

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**



PROJECT COUNCIL

#BIGEDCONVERSATION

#MILLIONCONVERSATIONS

BIG EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS

ABOUT THE PROJECT COUNCIL

Who we are

- A diverse group of **25** young people **AGED 13 – 19**, from across England
- A group of leaders
- Experts by experience, who are passionate about changing education for the better

How we work together

- Monthly project council **ZOOM** meetings
- Quarterly **IN-PERSON** meetings



BIG EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS



WHAT WE DID

We held **SIX BECs** across England, reaching mainstream schools, students in alternative provision and neurodiverse students.

Project Council members **DESIGNED** and **FACILITATED** every BEC, with support from Leaders Unlocked.

Our BECs included:

- standing debates
- group discussions
- creative activities

BEC DESIGN

The Project Council aimed to:

- gather young people's **VIEWS** on the purpose of education, the current system and ideas for change
- be **INCLUSIVE** of students in alternative provision and neurodiverse students

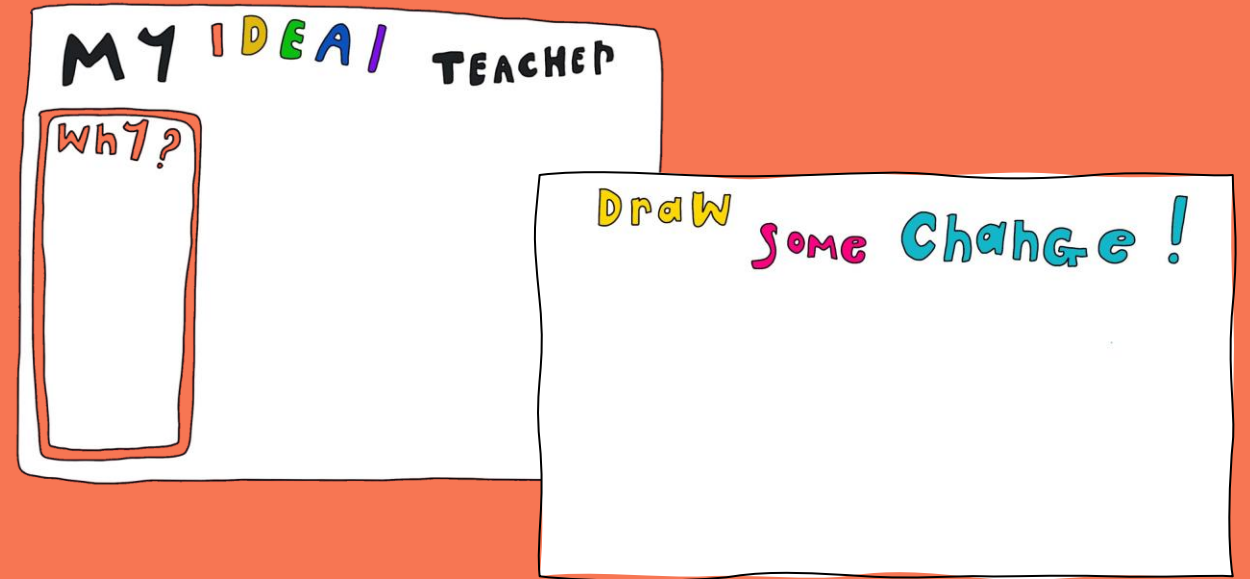
The Project Council felt a strong sense of **OWNERSHIP, PRIDE** and **PURPOSE** in the design.



BEC DESIGN

The Council created:

- an **AGENDA** for the BECs
- a pool of **STANDING DEBATE** questions, to get participants moving and sharing
- a set of **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES**

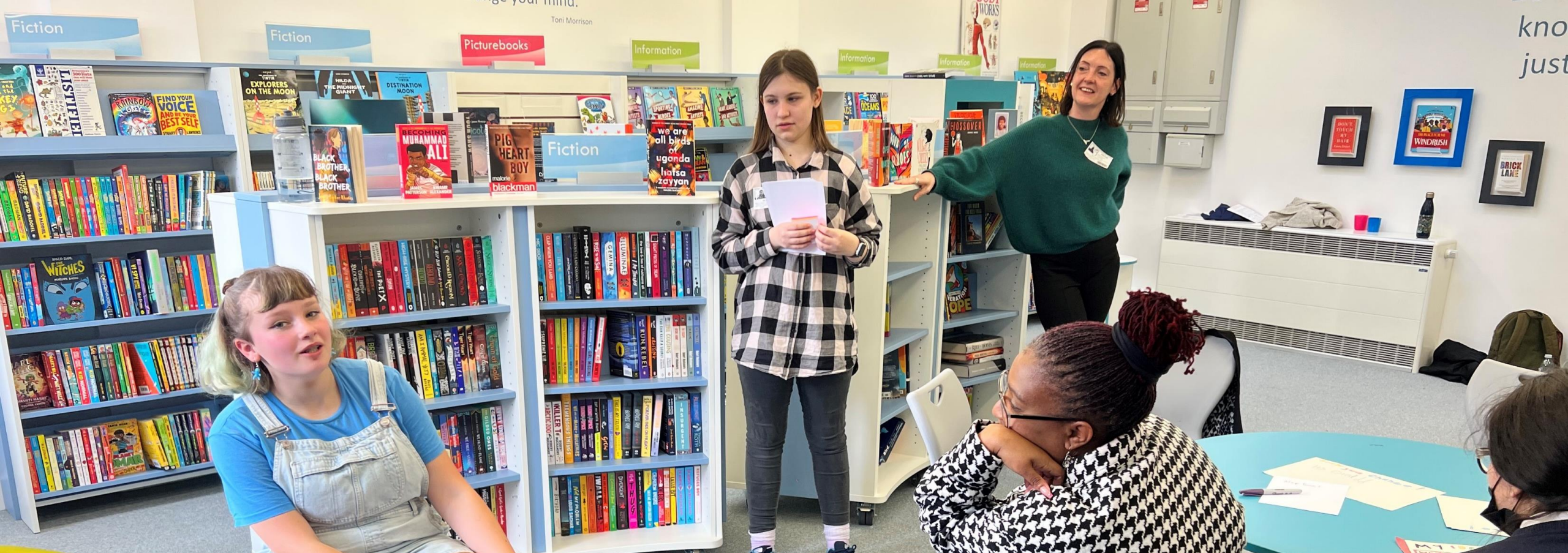


Our **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES** included:

- storytelling
- drawing
- poetry

They were designed to reach **NEURODIVERSE** participants and anyone who might not feel comfortable sharing aloud.

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WHAT WE HEARD

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

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CURRENTLY ON SHAKY GROUND

The system is built on shaky ground:

- A fragile **VICTORIAN** system
- **FEARMONGERING**
- Perpetuates **ELITISM**
- Teachers have a **SUPERIOR** attitude

It's a system with the wrong aims:

- Prepares for **SUBSERVIENCE**
- Doesn't encourage **LEADERSHIP**

"The current status of education is where you are taught to be institutionalised and be a **FOLLOWER**, instead of a **LEADER** or entrepreneur."

"School is pretty much, sit down, shut up, let me teach you how to work in a **9-5 OFFICE JOB** instead of doing what you love and learning life skills!"

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THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

SHOULD BE A PREPARATION FOR LIFE

Education should be about **LIFE**, not just **WORK**.

"It should be more about **LIFE SKILLS** and more **PERSON-CENTRED**."

"What is it *supposed* to be? A system that prepares you **FOR LIFE**."

Education should be about **DISCOVERY** and self-understanding.

"I still don't know what I want to do with **MY LIFE**."

"The future should be for wider career **OPTIONS** and advice and help to be an **ENTREPRENEUR**."

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WHAT WE HEARD

VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SYSTEM

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EXAM STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

EXAM STRESS can take a toll on students' mental health.

It feels like there's more focus on academic results than on **WELLBEING**.

"Teachers put a lot of **PRESSURE** on students. It's all about the exams."

"Can I share my personal experience? My maths teacher put a lot of pressure on us because of an exam but I got so stressed I couldn't focus on the questions... I had to leave the room and then I **PUKED** up."

"If you go to a teacher for help with academic things, they'll help you but if it's about socio-emotional stuff, that'll get **LESS ATTENTION**."

I know academics is the point of school but it would be better if they cared about **EMOTIONS** too."

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VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SYSTEM

LABELS CAN BE HARD TO SHAKE

Many students are labelled and allowed to become **SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES**.

"If you get a punishment, you start to see yourself in a **NEGATIVE** way."

Sets and exam results are often the source of these labels.

"I was dropped to a lower set. From there, the **HOPE WAS GONE**."

"I was labelled as **GIFTED** but felt **TOO MUCH PRESSURE** and felt like I was failing... Now I'm outside education I feel much more proud."

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VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SYSTEM

LOW AWARENESS OF DIVERSE NEEDS

Students with diverse needs—including neurodiverse and disabled students—often face **STIGMA**.

"There's a lot of **STIGMA** in mainstream."

"At my previous school I had no one. Everyone **BULLIED** me."

"Everyone knows you're going there because something is **WRONG**."

MAINSTREAM is often hard.

"Teachers don't always understand what needs to be in place. I'm disabled and don't always get **UNDERSTOOD**."

But **ALTERNATIVE PROVISION** can be different.

"When I was diagnosed when I was 8, I didn't even know what autism was, this school **HELPED ME** to understand it."



WHAT WE HEARD

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

MORE SUPPORT *FOR WELLBEING*

Ways of *REDUCING PRESSURE* should be built in to the system.

“Teachers need to recognise and *PREVENT* how much pressure that they are putting on people.”

“It would be good to have the ability to *SIT THINGS OUT* when it feels too much.”

Strong and close *RELATIONSHIPS* with teachers are really important to students.

“Students need more *ONE-TO-ONE* support. Meet them where they are.”

Students described their ideal teacher as:

- “Understanding, patient and a good listener.”
- “Respectful, thoughtful, someone with good listening skills.”

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

BEHAVIOUR SYSTEMS BUILT ON EMPATHY

Behaviour systems should prioritise students' **WELFARE** and foster mutual **UNDERSTANDING**.

Teachers should be trained in **INCLUSIVE** and **COMPASSIONATE** behaviour management.

"There should be **HELP** for disruptive students."

"In the future, the teacher is **RESPECTFUL** and **EMPATHETIC** and helps the student to calm down and return to study."

"There should be more **SUPPORT**, some young people have mental ill health or other **NON-VISIBLE** things such as ADHD."

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IDEAS FOR CHANGE

A MORE DYNAMIC CURRICULUM

The curriculum should be more **ENJOYABLE**.

"There should be more fun, but educational, **ACTIVITIES**."

It should involve more **APPLIED** learning.

"We should cover more **FIRST AID** in PSE, as well as mental health first aid."

"They teach you mathematics but not **APPLIED**."

And it should also prepare students for real-world **CHALLENGES**.

"We should have opportunities for **YOUTH LEADERSHIP**."

"If there's a fight they say 'Tell your teacher', but in the **REAL WORLD** there aren't teachers. What do you do?"

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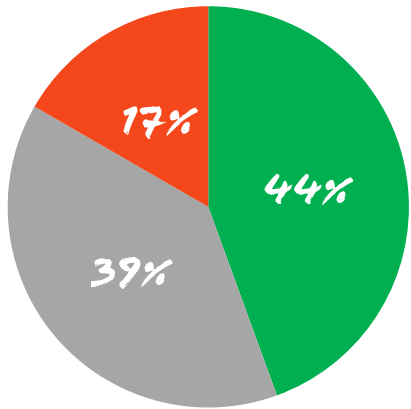
WHAT WE HEARD

OUR SURVEY

OUR SURVEY

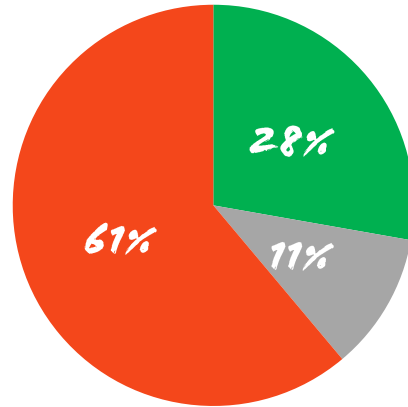
At our BEC in Hull, we conducted a **SURVEY** of the **18 YOUNG PEOPLE** who attended.
Here is a selection of the results.

Knowledge is not the same
as intelligence



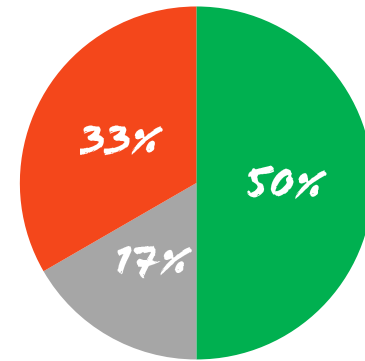
■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Is pressure in the school
system necessary?



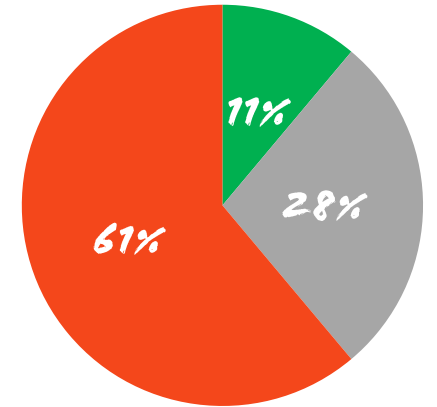
■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Removing students from
the classroom does more
harm than good



■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

School prepares students
for the real world



■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

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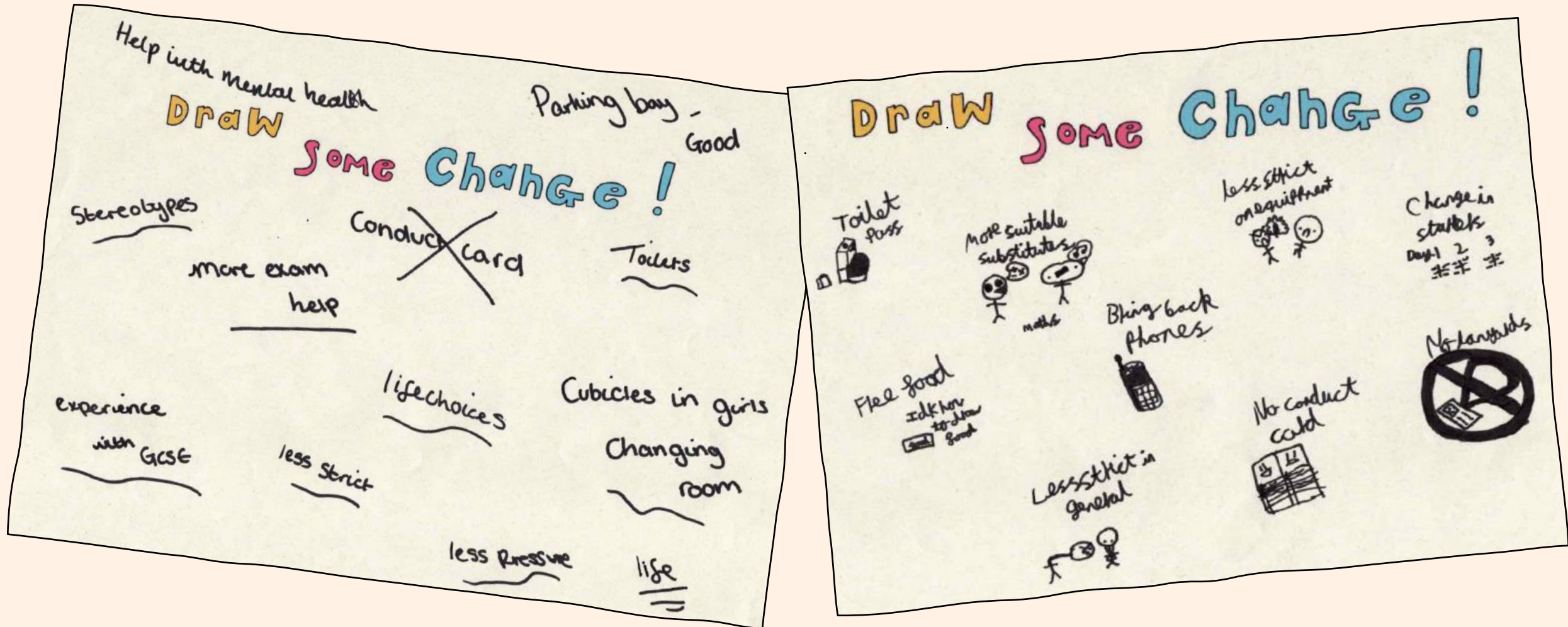


WHAT WE HEARD

CREATIVE RESPONSES

CREATIVE RESPONSES

DRAW SOME CHANGE



CREATIVE RESPONSES

MY IDEAL TEACHER



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CREATIVE RESPONSES

These **POEMS** were written by students at our BECs.
The student who wrote the poem on the right explained:

"The first verse **RHYMED** and the second verse did not. This represented the idea that education **USED TO WORK** in the past but not anymore."

Disabilities are liabilities
the expectations are high
but the support is low
you're always on the verge of tears,
do your teachers even know?
Should they show you more care?
Do they even know you're there?
Separated from the smart,
You were doomed from the start.

School is cruel,
Some may say,
Another exam,
Another day,
And when that day has dawned on you,
We still have piles of work to do,
We still have hours we have to cram,
Just to pass the next exam.

Everyone takes the same class,
But some stand out from the mass,
We are too focused on our future,
Never able to live in the moment.

Education system ever so outdated,
Schools not realising students stress,
Leading to declines in mental health,
When will they realise not one system fits all?

CONTACT US

The work outlined in this report was conducted by Leaders Unlocked, in partnership with Big Change.

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