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**Report of John Pearce, Director of Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide the findings of the recent Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) inspection of Durham's local area partnership and subsequent action plan.

**Executive summary**

- 2 The Integrated Care Board and Durham County Council are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for Children and Young People with SEND from 0 to age 25.
- 3 There was an inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in June 2024.
- 4 Overall, the inspection reflected the strengths and areas for improvement partners knew about locally. Officers across the local SEND system felt that it reflected well the detail and the findings of the comprehensive local self-evaluation we had completed and shared in Spring 2024, prior to the inspectors calling.
- 5 The area partnership's inspection outcome report was published on 3 September 2024 and the headline outcome was that our current arrangements lead to 'inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.'
- 6 Following publication of the report, the local area is required to update its SEND strategic plan within 35 working days of receiving the inspection report setting out how the partnership will address the key areas for improvement identified during inspection and listed in the report ensuring required improvements integrate with existing plans.
- 7 The strategic action plan has been co-produced with the local area partnership and was published in mid-October. It demonstrates the

intended impact of actions on the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families.

## **Recommendation**

- 8 It is recommended that the Health and Wellbeing Board:
- (a) note the findings of the area Special Education Needs / Disability (SEND) inspection of Durham's local area partnership; and,
  - (b) note the partnership's action plan to drive forward the recommended areas for further improvement from the inspection report.

## Background

- 9 The purpose of the inspection of the local area arrangements for children and young people with SEND is to provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND, and, where appropriate recommend what the Local Area Partnership (LAP) should do to improve the arrangements.
- 10 'Local area partnership' refers to those in education, health and care who are responsible for the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery, and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND who live in a local area.
- 11 Inspections evaluate arrangements for all children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 covered by the SEND code of practice, including those who have an education, health, and care (EHC) plan and those who receive special educational needs (SEN) support.
- 12 When evaluating the local area partnership, inspectors focus mainly on how effectively the local authority and integrated care board (ICB) jointly plan, evaluate and develop services for children and young people with SEND. However, they also consider the duties of other area partners, which are set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 and described further in the SEND code of practice.
- 13 The inspection considers whether local authorities' approach to commissioning and overseeing alternative provision arrangements for children and young people in the local authority area meets their duties as set out in section 19 of the Education Act 1996 and in statutory guidance.
- 14 There was a full SEND inspection of Durham's LAP conducted by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in June 2024.
- 15 The inspectors had meetings with a range of relevant service leads, manager and practitioners across education health and care on key topics selected by them. These included:
  - Durham Context and Local Area Partnership's Self Evaluation.
  - Durham's Parent Carer Forum.
  - SENDIASS.
  - CYP including at The Croft around Anxious About School Work and the eXtreme participation group.

- Strategy and Commissioning.
- EHCPs – Quality and Decision-Making.
- Local Education Partnership Chairs, Virtual School and Alternative Provision.
- Children's attendance, those missing or not attending, electively home educated and those on alternative packages of support.
- Children with complex needs including those with a social worker, care leavers and those on the Dynamic Support Register.
- Visits and discussions with family hubs, health teams, GPs, early years, primary, secondary, college and specialist school provision.

16 During the inspection, inspectors met with:

- Over 30 children and young people, 10 parents/carers.
- Over 110 DCC councillors, leaders, managers and officers (this includes staff in CYPS services and integrated commissioning).
- Around 95 NHS leaders, managers, and practitioners (including ICB and staff from 5 NHS Foundation Trusts).
- Around 55 Heads, SENCOs and staff from schools, nurseries, and colleges across Durham.
- Other partners including MCT parent carer forum, HumanKind and Investing in Children.
- Inspectors published a survey for practitioners, parents and carers, children, and young people which we widely promoted. They received almost 1,500 responses in total which helped to shape the inspection findings.

## **Inspection findings**

- 17 Following a full inspection, inspectors make an overall summary judgement about the local area partnership. This judgement reflects the inspectors' evaluation of the impact of the LAP's arrangements on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND.
- 18 A full inspection has three potential inspection outcomes (overall summary judgement):
- (a) The LAP's arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The

local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.

- (b) The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.
- (c) There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.

- 19 Overall, the inspection reflected the strengths and areas for improvement partners knew about locally. Officers across the LAP / SEND system felt that it reflected well the detail and the findings of the comprehensive local self-evaluation we had completed and shared in Spring 2024, prior to the inspectors calling.
- 20 The area partnership's inspection outcome report (see appendix 2) was published on 03 September 2024 and the headline outcome was that our current arrangements lead to 'inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.'
- 21 The report commented on some of our key strengths which included:
- Collaborative leadership being strong across education, health and social care and local leaders prioritise SEND.
  - Children and young people feel valued, visible, included in their communities, and listened to.
  - Children and young people build transferable skills so that they can participate in wider activities.
  - There is improvement in the length of time taken to complete new assessments the result of the recovery plan.
  - Most CYP have their needs identified and met early.
  - CYP with SEND have good attendance and this is improving further.
  - Persistent absence from school is reducing, preparing young people well in education, training, and employment.
  - Parents and carers state that their voice is mostly heard well, some have seen improvements to support and services as a result.

22 Four areas for further improvement were identified by the inspectors and in doing so inspectors were keen to emphasise the framing of these in relation to continuing important areas of work that had already commenced. The four areas for improvement identified were that we should:

- Intensify work to further improve Education Health and Care (EHC) plan quality and assessment timeliness and ensure that EHC plans consistently and accurately reflect the needs of children and young people. It should ensure all partner agencies contribute comprehensively with high-quality information, and that all plans detail children and young people's voice and needs, aspirations, and next steps effectively.
- Continue to strengthen its work to further reduce the delays to access CAMHS and neurodevelopmental pathways across the age range of children and young people.
- Ensure that children and young people and their families can access easily identifiable needs-led services. Informed practitioners should direct families to services that provide support, guidance, and intervention at the earliest opportunity.
- Further strengthen the monitoring and impact of strategic plans and policies to ensure that support and resources are consistently targeted to the children and young people and families that need it most.

### **Post inspection strategic local area partnership plan**

23 Following publication of the inspection report, the local area is required to update its SEND strategic plan within 35 working days setting out how the partnership will address the key areas for improvement identified and ensuring required improvements integrate with existing plans.

24 Key stakeholders have co-produced the updated area strategic plan including representation from children and young people, parents and leaders from health, care, SEND teams, schools, and other educational establishments. The updated plan demonstrates the intended impact of actions on the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families.

25 The Department for Education and National Health Service England monitor the LAPs progress against the updated plan on a six-monthly basis and assess how effectively the local area is responding to the recommendations in the inspection report.

- 26 The next full area SEND inspection is then due to take place within approximately 3 years unless there are changes to the inspection framework during this time.
- 27 The plan was published on the County Council's SEND Local Offer website as requested and has been shared with members across our local partnership (see appendix 3). From our partnership meeting in September, we have also developed and agreed a public facing infographic to highlight the intended impact of our actions on the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families (see appendix 4).
- 28 DfE and NHS colleagues have reviewed the draft plan and infographic and are content with the final version we have published. In addition, on 16 October 2024 we received a supportive letter from Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children and Families, about the inspection findings and the work we are doing.
- 29 The strategic action plan will be overseen by the SEND and AP Partnership Board with six monthly progress meetings also scheduled with DfE and NHS colleagues.

#### Authors

Martyn Stenton, Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children, Children and Young Peoples Services

Clare Nicholls, Interim Strategic Manager, Strategy and Assurance

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Ofsted and the CQC carry out joint inspections of local areas at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

Inspectors assess the extent to which the local area partners are complying with relevant legal duties relating to arrangements for children and young people with SEND. Relevant legal duties may include duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

When evaluating the local area partnership, inspectors focus mainly on how effectively the local authority and integrated care board (ICB) jointly plan, evaluate and develop services for children and young people with SEND. However, they also consider the duties of other area partners, which are set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 and described further in the SEND code of practice.

The actions described in this report are intended to comply with the requirements of the Department for Education and National Health Service England's requirements for updating the strategic plan and future monitoring requirements.

### **Finance**

There are a range of possible financial implications on education, health and care services which have been considered as part of the development of the action plan and discussed where relevant with individual partners.

### **Consultation**

Key stakeholders have co-produced the updated area strategic plan including representation from children and young people, parents and leaders from health, schools and other educational establishments and demonstrates the intended impact of actions on the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

The Equality Act 2010 details the requirement when taking decisions to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity for people with protected characteristics, foster good relations between such groups and eliminate unlawful discrimination,



## **Climate Change**

Through the wider SEND strategy, the LA seek wherever possible to support children and young people to attend local schools and provision, rather than travel to provision which is further away or out of county.

## **Human Rights**

None

## **Crime and Disorder**

A disproportionately high number of young people and children who commit crime and / or disorder have SEND. Through programmes of work we aim to support children and young people with SEND in achieving their best outcomes in life. Early intervention and support for children and young people with SEND and inclusion needs, should have a positive impact on crime and disorder by helping to prevent offending and / or reoffending.

## **Staffing**

A range of staff across education, health and care services support children and young people with their additional needs up to the age of 25.

## **Accommodation**

None.

## **Risk**

There are several areas of ongoing risk and mitigations including risks regarding recent sustained increases in demand for additional EHCPs and capacity issues in the system along with risks regarding demand on resources and the forecast funding expected to be available in coming years.

## **Procurement**

Commissioning and procurement implications are considered for each strand of work related to SEND more widely, and there is a multi-agency SEND commissioning group to support integrated commissioning activity.

# Area SEND inspection of Durham Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 June 2024

Dates of previous inspections: 22 to 24 January 2020

## Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.

The next full area SEND inspection will be within approximately 3 years.

Ofsted and CQC ask that the local area partnership updates and publishes its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

## Information about the local area partnership

Since the previous inspection in January 2020, there have been changes to the governance structure across the local area partnership (LAP). These include new governance appointments and the implementation of the Integrated Strategic Commissioning Team in 2020.

The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. At this time, the responsibility for health services in Durham passed to the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB). Durham County Council and the North East and North Cumbria ICB are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Durham.

Durham County Council commissions alternative provision (AP) for permanently excluded pupils, those identified as close to permanent exclusion and those who cannot attend school because of health needs. There is one pupil referral unit that provides support across separate sites for pupils in key stage 1 to key stage 4. Four registered alternative education providers add additional capacity for children and young people who need support away from mainstream education. A small number of children and young people who are unwell attend an education health care needs

unit. Some school-age children with SEND attend places in additionally resourced mainstream settings.

## **What is it like to be a child or young person with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in this area?**

Children and young people with SEND experience variable quality of assessment and inconsistent support to meet their education, health and social care needs. The LAP is ambitious for children and young people with SEND, and some partnership work is well embedded. However, there is variability in the effectiveness of some services to swiftly identify and meet children and young people's needs.

For many children and young people, the overall quality and timeliness in issuing their education, health and care (EHC) plans, and their use across services, is inconsistent. New EHC plan assessments are seeing a reduction in waiting times, and the LAP is implementing recovery plans to tackle the existing backlog of EHC plan assessments. This includes investment in additional educational psychology capacity to further reduce assessment waiting times. Children and young people typically give professionals their views during direct work with them. However, their views and aspirations do not routinely feature in their EHC plans. In addition, some assessment information is historic, and some professionals' views are not consistently included in EHC plans. Generally, children and young people's EHC plans do not link consistently well to other support plans that they may have. This includes social care plans for children in need of help and protection and children in care. Some health practitioners are not aware that the children and young people they support have EHC plans or SEND support plans in school.

The LAP identifies and meets the needs of most children and young people with SEND early. However, for some, the lack of early assessment, identification of needs and subsequent access to the right support has led to disengagement, suspensions and exclusion from school. This is most evident as they transition from primary to secondary school. To support children and young people, some mainstream schools have additionally resourced provision. This helps to keep children and young people with SEND in their local primary and secondary schools. The LAP strategy to increase capacity to meet demand for places in AP and special schools is not consistently clear. However, when children and young people attend these settings, their needs are assessed effectively, and they quickly receive the support they need.

In this area, children and young people with SEND largely have good attendance at school and further education. Over time, their attendance is improving and closely matches the typical attendance for individuals with similar additional needs in England. The number of children and young people who are persistently absent from education is decreasing. This prepares them well for next steps in education, employment or training. Young people are supported in future planning effectively. They receive useful information, advice and guidance for their next steps.

Practitioners create detailed assessments that inform an individual's transition arrangements. They coordinate links with social care for post-16 care packages to meet children and young people's needs as they move into adulthood.

Parents and carers state that their voice is mostly heard well. Some parents and carers have seen a positive improvement in the support and services that their children receive because of the issues they raise. Children and young people feel valued, visible and included in their communities. They feel listened to by adults, but they would like more face-to-face opportunities to share their views. Many children and young people access youth clubs during the week and at weekends. They make their voice heard through the eXtreme Group and receive effective support through community hubs such as the Sjøvoll Centre. These successfully bring children and young people with SEND together to make new friends and develop their confidence. Children and young people build transferable skills so that they can participate in wider activities. For example, they visit places in Durham to participate in a range of indoor and outdoor experiences through integrating. This provides helpful short-break support for parents and carers.

### **What is the area partnership doing that is effective?**

- Collaborative leadership is strong across education, health and social care. LAP leaders prioritise SEND. For example, the LAP has jointly commissioned specialist roles such as a designated social care officer, a designated clinical officer and a project leader for SEND. This is a strength of the LAP work.
- The focus on early identification of need is a positive initiative across Durham, with several arrangements in place to provide support for families and schools to help recognise and meet SEND needs. Fifteen family hubs throughout the area host drop-in sessions run by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Support Service (SENDIASS) and educational psychologists. Additionally, there are courses run by the family hubs, health staff and specialist inclusion support teams, including the Durham Portage Service. They provide regular access to professional support and guidance. Each hub has sensory spaces and offers additional outreach support for families. This support is highly valued by parents and carers.
- The Healthy Child Programme is delivered effectively. The 0-25 service delivers additional developmental checks to identify additional needs and offer support at the earliest opportunity. Two-year-old checks are integrated with early years providers whenever a child attends a setting. Dedicated and knowledgeable staff offer a range of support and interventions to support younger children.
- All therapy services offer open referral systems. This means children and young people and their families can access support directly. Waiting times for therapy services in Durham vary. However, the most urgent needs are prioritised. Children

and young people and their families can access support while waiting, and their therapeutic needs are assessed accurately in a timely way.

- Schools and further education providers can access a range of guidance to support and develop children and young people. This includes support for emotional resilience and mental health, although there is a variable uptake of this offer. Children and young people can self-refer to the emotional resilience team. This team offers effective emotional well-being support to children and young people. Equally, children and young people with SEND are well prepared for next steps in education, employment and training through DurhamWorks and DurhamEnable.
- The children with disabilities social care team conducts thorough assessments of disabled children's needs. Children have their needs quickly and accurately identified. For example, social workers identify any needs arising from disability or environmental issues, and when needs are identified, social workers make prompt referrals to services and ensure support is quickly put in place. Specialist services are brought into holistic planning as needed.
- Children and young people with complex medical needs access continuous support through the complex care nursing team. There is strong multi-agency working, and services are responsive to these individuals' needs. Residential placements for children in care are selected to ensure their SEND needs are met well.
- Across education, health and social care, planning for post-18 support for children and young people with complex SEND starts early. This ensures that there are no gaps or delays in the support and care that individuals receive. Detailed assessments inform transition arrangements and future care packages. These support an individual's needs as they move into adulthood.
- Early help workers and children with disabilities social workers are knowledgeable about the support available to children and young people and their families. Navigation workers ensure that support features in young people's future planning and continues into adulthood. For example, planning to support children with SEND as they approach adulthood starts when they become 14 years old. Navigation workers complete Care Act assessments and capacity assessments as needed. This ensures that young people who need continuing care and support from adult services post-18 have their care packages agreed in advance.
- The virtual school operates through a multi-disciplinary approach across education, health and social care. The LAP has invested in staffing capacity to support children who are in care and have SEND. This includes a dedicated educational psychologist.
- The LAP prioritises co-production. Children, young people and their families are represented at the Health and Wellbeing Board. They make frequent contributions locally through the Making Changes Together parent carer forum and the eXtreme

Group. For example, children and young people have shared their experiences of the use of language around autism to inform guidance for professionals.

- Access to support and AP is supported effectively through four secondary school inclusion partnerships that support local area needs. Similarly, primary schools share their own inclusion partnership arrangements. The LAP has well-thought-out quality assurance processes to ensure AP providers meet LAP standards. The LAP has oversight of children and young people placed in AP. The provision is flexible to meet a range of demands, including day six provision. All movements in and out of AP are monitored by the LAP.

### **What does the area partnership need to do better?**

- Children and young people in Durham wait too long for neurodevelopmental assessments. In addition, some individuals experience lengthy waits for therapeutic support from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). This mirrors the national picture. Swift support may only be available at crisis point. The most vulnerable children and young people do not routinely benefit from accelerated neurodevelopmental assessments when needed. However, there is new investment and a detailed recovery plan from the LAP and Durham executive leaders to reduce waiting times for assessments and support.
- Schools generally identify children and young people's SEND at the earliest opportunity. However, for some individuals, the lack of early assessment of needs has led to parents and carers feeling that they need to make requests for EHC plan assessments to secure support for their child.
- The needs-led offer supports children and young people and their families while they are waiting for diagnostic assessment. However, practitioners' general understanding of this offer is inconsistent, and some are unclear of what support is available. The LAP has a comprehensive workforce development plan to improve practitioners' understanding of what support is available. The impact of this plan is too early to evaluate.
- Multi-agency groups audit EHC plans. Groups are well represented, and learning is shared across the LAP. However, learning from these audits has not consistently had a positive impact to improve the quality of EHC plans.
- The monitoring of the impact of new LAP strategic plans and policies that target support and resources is developing. However, some evaluation work to improve multi-agency support and provision for children and young people with SEND is carried out independently rather than jointly across agencies. This lessens its impact to improve multi-agency work.
- Children and young people's views are typically sought during direct work with them. However, their wishes and aspirations do not routinely feature in their EHC plans. This means that planning across education, health and social care is not

always informed by what children and young people want to happen and how they feel.

- Children and young people with less complex SEND, who are working with social workers other than the children with disabilities team, receive inconsistent support. Their individual wider needs are not consistently recognised alongside their SEND in professionals' planning, for example the impact of neglect. As a result, some support offered may not be consistently appropriate or accessible.
- Occasionally, some services label children and young people and their families as 'hard to engage'. This leads to a lack of creative and innovative thinking to make services more appealing and accessible to children and young people and their families. The effect of some professionals' language has a negative impact on how some services engage with families. As a result, some services withdraw support through lack of engagement.
- The availability of specialist equipment in schools is an emerging challenge. Equipment is available locally, but some children and young people do not consistently benefit from its use. The LAP has plans to maximise the use of existing equipment across schools to ensure children receive the support they need to access education. The impact of these plans is too early to evaluate.
- Parents and carers describe their frustrations with the usefulness of the local offer website. They acknowledge that many services and support systems exist, but users of the website cannot easily find them. As a result, some children and young people miss opportunities, adding to parents and carers' frustration.
- Preparation for adulthood across health services is variable. Different services follow a variety of service specifications. These state different ages to access a range of adult services. As a result, some services provide support at contrasting times. For example, children and young people aged between 16 and 25 who are supported by the dynamic support register and are open to a range of services do not consistently receive coordinated multi-agency support.

## Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
The LAP should intensify its work to further improve EHC plan quality and assessment timeliness. It should ensure that EHC plans consistently and accurately reflect the needs of children and young people. It should ensure that all partner agencies contribute comprehensively with high-quality information and that all plans detail children and young people's voice, needs, aspirations and next steps effectively.
The LAP should continue to strengthen its work to further reduce the delays in accessing CAMHS and neurodevelopmental pathways across the age range of children and young people.

The LAP should ensure that children and young people and their families can access easily identifiable needs-led services. Informed practitioners should direct families to services that provide support, guidance and intervention at the earliest opportunity.

The LAP should further strengthen the monitoring and impact of strategic plans and policies to ensure that support and resources are consistently targeted to the children and young people and families that need it most.

## Local area partnership details

Local authority	Integrated care board
Durham County Council	North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
John Pearce Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services	Samantha Allen Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board
<a href="http://www.durham.gov.uk">www.durham.gov.uk</a>	<a href="https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk">https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk</a>
County Hall, Durham DH1 5UJ	Parkhouse Building, Baron Way, Kingmoor Park, Cumbria CA6 4SJ

## Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

The inspection was led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors including: one social care HMI and one Ofsted Inspector from education; a lead Children's Services Inspector from the Care Quality Commission (CQC); and two Children's Services Inspectors from the CQC.

## Inspection team

### Ofsted

David Mills, Ofsted HMI lead inspector  
Kathryn Grindrod, Ofsted HMI  
Angela Spencer-Brooke, Ofsted Inspector

### Care Quality Commission

Jessica Taylor-Beirne, CQC lead inspector  
Louise Holland, CQC inspector  
Natalie Palmer, CQC inspector



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# Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) - Strategies, plans, policies and inspections

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Our strategies, plans and policies to support special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and details of our inspections.

## County Durham Care Partnership, SEND Strategy 2022/24

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This is our local strategy for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The strategy shows how services and the people in them are going to work together to make sure young people with SEND thrive in their communities including home, school and neighbourhood.

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You can view the:

- [SEND Strategy for County Durham Local Area Partnership \(PDF\) \[1MB\]](#)

- [SEND Strategy for County Durham Local Area Partnership - children and young people's version of the strategy \(PDF\) \[1MB\]](#)

The strategy has been developed with significant contributions from children and young people with SEND, their families and key partners as part of an ongoing commitment to identify and meet the needs of this part of our Durham community.

At the heart of this plan is the principle that all children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), be given every opportunity to take control of their lives, be as independent as possible and achieve as much as they are able.

Our current strategy is now ready for review and this is one of our agreed next steps. We still feel the overall vision still reflects what we strive to achieve, this page will be updated on progress.

## Special Educational Needs and / or Disability (SEND) in schools - a guide for parents and carers

This guide is aimed at parents and carers of children and young people with SEND to help understand how children and young people should be supported in schools, and other educational settings, in County Durham.

The information contained is good practice for all schools and settings.

[Special Educational Needs and/or Disability \(SEND\) in schools - A guide for parents and carers \(PDF\) \[1MB\]](#)

In County Durham we also have a [SEND toolkit](#) aimed at staff in schools and colleges, but it also has information for health and social care providers too. This, along with other SEND documents, can be found on the [information for professionals and providers](#) section of the local offer.

# Local Area Inspection

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In November 2022 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) published a new inspection framework and handbook setting out how local area partnerships would be inspected going forward.

In November 2022 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) published a new inspection framework and handbook setting out how local area partnerships would be inspected going forward.

The framework and handbook explain how inspections are carried out in areas for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The goal of these inspections is to see how local groups work together to make life better for children and young people with SEND. You can view the framework and handbook at [Gov.uk: Area SEND - framework and handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-sen-framework-and-handbook).

## Inspections in Durham

Durham was last inspected in June 2024. As part of the inspection process, inspectors received feedback and views from 1,500 children, young people, families and partners. Inspectors found that:

- Working together in leadership is effective and that leaders focus on supporting children with SEND.
- Children and young people feel important, seen, included in their communities, and listened to.
- Children and young people learn useful skills that help them join in more activities.
- It is taking less time to finish new assessments because of a recovery plan.
- Most children and young people get their needs recognised and met quickly.
- Children and young people with SEND are attending school well, and this is getting better.
- Fewer children and young people with SEND are missing school, which helps them prepare for their education and jobs.
- Parents and caregivers feel that their opinions are mostly heard, and some have noticed improvements in the support, and services available.
- The way things are organised for children and young people with SEND can vary.

The report mentioned **four main things** that the local partnership will work together on to further improve SEND support in County Durham:

- Across education, health, and care, trying to ensure that assessments and plans consistently high quality so that children's needs are well understood and met.
- Providing help quickly in a joined-up way, based on children and young people's needs.
- Making it easier for people to find and get help and support quickly. Offering more resources for those working in education, health, and care to make this happen.

- Building on how we monitor our partnership progress and ensure that we target support to those who need it most.

The full inspection report can be viewed and downloaded from the Ofsted website [Ofsted inspection reports for Durham County Council](#).

Our [plan](#) shows how our local partnership will work together to further improve SEND support in County Durham.

# SEND Participation Strategy: Engaging and involving parents and carers

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This strategy has been produced in consideration of the significant government reforms to education, health and social care when working with and for children and young people with SEND (0-25) and their families and/or carers.

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Locally, we carried out a review of the approach to communication and participation with parents and carers and to implement a Parents Charter. Through engagement, parents and carers gave their views on communication and involvement and those have been used to co-produce the Strategy and Charter.

This strategy will explain what participation is and how best to implement it in your setting or service, by giving useful tips and highlighting practical examples of good practice.

[SEND Participation Strategy: Engaging and involving parents and carers \(PDF\) \[1MB\]](#)

This strategy is being reviewed and will be published on this page when complete.

# Think Autism in County Durham Strategy

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The Think Autism strategy is a local strategy for children, young people and adults on the autism spectrum.

The Think Autism strategy is a local strategy for children, young people and adults on the autism spectrum.

It provides focus and clarity on the priorities for improving services and opportunities for these people and to improve support during the transition from childhood through to adulthood.

The strategy for 2023-2026 can be viewed on our [Think Autism in County Durham Strategy](#) page.

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## Appendix 4: SEND Action Plan Infographic

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### How our partnership will help us further improve SEND support in County Durham

