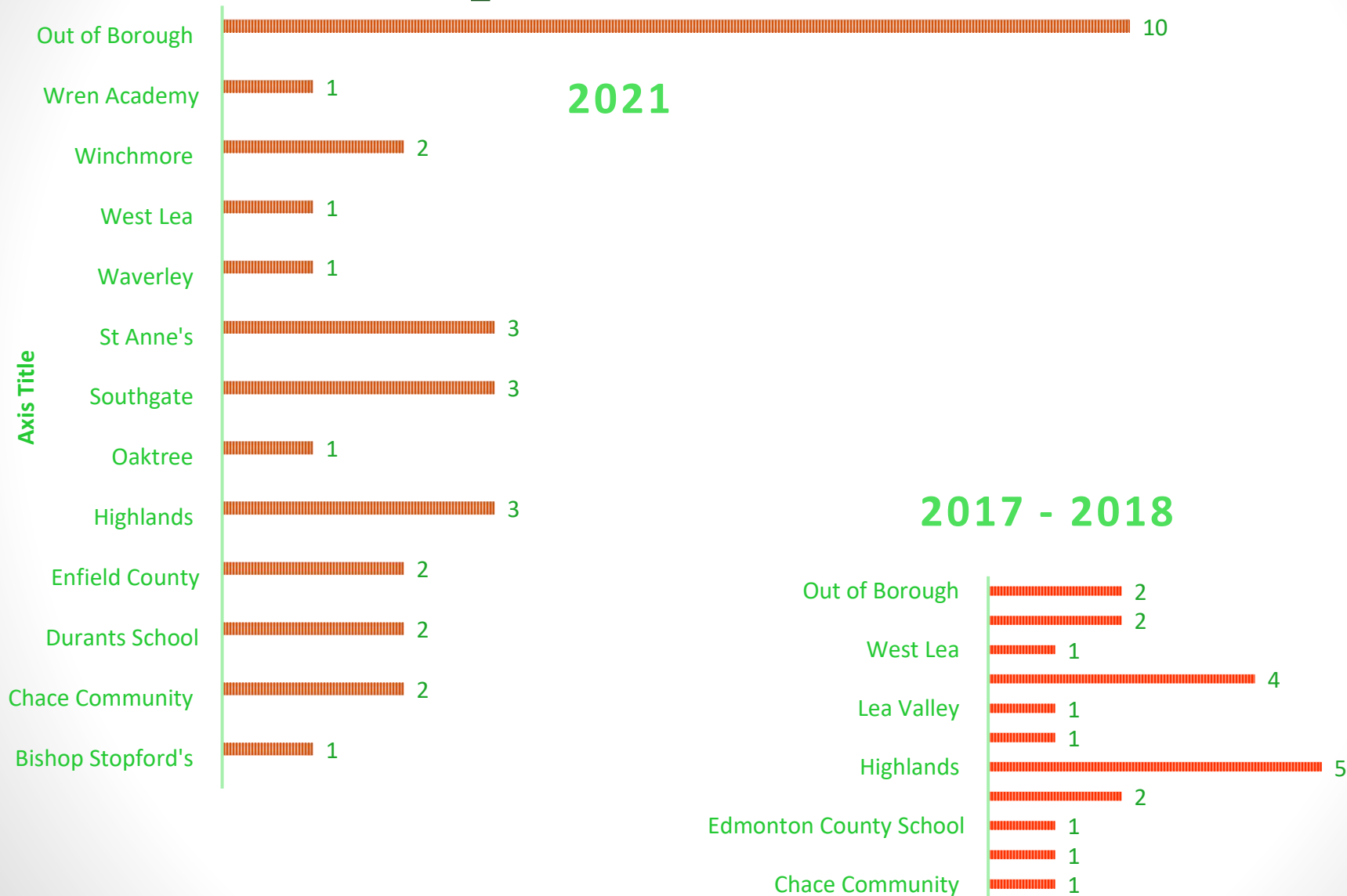
EHCP or SEN Support



Current year group



Schools reported on



Recommendations from other parents

When talking about the schools they had visited 22% said the schools had been recommended by other parents of children with additional needs, and 6% said they had been discouraged from choosing that school.

29% of parents said that they had been discouraged from visiting other specific schools by other parents of children with special needs.

Comments included:

- I was told it was “elitist” and only for the bright
- They felt judged and by school staff and comments made them feel they would exclude child as they cannot be bothered to find ways to adapt to child’s needs
- I was told the support system was rubbish
- They focus too much on exam results and not enough on pastoral care
- It’s quite academic and traditional

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