

My time as an Ambassador **for the Children's Commissioner for England**



Who is the
 **CHILDREN'S
COMMISSIONER**



Dame Rachel de Souza is the Children's Commissioner for England

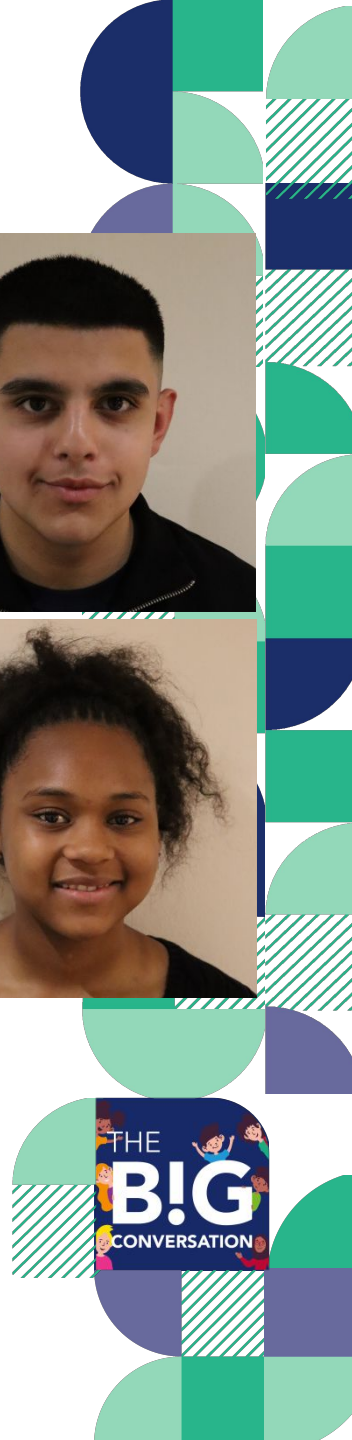
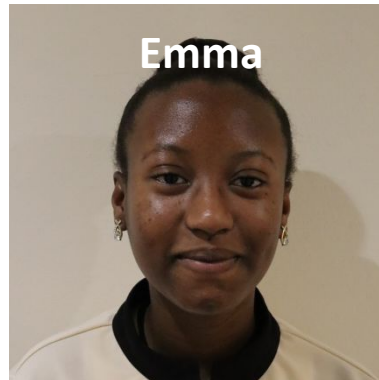
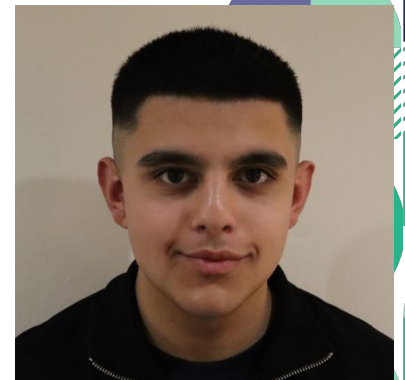
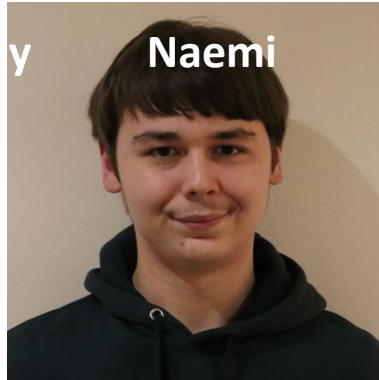
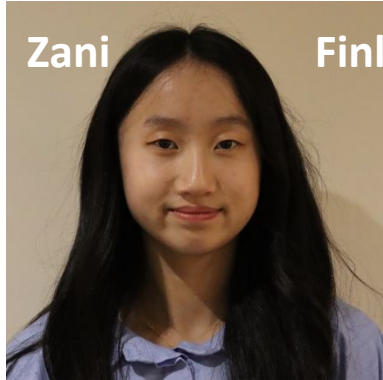
- The Children's Commissioner for England - **Dame Rachel de Souza** - listens to children and young people's views.
- She speaks up for you and explains your views and interests.
- It's her job to make sure that the government listens to children when they make decisions.



The Children's Commissioner gives children and young people a voice in politics!



Ambassadors 2025/2026



My time as an Ambassador for the Children's Commissioner for England

A look back – what's happened so far?

February

- Induction meeting

March

- First call
- Meeting with Minister Dalton
Young Carers Action Day

April

- Festival of Childhood in April

May

- A report on Assisted Dying
- Tech companies Roundtable
- Mental Health Awareness week

June

- A blog on Assisted Dying
- Podcast with Youth Sports Trust
- Media Training
- Youth Shadow Panel Event in Parliament
- Six SEND Panel meetings (Jan to June)

July

- Your views on voting at 16
- National Youth Sector Meeting
- Podcast with Josh Pelled (going out Sept)
- #ScreenFreeSummer Campaign

September

- School and College Survey launch



- The Big Ambition was a survey carried out by the Children's Commissioner between September 2023 and January 2024. It asked children about their experiences, views and what they want government to do.
- The results from the survey are informing the Children's Commissioner's own priorities for her time in office, and the work she does to influence the government's plans.

Children told the Commissioner that they cared about seven main things:



The Children's Commissioner's Big Ambitions



1 Every child grows up in a family who has what they need to support them and no child grows up in poverty.	2 Every child grows up in a loving and supportive family.	3 Every child has access to high quality support in the early years.	4 Every child grows up happy and healthy and where children need additional help it is provided as early as possible.	5 Every child has access to high-quality mental health and wellbeing support in their school and local community.
6 Every disabled child, child with special educational needs, and neurodiverse child receives excellent, joined up healthcare, social care and education.	7 Every child with the most acute health needs, living away from home, receives loving, caring support.	8 Every child has access to a brilliant education.	9 Every child attends and is engaged in school every day.	10 Every child who needs additional support to engage in education can access it easily.
11 Every child involved with children's social care is truly listened to, and their views are heard.	12 All families get consistent, effective help to improve children's welfare, and to stay together wherever it is in a child's best interests.	13 Every child in care has a loving stable home.	14 Every young person with care experience continues to receive care and support for as long as they need it.	15 Every child who needs secure care receives it in an integrated, homely environment. All Young Offenders Institutions are closed.
16 Every child seeking asylum has access to a stable and loving home.	17 Every child seeking asylum is supported to thrive in education.	18 Every unaccompanied child in need of care and protection is supported from the day they arrive.	19 Every child has access to play and fun things to do, and places to spend time with their friends.	20 Every child has access to high-quality youth provision in their local area.
21 Every child is supported by services that work together with youth work, to prevent issues escalating.	22 Every child is safe in their home, school, relationships and local area.	23 Every child is prevented from being affected by violence and criminality.	24 Every child who is a victim of crime receives specialist care and support.	25 Every child is safer after an interaction with the police or youth justice system.
26 Every child can play and learn online safely.	27 Every child has the knowledge and support to be safe online.	28 Every child is protected from online harms, and services can effectively safeguard and support them.	29 Every child is taught about the life skills they will need as adults.	30 Every child has access to high-quality careers advice, information, and guidance which is tailored to their interests.
31 Every child, no matter their background, is given the support they need to secure their dream job whether that is through further or higher education or an apprenticeship.	32 Every child feels empowered to enact change about issues that they care about.	33 Every child's thoughts, feelings, views, and ambitions are listened to.		



The Ambitions

1

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2

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Every child has access to high quality support in the early years.

4

Every child grows up happy and healthy and where children need additional help it is provided as early as possible.

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Every child with the most acute health needs, living away from home, receives loving, caring support.

8

Every child has access to a brilliant education.

9

Every child attends and is engaged in school every day.

10

Every child who needs additional support to engage in education can access it easily.

11

Every child involved with children's social care is truly listened to, and their views are heard.

12

All families get consistent, effective help to improve children's welfare, and to stay together wherever it is in a child's best interests.

13

Every child in care has a loving stable home.

14

Every young person with care experience continues to receive care and support for as long as they need it.

15

Every child who needs secure care receives it in an integrated, homely environment. All Young Offenders Institutions are closed.

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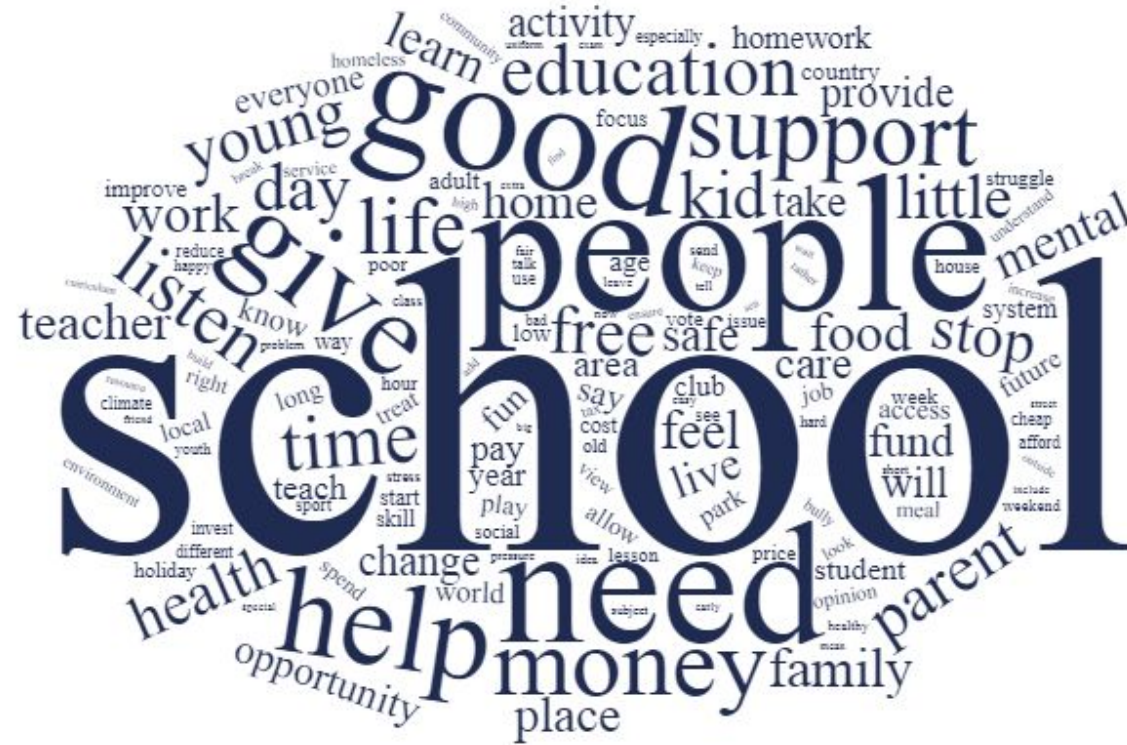


The Ambitions

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‘What do you think the government should do to make children’s lives better?’



"Add to education a focus on current global issues like conflict, poverty and climate change and what we can do to help." – Girl, 15.

"try to visit all charities and try to help their lives like giving them money, a home, food and a good education." – Girl, 9.

"more trees, no one can be poor and everyone can be kind to each other and all be friends." – Girl, 9.



"Open your eyes. [...] Go and speak to kids off of the street and ask them about their problems. Because all of you in your cushy, poxy offices have no clue." – Boy, 17.

"They should reduce the costs of living and stop being selfish, children are being put in poverty or bad conditions because of this greed." – Girl, 14.



"get better job opportunities" – Boy, 14.

"i think we should learn more about life after school like jobs, what are good jobs and bills and taxes" – Girl, 14.

"More job opportunities for children over 14." – Boy, 14.



"Provide schools with more money so that the school can buy resources that they need so that everybody gets a great education and get jobs that pay well as well as things that help students and books for library."
– Girl, 11.

"I want the government should let students pick what job they like" – Girl, 10.

"Shorten school days, more help with mental health." – Girl, 14.

"They should make more people stop smoking near kids" – Boy, 10.

"Make people healthy." – Boy, 7.



"Pay doctors and teachers more because without them we wouldn't have any education. Without teachers and doctors, the world would be a mess." – Boy, 9.

"that they should cut down on nhs waiting times , to allow for the health care system to run more efficiently." – Boy, 14.

"He should make children who don't have a home have a home" – Girl, 7.

"Give the poor children a place to stay and food
Good foster home and check on them from time
Good education
Give them gift on the holiday" – Girl, 14.

"try to change the social worker system so foster children don't feel alienated from other children." – Boy, 13.

"donate more money for children in need." – Boy, 9.

"care more about kids in care" – Boy, 17.



CARE

"That the government should do more to help those who are in orphanages or in foster care by donating more money to those who need it." – Boy, 13.

"Don't raise University fees" – Girl, 16.

'they should give them an opportunity to go to school have fun and have a home' – Child of unspecified age and gender.

'Give more money to schools. Create a better and more positive outlook on exams and create other ways of assessing.' – Girl, aged 14.



SCHOOL

'they should treat childrens opinions better and do tv shows about them. They should give them money to pay for childrens school equipment' – Girl, aged 9.

'Invest more in schools.' – Girl, aged 11.

'later start to school because children are tired' – Boy, aged 11.

'i think to make childrens lives better would be increase workshops and sport development in school' – Boy, aged 18.

"For Children That Go To School To Have More Family Time" – Girl, 8.

"Getting more resources for single parents" – Boy, 14.

"More people have should have a place to live with friends and family." – Girl, 7.

"Pay the parents more" – Girl, 17.



FAMILY

"i think less homework so we can spend more time with family and friends" – Girl, 11.

"I think the Government should make the school times less as it is very long and gives us less time to spend with our family." – Child of unspecified gender, 14.

"The Government could make more local areas so friends can have a meet and greet play with each other" – Boy, 9.

"Have more places to go to do fun things and draw." – Girl, 6.

"make sure areas are safe and supported" – Girl, 14.

"Create funner things to do for older age groups in more towns" – Girl, 16.

"i think the stuff from the shop should be cheaper and we need a better park and we need more police because they crime where i live" – Boy, 13.

"more parks around me and more shops" – Boy, 9.



Youth Voices Forum

Sign up to the Youth Voices Forum to hear about the work the Children's Commissioner is doing to make children's lives better and to hear about opportunities to get involved and have your say around issues that may affect you.

The Youth Voices Forum is for 13+ and every month you will receive a newsletter.

We will also share opportunities from government departments & public bodies.

The ideas you share will feed into our policy and research work.



**CHILDREN'S
COMMISSIONER**

THE
BIG
CONVERSATION




Youth Voices: Child poverty

'Child poverty' is when a child grows up without the things every child needs – like healthy food or a warm home.

Around 4 million children are living in poverty in the UK. If children are living in big families they are more likely to be in poverty.



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Our Future, Our Voice Festival of Childhood



Plan for the year, 2025-26



[childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
/resource/my-plan-for-the-year-2025-26](https://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/my-plan-for-the-year-2025-26)



MY WORK

As Children's Commissioner, one million children and young people have told me about their experiences and aspirations. I have divided my work into seven areas that young people have told me are most important:



The year ahead – 2025-26 – will be my penultimate year as Children's Commissioner. It marks 20 years since a Children's Commissioner for England was created – a milestone that gives us an opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made and a reminder about the many urgent challenges that remain.

This year, I will pay particular attention to ensuring all the public services you rely on work for you, wherever you live. Childhood is short, and you should never be passed back and forth between services or left waiting for the help you need.

I will shine a light on why it's important to put your views at the centre of solutions to the challenges you face. That means thinking broadly about your needs and consulting you when designing systems that are intended to support you. Health, education, social care, and justice must work together.

In this plan I share what I'll be focussing on in the upcoming year to work towards making England the best place to grow up.

MY WORK IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Visits

I also went on 98 visits to speak to children and young people across every region of England, touching on all key areas of my work. These included visits to young offender institutions, reception centres for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, schools, children's homes and hospitals.



JOBS AND SKILLS

Children have told me they want to be supported into adulthood with access to high-quality careers advice, work experience, and post-16 education opportunities that set them up for success. I want to ensure every young person, regardless of background, has what they need to thrive in adulthood.

Last year I:

- focused on improving support for care leavers and young people in post-16 education, ensuring they have the guidance, opportunities, and stability needed for a successful transition into adulthood
- published a handbook created with my **Care Experienced Advisory Board** for professionals working in higher education, focused on how to support care experienced students, encouraging them to recognise and respond to the challenges they face
- published a **Hierarchy of Needs for Care Experienced Young People** – a visual guide to help any professionals working with them understand what they need to be supported
- released a comprehensive report on post-16 alternative provision, addressing the gaps in education, training, and employment support for young people not in mainstream education and sharing my recommendations with government and education policymakers to ensure that alternative provision leads to real opportunities

My plan for this year:

- improve different career routes for young people, particularly those with additional needs, based on evidence from my **Schools and College Survey**
- make sure colleges provide the right support for children as they transition into adulthood
- push to reform that give every young person with additional needs a clear, accessible route into work or further study
- push for more accessible and inclusive work experience programmes
- assess whether young people in the secure estate have access to educational and vocational training and are receiving the right support to develop employability skills and reintegrate into society

"There should be more awareness of the university courses, as well as more degree apprenticeships"
– Girl 10, The Big Ambition

THEME FOR THE YEAR

A system that works for children

I will push for childhood to be taken more seriously in society, establishing a plan for England to fully incorporate the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**.

Over the course of your childhood, most of you will rely on some form of specialist support – whether that is from social care, for learning needs, or for health reasons. Those needs often overlap and interact – but the way services support you is often fragmented. This year, I will be looking at ensuring every child who needs support gets it, that services think about additional needs in the round, and that the professionals in your lives communicate with each other.

I will pay particular attention to ending situations that a child should never experience. For example, a child should never be inappropriately strip searched, sprayed with chemical insecticide spray in custody, admitted onto an adult hospital ward or wait months for necessary healthcare treatment to begin. A homeless family should never be placed by a council in bed & breakfast accommodation. No child should live in constant fear of being illegally assaulted by a parent.

The role of schools in the wider system

You deserve a school system that meets your needs. In September 2024, I launched the **Schools and College Survey** – the largest of its kind – gathering insights from 40,000 schools and colleges across the country.

Schools and colleges are not just places of learning, they have become lifelines. They are supporting your mental health, additional needs, ensuring your safety inside and outside of school, and providing crucial assistance to families in need – but the education system is not yet equipped to sustain this expanding role.

Over the coming year, I will conduct further analysis of my findings and will be highlighting the role schools and wider services play in supporting children with a range of additional needs and bringing them to government and policy makers.

Mapping childhood

"What do adults expect us to do when we have nowhere to go, nothing to do?"
– Girl 10, The Big Ambition

England should be the best place in the world to grow up, but there is too much variation in accessibility and quality of the services that you need. This year, I am launching my most ambitious data project yet: **Mapping Childhood**. My team will create an interactive map to tell a compelling story about childhood in England, based on measures of the things children tell me are important.



SEND Panel

"Schools should work with families to help them realise having a child with a special educational need is not a bad thing. There can be a lot of stigma about this in immigrant families, like mine. But parents need to know that having a child who is autistic, or dyslexic is not a bad thing"

Young person, member of the Children's Commissioner's SEND Panel

"Whenever a child joins my school our head of learning support asks if they have barriers to learning and what can be done to remove these. This happens for every child, regardless of if they have SEND or not. Every pupil can benefit from this inclusive thinking."

Young person, member of the Children's Commissioner's SEND Panel



"Teachers really need to be taught to understand they are setting up a person for life. It's not just about a young person's time in school or exam results. This is a young person who is going out into the world and the teacher's job is to make sure that they get the best chance at that."

Young person, member of the Children's Commissioner's SEND Panel



In the press and Parliament

- We bring children's voices and views to the public, Parliament and policy makers to influence decisions that affect children's lives.
- Our work has also helped to influence television dramas – we recently advised on a storyline in the BBC soap EastEnders, where a 15-year-old girl was strip searched by police.



Children joined riots for the 'thrill', report says



Children in youth custody 'failed' before they arrive – Children's Commissioner

Dame Rachel de Souza has warned secure settings risk turning out 'hardened criminals with a palpable distrust in the state'.

Evening Standard • Thursday 27 February 2025 00:01 GMT



Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza has warned that children in youth custody were 'trained' by managers to behave before they arrived (Karen Chown for the Evening Standard)



TECH FIRMS MUST ACT FAST TO KEEP OUR KIDS SAFE

By Dame Rachel de Souza

AS Children's Commissioner I have been utterly shocked to hear from primary school-aged children that they have seen extreme content online, such as porn, violence and other inappropriate content. We wouldn't let children wander the streets alone, due to the threat of physical danger – but we inadvertently turn a blind eye to online threats by letting our children explore the internet often unsupervised. This is a generation that has grown up online, never knowing a world without social media, smartphones and instant, 24-hour communication. This has brought a world of benefits – never before has a generation been so connected and well-informed. Yet the online world, where so much of childhood is now spent, is not designed with children's safety, wellbeing and best interests in mind. That is why it must be our responsibility to understand what it is like to grow up online. Parents can no longer bury their heads in the sand, saying they do not understand the online world – the genie is out of the bottle. Girls as young as nine have told my team about strangers asking for their home address online. And in a room of 15 and 16-year-olds, three quarters had been sent a video of a beheading. My research has found that children are designed to capture and retain their attention. There is no doubt – children are digital pioneers. And that is why they need our help. It can be tough, but as adults we need to keep talking to our children about what they are seeing online – even if children are initially resistant to sharing. We need to make sure that mobile phones are not left in bedrooms overnight and I would always urge parents not to leave children for too long online without supervision. It is vital that parents use the tools available to them, including child safety settings, and have open and honest conversations with children about boundaries. They must also continue to ask their children what they are up to online, even if their children try to give them the brush-off.

Deeply disturbing

Our children are being failed – and they know it too. They know tech companies are not doing enough to protect them online. The Children's Code was an opportunity to right these wrongs – I hope that what they are up to online, even if their children try to give them the brush-off.

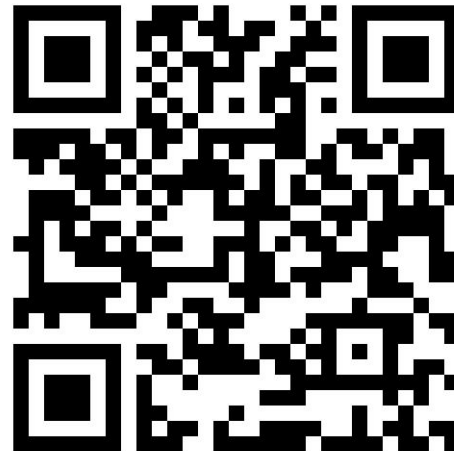
Years have gone by and it is clear that self-regulation by tech companies



The Big Conversation Podcast



[podfollow.com](https://podfollow.com/1778261559)
[/1778261559](https://podfollow.com/1778261559)



The Big Conversation – Have your say!



childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/the-big-conversation

The Children's Commissioner wants to make sure that your experiences are listened to and taken seriously. Have your say is an opportunity to share your views so that she can make sure your voices are heard.

The Big Conversation is **open for all young people** in England to make your voices heard. Adults can respond on your behalf if you would like them to, but the responses should be in your own words where possible – we want to hear from **you!**

Your responses will be anonymous, and you don't have to answer any question if you don't want to.

1. What would you like the Children's Commissioner to know about growing up in England?

2. If you were the Prime Minister what would you do to make England the best place to be a child?

3. What are your hopes and ambitions for 2025 and beyond?



IMO



Our digital offering for teenagers in care and care leavers.

A place to share stories, experiences, and achievements, get and give advice, and gain access to career advice, training opportunities and useful life hacks.

0800 528 0731

help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand/



A voice for teenagers in care and care leavers, a place to share your stories, experiences and achievements and find useful life hacks

Be inspired



Write,
speak,
share.



Open and honest conversations with care leavers
imohub.org.uk/podcast

Help at Hand



Advice, assistance, and representation to children in care, leaving care, working with children's services or living away from home.

We ensure care leavers receive what they are entitled to and can intervene on a range of issues, including:

- Accommodation and homelessness
- Financial assistance from the local authority
- Difficulties with PAs and Pathway Plans
- Support with education and training
- Complaints, independent advocacy, and legal advice.

0800 528 0731

help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand/



0800 528 0731

We're here to help you

If you're in care, leaving care or living away from home, speak to us today.



help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk



The School and College Survey

Every child has the right to a great education. The Commissioner used her statutory powers to carry out a 'census' of schools in England to find out how they are supporting all children and young people academically and pastorally, including those with additional needs such as bereavement, homelessness, social care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

- [The Children's Plan: The Children's Commissioner's School Census](#) (Full & Summary versions)
- [Youth Voices: Schools supporting children](#)

How have you been supported or not by your schools/colleges at any point during your education?



Survey about online influences on young people's health

Beauty, fitness and wellness content is everywhere online, we know much of this content can be fine but we know that some of the associated products can carry health risks or affect how young people see themselves.

There are already some restrictions about what beauty, fitness and wellness products under 18s can be advertised, but we're interested to know more about what young people are seeing.

We're running a survey to find out more.

Examples of products include:

- Beauty products like skin and haircare products, and cosmetic procedures (like eyelash extensions and lip filler).
- Fitness-related products such as supplements and fitness trackers but also products that can infer they can change someone's size.
- Wellness products - for example vitamins, supplements and drinks that suggest they enhance overall wellbeing.

My time as an Ambassador **for the Children's Commissioner for England**

Questions?





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