

Finding School Places
for Ethnic Minority
Children with SEND in
the Ealing Borough
of West London



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The ESDEG research team would like to thank all the mothers who participated in our focus group meeting and appeared for one-to-one interviews for their time and insights. We would like to thank ESDEG's Director Mohamed Ahmed for his guidance and Rahma Elmi, ESDEG's Project Coordinator for her help.

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Executive Summary

Introduction to ESDEG

ESDEG is committed to improving the lives of disadvantaged children through education and social integration. We are based in Ealing and work in the boroughs of West London. Since ESDEG's establishment in 2005 we have supported children and families from refugee, asylum seeker, ethnic minority and other deprived backgrounds to overcome barriers to educational achievement. In response to the needs of our service users ESDEG's work has expanded to focus on the specific needs of children with special educational needs, disabilities, and those at risk of exclusion and in danger of being left behind. We recognise that the wellbeing of families is crucial to a child's development and education and that early intervention is effective in preventing long term problems, so we have adopted a whole family approach in supporting children.

ESDEG's SEND Project

ESDEG's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) project supports children in West London boroughs with special educational needs and disabilities. Our aim is to bridge the gap between families, schools and the Local Authority by working with the parents and their children to ensure that the child is receiving the right support s/he needs for developmental and educational success. Our specialised staff focus on identifying the reasonable adjustments a child with SEND may need to reduce the disadvantages s/he face as well as providing extra encouragement in his/her learning and support with physical and personal care difficulties. We nurture the confidence and self-esteem of the children with whom we work.

The SEND project offers:

- Extra Educational support (Viking Centre) for SEND children
- Coffee mornings to support parents
- Workshops, events, focus groups to disseminate information about SEND and the process
- Support for families via our telephone, email, 1:1 meetings, school and college meetings and annual reviews.

- Information and guidance on how to apply for statutory assessment; including relevant documents and evidence to be submitted.
- Review EHC plans with parents to ensure that objectives and outcomes of the special education provision meet the child/young person's needs.

In 2022 through our SEND project ESDEG has helped more than 38 ethnic minority families from deprived backgrounds whose children have SEND needs and go to school in the London borough of Ealing.

Ethnic Disproportionality

We are going to analyse the drawbacks and gaps in the SEND system through the lens of Ethnic Disproportionality.

According to 'Ethnic disproportionality in the identification of Special Educational Needs (SEN): Ealing Local Authority Feedback Pack' – Disproportionality exists when pupils from an ethnic minority group are more (or less) likely to be identified with SEN than pupils in the majority group (in England, White British pupils). We say an ethnic minority group is over-represented when pupils in that group are more likely to be identified, and we say an ethnic minority group is under-represented when pupils from that group are less likely to be identified, than those in the majority ethnic group.

National SEND Data

"Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources" (May 2021) revealed a disproportionality of SEN children with EHC Plans in ethnic minority groups in January 2020.

National figure 3.3%

Indian pupils 2.1% – the lowest percentage

Travellers of Irish heritage 5.0%

Black Caribbean pupils 4.7%

These are the highest percentage of pupils with EHCP among all racial groups

Target Group of this Report

School going children of 5 to 16 years of ethnic minority origin with SEND who may or may not have the EHC Plan in the London borough of Ealing.

Significance of studying school placements of ethnic minority children with SEND

Ethnic minority children often struggle in the education system fighting stereotyping, unconscious racial bias, institutional racism, bullying, violence etc. For those with SEND the situation is much worse. These children are the classic example of intersectionality where race, class, gender, special needs and disability intersect with one another and overlap. Multiple odds are stacked against the child. Though SEND is a relatively recent concept, facing discrimination is nothing new for ethnic minority families in England. There are glaring examples of racial bias faced across several generations in minority families in the migrant dense London boroughs of Brent, Ealing and Hounslow.

We know that the right school positively shapes a child's overall development and education which in turn impacts her/his adult life. But for many ethnic minority children and particularly those with SEND finding the right school is often an uphill struggle for which most of the time their parents are neither equipped, nor have the confidence to get into a prolonged battle with the Local Authorities and the schools.

Goal of this Report

- Understand and highlight the data regarding school placement of ethnic minority children with SEND needs in Ealing
- Review the existing studies on problems faced by ethnic minority children with SEND and their parents in the English school system
- Understand the challenges faced by the children and their parents and propose recommendations at school, Local Authority and national government level

Research Methodology

ESDEG organised a focus group discussion in November 2022 which was attended by ten mothers belonging to South Asian mainly Pakistani, East European and

Somali ethnic backgrounds. Since it was an all women discussion the mothers could open up and talk about the challenges they faced and how they resolved those.

ESDEG research staff conducted three in-depth interviews with ethnic minority women whose children with SEND needs go to school in Ealing.

Key Findings

If we were to look for one word to describe the experience of parents from ethnic minority backgrounds trying to find suitable school places for their children with SEND in the London borough of Ealing that would be STRUGGLE. The common pattern which emerges after talking to eleven mothers is that of a prolonged struggle which left them frustrated and often in despair as they tried to figure out how to navigate the SEND jungle. It must be remembered that unlike other parents, for parents with SEND children finding suitable school places is just one milestone in their SEND journey. By the time they arrive at this stage they are often exhausted and emotionally drained fighting the system. The roadblocks they face at this stage add to their woes. Being ethnic minorities often from economically deprived backgrounds they suffer from added layers of disadvantages which need to be studied from the lens of intersectionality. This finding is nothing new, rather has been highlighted numerous times and the governments at all levels made aware of, yet the ground situation still continues to be the same.

Finding School Places for Ethnic Minority Children with SEND Needs in West London

Understanding the School Admission Process for Children with SEND in England

School Selection Criteria: There is no denying the role of school on a child's overall development, self-esteem, social skills and academic performance. Every parent wants holistic development and best possible education for their child, hence finding the right school becomes a top priority. With so much at stake, school admissions are stressful times for families. Postcode lottery, complex admission arrangements, and oversubscribed schools are some of the external factors that control the options parents have.

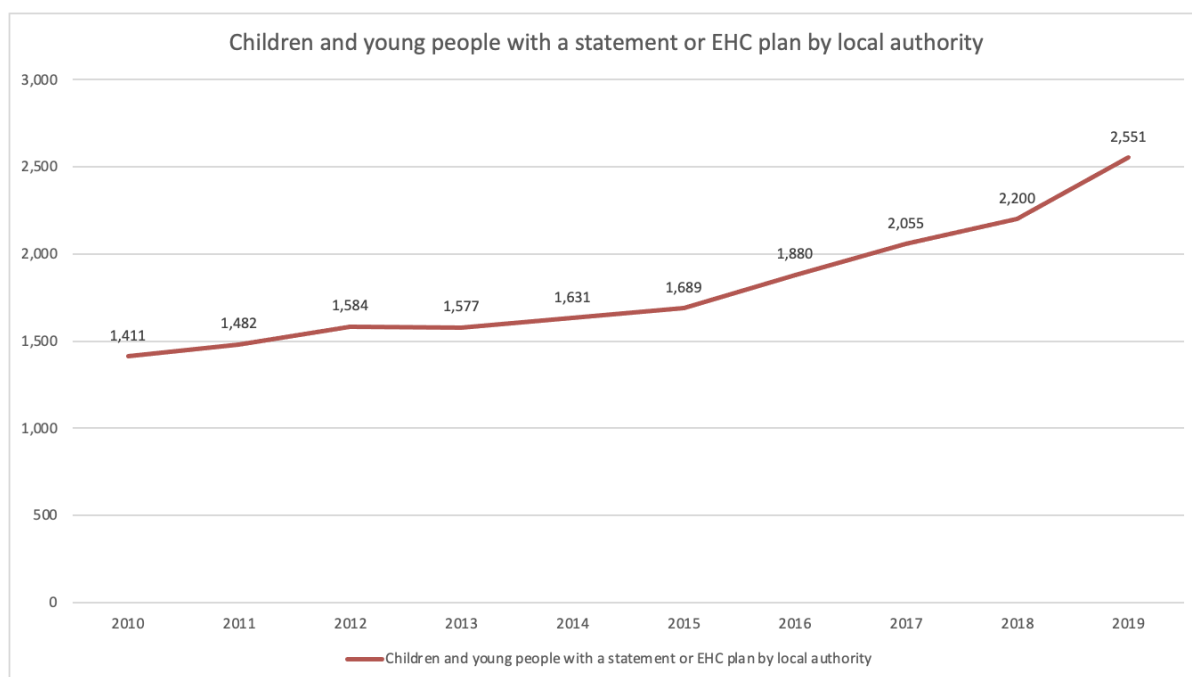
Families of SEND children have additional concerns around

- Whether the school would accommodate their child
- Whether the school would be able to provide specialist support for the child's needs
- Quality of special needs support – presence of SENCO, specialist staff, type of support provided to child
- Keep the child safe
- Create a healthy learning environment for the child

Children with Special Education Needs: There are two classes of children with SEND

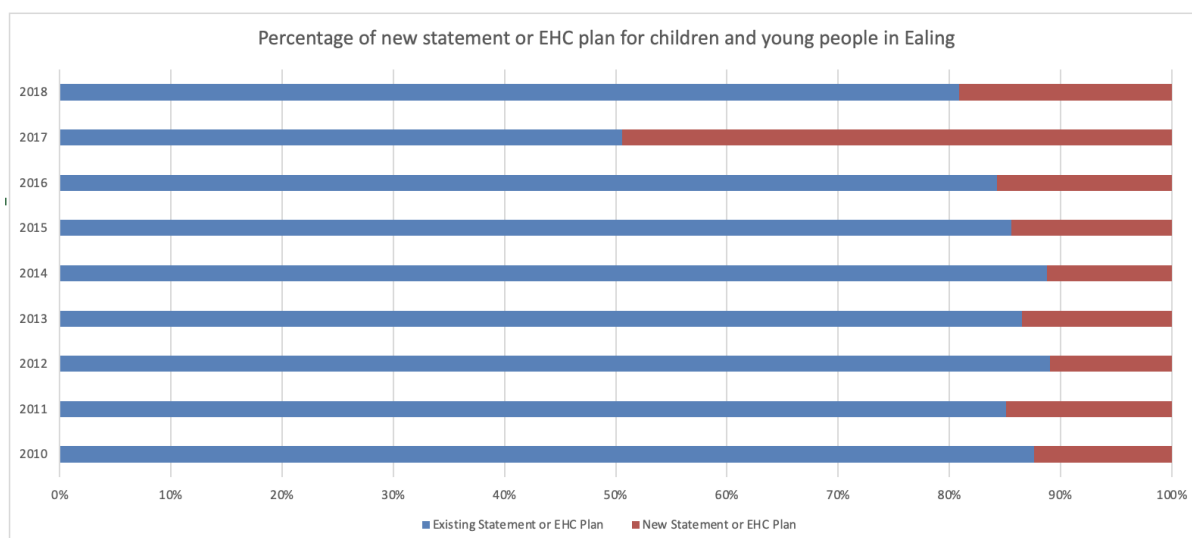
- those who have SEND but do not have an EHC Plan
- those children who have the EHC Plan

For the purpose of this study we are looking at both groups of children in the school going age of 5 to 16 years in the London borough of Ealing.



What is an EHC Plan? Some children with special educational needs may have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. An Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan issued by the Local Authority details the education, health and social care support that is to be provided to a child or young person who has Special Educational Needs (SEN) or a disability. These plans are reviewed annually.

These plans come with a budget which depends on the complex needs of the child and a plan on how to spend that money to provide additional support to the child.



School Admission Process for SEND children without EHCP: In England SEND children who do not have an EHC plan have to attend mainstream schools and need to go through the normal admission process with the children who do not have SEND needs.

Odds stacked against a SEND child without EHCP

- Special needs and disability
- Despite of special needs and disabilities they are in the same system with non SEND children
- Chances of needs being ignored by school
- Chances of being bullied at school
- Postcode lottery
- Complex admission arrangements
- Oversubscribed schools

Protection for the SEND Child: Under the Equality Act schools cannot refuse admission on SEN or disability grounds if the child has otherwise qualified for a place under the admission criteria. Once the child starts school, s/he is supported from the help generally available in the school.

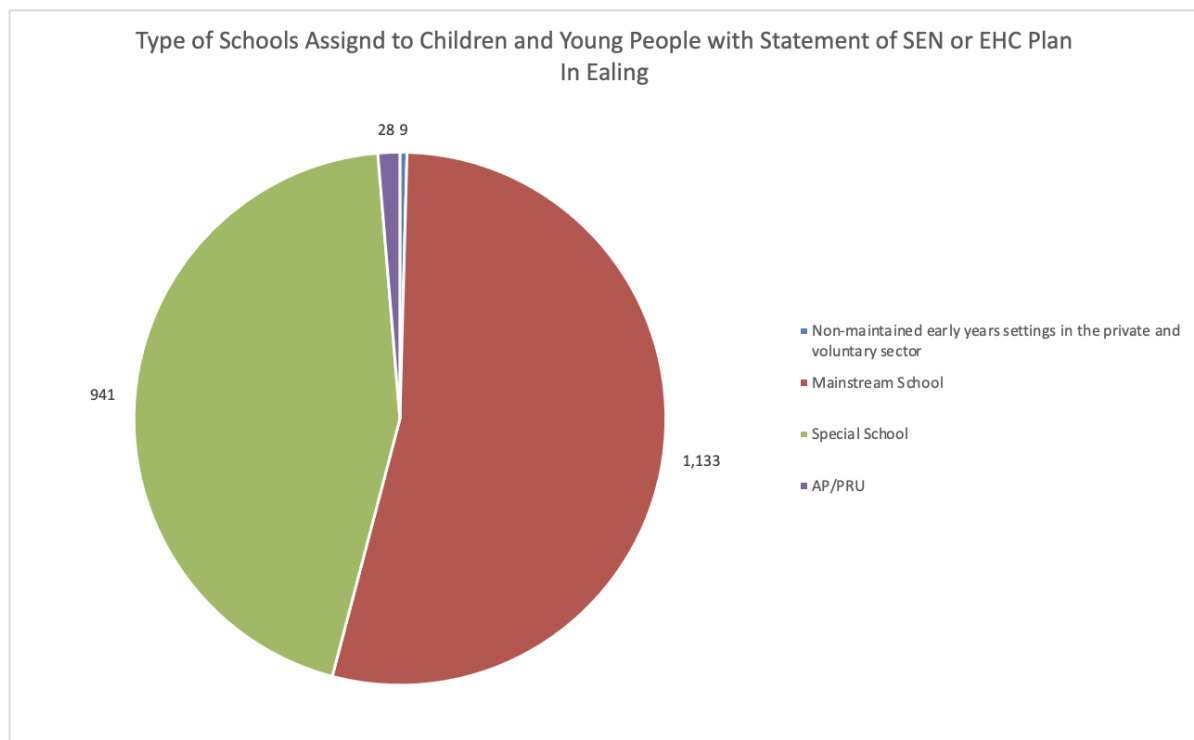
EHCP in Process: Children who have complex needs but do not yet have the EHC Plan have to go through the same admission process as above.

Children with EHCP: Children who have the EHC Plan go through a different admissions system. The school that a child will attend is decided by the Local Authority (LA) in consultation with the parents. When parents receive the draft EHC Plan, the name of the school in section I is left blank. Parents are asked for their preference of school.

Parents can choose from any of the following schools

- Maintained schools (community schools and voluntary-aided or controlled schools)
- Academies and free schools
- Further education colleges
- Non-maintained special schools (independent but generally run not-for-profit)

- Approved independent schools or colleges on the government's 'section 41' list



Timeline for Stating School Preference: Parents have the right to express a preference for the school they want their child to attend when they

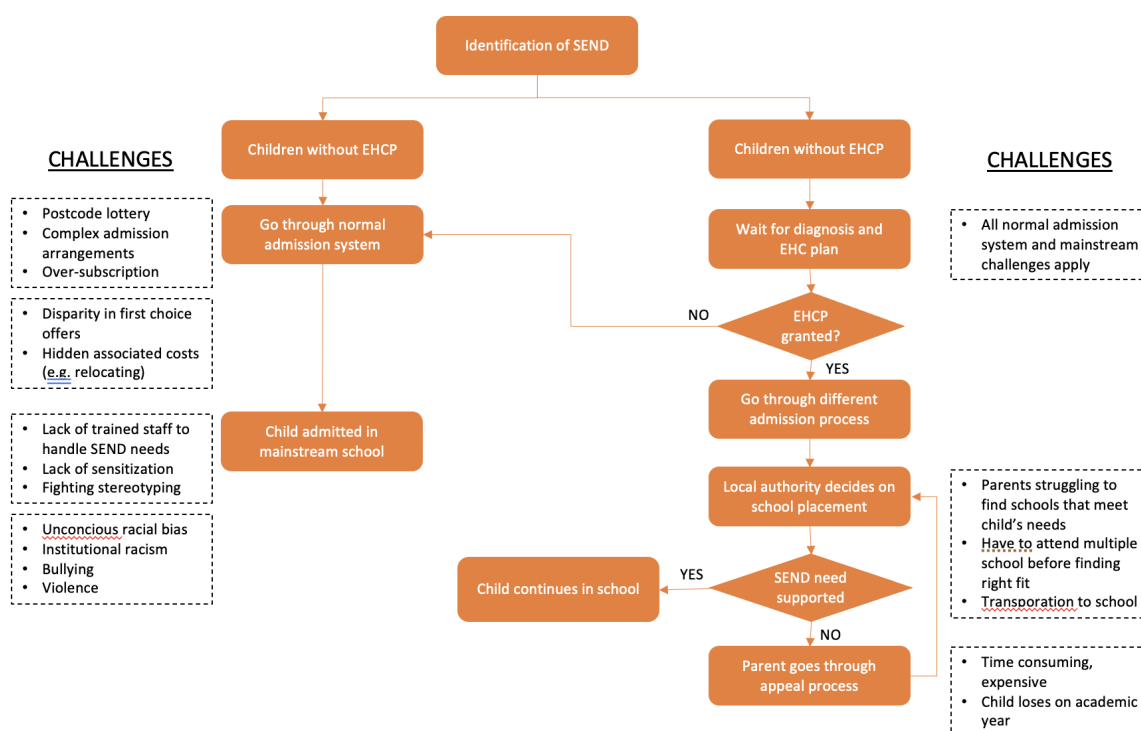
- initially receive the EHC plan
- their child moves to a different phase of education
- at an annual review

If satisfied that the named school is suitable for the child, is an efficient use of Council resources (not too expensive) and not incompatible with education of other children, the LA sends the 'named' school a copy of the child's EHC Plan and reports, on the basis of which the school gives an opinion about whether they can meet the child's needs. The final decision on whether to name a school on EHC Plan lies with the local authority. Once a school is named on the EHC Plan, then it must offer a place to the child. When the parents feel that the mainstream schools do not have the right support in place for their child's special needs they can ask for the LA to consider an independent school. This process is called 'making representations'. The conditions are that the 'named' school would need to offer the child a place, and the parent would have to prove that no other school is suitable to meet the child's needs. Alternatively the parents have a right to educate their child in a mainstream

school, they may not want to send their child to a special school. If LA cannot find a mainstream school which meets the child's needs, then they need to broaden their search and look for mainstream schools outside the catchment area.

In some cases LA may not name the school the parents asked on the basis that the school does not cater to the particular child's needs, taking in the child would negatively impact the education of other children and/or the school is too expensive, the LA can provide less expensive options which supports the needs of the child.

Bajwa-Patel, Menu in her aptly titled article 'Stories of tiger mothers struggling to survive in the SEND jungle' (2015) says that parents facing school placement dilemmas described their situations in terms of conflict. Severe lack of funding has created an adversarial situation where parents, schools and local authorities are pitted against one another. Post Covid the situation has further deteriorated, some mother's complained that the waiting period is about two years long and due to the slow process their children not only lose out on support but also an academic year or two at schools.



Literature Review: Explaining the Gaps in the SEND System

Existing literature consistently highlights a host of closely interlinked challenges faced by children with SEN needs and their parents while trying to secure suitable school places.

Challenge I: Lack of Local Provision – Lack of state funded provisions in local areas along with steep rise in EHC plans and increasing complexity of needs means that there is a heavy reliance on expensive independent schools. In a move to curb expenses councils are refusing to place children with complex SEND needs in independent schools which forces the parents to go to the tribunals which is time consuming, not to mention an expensive process and the child often loses an academic year in the process.

A report by Bureau of Investigative Journalism titled “Revealed Special Needs Funding Crisis” published in 2022 reveals

- At least 43,000 children with SEND in England attend schools outside their local area, while 13,000 have to travel long distances in private taxis on their own due to lack of transport provision.
- More than 3000 children in England travel further than 20 miles each way to school while 100 children attend school 200 miles away from where they live.
- These journeys apart from creating stress and anxiety for the children and their parents, also generate a huge expense for the councils and are exacerbating the funding crisis.

Challenge II: Navigating the SEND system – According to ‘*Right Support, Right Place, Right Time*’ SEND Green Paper report published in 2022 “navigating the SEND system and alternative provision (AP) is not a positive experience for children, young people and their families.”

The report further elaborates “We have heard that for too many families their experience of the SEND system is bureaucratic and adversarial, rather than

collaborative. Too many parents and carers do not feel confident that local mainstream schools can meet their child's needs. Parents and carers are subsequently frustrated with the difficulties and delays they face in securing support for their child. The system relies on families engaging with multiple services and assessments, making it difficult to navigate, especially for the families of children and young people with the most complex needs. Some families with disabled children tell us they are put off seeking support from children's social care because of fear they will be blamed for challenges their children face and treated as a safeguarding concern rather than receive the support they need. The difficulty faced in navigating children's social care assessments, and the lack of consistency in the offer among local authorities, can mean that support is often only provided once families reach crisis point." (Page 10) Bajwa-Patel, Menu in her aptly titled article 'Stories of tiger mothers struggling to survive in the SEND jungle' (2015) says that parents facing school placement dilemmas described their situations in terms of conflict. Severe lack of funding has created an adversarial situation where parents, schools and local authorities are pitted against one another.

Challenge III: Cuts in the national budget – According to a House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts report published in 2022 titled 'Financial Sustainability of Schools in England' – The number of local authorities reporting a deficit on their dedicated schools grant increased from 5 of 150 in 2014–15 to 94 of 149 in 2019–20. The total deficit, for local authorities reporting a deficit, was £675 million in 2019–20, an increase of £664 million since 2014–15. (Page 13)

The same report further points out that "Some of the steps that schools have needed to take in recent years to remain financially sustainable have adversely affected children's education. This includes schools that have cut staff, dropped certain subjects from the curriculum, and reduced support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in response to financial pressures. The Department (of Education) needs to recognise that these actions have an impact on the quality and breadth of the education that children receive." (page 3)

In a previous report published by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts in 2020 titled 'Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities', the committee had noted that "Children with SEND but who do not have EHC plans risk missing out on the support they need, especially in mainstream schools that are under significant financial pressure." (Page 3)

According to 'Right Support, Right Place, Right Time' SEND Green Paper 2022 "despite unprecedented investment, the system is not delivering value for money for children, young people and families."

The SEND deficit for councils in England hit £1.3 billion in March 2022, an increase of more than £450 million in a single year according to a report by Bureau of Investigative Journalism titled "Revealed Special Needs Funding Crisis" published in 2022. The gap between government investment and high needs spending is increasing and is one of the key areas that the government is investigating in the planned SEND reform which is currently underway. But the proposed new national framework of banding and the price tariffs for funding has already faced severe criticism by the organisations working with children.

Challenge IV: Steep rise in Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which is considered by many as the golden ticket to get the support that the SEND children need. EHCP sets out the provision a child or young person needs from 0 to 25 years of age. This legally binding document which is produced by the local authorities (LA) after a formal assessment offers families some certainty about what their children are entitled to and who delivers those services. Some of the figures quoted in a report published by the Department of Education in 2022 titled 'Special educational needs and disability: an analysis and summary of data sources' are –

Total number of EHC plans maintained by local authorities There were 473,300 children and young people with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans in January 2022. This is an increase of 10% from 430,700 as at January 2021. This follows similar increases in recent years.

Number of new EHC plans issued by local authorities 62,200 new EHC plans were made during 2021, an increase of 2,100 (3%) when compared against 2020. This follows an increase of 11% from 2019 to 2020.

Number of initial requests for assessment There were 93,300 initial requests made for assessment for an EHC plan during 2021, up from 76,000 in 2020 and the highest number since data was first collected in 2016.

Since parents have low confidence in the system they feel that only the EHCP can guarantee their children get the specialised help they deserve. This has resulted in a steep rise in the request for the plans. This is overwhelming the system, there are delays beyond the stipulated 20 weeks in producing the plan. Also the children who do not have the plan and hence are not legally eligible for the specialised support are slipping through the cracks in the system and are not getting the additional help they need.

Challenge V: Discrimination within the SEND system – According to *‘Right Support, Right Place, Right Time’* SEND Green Paper report published in 2022 “The system is not equally accessible: parents and carers with access to financial and social resources are often better placed to navigate the system and secure support for their child. Parents and carers of children in alternative provision often have little choice over whether their child ends up in these specialist settings, or whether the support and education being provided meets their child’s needs.” (Page 10)

Postcode Lottery – According to Jo Hutchison’s report ‘Identifying pupils with special educational needs and disabilities’, published in 2021 by the Education Policy Institute and Nuffield Foundation, “The most important finding from this report is that which primary school a child attends makes more difference to their chances of being identified with SEND than anything about them as an individual, their experiences or what local authority they live in. The lottery is mostly at school level, with more than half of the differences in identification explained by the school attended... which school a child goes to matters an awful lot to whether they receive SEND support at both the higher or lower levels. The system of assessment is not

consistent and not adapted well to children's individual needs." Postcode lottery has emerged as a key issue in the dysfunction of the SEND system and one of the main points under consideration in the SEND reforms currently underway.

While inclusivity is the new buzz word in the SEND system, there is a lack of viewing SEND through Intersectionality lens.

Challenge VI: Lack of Holistic Approach – According to Ofsted Report SEND: old issues, new issues, next steps published in 2021 "there is not enough clarity about which authority is held accountable for services and provision in the local area and an uncoordinated response between health, education and social care was at the core of most problems that appeared to exist."

This fractured approach results in confusing both the service providers and parents seeking help and results in further delays.

Challenge VII: Disruption caused by the pandemic on health, learning and development of children with SEND needs – The Covid pandemic has exposed the already existing cracks within SEND system and the full impact of the pandemic on the mental health of children with SEND needs is yet to be audited. One direct impact of the pandemic has been the two year delay in review of the SEND system by the Department of Education (DfE).

Starting the Local Conversation: Finding School Places for Ethnic Minority Children with SEND in the Ealing Borough of West London

Introduction to Ealing – Poverty Situation

Ealing in West London is the third most populous London borough with a population of 367,100 inhabitants (Census 2021). Traditionally considered a well-to-do borough, the Trust for London Poverty Rate (2020) map shows Ealing to be at the mid level, but the heavy dependence on food banks by its inhabitants tells another story. Ealing Food Bank has reported that for the year April 2021 to March 2022 it was the busiest Trussell Trust foodbank in the Greater London area. In 2019 Ealing ranked 94 by the IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivations), being a relatively deprived area in England, but 4 areas in the Ealing borough were categorised by IMD as the 10% most deprived areas in England, while 29 areas in the borough were included in the 20% most deprived areas in England (Ealing Data, 2019).

Being an inner city borough of London, Ealing is witness to great wealth and huge inequality in wealth distribution. Families in London face far higher living costs than families living elsewhere in England. Poverty is higher in London than the other parts of the UK at 27%. Nearly 40% of Londoners have an income below the amount needed to achieve a basic decent standard of living. Ealing borough is no exception, according to Ealing Council data published in 2018 – one in eight workers live in poverty, around 3.7 million people. At the present time when the country is in the grips of the worst cost of living crisis in the last forty years, poverty is evenly split among in-work and workless households.

Ethnicity in Ealing

According to Census 2021, the population in Ealing is predominantly white (43.2%), with non-white minorities representing the remaining 56.8% of the population.

Asian people formed the largest minority group in Ealing accounting for 30.3% of the population, while 39,491 or 11% of the Ealing population are black.

Population by Race in Ealing (Census, 2021)
White - 158,463 people or 43.2%
Asian - 111,241 people or 30.3%
Black - 39,491 people or 10.8%
Other - 38,760 people or 10.6%
Mixed - 19,161 people or 5.2%

Ealing's School Population

According to a report titled 'Equality in Ealing 2020' in Ealing schools 70% of the pupil population is from Asian, Black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. 69.4% of primary school pupils and 72.9% of high school pupils are from an ethnic minority.

Ethnic Disproportionality in Ealing

According to 'Ethnic disproportionality in the identification of Special Educational Needs (SEN): Ealing Local Authority Feedback Pack'-- There is substantial ethnic disproportionality in Ealing for the following groups:

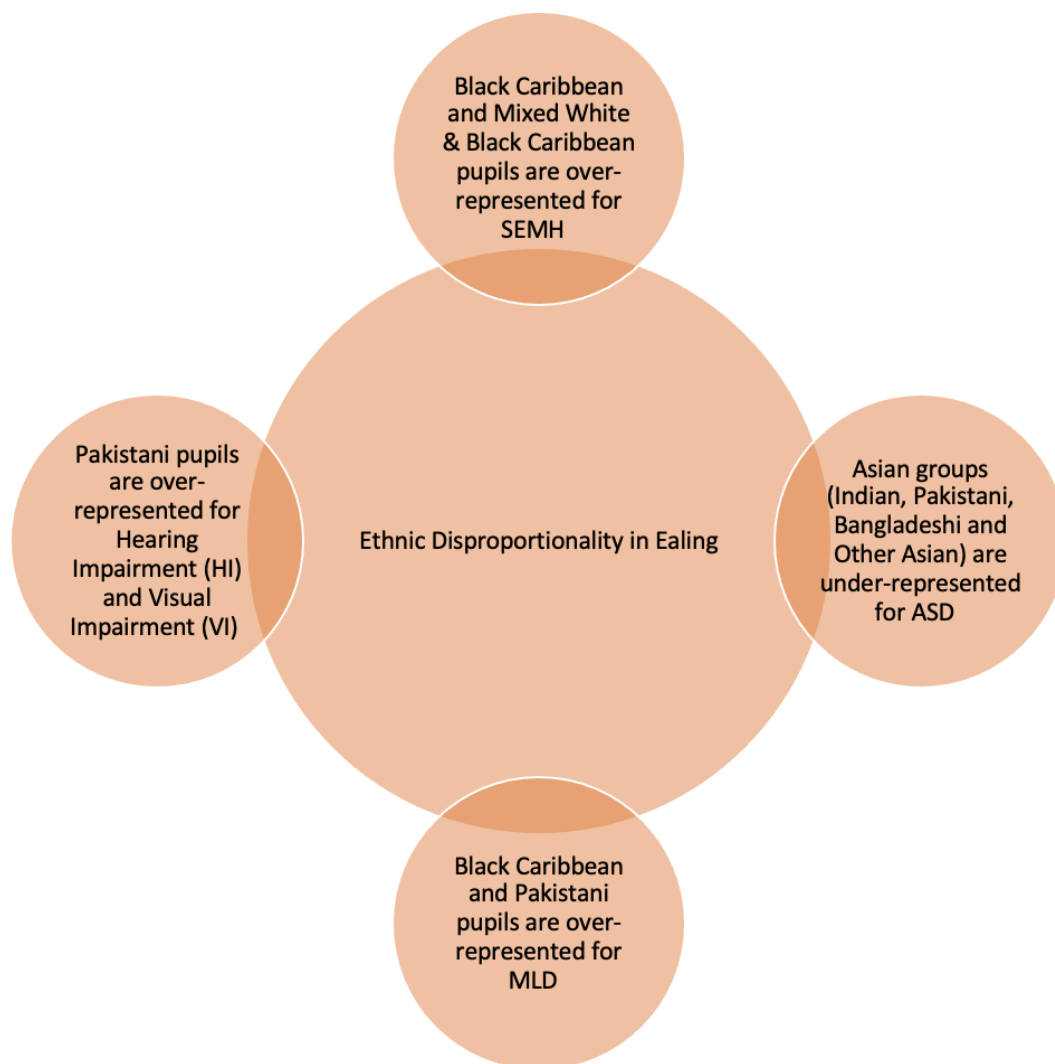
Black Caribbean and Mixed White & Black Caribbean pupils are over-represented for SEMH

Asian groups (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Other Asian) are under-represented for ASD

Black Caribbean and Pakistani pupils are over-represented for MLD

Pakistani pupils are over-represented for Hearing Impairment (HI) and Visual Impairment (VI)

The over-representation for MLD is accounted for by pupil background factors including age, socioeconomic deprivation and gender, but the other ethnic disproportionalities remain apparent even after accounting for pupil background characteristics.



The Challenges Faced by Ethnic Minority Parents in Ealing

In this section we will be discussing the challenges faced by the parents while trying to find suitable school places for their children with SEND needs. These host of inter-related challenges are nothing new, all of them have been mentioned in previous studies, green papers, articles and both the government at the national and local level have been made aware of them but these problems still persist on ground.

First Hand Experience: A perspective from ethnic minority families

ESDEG organised a focus group of ethnic minority parents of SEND children which was attended by ten mothers from Pakistani, Somali and East European backgrounds. In the all women's group the mothers could relax and freely talk about the challenges they faced and how they dealt with them. The research team conducted one-to-one in-depth interviews with 2 mothers from this focus group and another mother who was not part of the focus group. So in total we spoke to 11 mothers.

To protect the identity of the mothers and their children in this report we have assigned an alphabet to each mother. Henceforth we will be referring to the mothers as A, B, C upto K.

Point to be noted some of these mothers have more than one child with SEND needs.

Mixed group in terms of where they are at in their SEND process
4 children have EHCP
7 children are awaiting EHCP and
4 children have SEND needs but no EHCP

In the table below we are sharing some basic information about the mothers who attended ESDEG's focus group meeting and with whom we conducted one-to-one interviews.

Case No	Data Collection	Alphabet assigned to the mother	No of children with SEND needs	Do the children have EHCP plan	Did they struggle to find a school place	Is the mother happy with the school
1,	Focus Group, one-to-one interview	A	2 children have SEND	Both have EHCP	Had to go to the tribunal for her son	Yes
2.	Focus Group, one-to-one interview	B	2 children have SEND	One has EHCP, applied for the other one. This is the second application since the first application got lost	Had been asking for an early intervention for her child, the school took notice only after the child got into trouble	No
3.	Focus Group	C	Youngest child has SEND	Not applied yet	Trying to get extra support from school, set up meeting with SENCO	No
4.	Focus Group	D	2 children have SEND	EHCP has been applied for one child whose needs are more complex	Feels overlooked by the school	Happy with SENCO's advice

5.	Focus Group	E	1 child has SEND	Still awaiting EHCP	Not happy with how the school dealt with her child	No
6.	Focus Group	F	1 child has SEND	Not yet applied	Happy with the additional support school provides	Yes
7.	Focus Group	G	2 children have SEND	Still awaiting EHCP	Frustrated with the school, both children faced exclusion	No
8.	Focus Group	H	2 children have SEND	1 has EHCP, other still awaiting	Mentioned how much faster the process was before Lockdown, also schools had more resources available	Happy with one school
9.	Focus Group	I	1 child has SEND	Not yet applied	In talks with the SENCO	No
10.	Focus Group	J	1 child has SEND	Still awaiting EHCP	Feels school treated child unfairly	No
11,	One-to-one interview	K	1 child has SEND	Has EHCP	Attends the same school after his EHCP came through	Yes

					with additional support	
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Challenge I: Lack of Awareness About SEND

All ten mothers present at the focus group meeting were of the view that when they started their SEND journey they had no clue how to identify the problems their children faced.

A talked about how her son had trouble taking baths, doing basic self-care chores like brushing his hair, and was terrified of going to school. Initially she thought of it as a behavioural problem till a health professional flagged the issue and did a referral for her son.

B talked about how the needs of her daughter with SEND were totally different from her son who also had SEND needs. This led to a delay in her understanding of the problem and seeking help.

C added that since her other children did not have SEND needs, as a family it was difficult for them to figure out the special needs of her youngest child.

E talked about how without any prior warning one day she received a note from her daughter's school about her disruptive behaviour and how the school felt she had special needs. Till then E had been led to believe by her daughter's school teachers that she was progressing at par with the other children in her age group.

G talked about how her children complained about being bullied in school, when she flagged the issue, the school disregarded her, then her children got into trouble and both faced exclusion, eventually on advice of a friend she asked for the SENCO who identified the special needs of her children.

J shared that till the SENCO at her son's school sat her down and explained the special needs of her son, she was not able to comprehend.

Rest of the mothers also had similar stories of struggle. What was telling was that given the complex nature of special needs, mothers with more than one child with SEND needs had difficulty in identifying the special needs of their child. The mothers talked about how there should be more awareness on the special needs and how parents need more exposure on this issue.

Challenge II: Lack of Knowledge About How the SEND System Works

During the discussion the mothers shared their frustration over the lack of knowledge about the SEND system and how that is hindering the process of seeking the best possible help for their children.

D remarked that entering the SEND system was akin to being pushed into a battleground with eyes blindfolded. This statement was met with nods of approval and verbal agreement. This opened the floodgates and mothers started reminiscing about the struggles they went through while trying to get the additional support for their children. The mothers did not stick to the school admission process, rather they talked about issues with getting a diagnosis, negotiations with the school, how the referrals at the Carmelita House worked, the waiting period, the SEND misconceptions and much more.

We are highlighting the issues which are relevant to this current study.

A shared how there was no one place with all the SEND information available when her son was undergoing the process some years back. She had to attend various workshops, seminars, meet various professionals to piece together a holistic picture. Mothers undergoing the process recently mentioned that it was still the same, there was no one place where they could visit to get all the information.

C shared how they had been negotiating with her youngest son's school to get him some extra support. Initially the school had refused, and the family had accepted it. But a charity advised them to push their case and now with the SENCO involved the school is cooperating and have provided her son with one-to-one support during the school hours.

G shared how her children were bullied in school and when they fought back, they faced unfair exclusion. Though she was unhappy, she did not challenge it, assuming that the school had the last word. She regretted it later when she realised that it was a major setback for her children.

H shared that when the EHC plan came for her child and they were asked to fill in a school name, she had filled in the name of the nearest school. That school rejected her child and LA assigned him to a school where he was bullied. Finally on advice of her friend she went to the tribunal and got her child the school which accommodates his needs.

I talked about how talking to the SENCO had helped her make sense of everything happening to her child. She wished she had approached the SENCO at least a couple of years ago.

All the mothers agreed that this lack of clarity added to the stress of the process and made them feel out of control.

Challenge III: SEND Misconceptions

This is linked to the second challenge, the mothers pointed out that in addition to the lack of information on SEND, there were lots of misconceptions about the process which had misled them in their SEND journeys.

Unaware of the Children and Families Act 2014 – Most of the mothers present at the focus group had not heard of the Children and Families Act 2014 which is the law about children and young people in England with special educational needs or disabilities. They were curious to know what rights the Act gives them and their children and how they could access those.

Unaware of Ealing Council's Local Offer (LO): 7 out of the 10 mothers were not aware of the Local Offer website, of the 3 who knew about the website only **A** said that she had used it in the past, **E** and **F** said that they preferred to speak to a professional like the SENCO to get the information. **C** and **D** said that once they got home they would ask their older children to check out the website on their behalf.

The Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) Request has to be done by the school – **B, C, F** and **I** said that they believed till recently that only the school could ask for the EHCP and not the parents. They said that this misguided belief delayed the process of seeking help for their children. The other mothers joined voices, they claimed that this was a very common misconception and many parents believed in this. When asked what helped change their idea, the mothers replied that they got the right information when they started attending the various information sessions conducted both by the council and charities working on this issue.

The Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) is a must to get additional support for the children – **G** shared that she also believed this and did not push the school to provide additional support while she awaited EHCP for both her children. It changed when the SENCO got involved and coordinated with the teachers to provide additional support to the children. **B** agreed that the additional support her son's

school is providing while they wait for the EHCP to come has had a huge impact on her son. He has become calmer and settled down in school, unlike previously when he used to dread going to school, complained about being bullied and used to have episodes.

The Local Authority/Schools Have the Final Say– Most of the mothers present at the focus group meeting shared that they believed the decision of the schools and local authority was the final and there was no way to challenge it. Two of the mothers **A** and **H** had taken their children's cases to the SEND tribunals and had won against the local council/school. But both mothers said that in the early days they had no idea that they could challenge the local authority in court. The other mothers added that this knowledge gave them confidence and made them feel more in control while negotiating with the Local Authority on their children's behalf.

Challenge IV: Lack of a Supportive Social Network

8 out of the 10 mothers attending ESDEG's focus group meeting had migrated to the UK in the last decade or so. Out of the 8, 2 mothers said that they had immediate families who helped them settle down in the UK. The rest of the six mothers were on their own. Migration to the UK had been a challenge, followed by setting up a new life, finding a house, new jobs, schools for their children – all these activities had been rather stressful and they faced roadblocks in each step. Most of the mothers were not fluent in English language and needed the services of a translator while interacting with school or other professionals. Also they found it difficult to attend meetings during work hours. These were compounded by cultural differences and lack of knowledge about how the system works. They had no previous knowledge of the English education system, let alone how to navigate the SEND jungle. The mothers complained about feeling isolated and lonely and how miserable it made them. Some of the mothers confessed (on condition of anonymity) about being depressed and being on anxiety medication.

A, a second generation British Pakistani woman had been successful in securing the additional support to meet her children's needs. She stated that it helped that she was fluent in English, this gave her the confidence to communicate with the professionals dealing with her children, ask questions, keep up regular email communication, and chat with the service staff to find information. She attended

various workshops to collect information about the options available to her children and pieced together bits to get a holistic idea. She agreed that her local upbringing and knowledge of how the system and the people within it function have been a huge help. She added that her mother who is a first generation migrant, not very fluent in English, nor very confident about dealing with the professionals would have been lost.

Challenge V: Fighting Stereotypes, Racial Prejudices

Most mothers claimed that they had faced racial prejudices and had to fight stereotypes at some point of the school placement process.

G shared how she had been fighting to get a referral since her child was in nursery. By the time the child got the help he was already ten years old and the mother felt that an early intervention would have helped her child more. Several mothers added that they have had similar experiences. They felt ignored by the schools, while others felt that their lack of English language skills was used as an excuse by schools, health services and even translators to impose their decisions on them.

B shared her experiences with the translator assigned to her by the Carmelita House. The translator who was a fellow Somali was not at all cooperative, nor was he interested in listening to what B had to say. B felt that the translator had made up his mind about the case and was dismissive of her. She did not feel confident in the translator's ability to represent her, hence she had to ask for another translator. In this process three months were wasted and diagnosis for her child took longer.

G shared that she felt certain that her children faced exclusion at school because of their race because the White children also involved in the trouble went scott free.

Recommendations

As the eleven case studies show the ethnic minority parents are far from happy with the way Local Authority/schools have handled their cases. The parents felt overlooked and ignored by the system and distrusted the very institutions which were supposed to provide their children with education and additional support. There appeared to be an obvious power imbalance between the parents and the Local Authority/schools and this has a negative impact on the children as well.

Based on our research we propose several recommendations at four levels – parents, schools, Local Authority and the national government.

Parent Level	School Level	Local Authority Level	National Government Level
Flag issues for early intervention	Awareness campaigns on SEND issues for both the public and the professionals working in the field School, health care and social workers should identify the needs of a child at early stage		
Learn the law and know your rights	Representation at decision making level		
Read the school policies and know the rights of your child	Not only SENCOs, every teacher in the school should be SEND trained	Prioritise the needs of the SEND children	
Start both verbal and email communication with the school regarding needs of your child	Organise training for parents to be SEND trained	View SEND through intersectional lens	
Participate in parent forums	Enhance communication and strengthen relationship between schools and parents	Better manage SEND	Dismantle the structures of inequality
Share your story – it may motivate	Update and expand the	Learn to adapt to the specific needs	Strengthen data collection on each

other parents to speak up and assert their rights	outdated school policies on a regular basis with inputs from the parents and children	of the local area. Blanket national policy implementation does not work	step of the SEND process with stress on ethnic group data
Fight the stigma against SEND in your community	Make sure all school staff adhere to these policies and work without any bias	Set up an independent body where the parents can express their grievances against schools	

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