

# SEND Strategy

Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities









# SEND Strategy

## Foreword:

In Somerset we believe that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are everyone's business. Our ambition is for every child and young person with SEND to receive an inclusive education and access the opportunities and support they need to lead and achieve their best in life.

Our SEND Strategy 2023 – 2026 has been co-produced with children and young people with SEND and parent carers. This involved an extensive engagement and consultation period, documenting the views and ideas expressed at listening events and reviewing feedback over the past 18 months. The views of these experts by experience are critical to this strategy's success.

We believe that by working together with Somerset Parent Carer Forum and the Unstoppables (participation group for children and young people with SEND in Somerset), as well as other interested individuals, we can deliver our SEND Strategy ambitions for children, young people and their families.

There are some key changes that we feel will make a real difference to the lives of our SEND community in Somerset. These are the underpinning activities which we know will help children, young people, and families to feel a difference:

- A “local first” approach to education provision so that children can access education in their community
- A network of community hubs where families can access the help and support they need as early as possible
- A mental health and emotional wellbeing portal to help children and young people access the right support at the right time
- A commitment to working together to ensure our children and young people are prepared for their future, including housing and career opportunities

This strategy has been developed during unprecedented times having emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic and whilst entering a cost-of-living crisis. In addition, over the next year there will be significant changes in the SEND system with changes arising from the national Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan. We believe strongly that our culture of collaboration across health, social care and education will also enable us to deliver this strategy despite these trials.

**Shelagh Meldrum and Claire Winter**







# Introduction

This strategy has been developed with the help and involvement of Somerset children and young people with SEND and their families. This strategy sets out how the Somerset SEND partnership will work together.

## **The Somerset SEND Partnership includes:**

- Somerset Council
- NHS Somerset
- Education providers: schools, early years, further education providers
- Somerset Parent Carer Forum
- The Unstoppables
- Voluntary, Community, Faith, Social Enterprise

In you are looking for SEND information and support please refer to the [\*\*Somerset Local Offer.\*\*](#)



# Somerset's SEND Local Offer

Somerset's SEND Local Offer is a website full of information on the services available for children and young people up to 25 years with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) and how to access them. The aim is to help families find the right help at the right time and support them to be the best they can be.

See more at [Somerset's SEND Local Offer](#) or [www.facebook.com/LocalOfferSomerset](https://www.facebook.com/LocalOfferSomerset)

Families and professionals will find understandable, comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about the available support and how to access it. It explains how decisions are made and who by. It sets out clear pathways for action and directions about what to do and where to go if things go wrong.

Somerset's SEND Local Offer not only helps advise families, but also promotes local services and businesses. There is an [events calendar](#) and [SEND services directory](#) to help families find things close to their home. The search function allows users to filter results based on postcode and by type, for example support group, information and advice, or leisure.

We aim to make services more responsive to local needs and aspirations by directly involving children and young people with SEND, their parent carers, and service providers in its development and review. Feedback about Somerset's SEND Local Offer is really important.

There is a link at the end of each page **'Is this page useful?'** where you can tell us if there is a problem with information or if something isn't working properly. Or you can email [localoffer@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:localoffer@somerset.gov.uk) or message [@LocalOfferSomerset](#) on Facebook.

You can find out what has happened as a result of feedback over the year in the [Local Offer Annual Reports](#).





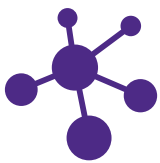


# SEND Vision

We want to be able to move through the world without having to force our way through it.

**My life - not a service.**

## Strategy Themes



### Working together

I can achieve what matters to me because people are working together with me and my family.



### Getting Help as Early as Possible

My family and I can access the right support at the right time.



### Access to the right support and provision

I understand the support and provision that is available to me, and I can access it, if I need it.



### Preparing for the future

I am gaining the right skills and understand my choices to be in control of my future and to achieve the ambitions important to me.

# SEND Outcomes and measuring success

We have worked with children and young people with SEND and their families to understand what is important to live a happy life. They have identified seven key outcomes, which together spell the word ACHIEVE.

- **Ambitious** – pursue my interests and aspirations
- **Connected** – have relationships with people who are important to me
- **Healthy** – access health and wellbeing support when I need it
- **Informed** – make informed choices
- **Educated** – access education and opportunities for lifelong learning
- **Valued** – be heard, have choices and have control over my life
- **Employed** – or have access to money

The outcomes are underpinned by three core things which run through the heart of our strategy.



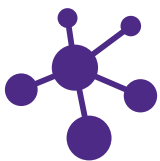
## Empowerment

Children and young people can ACHIEVE their ambitions and aspiration, if given the right opportunities and support.



## Early Intervention

The earlier children, young people and their families can access information and support, the more likely it is that they will ACHIEVE better outcomes in the future.

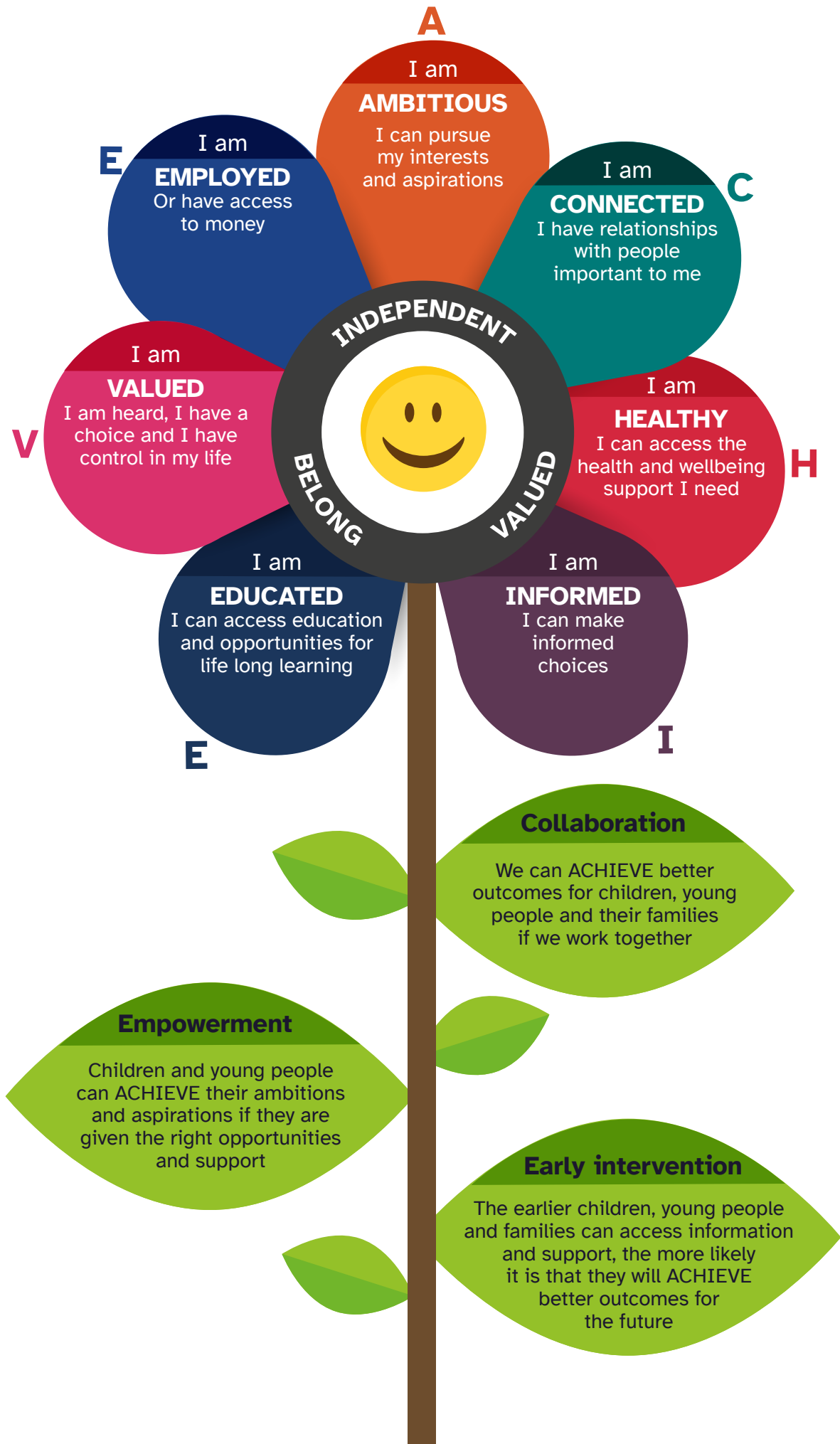


## Collaboration

We ACHIEVE better outcomes for children, young people, and their families if we work together.







# Strategy Themes and Mission Statements

Our strategy sets out what we, as a partnership, will do over the next three years. Each theme is a priority that has been identified through engagement with children, young people, and their families. For each priority we have identified several missions. These are specific commitments that as a partnership we are going work together to achieve.

We will put children and young people at the heart of everything we do - hearing, listening, and responding to them and ensuring they are involved so we can develop brilliant services together.



We will work to understand the needs of parent carers, to support them to fulfil their caring role and champion their voice through the Somerset Parent Carer Forum and SEND participation theme.





# Working together

## I can achieve what matters to me because people are working together with me and my family

- We will improve the way we work together and with you in your community. One of the ways we will do this is by developing effective Community Hubs, a place that you can visit for face-to-face help.
- We will establish Area Inclusion Partnerships that enable schools to better support vulnerable learners.
- We will ensure services work together through local partnerships that bring together schools, support services and others to agree how to use shared resources to help you.
- We will make sure that your information is shared with those working with you, and the roles and responsibilities of those you meet is clear. You will be given the information you need to make a decision and you will be involved in designing any plans that include you.
- We will publish clear information on Somerset's SEND Local Offer about how to access support and how long it may take.
- To better understand your needs and to improve the ways we support you, we will develop systems to listen and learn from feedback and share this knowledge with teams across the partnership.
- We will ensure Somerset's SEND Local Offer to provide updates on changes made based on the feedback we have been given. We will publish the results and actions taken following feedback from families.
- We will make sure we listen and respond to children and young people with SEND and their families. We will collaborate with schools, communities and groups including The Unstoppables.

# Getting help as early as possible

## My family and I can access the right support at the right time

- We will make it easier to access early advice, information and support for special educational needs through Connect Somerset, local community hubs and online guidance. Hubs will use the systems we establish together to regularly gain feedback from families to understand their needs.
- SENCOs and other staff in education settings will have access to support through a dedicated inclusion advice phone line, enabling them to identify help and support at an early stage.
- We will use the Somerset Inclusion Tool with schools to establish an offer for schools, addressing gaps in support, sharing knowledge and enabling your child's school to have an open conversation with you about how their needs can be met.
- We will work with you and the professionals supporting you to develop a joined up Speech, Language and Communication offer which will improve support for children from birth, in their early years, at school settings, and at home.
- We will help you and the teams working with you to feel confident to recognise and support trauma in children and young people by implementing a Trauma Informed approach.
- We will promote clear and up-to-date information around mental health support and ensure our services are easily accessible.
- We will work to ensure that gaps in Mental Health support are identified and addressed.







# Access to the right support and provision

## I understand the support and provision that is available to me, and I can access it, if I need it

- We will ensure that you are able to access clear information about when to request a neurodevelopmental assessment (such as autism or ADHD) and how you can participate in making the request. You will be able to access clear information about the process and timeframes for the assessment.
- We will invest in and develop a neurodevelopmental pathway so that if you have an assessment it will be timely and you will receive support throughout the process.
- We will work with schools to promote inclusion by sharing expertise and skills and providing opportunities to learn in a way that suits you. We will work with schools to develop enhanced offers of support in mainstream schools so that you can access education in your local community.
- We will increase the number of specialist places for children with social and emotional mental health needs available to meet needs.
- We will make sure that through our assessment processes you are given the advice you need so that you do not need to seek private reports.
- We will recruit key workers to co-ordinate support for children and young people with a learning disability or autism and their families, so that they can receive the right support to live safely at home.
- We will work with you to understand what you require from short breaks and work with you and the professionals and communities who support you, to put in place a new short breaks offer.
- We will work with schools to put in place enhanced wrap around support for children with additional needs.

# Preparing for the future

**I am gaining the right skills and understand my choices to be in control of my future and to achieve the ambitions important to me**

- So that you can live your best life and achieve your goals, we will evaluate the support and guidance available to you and develop it so that you can plan for adult life as early as possible. This includes if you need to transfer to adult services across health and social care.
- You will be supported to be as independent as you can be through work readiness and life skills programmes. We will work with supported employment groups and key partners to improve the employment opportunities available to you.
- We will support you in your next steps whether you choose to continue your education, take up employment or training after you leave school.
- You and your family will be able to get support to be as healthy as you can be. This will be supported by local partnerships including; education, health, care and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sectors.
- We will have clear guidance about career options available from year 7. We will audit what's already available in schools, including where they already work with the local community. We will monitor effective careers delivery using 'Compass' a careers benchmark tool.
- As part of developing our housing strategies we will work with you to understand what you need to live as independently as possible, including in your own home, flat or shared living. Based on what you tell us, we will develop a refreshed and accessible housing offer in a location that is right for you.



# How we will make this happen and monitor it

**Delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the Somerset SEND Partnership Board containing the following members from across the local area**

- Representation for young people with SEND - Engagement & Participation officer
- Somerset Somerset Parent Carer Forum
- NHS Somerset
- Somerset Council
- Somerset NHS Foundation Trust
- SENCO & Pre-school, Early years setting representative
- School Association of Primary Heads (SAPH)
- School Association of Secondary Heads (SASH)
- Special Educational Needs Somerset Expertise (SEN-se)
- Post-16 education representative
- Designated Clinical Officer (DCO)
- Spark Somerset

**SEND Partners will provide regular reports to the SEND Partnership Board on progress against the agreed mission**



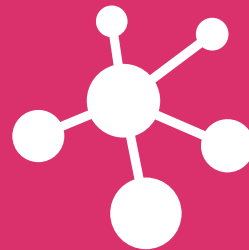
# Somerset's SEND Charter

The SEND charter outlines our promise to deliver excellent SEND services for children and young people in Somerset. This was developed with children, young people and families and sets out our commitment to the delivery of excellent SEND services.

The SEND Charter is not about creating new structures or services, but establishing a cohesive, collaborative SEND provision delivered jointly by all partners. **We will commit to providing high quality SEND provision by:**



Ensuring our services and staff are accessible and approachable, supporting the use of universal language wherever possible



Working collaboratively in an open, honest and transparent way



Nurturing and encouraging positive, flexible and solution focused attitudes



Working and thinking creatively in a structured and organised way





# Our Principles

**Our approach to providing excellent SEND provision is based on a set of shared principles:**

- ➡ First and foremost, ensuring that provision is child and family centred and that they are at the heart of everything we do and involved in processes
- ➡ Help will be provided early and effectively reducing the need for statutory or specialist intervention, empowering families to promote their independence
- ➡ All practitioners will be treated respectfully and professionally by one another in a blame-free, supportive environment offering positive challenge where appropriate
- ➡ Communication will be clear and open, ensuring information is shared effectively, helpful signposting is in place and clarity given over roles and responsibilities

## Our Impact

- The child's voice is heard and acted upon
- Stronger and more efficient partnerships
- Coherent service that meets the needs of families
- Clear and meaningful planning and guidance
- Consistent use and understanding of language
- Better experiences and increased confidence in services
- Holistic approach to achieve outcomes quickly
- Improved engagement with children and families
- Empower families with increased resilience

**Children and young people with SEND have the same rights and choices as all other children in Somerset.**

# Collaborating

The Somerset SEND Partnership has committed to working with children, young people, and their families to design and review services. We will do this through the use of our collaboration framework.

## Collaboration Framework



We will listen and record your thoughts and consider these as part of our work.

This will include surveys, website feedback (such as Somerset's Local Offer), question and answer sessions, listening events, Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), complaints and social media.

**Listen to**  
(involve)



We will have a conversation with you so that your thoughts are reflected in the decisions made. We will work together with you to understand your experiences and exchange ideas.

This will include focus groups, themed meetings. This should be a process that happens over time.

**Discuss with**  
(participate)



Participants will be involved from start to finish. We will work together with you to make decisions, design visions, activities and solutions, with you not for you. All views are equal regardless of professional status and all participants will be given the information they need to make informed decisions. Solutions are created, overseen and reviewed by the whole group.

**Do together**  
(co-design/co-produce)

## Inform

At all stages we will keep you updated about Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). For example SEND weekly news, Somerset's Local Offer, social media, leaflets, posters, carers information points and Parent Carer Forum.

## Feedback

We will tell you how your involvement has been used and the outcomes. You will be able to see the difference that your involvement has made.

This will include follow up emails, you said and we did information, reports and documents.

## Evaluate

We will review the number of people we involve and the difference it has made. All organisations will be expected to evaluate this.

For example how have they engaged and if it has worked.



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# Why have we selected the themes for our strategy?

The Somerset SEND Partners have worked together with parent carers, young people with SEND, schools, early years and further education providers, health commissioners and providers and social care services to explore the key improvement themes which should remain a focus over the next three years. This work and some key documents outlined below have informed the development of these themes.

## What children, young people and their families are telling us

We want you, our families in Somerset to be at the centre of all we do. We know it's important that you remain the lead in your own life. We want to regularly talk to you to understand what is important for you.

### You have told us:

- I want to see strong and trusting relationships across the SEND partnership. There is a lack of information sharing between services (resulting in us having to tell a story more than once).
- I worry that our feedback does not result in positive change. As children, young people and parent carers we are the experts in our lives and our experience should be used to plan future services.
- We need education and health and care services to pledge to support families without prejudice and stigma.
- As children and young people with SEND we are learning to live with the new normal but have struggled through covid with not getting the support we need when we need it. We sometimes felt Isolated and vulnerable.
- I would like you to focus on my strengths and help me to promote my independence for the future. This requires a focus on my extra ability and not my disability. It also involves strengthening my whole family and ensuring support is available for my carers.
- Access to services can feel slow – a week can feel like a year, continuous communication is needed and from listening must come action.
- I like the “team around the child approach”, and I should be included in the team.
- Transparency and accountability are important – be realistic with me and tell me who will I get a response from and when.
- We want to access support as early as possible to help us to develop the tools we need to manage our own children alongside the staff supporting them. Consistency for children is important.
- We want a partnership with support services and not a battleground. Families live this every day, and we are not yet feeling a change.

**This strategy should be read alongside the following supporting documents:**





# Legislation and the national context

The SEND Code of Practice provides statutory guidance on duties, policies, and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations and applies to England.

The Code of Practice uses the word 'must' to outline a statutory requirement under primary legislation, regulations, or case law. Local area partners must have regard to the Code of Practice when taking a decision.

Where the Code of Practice uses the word 'should' it means that the guidance is considered and that those Local Area Partners will be expected to explain any departure from it.

In March 2023, the Government published the SEND and AP Improvement Plan (Right Support, Right Place, Right Time). This sets out actions that the Government will be taking to address three key challenges:

- Improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision
- Making it an easier and more positive experience for children, young people and their families to navigate the SEND system
- Achieving value for money within the SEND system

The SEND and AP Improvement Plan sets out proposals to develop a national SEND and AP system with agreed National Standards being developed to improve consistency in early identification of needs and the types of support that will be ordinarily available to respond to children's needs. The Government's plan is to develop this system and these standards between 2023 and the end of 2025, so the delivery of Somerset's SEND Strategy will align with and respond to these developments nationally.

# Somerset - the local context

There has been a strong focus on improving SEND services and provision in Somerset in recent years. From 2020 to 2022 – throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Somerset SEND Partnership has worked together to deliver an ambitious programme (the Written Statement of Action) to address weaknesses that were identified by OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission when they inspected Somerset's SEND system in March 2020. This programme focused on improving our culture of inclusion and collaboration, strengthening joint commissioning, inclusive education and communities, and better assessment and planning.

In May 2022 the Partnership asked the Local Government Association (LGA) to review progress in improving SEND services. The LGA review recognised the significant progress that the Somerset SEND Partnership had made since 2020. Nevertheless, the Review recognised that there was still more to be done, **and it made the following recommendations:**

- Partnership leaders should develop and communicate a clear vision and strategy with children and young people's outcomes at its heart.
- Be ambitious and aspirational for children with additional needs from the start. Use the wider organisational changes across local government and the NHS to put children and young people centre stage.
- Build an environment of trust and collaboration by improving the quality and regularity of the dialogue with children, families, and professionals.
- Strengthen the local area data set to identify local need, inform performance, address early identification, and measure outcomes.
- Develop a system wide/ integrated universal early help offer for social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) and autism.
- Develop a clear understanding of the resources available and how they are accessed by both professionals and parents, building on the lived experiences of parents.
- Improve the level of understanding within the wider workforce of the partnership regarding neurodevelopment.
- Embed (and resource) the **Graduated Response approach**.
- Continue to strengthen the voice of children and young people to raise aspirations and evaluate success.
- Develop a comprehensive SEND partnership workforce strategy.

From 28 November to 1 December 2022, OFSTED and CQC undertook a revisit to Somerset to assess progress since their 2020 inspection. They reported that the area had made sufficient progress in addressing seven of the nine areas of weakness identified in the 2020 inspection.

The report stated that, "leaders across the partnership worked to resolve their differences and come together to tackle widespread weaknesses". The report noted improvements in how services work together, the offer services available and improved access to support for children and young people.



## Better working together

- Involvement of parent carers in strategic developments
- Spirit of collaboration, mutual trust and support
- System performance information
- Comprehensive strategic needs assessment

## Better offer of services

- Autism pathway
- Specialist education provision
- Education, health and care plans
- Joint commissioning of SEND Information and Advice Service

## Better access to support

- Therapy services
- Reduced waiting times for Portage
- Access to social care advice and support
- Schools taking lead on EHC requests

The revisit identified that there are two areas where we have not yet made sufficient progress. Firstly, there is still more to be done to improve to consistency of practice in identifying and supporting children with SEND in all schools and settings across Somerset. What works well for some children and young people, doesn't always happen for all those who need it. Secondly, there are still too many children and young people with SEND in Somerset who miss out on education due to high rates of exclusion and poor inclusive practice.

The SEND Partnership has developed a plan to address these areas, and these will remain a focus as part of this strategy.

This strategy is about the future of SEND in Somerset – where we go next, and how we build upon the progress that we have made. In developing the Strategy we have taken time to take stock, review where we are and challenge ourselves about what we need to do next.

# Somerset SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

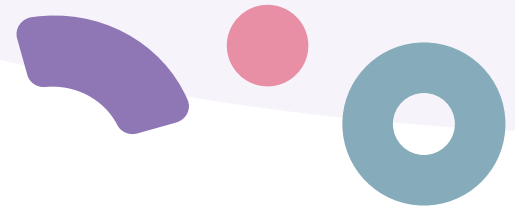
A Joint strategic needs assessment is based on evidence and research and describes the SEND services currently available to children and young people with SEND in Somerset. It is published by both Somerset Council and NHS Somerset.

The SEND JSNA was completed during May - June 2022. **The findings can be summarised as follows:**

- In January 2022 there were approximately 14,500 children and young people living in Somerset identified with SEND, of which over 4,000 had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- In Somerset 24% of EHCPs state that the child or young person's primary need is Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). Nationally this is 15% of all EHCPs.
- This is also reflected in Somerset health service measures, such as higher than average rates of self-harm, alcohol related and substance misuse admissions to hospital.
- In Somerset rates of permanent exclusion and suspension are higher than national average rates. Those with SEMH needs are more likely to be excluded from school.
- As a category of need, SEMH includes a variety conditions and can be short lived as other needs are identified such as neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g. autism) or moderate learning difficulties.
- The number of people with an SEMH need raises the importance of ensuring accurate and early identification. Progressing neurodevelopmental pathways and embedding the graduated response tool will be key moving forward.
- A higher than average number of children and young people with an EHCP have speech, language, and communication difficulties as their primary need. Data is being looked at in more depth to allow us to fully understand this so that resources such as Speech and Language Therapy are available in the right places.
- The data highlights the need for making sure access to appropriate help is local to the families that need it.
- Children living in the most deprived neighbourhoods of Somerset are more than twice as likely to have identified SEND than those living in the least deprived areas. However, there appears to be little association between income deprivation and Autistic Spectrum Condition or Specific Learning Difficulty. This should be explored when targeting services at a local level.







- The analysis shows that around 50% of people with learning disabilities also have a physical health condition.
- In Somerset, boys outnumber girls across most types of need. This is most prevalent in Autistic Spectrum Disorder (78% boys) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (70% boys). Children, young people and parents tell us that girls sometimes remain undiagnosed or overlooked due to the different ways the condition may present itself in girls. When understanding the effectiveness of the graduated response this may need further research.
- In Somerset, nearly half (47%) of Children Looked After (CLA) have an EHCP. This is above the national average rate of 29%. Partners should seek to understand what might work for Somerset to ensure these children and young people are supported effectively.
- The data we have available for the effectiveness of services which prepare our children and young people for adulthood requires improvement. We have good information regarding the education and training outcomes, but very little with regards to their independent living skills, such as how many transition effectively to adult services and how many are able to live independently when the time is right.
- Listening to the voice of children, young people and their families is vital to ensure services are effectively meeting the identified needs. Parent carers, or children and young people themselves are the experts in their lives and the support they may need.