

Staffordshire SEND Strategy 2020-2025

Introduction:

We all want children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), their families and the professionals who support them to know that we have a joint commitment to making services for SEND in Staffordshire the best they can possibly be.

We have been working hard over the past year, with our colleagues and partners across the council, health services, parent/carers groups and education providers to improve what we are doing and deliver the activities outlined in the Written Statement of Action. The Written Statement of Action was developed as a result of the inspection in November 2018. We also took into consideration the self-evaluation of SEND services provided by the County Council and CCG which was completed in 2020 and is based on feedback received from stakeholders and an analysis of performance information.

As a result, we have jointly developed this document to describe our long-term aims for SEND. We are calling it the SEND Strategy. It will provide us with clarity and a common understanding of what we want to do in the future. We will review this regularly to make sure it is delivering our vision for SEND.

It is important to note that although the local authority and local health organisations are lead partners in the strategy they do not have control over all aspects contained within it and therefore the success will come down to how well they are able to influence others, particularly schools and the community. Staffordshire is a large county with over 400 schools and academies providing education for around 120,000 pupils. There are approximately 12,750 children (10%) receiving SEN (Special Educational Need) support in schools, over 6000 children with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) (3.7%) and 64% of children with an EHCP attend a special school. We currently have more children with an EHCP and more children attending a special school than the national average.

This strategy will be delivered through a number of actions that together will form a plan. The plan may change and adapt based on ongoing feedback from Parents/Carers, professionals, education settings, stakeholders and our performance may also change as a result of any changes that may take place within national frameworks for children's health, social care and education services.

We will continue in our collective ambition to listen to children, young people and their families; supporting inclusion, meeting needs and changing lives together because we are stronger working as a team.

What we are hoping to achieve: the vision

Our ambition is that all children and young people with SEND believe that they can reach their full potential. They receive the right support at the right time from their parents, the community and the professionals that work with them to make this happen.

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

1. We work well together
2. The right support is available at the right time
3. There is improved access in the community
4. The future is planned for

More information on each of these priorities can be found below.

Our priorities

1) We want to work well together, keeping open lines of communication

Our families have told us that professionals from different organisations do not always work well together and some partners are missing when EHCPs are discussed. Parents and young people are not always equal partners in the process and feel that communication could be improved.

We will work to a future where:

- a) We work 'with' not 'do to'. First focus is always what the child needs, and, where it's appropriate, they will be seen by the people making decisions about them.
- b) All professionals understand Special Educational Needs and can communicate effectively with children and young people who have SEND
- c) Everyone is clear about their expectations of each other. They work in a timely manner, respecting deadlines and making sure any transfers between services happen smoothly.
- d) Everyone is on the same page (we all know what each other are doing to help assess and support, and where progress has got to).
- e) Appropriate professional advice is available. Where possible, we will work to the principle of 'tell it once' and ensure our advice compliments not contradicts.
- f) Referrals and plans are easy to complete and information easily understood. There is help available for those who need support to read and interpret documents.

- g) Up to date information on how to access support and where to go, is available and easy to access

2) We want to ensure that the right support is made available at the right time.

Our families have told us that it can take a long time for their child to get the support that they need in school and that the EHCP process takes too long (experiences vary greatly from school to school). For most children an EHCP won't be required to get the support that they need in school.

For those that require an EHCP, the process should be completed within 20 weeks (legally set timeframe) and an application is not made before the school has tried to support the individual themselves under the graduated response. This means that for some children and young people it can take more than half of the school year to get additional support in place. This can have a negative impact on the child and their self-esteem, their teachers, and the other pupils in their class. The 20 week time limit is a maximum and we have an ambition to complete them more quickly. This will be dependent on each contributor being able to complete their part more swiftly.

Children must be able to be educated in their local mainstream school wherever that is possible and appropriate. This means that mainstream schools need to be equipped to understand the needs of children with SEND and know how to access additional support when it is required. We want parents to be confident that the school can provide or get the support that their child needs.

In future, we want to have:

a) Early intervention support in place to prevent needs escalating:

- i) Rapid access to advice and support (consistent across Staffordshire) both in the beginning and also in times of crisis for those already receiving support.
- ii) One point of contact for parents and schools to approach for signposting advice.
- iii) Funding is available in schools to provide lower level or short-term support for children without an EHCP (the 'graduated response') without impacting negatively on the education of other children in the school.
- iv) School SEND Coordinators have adequate time dedicated to arranging and monitoring support for children with SEND. Induction advice & school to school support is available to help them succeed in their role.
- v) Parents know that there will be a governor with responsibility for holding the headteacher in their school to account on SEND matters.

- vi) Quick access to temporary additional funds or support is available when it is clear the school cannot meet the child's needs without it (this may include facilitating a quick move between schools).
- vii) Videos are available to promote awareness - particularly of sensory conditions - and also provide information about how to get support.

b) An effective EHCP process

- i) There is awareness amongst schools and parents that an EHCP is not needed for every child with additional needs and they will use the graduated response before applying.
- ii) For those that do, the EHCP 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 across Staffordshire.
- iii) Evidence requested to support applications will be 'just enough'.
- iv) Everyone has a voice that is shared and heard (child, family, carer, education, health, care)
- v) The EHCP is aspirational and reflective of the child's needs and as such is updated regularly (seen as a 'live' document).
- vi) It is recognised that schools can't be experts in everything and there is a team of specialists available to advise when needed.
- vii) Any funding attached to the EHCP follows the child if they move school (notice periods may apply)
- viii) Training and advocacy is available to support families and schools through the process (offered to all)

c) Accessible health services

- i) It is easy to get hold of the right people for the support you need.
- ii) There is a reduced need for specialist services because more are included from the start.

3) We want to see improved access and awareness in the community about SEND

Our young people want to be able to go to groups in their community just the same as everyone else, but they don't want their parents to have to go to when no-one else's does. Parents have told us that awareness in the community has dramatically improved over recent years, particularly with the initiative to wear sunflower lanyards when out shopping, 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 our families are generally happy with the support that their child receives but parents would like to be able to have more breaks and time for themselves. Services such as babysitting are very limited which means parents can't take an hour or two out for an evening meal. They would also like to see the successful parent support groups that can be found in some areas, replicated across all.

In future, we want to see:

- a) Shops and community activities encouraged to be accessible and include changing facilities. Training made available to leaders of community groups to help them to do this.
- b) Schools are friendly and welcoming for children with additional needs (standards for schools can be found in the Accessibility Strategy). They have differentiated learning opportunities and support children with SEND to fully participate in school life.
- c) Schools are encouraged to teach awareness of SEND and different methods of communication (for example teaching Makaton alongside languages).
- d) Schools help to educate their parents and wider community about SEND through the distribution of awareness literature
- e) Parents and carers have support mechanisms available to them locally (such as babysitting services, short breaks, and relationships with other parents).
- f) Children and young people have opportunities to develop friendships outside of school.
- g) There are more activities available to young people with SEND as they get older, particularly in the school holidays. For those with an EHCP, review meetings will consider how they can attend without their parents and whether there are also activities available to attend as a family.
- h) It is easy to find out what activities there are in your local area and how to access them.

4) The future is planned for

We need to be more aspirational for our children and young people with SEND. Focus on what they can do and ensure we are always building their independence. We need to consider how to help them to lead as 'ordinary' a life as possible

This means that:

- a) We will work to ensure that we have the right places available, at the right time. This includes specialist support and professionals to complete assessments.

- b) Wherever possible we will prioritise school placements that are close to home to help the child to have friendships in their local community and promote walking to school.
- c) All transition points (e.g. between classes and schools) are planned for well in advance and as a result go smoothly.
- d) Independence skills are encouraged from an early age and support is available to parents to help them to also do this at home.

How our progress will be measured

A set of measures will be developed for each priority with clear timescales attached. These measures will then be monitored by the SEND Inclusion and Partnership Board. 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 are 10 high level measures that will tell us that the strategy is making a difference:

1. Children and parents feel listened to and understood
2. Children can be educated in their local mainstream provision wherever it is possible and appropriate
3. Schools are a friendly place for children with additional needs, they are part of the whole school community and are offered differentiated learning opportunities to support their academic achievement.
4. Parents have confidence that schools can support their child
5. EHCPs are completed within 20 weeks (the 2020 target is for 80% and this will then be raised in subsequent years as the backlog is addressed)
6. Less EHCPs are issued because support and advice is available early to prevent needs from escalating.
7. Children with SEND are able to access more community activities (without their parents needing to stay with them)
8. Parents are resilient because they are appropriately supported
9. There is true partnership working between professionals and parents with solutions developed together.
10. Our children are more independent and young people are prepared for adult life

How I can get involved

Further information about the strategy's progress alongside ways to provide feedback will be advertised on the local offer website. There you will also find information on groups for young people, parents and SENDCOs (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in education settings) 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.