

TITLE OF REPORT: Gateshead Local Area SEND Strategy and SEND Improvement plan 2023-2026

REPORT OF: Helen Fergusson, Strategic Director, Children's Social Care and Lifelong Learning

Purpose of the report

1. This report informs Cabinet of the new SEND Strategy and associated improvement plan as well as providing an update on the outcome of the recent Local Area SEND inspection and the partnership response to the recommendations that followed.

Background

2. The Gateshead local area SEND strategy 2023-2026 was co-produced with all partners in January 2023 and has been the catalyst for the development of the subsequent Gateshead SEND Improvement Plan. The strategy sets out the vision and priorities for integrated and multi-agency SEND services in the local area over the next 3 years, with the aim of improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families. This requires educational settings, health commissioners and providers, Gateshead Council's social care and education services; voluntary and community sector partners working together with children and their families to meet needs,
3. The SEND Strategy is ambitious about improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and the whole system approach that is needed to achieve the step change required to respond to the views and aspirations of parents, carers, young people and professionals and their desire for change. The associated improvement programme is designed to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND and this report outlines what the programme of work has achieved so far and the proposed focus for 2023-2026 to embed and accelerate change as well as responding to the recent Local Area SEND inspection findings.
4. The SEND Strategy and Improvement Programme is aligned with Gateshead's THRIVE agenda and Health and Wellbeing Strategy which seeks to reduce inequalities and more specifically to realise the Council's ambition that everyone benefits from education, skills and employment opportunities that help them to succeed in life. The Local Area SEND Strategy 2023 - 26 emphasises that better long-term outcomes for children and young people are achieved when:

- Their needs are identified and met early in their life and early in the emergence of the issue
 - When children and young people feel included in their local communities and schools
 - When children can be educated closer to home
 - When services are integrated and well coordinated
 - When specialist help and support is timely and easily accessible
 - When children, young people and their families are actively involved in decisions which affect and shape their lives.
5. The Strategy and improvement plan formed the basis of the local area's self-assessment which was completed to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in the delivery of support services for children and young people with SEND and was shared with the SEND inspection team as part of the local area inspection which took place in May 2023. Since the inspection, the improvement plan has been revised and amended to reflect the recommendations from the inspection and the plan forms the basis of an extensive programme of transformation work over the next three years.

National Policy Context

6. The Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3) provides the legislative framework for the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 years (2014) which lays out the duties of local authorities, health bodies, schools and colleges to provide for those with special educational needs.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND Code of Practice January 2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf)

Current Local Context

7. Since the pandemic, Gateshead has seen a significant rise in the overall number of children and young people identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is particularly the case for children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or requests for assessment for an EHCP. This has placed all SEND teams in the Council under significant pressure. This rise in demand, alongside financial pressures, has also placed challenges upon the wider workforce connected to those delivering to children with Special Educational Needs, including those in the health, care and school sectors. The pandemic has particularly impacted on the number of children and young people who are identified as having autism, and those with social, emotional and mental needs.
- 38,498 children (0-17) live in Gateshead and 16,653 young adults (18-25).
 - 16% children & young people have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (4859)
 - 11.9% pupils have SEND support (3618)
 - 4.1% have an EHCP (1241)

(Source – special educational needs in England 2021/22 publication)

Changes since 2021

- 19% overall increase in need for children with SEND between 2021 and 2023 and a 13.5% increase in new EHCPs issued.
- Of the new EHCPs issued, there has been a 70% increase between 2021 (588) and 2023 (1002) for C&YP with **Autistic spectrum conditions**.
- 36% increase between 2021 (1597) and 2023 (2178) for C&YP with **Speech, Language & Communication needs**.
- 32% increase between 2021 (764) and 2023 (1009) for C&YP with **Social, Emotional & Mental Health Needs**.
- We have more children with an EHCP children placed in special schools than comparators nationally (53% in Gateshead compared to a national rate of 32%).
- We have significantly more special school places than our contextual neighbours and they are all currently full. This indicates a need to fundamentally rethink the way in which children with SEND can be supported within our local school system.

The Gateshead SEND Strategy (see Appendix 2)

8. A wide range of partners have been involved in the development of the SEND strategy. Consultation, engagement, and co-production has been undertaken with children, families, young people, schools, other education partners, health colleagues and social care colleagues.
9. Our vision in Gateshead is for all children and young people with SEND to thrive, have appropriate provision, feel positive about their next steps and believe in themselves. We put families at the heart of everything we do.
10. A period of consultation was completed from 15th February 2023 to 15th March 2023 for the SEND Strategy. The consultation feedback was very positive. 189 respondents accessed the online survey together with comments received from the Parent Carer Forum, and two emails suggesting minor wording changes. In addition, separate consultation events were held which were attended by 61 young people.
11. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they 'Strongly agree/Tend to agree/ Tend to disagree/ Strongly disagree or had no view on the following areas:

	% Strongly Agree	% Tend to Agree	% Tend to Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% No View
The Vision for SEND	69.4	23.5	2.73	1.09	3.28
Priority One	79.72	15.38	2.80	2.10	0
Priority Two	74.13	19.58	4.20	1.40	0.70
Priority Three	80.14	15.60	3.55	0.71	0
Priority Four	81.69	16.20	0.70	1.41	0

The Local Area Inspection for SEND Services in Gateshead (see Appendix 4)

12. Between the 5 May and the 26 May 2023, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) jointly inspected arrangements across education, health and care services to understand how well members of Gateshead's Partnership work together to improve the experiences of children and young people with SEND.
13. The inspection found many positive areas of practice across the local area which included:
 - Leaders are determined to provide high-quality education and support for children and young people with SEND
 - Leaders have invested in Additionally Resourced Mainstream Schools (ARMS) provision to meet changing needs
 - Delays for CYPS are mitigated against with the provision family events, support workshops and support from the emotional well-being team.
 - Children and young people in residential settings out of Gateshead have their needs met effectively. They are supported well, and systems are in place to ensure they are safe.
 - The fair-access protocols work well, which results in children and young people attending well and has reduced the risk of permanent exclusion.
 - The parent carer forum actively contributes to strategic developments. They feel confident that their views and concerns are listened to.
 - SENDIASS support parents well, giving impartial advice on EHCP's and tribunals.
 - Children's and young people's views are sought and shared with leaders, facilitated by the involvement worker and youth ambassador.
 - The virtual school team play a crucial role in supporting children and young people with SEND who are in our care. They have provided training across schools and health to understand the impact of trauma on school attendance and well-being.
 - Across the partnership, there is a combined strategy for workforce development. This is responding to the growing number neurodevelopmental and SEMH needs among children and young people.
 - Multi-agency working through early help and CWD teams make a positive difference for children and young people with SEND.

- The dynamic support register is well established, with a strong multi-agency team providing individualised support.
 - Specialised speech and language teams support young people up to the age of 19, with a smooth transition to adult services and specialist providers.
 - Timely EHCP assessments and amended plans within the statutory 20-week process.
14. These findings were reflected in Gateshead's accurate self-assessment.
15. The inspection also identified several areas for focused improvement which led to 5 specific recommendations as well as some additional areas for focus:
- Leaders in health should ensure that plans to target the reduction in waiting times for services clearly identify the support that children and young people and their families will receive while waiting. These plans should contain ambitious timescales for improvement and clear monitoring and evaluation procedures.
 - Leaders in health should ensure there is clear oversight of children and young people as they move through the emotional well-being and mental health support systems in the area. Leaders should provide clear and consistent information to children and young people, families and professionals on the pathway.
 - Strategic leaders across education, health and care should ensure that they provide clarity and consistency of expectations on the level of contribution from all agencies to continue to improve the quality of the EHC assessment and review process.
 - Strategic leaders should continue to improve the transitions from child to adult services in health, education and care. They should ensure that the strategy for preparation for adulthood starts from the earliest years, particularly for children with complex needs.
 - Leaders within the SEND service should improve communication between health, education, care and parents and carers to improve the experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families. They should further develop the role of the SEND caseworkers to strengthen communication. This should include tailored communication for parents and carers new to the country or who speak English as an additional language.
16. The inspection team also identified the following areas which the partnership must address:
- Provision for children and young people with physical needs with opportunities for academic qualifications
 - Strategic plans across education, health and social care for children born with complex needs
 - Social work assessments to provide a holistic view of children and young people's history and lived experience. This includes ethnicity, language, religion and culture
 - Reduce waiting times for some children who are waiting for support through the short breaks service

- Improve the 18-25 offer in health, so that it is just as supportive as the offer pre-18.
17. This led to an overall inspection outcome which found that Gateshead's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and have asked the partnership to work together to address the following areas for improvement:
18. In response to the inspection findings, within 30 working days of the publication of the inspection report, Gateshead SEND partnership was required to update and publish its SEND Strategic Priority Action Plan so that the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted and the CQC integrate with the Partnership's existing plans. This has been completed and from this Priority Action Plan a more detailed Delivery Plan has been developed. The delivery plan has 4 priority areas linked to the SEND Strategy and Areas for improvement from the inspection. The 4 priority areas are:
- *Priority 1: To have a transparent approach to identify children and young people's needs which is understood by parents, carers and professionals, so that the right support is in place at the right time.*
 - *Priority 2. To actively engage with children and young people and their parents and carers, so that their vision of 'Our choice, our voice' is heard and supported during strategic planning.*
 - *Priority 3: For health, social care, and education services to work together to commission the best support for children and young people's needs, and to keep all children and young people safe.*
 - *Priority 4. To ensure that children and young people are well prepared, supported and feel positive about taking their next steps.*
19. Each priority area has an agreed workstream and identified group members to ensure progress against each area (see Appendix 3 and the summary provided in appendix 1 attached for further details). Each priority is scheduled to be shared quarterly at the SEND Board.
20. The Local Area will have a further inspection of SEND services within three years.

Conclusion

21. Local partners, the DFE and CQC have endorsed the improvement plan and are confident it will support improvements against the key areas identified within the inspection. In addition, the plan is aligned to our vision for all children and young people in Gateshead and we are confident that the plan will:
- Ensure the local area partnership are able to meet the needs of children and young people and their families in Gateshead as issues emerge and intervene early

- Children and young people and their families will be clear of the vision for SEND in Gateshead and feel that they are continually influencing the vision and service improvements
 - Children and young people and their families will be clear on the strengths in relation to practice with children and young people with SEND in Gateshead and will be fully informed on the areas for development.
22. The improvement plan is monitored via the SEND Strategic Board, which is chaired by the Director of Children's services. Each priority area lead updates the board on progress in their area. The Strategic Lead for SEND and Inclusion monitors the progress of the whole plan and is supported by a Project Officer. Local Authority and Health senior leads will meet with the DfE/NHSE to report progress and will update the published plan every six months
23. The local area partnership will be supported in this programme of work by a SEND advisor from the DFE.
24. Progress reports will be provided into Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a six-monthly basis with an annual update to Cabinet and Council to provide assurance of progress against the inspection action plan.

Recommendations

25. Cabinet is asked to recommend Council to:
- (i) Endorse the Local Area SEND Strategy as set out in appendix 2 to the report.
 - (ii) Note the areas for development following the Local Area SEND inspection in May 2023;
 - (iii) Note the progress of the SEND improvement programme so far and its impact for children and young people with SEND and their families; and
 - (iv) Endorse the focus and priorities for the programme for 2023-26 to embed and accelerate change, responding to the Local Area inspection for SEND as set out in appendix 3 to the report.

For the following reasons:

- (i) To improve SEND services across the Local Area and respond to feedback from families, carers and young people with SEND.
- (ii) To appropriately respond to the Local Area Ofsted/CQC SEND inspection outcome.

CONTACT: Suzanne Dunn

extension: 8606

Policy Context

1. The SEND Strategy and Improvement Programme is aligned with Gateshead's Thrive agenda and Health and Wellbeing Strategy which seeks to reduce inequalities and more specifically to realise the Council's ambition that everyone benefits from education, skills and employment opportunities that help them to succeed in life.

Key Programmes of work linked to the four main priorities of the SEND Strategy

Priority 1: To have a transparent approach to identify children and young people's needs which is understood by parents, carers and professionals, so that the right support is in place at the right time.

1a) The Gateshead Thresholds Document

2. In order to support our overarching ambition of improving the experiences of inclusive practice for children, there is a need to develop an easily understood and consistently embedded approach to the identification of children's special educational needs which is used across the local area by every school; every health and social care professional and which makes sense to parents and carers and to which they have had input in the design. This is a key piece of work which underpins much of the rest of the programme of SEND improvement work. The work supports our vision of intervening early to ensure that children are provided with the right support at the right time and that the EHCP process is not the only route to support for children.
3. A SEND Consultant has been commissioned to lead on the review of the current Gateshead 'graduated approach' to the identification of children's needs and to work with all partners to coproduce a document which will be called the Gateshead SEND Thresholds.
4. The document will lay out the nature of a child's needs and the type of intervention and support which should be offered to that child and through which service. It will offer clarity about the services available to schools where a child has an additional need and where it is appropriate for services to refer for more specialist intervention and support.
5. The document has been developed alongside a wide group of stakeholders including parents and is currently being piloted in round 40 schools to test efficacy. A comprehensive programme of training will be rolled out in the new year to all professionals working with children and young people with SEND and it is intended that this new way of working will go live in September 2024.

1b) Pathway of support for children born with complex needs

6. Colleagues within the Education, Schools and Inclusion and the Data Team are working together to develop a database system which will support the strategic planning for children born into Gateshead with complex needs to ensure that there is sufficiency of provision to meet need into the future.

7. The Strategic Lead for SEND and Inclusion is working with Special School leaders to complete an analysis of the needs of children within their school populations and how these have changed over the last 5 years to support sufficiency planning for the future.

1c) Quality Assurance and Monitoring of SEND Support Provision

8. To ensure the right support is in the right place at the right time, the Quality Assurance and Monitoring strand of the SEND statutory team has been strengthened with additional capacity. This team are going to be central to the monitoring of the Gateshead SEND Thresholds in schools as they complete the monitoring visits of SEND in all of our educational settings. They will also be the point of contact for any family, professional who have concerns in relation to the provision for SEND C&YP in Gateshead. It is imperative that we strengthen the SEND Support monitoring process to ensure that we are identifying need early and supporting in a child's current school to ensure there is no escalation of need. As part of the implementation of the SEND Thresholds, we are trialling a SEND Support panel to support schools in meeting the needs of learners at this earlier stage.

Priority 2. To actively engage with children and young people and their parents and carers, so that their vision of 'Our choice, our voice' is heard and supported during strategic planning.

9. Two key areas for improvement have been identified in this priority area linked to improving the experiences of families experiencing the needs assessment process and the role of the SEND casework team in facilitating relational practice across the partnership and with families.

2a) Review of SEND casework team

10. A complete service review has been completed of the SEND Team. Capacity has been added to reflect the increased demand for EHCP assessments and to ensure a more relational approach can be provided by the team through a more iterative process of advice, support and guidance for families.
11. In addition, the functions of the team have expanded to have not only responsibility for the statutory assessment process but also to ensure appropriate oversight of support to children with SEN support needs - again in support of the vision to ensure every child get gets the right help at the right time in a timely way.

2c) Improve feedback from parents, carers and young people within the EHCP assessment and review process

12. The SEND Service Manager, Designated Clinical Officer and Designated Social Care Officer are working in collaboration to review the processes and procedures in relation to the collation of the views of all professionals involved with a child to inform the needs assessment with a view to improving the overall quality and the experience of families.

Priority 3: For health, social care, and education services to work together to commission the best support for children and young people's needs, and to keep all children and young people safe.

3a) Reduce waiting times for children who need Therapy services

13. A significant amount of work has gone into reducing the waiting times for children across children's therapies since the SEND inspection. Children's Bladder and Bowel and Physiotherapy now have wait times of under 18 weeks for both assessment and treatment which represents a significant improvement for Bladder and Bowel who had waits of up to a year and physiotherapy where a small number of children were waiting for over 18 weeks. This is reviewed regularly by Commissioners and the provider.
14. Speech and Language Therapy waiting times have also reduced for assessment and a detailed piece of work to capture the treatment started time has commenced. At present no children wait longer than 18 weeks for a SALT assessment with times in the special schools being less than this. This is partly due to changes in the way that services are being delivered including the introduction of further group work sessions and integration with the Portage pathway to support early intervention.
15. Occupational therapy wait times remains a concern and the teams have identified work undertaken in Hartlepool and at Newcastle to support a change of model to introduce more group work which is intended to have a positive impact on the waiting list which do remain long.
16. Ambitious targets are in place to continue to drive down these waiting times to support the vision to ensure that all children receive the right help at the right time and access specialist services in a timely way.

3b) Access to Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Services

17. Work has been undertaken to understand the current mental health offer, the challenges families are experiencing in accessing services and areas for improvement. To address the significant increase in need and demand work is being completed to review the current offer and redesign the system with a focus on greater system integration and earlier identification and intervention. Proposals for transforming the offer will be completed by December 2023 which will focus upon building capacity as well as increasing access to services as early as possible.
18. In the meantime, work is being undertaken with existing commissioned services to ensure there is clear criteria and information available for children, young people and their families. Work is also ongoing with CNTW, NECS and the ICB to establish a digital dashboard to clearly show the performance of all commissioned services and provide all partners with an understanding of current wait times and performance.

3c) Commissioning of Alternative Provision

19. Additional leadership capacity within the Education Service has been created to ensure a strategic focus is being given to this area for improvement and will include the creation of a strategy for Alternative Provision in Gateshead to meet the needs of those children who need access to alternatives to mainstream education for a period of time. This process has already started with the review of the current Home and Hospital offer and with the introduction of assessment provisions to support young people at SEND Support in schools. It is intended that a pilot for the assessment provision will be established by September 2024.

3d) Developing the short break offer

20. The Short breaks offer was reviewed in collaboration with all partners and updated in March 2023. Following the review, the SEND Local Offer was updated to ensure parents knew what was available and the eligibility criteria for each short break was clear.
21. Additional short break capacity has been developed to meet increasing need and demand across the Borough.

Priority 4. To ensure that children and young people are well prepared, supported and feel positive about taking their next steps.

4a) Transitions across key stages within educational settings

22. The implementation of the Gateshead SEND Thresholds will ensure that preparation for adulthood starts at the earliest possible stage in a child's life and will support the experiences of transition for children from primary to secondary school. This will ensure that all children with special educational needs have a clear plan in place which supports planning for each transition for the following areas: employability & education, Independence, Community Participation and Health. All referral forms, support plans proformas and needs assessments will evidence the preparation for adulthood outcomes from September 2024.

4b) Transition planning across health services

23. Work is being completed between health colleagues and Paediatricians at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital to look at broadening the age range to ages 12/13 to begin to plan for what young people would need for a smoother transition from children's to adult health services. A template has also been devised to identify any health needs which may cause an issue for a smooth transition and work is being carried out to embed this process within schools so they are aware of support available from health services. Future work is to be progressed for the 0-4 years cohort and supporting the transition between nursery and school.

4c) Transitions within Social Care services

24. Ages and Stages - The refreshed Ages and Stages document is established and in use within the ASC Transitions Team following refocusing work undertaken this year and communicated during the last team development session. The document has been shared with CSC colleagues to embed across the service area and CSC colleagues are looking to roll out training/practice short across the service area for practitioners, ASC Transitions colleagues have agreed to work with CSC colleagues where necessary to support this relaunch.
25. Supported Living Service (SLS) Transitions – This work is building on the successful model already provided in the borough. A new in-house offer for young people with more complex needs who are preparing for adulthood is being developed to support the transition from Children’s services to the Adult Social Care (ASC). The aim of this strengths-based model of support is to enable greater independence as young people are preparing for adulthood with the aim of this offer being available for an initial cohort of three young people with complex needs from Autumn 2024.
26. The council has established a comprehensive transformation project across directorates and with NHS partners to review and develop housing pathways, services and accommodation pipelines to support people with complex needs. The IASCS directorate has committed to designing and establishing a new supported living service for disabled young people transitioning to adulthood with complex needs.

Consultation

27. A wide range of partners have been involved in the development of the SEND strategy. Consultation, engagement, and co-production has been undertaken with children, families, young people, schools, other education partners, health colleagues and social care colleagues. The Cabinet Members for Children and Young People have been consulted on this report.

Alternative Options

28. There are no alternative options.

Implications of Recommended Option

29. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that the SEND Strategy and associated improvement plan will have financial implications in relation to improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs. Implementing the delivery plan to respond to the areas of development from the local area inspection may also have a financial impact as we need to commission new additional resource mainstream settings, assessment provisions and alternative provisions to meet the needs of young people. These costs will be met from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

b) Human Resources Implications – In order to transform SEND services in Gateshead this will have HR implications in relation to the review and restructure of existing services to ensure best value for money and services to families.

c) Property Implications - There would be no property implications to implement the SEND Strategy and associated improvement plan, we would propose to use existing space in Gateshead educational settings to base new settings.

30. Risk Management Implications – Risks to the delivery of the plan are monitored via the multi agency SEND Strategic Board and will be highlighted via regular reports into Families OSC.

31. Equality and Diversity Implications

The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- Foster good relations between people from different groups
- The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day to day business and to keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services.
- Maintained schools are public bodies and must comply with the public sector equality duty and set and publish equality objectives.
- A school must demonstrate that it is compliant with the duties of schools as identified in the Equalities Act and that the school positively promotes equality of opportunity for all pupils (e.g. irrespective of gender, race, disability, sexuality).

The main duties under the Equalities Act are:

A school must not:

- Discriminate against a pupil or prospective pupil because of their disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, religion or belief, or sexual orientation;
- Harass or victimise a pupil or prospective pupil. A school must not discriminate against a person in relation to the following activities:
 - Admission to the school;
 - The provision of education to pupils;
 - Access to any benefit, facility or service;
 - Exclusion from school; by subjecting a pupil to any other detriment.

32. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime and disorder implications from this report.
33. **Health Implications** – There are no direct health implications linked to the SEND Strategy and associated improvement plan.
34. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - There are no climate emergency and sustainability implications from this report.
35. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no human rights implications from this report.
36. **Ward Implications** - The SEND Strategy and associated improvement plan covers all wards in Gateshead.