



# The Ask, Listen, Act Study Summary

## The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Education, Health and Social Care Provision for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

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### Why was the study done?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were already many problems and gaps within services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

In May 2020, children with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans had their legal rights altered by the Coronavirus Act 2020. Many children with SEND stayed at home during national lockdowns and the delivery of essential services such as 1-to-1 educational support, mental health support, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and respite care were reduced or paused.

The Ask, Listen Act study focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education, health and social care provision for children with SEND.

### Who took part in the study?

- Children with SEND (aged 5-15 years) with or without an EHCP
- Parents/carers of children with SEND
- Professionals (education, health and social care, local authority).

### What was done in the study?

#### Phase 1 June 2021

The review of the evidence

#### Phase 2 June-October 2021

The perspectives and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Phase 3 November-December 2021

The development of priorities for 'going forward'

33 published research reports and unpublished research reports were looked at.

#### Online surveys

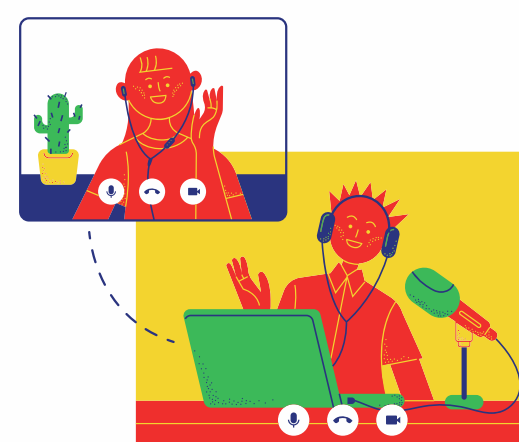
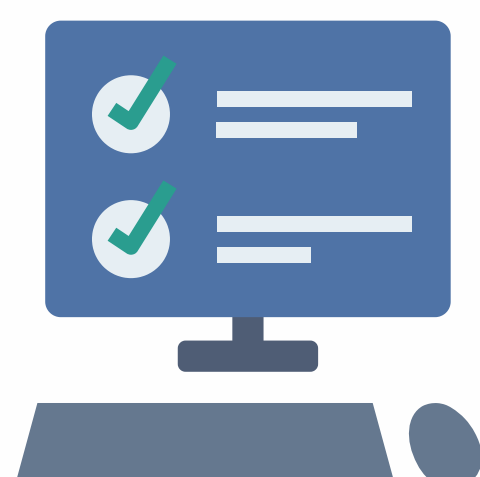
55 children with SEND,  
893 parents/carers,  
100 education staffs  
163 health and social  
care staff  
44 Local Authority staff

#### Online interviews

4 children with SEND  
10 parents/carers,  
3 education staff,  
11 health and social care  
professionals  
1 Local Authority staff

#### Stakeholder workshops

Seven workshops to decide priorities were held online and in person using creative methods with;  
20 children with SEND,  
11 parents/carers,  
38 professionals



## Phase 1: What did the evidence say?

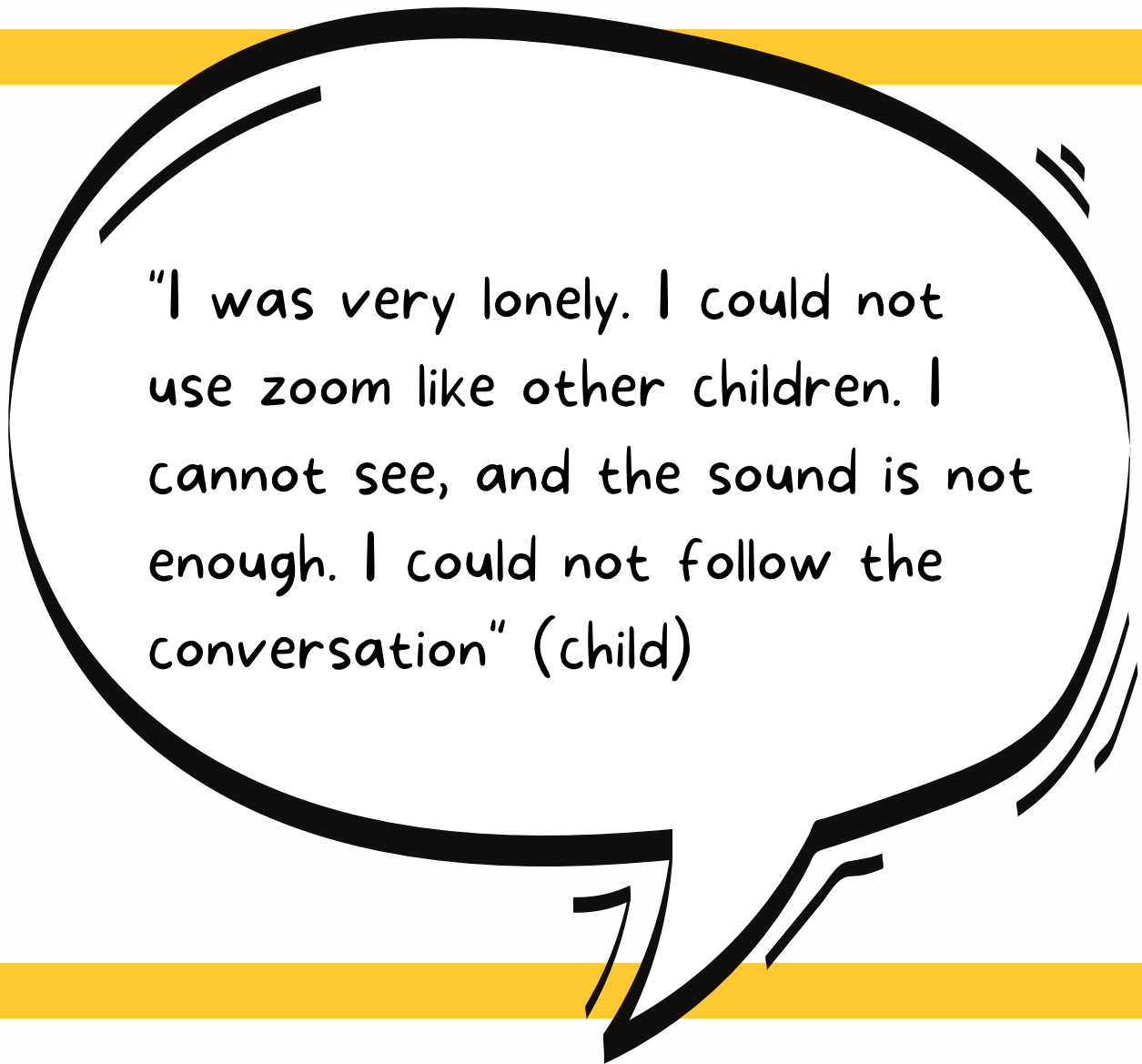
- The research reports showed that children with SEND's education has been negatively affected during the pandemic.
- Although children with an EHC plan should have been able to still go to school, most did not, and many were not offered a place in school.
- Online learning was really hard for children with SEND as work was not tailored to their needs.
- In many cases, health and social care services completely stopped, or moved online, with a negative impact on many children's physical health.
- Many children with SEND struggled with their emotional well-being and mental health.
- With very little respite care available, families of children with SEND have been left exhausted and sometimes in despair.

## Phase 2: What did the surveys and interviews say?

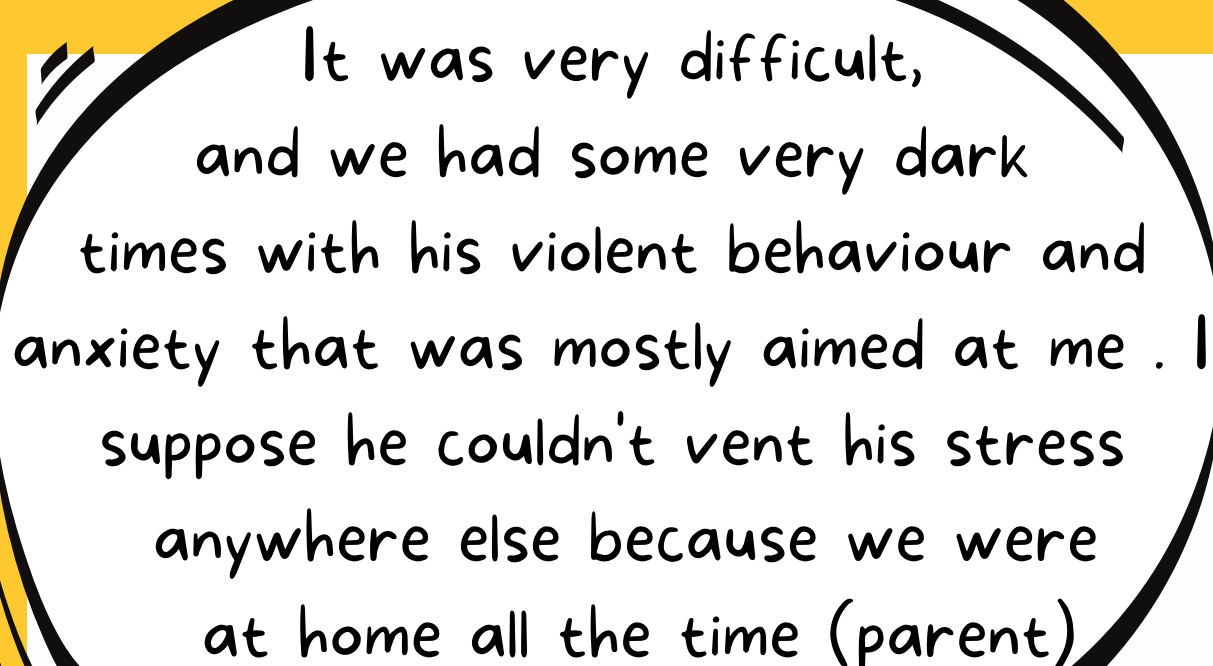
### Children with SEND

Children with SEND told us that

- lockdowns had been "lonely" and "boring"
- lockdowns had negatively impacted their social, emotional and physical development and health.
- Lockdowns and changes to routines had resulted in high levels of stress.



"I was very lonely. I could not use zoom like other children. I cannot see, and the sound is not enough. I could not follow the conversation" (child)



It was very difficult, and we had some very dark times with his violent behaviour and anxiety that was mostly aimed at me. I suppose he couldn't vent his stress anywhere else because we were at home all the time (parent)

### Parents/Carers of Children with SEND

Parents/carers told us that

- there was already a lack of support for their child/ren with SEND, and this was made worse during the pandemic.
- the pandemic had a negative impact on their child's education and learning
- their child was not able to access face-to-face education during the pandemic and remote learning was not at all effective in meeting their child's needs.

- their child was not given the SEND specific equipment to help them learn at home
- their child was not able to access the therapies they needed
- the pandemic had a negative impact on their child's social skills, mental health and well-being.
- some children had flourished over the pandemic not having to go into school.
- their own mental health and well-being had got worse over the pandemic



“One autistic child with an EHCP found lockdown and the changes very difficult and this resulted in poor attendance changing to school refusal. The break in the pattern coming to school exacerbated the problem.” (education staff)

## Education Professionals

During the pandemic education professionals told us that

- their job role had changed and this had a negative impact on their ability to deliver education for pupils with SEND.
- they were not able to provide the resources needed for children with SEND to learn.
- those children with SEND who had accessed in-person schooling benefitted from small classes
- pupils with SEND had been more negatively affected by the pandemic than pupils without SEND.
- the number of children with SEND needing mental health/wellbeing support. SEND support/assessments and with safeguarding concerns has risen.

## Health and Social care Professionals

During the pandemic health and social care professionals told us that

- the quality of their service provision was worse than before the COVID pandemic,
- the services that support children with SEND were prevented from operating and that guidelines were unclear, inconsistent, and rapidly changing.
- they had been concerned about safeguarding and social care provision for children with SEND.
- there had been a huge increase in the demand for services, increased waiting lists, staff shortages, and increased workload and burnout.

Our referral rate has increased, on average from the year previous by 167%... There's such long waiting lists now... (professional)

## Local Authority Professionals

During the pandemic local authority professionals told us that

- in most cases children with EHCPs were included in their definition of 'vulnerable' which meant that they were allowed to continue attending school.
- there had been an increase in requests for EHCPs for children with SEND.
- fewer EHCP assessments were completed within the statutory timeframe
- even though EHCP reviews moved online, there was still a delay in some annual reviews of EHCPs being conducted.
- had seen an increase in requests for educational support, respite and short breaks, health care support, social care support and play and recreation
- waiting lists for these services were 'significantly longer' or 'slightly longer'.

## Phase 3: Developing the priorities

We pulled together the information from phase 1 and phase 2 and organised these into the main topics. We then took this information to workshops with children with SEND, parent/carers and professionals to help develop the priorities -the most important things to support children with SEND going forward from the pandemic.

We organised these priorities under a child rights-based approach under five themes of the most important things

### The priorities for children with SEND



**My right to play, socialise, have fun and be part of my community**



**My right to support for my social, emotional well-being and mental health**



**My right to flexibility, choice and support so I can feel safe, belong and learn in school**



**My right to health and social care services and therapies in order for me to stay healthy**



**My right to support for my parents/carers and my family**

### Want to know more?

All the reports and more information about the priorities for policy and practice are on our webpage.

### Thank you

We would like to thank the children, parents and professionals who took part in the study and shared their time, views and experiences as well as the steering group and public and patient advisory group members for their guidance and support throughout the study.

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THANK  
YOU