

Staffordshire Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021-2026



Cannock Chase Clinical Commissioning Group
East Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
South East Staffordshire and Seisdon Peninsula Clinical Commissioning Group
Stafford and Surrounds Clinical Commissioning Group
Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Group



Introduction:

Our highest priority is to ensure that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) receive the support they need to achieve the best possible outcomes in life.

We know that we need to strengthen, develop and deliver services to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers. This strategy will set out our high-level vision and future strategic aims for Staffordshire that places children's outcomes at the forefront. These shared aims have been endorsed by all stakeholders.

The [SEND and Inclusion Partnership](#) Group are responsible for setting the vision and direction of services that support children and young people from 0-25 years with special educational needs and disabilities. The members of the Partnership are:

- Staffordshire County Council (SCC)
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)
- MPFT (Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust)
- North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust
- Representatives from education (Primary, secondary, further education and special schools)
- Representatives from parent/carer groups

This strategy includes all children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND and their families. A child or young person has special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Special educational provision is provision that is additional to or different from that which would normally be provided for children or young people of the same age in a mainstream education setting. In this document 'we' refers to all members of the partnership and as it is for children and young people from 0-25 years and their parents/carers 'education settings' refers to childcare providers, schools, further education and specialist provision; and 'support' refers to any extra help a child may need (including while in an education setting).



Developing the Strategy

We began by consulting with a range of professionals, young people and families to inform a self-evaluation of what is working well and what needs to improve. We also asked if you had a magic wand what would you change. The findings were reviewed by a group of parents/carers, SENDCos (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators), and other professionals who then used them to collectively write the aims and priorities of the strategy. The strategy was developed during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, this made seeking the views of children challenging and we were reliant on hearing their views through the people who are supporting them and through recent consultations carried out for various purposes, for example as part of the development of the Autism Strategy. Further consultation took place on the first draft of the strategy and a number of changes were made as a result. Working together is an important part of the strategy and it was important to start as we mean to continue. As the action plan is developed to deliver the strategy we will continue to work with parents/carers and children and young people to ensure we are taking the right action to deliver our ambitions.

The voices of families were powerful and clear. They want Staffordshire to provide quick access to support at the right time, to have clear and regular communication and as a community to be welcoming and inclusive. This is captured in the 'Our Vision and Priorities' section of the strategy.

The success of this strategy depends on everyone working together. An action plan will be developed to support implementation; this will be co-produced and aligned with existing plans such as:

- the Written Statement of Action (which was developed in response to the last inspection from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission)
- the Accessibility Strategy,
- the Preparing for Adulthood protocol,
- Joint Autism Strategy,
- Whole Life Disability Strategy and
- Education and Skills Strategy.



All plans will be regularly reviewed and adapted to respond to ongoing feedback with the implementation of the strategy overseen by the Partnership. You will be able to read the action plan and check on the progress of its implementation by reading the quarterly updates that will be provided to the Partnership Board (available on the [Local Offer Website](#)).

Context

In November 2018, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission conducted a [Local Area Review](#) of SEND provision and found there to be a number of areas for development. In response, a Written Statement of Action was developed and as a Partnership we have improved our governance so that we can effectively lead and monitor SEND provision throughout Staffordshire.

Staffordshire is a large county with over 400 schools and academies providing education for around 120,000 pupils. About 13.5% of pupils in Staffordshire have special educational needs compared with a national average of 15.3%. The number of children and young people with an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) has been steadily rising each year from 3,500 in 2014 to 6,200 in 2021. There are far more children with SEND that are educated in a special school in Staffordshire than the national average (24% compared with 9%). More information about the picture in Staffordshire can be found on the next page.

Historical national underfunding has meant Staffordshire County Council has overspent on its SEND budget allocation each year. The gap has been financed through reserve funds which have now diminished. Although lobbying of the government has resulted in some additional funding it is anticipated that the amount of funding won't continue to rise and therefore a funding gap will again develop if nothing changes in the way we do things.

Everyone has a responsibility (particularly Education, Health and Social Care) to ensure that children and young people with SEND get the support they need when they need it. SEND and Inclusion District Hubs and Locality Management Groups have been set up in each district of Staffordshire to provide a mechanism to identify needs early and support children and young people experiencing difficulties; potentially reducing the need for EHCPs. Through Staffordshire County Council's Strategic Children's transformation programme, the delivery of the SEND support offer will be reshaped into district-based teams alongside social care services to ensure that all Staffordshire County Council services are aligned, to meet the child's needs.





What we know about Staffordshire



Staffordshire is a large county with over 400 schools and academies providing education for around 120,000 pupils

The percentage of pupils with SEND in Staffordshire in 2019/20 was 13.5% and in England 15.3%.

In 2019/20, 10.3% of pupils in Staffordshire required SEND support. This is lower than the national figure of 12.1%.

4% of the Early Years Population have high SEND needs. 20% go on to a special school, 15% mainstream school with an EHCP and 56% mainstream supported under school resources

There are 6,048 Children and young people with an EHCP

We have 12,758 pupils who have been identified with SEND that are being educated in mainstream settings

24% of SEND pupils in Staffordshire are placed in special academy schools compared to a national average of 9%.

Our % of pupils with an EHCP attaining age expected levels in key stage 2 in Staffordshire is lower than national average (6% compared with 9%).

2.1% of adults with learning disabilities were in paid employment in 2019/20 compared with an average of 5.4% for all English regions.

In 2019/20 70.7% of adults with learning disabilities lived in their own home or with their family.

The % of students with SEN Support gaining 9-5 at GCSE (including English and Maths) is 16.9% compared to 20.5% nationally

1% of those Electively Home Educated have an EHCP

2,500 pupils attend 23 special schools and 6 PRUs

In 2020 there were 1,127 requests for statutory EHC assessments and 489 were agreed (48%)

In January 2021, 33% of EHCP were issued within 20 weeks.

The number of mediation cases in Staffordshire appears to be low in relation to national averages

Unemployment and youth unemployment rates are lower than national averages

The number of personal budgets taken up for EHCP plans is significantly below national averages

Permanent exclusions for those at SEN support is higher than national averages

What you have told us

During the writing of this strategy we listened to some great examples of services being provided by mainstream schools and from services such as Early Help supporting parents/carers at home. However, there were also a number of negative experiences shared and suggestions for improvement and these are summarised below.

Our families have told us that:

- Experiences for families vary greatly between schools.
- Parents/carers and young people are not always equal partners in the process of developing a solution to meet their needs
- Professionals from different organisations do not always work well together with some professionals missing from important conversations such as involvement in the EHCP process.
- Communication could be improved so that everyone is clear what is happening.
- Documents received are not always easy to understand.
- Families need to repeat their story multiple times.
- It can be a 'battle' to get support unless in crisis.
- Waiting for support is a really difficult time for families. Children's needs are not fully met and at the same time parents/carers are trying to understand new conditions and diagnoses.
- Things usually get better when an EHCP is in place
- Families get advice at the end of a process (when they are turned down for support) that could have been provided at the start.
- It feels like there is layer upon layer of decision making.
- Awareness in the community has dramatically improved over recent years, but there is still a way to go with some shops still inaccessible if you have impaired mobility, and community groups that are not able to open their doors to all.
- Within the home environment, families are generally happy with the support that their child receives but parents/carers would like to be able to have more breaks and time for themselves, for example, access to services which allow parents/carers to take an hour or two out for an evening meal, are very limited.



Professionals have told us that:

- Funding is focussed on high needs and sometimes we miss opportunities to prevent escalating needs.
- We do not always jointly commission, this means that services can be fragmented and results in some of the problems experienced by families.
- Physical issues can be overlooked where children and young people are either at, or just managing, to keep up with age related expectations.
- The root cause of issues is not always considered and addressed.
- SENDCOs do not always know where to go for support and signposting advice.
- When children with more complex needs in mainstream schools are awaiting an EHCP, the school are needing to redirect educational resources away from all pupils or needs remain unmet. This is because the 'SEND notional budget' is based on an average funding formula and does not cover every child that needs extra help in the school.
- There can be a negative impact on the child/young person, their family, teachers and the other pupils in the class when children's needs are unmet.



Looking to the future:

- We need to be more aspirational for children and young people with SEND.
- Children and young people want to be able to go to groups and activities in their community just the same as everyone else (but they don't want their parents/carers to have to attend these groups/activities).
- Parents/carers want schools to ensure notional budgets are used appropriately and they are held to account for how the money is spent
- Parents/carers would like to see successful parent/carer support groups embedded across the county.

What we are hoping to achieve: the vision and priorities

A vision is a goal for the future. It is something to aspire to, not what is happening now. A shared vision helps the different partners involved in supporting children and young people with SEND and their families to understand the direction of travel and make sure we all work towards this. Our vision is that:

“All children and young people with SEND are given the opportunity to achieve everything that they can. They engage with the right support at the right time from their parents/carers, the community and the professionals that work with them to make this happen.”

This will look different for every family as each child and young person is an individual with different abilities and needs who require different levels of support.

Importantly, we aim to support children and young people to have high but realistic aspirations for themselves and what they want to achieve.

We will strive for consistency throughout Staffordshire with education settings encouraged to be inclusive, needs met as early as possible, independence skills encouraged at every stage and children at the centre of every decision. We will work together because we are stronger as a team and it is everyone's responsibility to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.



We have set 4 priorities to focus on to help achieve our vision.

These are:

1. We communicate well with each other
2. We work in partnership to meet the needs of children and young people
3. We ensure that the right support is available at the right time
4. We encourage communities to be inclusive

Making improvements in each of these priority areas will improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families. Further details on each priority are set out below.



Priority 1

We communicate well with each other

- a) There is good, regular communication between children and young people, parents/carers and all the professionals involved so that everyone is kept up to date.
- b) Up to date information on how and where to access support is available and easy to access.
- c) We work 'with' not 'do to'. Children, young people and their families are equal partners when developing solutions to meet their needs.
- d) All professionals understand Special Educational Need and Disability and can communicate effectively with children and young people with SEND.
- e) When a professional is involved in supporting or assessing a child or young person, they will collaborate with other relevant professionals supporting the principle of 'tell it once' and ensuring that there are no gaps.
- f) Regular opportunities are provided for children, young people their families/carers and professionals to provide feedback on, and influence the future delivery of services.
- g) Partnership governance is effective and supports us to make effective decisions and share information.
- h) There are good levels of satisfaction. If a family feels like they are being failed by the people who are supporting them, they will know how to raise this.



Priority 2

We work in partnership to meet needs of children and young people

- a) Professionals from different organisations come together as a virtual 'team' to support a child. They all have high aspirations for children and young people and encourage them to do the same.
- b) Everyone is clear about their expectations of each other. They work in a timely manner, respecting deadlines and making sure any transfers between services are planned and happen smoothly.
- c) We all have honest conversations.
- d) Appropriate professional advice is available. Where possible, we will work to the principle of 'tell it once' and ensure our advice is consistent.
- e) Referrals, plans, and processes are easy to complete, and information easily understood. There is help available for those who need support to read, interpret and access documents.
- f) The main focus is always what the child needs, which is more important than who will be funding support.
- g) There will be awareness of what has already happened to avoid repeating actions that do not lead to improved outcomes.
- h) Decisions are transparent and based on achieving the best outcomes for the child or young person. This will normally include the child being visited or spoken to by the people making decisions unless it is felt to not be in their best interests.
- i) We have high aspirations for the services we commission and where we can we do it once and do it well.
- j) Partners will jointly commission services for children and young people wherever it is possible to do so. We will provide clear pathways so that people understand how to find the appropriate support.
- k) All transition points (for example, between classes, education settings, and from education into employment), are planned for, well in advance and as a result, go smoothly.



Priority 3

We ensure that the right support is made available at the right time

There are two elements to this priority:

- 1) That early help is in place to prevent needs escalating. We know that the graduated response process is often the best route for education settings to make sure that children and young people get the right support quickly.
- 2) When an EHCP is required that there is an effective process for completing one

Early help is in place to prevent needs escalating:

- a) Children and young people with SEND are offered the support they need at an early stage, in a place they are comfortable and without the need for an EHCP (where this is possible).
- b) Quality teaching is delivered to adapt learning for every child.
- c) Identification at the earliest opportunity will help children longer term so everyone is encouraged to identify and provide support when a child is not developing in line with expectations and consider whether Early Help will support the child and family. Children and young people will not need to be in crisis to get support.
- d) Parents/carers and education settings know who to approach for signposting advice.
- e) Training is available so that everyone has the knowledge and skills to support early help for children with SEND.
- f) It is recognised that no one is an expert in everything and there is a team of specialists available to advise when needed.
- g) There will be rapid access to consistent advice and support (across Staffordshire) both at the beginning and also at times of crisis for those already receiving support.
- h) The SEND and Inclusion District Model helps to meet the needs of children early within a partnership approach.
- i) Funding is available to support early identification and support.
- j) People supporting children and young people with SEND, including SENDCos, have adequate time dedicated to arranging and monitoring the support required for children in their setting. Induction advice and school-to-school support is available to help them succeed in their role.
- k) Children and young people will be encouraged to have aspirations for their future, and professionals should be continually exploring further development.
- l) Independence skills are encouraged from an early age and support is available to parents/carers to help them to also develop their child/young person's independence at home.



An effective EHCP process

- a) There is awareness amongst education settings, parents/carers, and professionals that an EHCP is not appropriate for every child with additional needs and they will explore other options through the graduated response where suitable.
- b) For those that do need an EHCP, the process is timely and easy to understand so that support can be put in place as quickly as possible and ensure there is a consistent experience for children and young people across Staffordshire. It is recognised that the national 20 week timescale is a significant proportion of the school year, however this timeframe does allow all of the people involved to properly contribute.
- c) Evidence to support applications will be realistic and reflect the current needs of the child and sit alongside appropriate assessments to be used in the statutory process.
- d) Professionals are knowledgeable and feel confident to meet the needs of those identified with SEND.
- e) Training and advocacy are available to support families and education settings through the process.
- f) Everyone has a voice that is shared and heard (child, family, carer, education, health, care).
- g) The EHCP is reflective of the child's needs, designed to improve their outcomes, details specialist teaching provision required and as such is updated regularly (it will be a 'live' document for updating the elements that are not related to funding).
- h) Any provision attached to the EHCP will be reviewed and adapted as necessary if the child/young person moves education setting (notice periods may apply). Parents/carers are offered a personal budget where this is suitable for their circumstances.
- i) Children and young people are given the opportunity to be educated in their local mainstream education setting whenever it can meet their needs. These education settings will be well equipped to understand and meet the child's needs and know how to access specialist support when it is required.
- j) Planning for the future is an important consideration in all EHCPs and annual reviews.
- k) Education settings understand their role in preparing young people for independence and from the age of 14 preparing for adulthood will be a key feature in every EHCP and review (there are four key components to preparing for adulthood: living independently, gaining employment, having good health and participating in the community).



Priority 4

We encourage our communities to be inclusive

- a) Places are friendly, welcoming and inclusive for children and young people with additional needs and their families (standards for schools can be found in the Accessibility Strategy).
- b) Everybody is encouraged to be an advocate for SEND so that there is greater awareness of SEND in the community.
- c) Training is made available to leaders of community groups.
- d) Community facilities and organisers of activities and holiday clubs are encouraged to be accessible so that children and young people can participate in the activities that they want to do.
- e) Education settings tailor learning opportunities and support children with SEND to fully participate in school life.
- f) Wherever possible, children will access education placements that are close to home to help develop friendships in their local community and promote independence.
- g) Good information, advice and guidance is available to support children. Children, young people, families and professionals should be able to find out what activities there are in the local area and how to access them.
- h) Parents/carers have support mechanisms available to them locally



How our progress will be measured

A set of measures will be developed for each priority with clear timescales. These measures will then be monitored by the SEND Inclusion and Partnership Group. They will consider the voice and experience of children, young people, parents/carers and professionals to gain assurance that agreed actions are having the desired impact.

Below is a list of some of the things that the partnership will be looking for:

- Children and young people and their families will tell us that they feel:
 - Listened to and understood.
 - Part of their school community.
 - Well informed about their child's support.
 - Communication is clear and easily understood.
 - The support they receive is improving their outcomes.
 - More resilient because they are well supported.
 - Able to access more community activities (without their parents/carers needing to stay with them).
- More children and young people with SEND:
 - Are accessing the right support at the right time.
 - Improving their educational progress and attainment.
 - Engaged in further education and/or employment.
 - Are regularly attending school (either due to reduced exclusion or health reasons).
 - Are educated close to where they live.
 - Will receive the support that they need earlier and without the need for an EHCP.
- EHCPs are completed in a timely manner.
- Education settings are committed to inclusion.
- Provision maps and Local Offer show a breadth of support to meet need.
- There is true partnership working between different professionals and parents/carers with solutions developed together.
- Staffordshire compares well against other local authorities and nationally accepted frameworks.

How you can get involved

Further information about the strategy's progress alongside ways to provide feedback will be advertised on the SEND Local Offer website. There you will also find information on groups for young people, parents/carers and SENDCOs to help influence the delivery of SEND services. These groups are open to everyone; either a young person with a special educational need or disability or those that are supporting them. 'You said, we did' style documents will be produced to show that feedback is being listened to and acted on.

