



Local partnership maturity assessment guidance



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Introduction

The Secretary of State for Education set out 5 principles for special educational needs and disability (SEND) reform in her [letter to the Chair of the Education Select Committee](#) in October.

Principles for SEND reform

1. **Early.** Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. This will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse, instead intervening upstream, earlier in children's lives when this can have most impact.
2. **Local.** Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting children and young people with the most complex needs.
3. **Fair.** Every school should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children in mainstream, special or Alternative Provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.
4. **Effective.** Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children.
5. **Shared.** Education, health and care services should work in partnership with one another, local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children.

In its upcoming schools white paper, the government will set out reforms of the current SEND system to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The government's plan is to ensure opportunity for all by delivering an excellent, inclusive education for every child with a world class curriculum and highly trained, expert teachers. This will be based on an inclusive mainstream system, with specialist support for children that need it, and improved, efficient and effective local delivery.

The role of a local SEND and AP partnership¹

The Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England ask that all SEND and AP partnerships (which should include local authorities, integrated care boards, education providers and representatives of families and children and young people) come together collaboratively to understand and evaluate the capability and maturity of their current practice.

To support this, we recommend using this guidance as a structured way to evaluate and enhance your current approach. This will help lay the foundations of effective, trusting local partnerships that are crucial for enabling the other shifts that strengthen the whole system focus on inclusion, as shown below. We recognise that many of you already have tools for evaluating your systems and practice, but we believe that having a consistent, shared framework with common language will support a national conversation in a complex system.

Foundations of effective and trusting local partnership for inclusion

Putting in place the system conditions for leadership and governance across the local area to ensure that changes are based on co-production across partners, including the voices of children, young people, and their parents and carers.

Shared ways of working to direct resources to needs across the local area

Align operations across the local area to reduce fragmentation, ensuring partners work towards a shared vision for inclusion. This includes integrating data, workforce strategy, funding and establishing a clear operating model for supporting settings.

Support for mainstream settings and practitioners to meet needs

Shift focus from reactive statutory support toward collaborative work with early years settings, schools and further education providers. Create a shared understanding of and commitment to inclusive practice, while building system capacity to identify needs and provide support.

¹ The 'SEND and AP partnership' is a term used to describe the collective local partners who should be involved in the strategic planning and commissioning of the statutory Local Offer of services and provision for children and young people with SEND, as set out in Chapter 3 and 4 of the SEND Code of Practice

The DfE and NHS England encourages all local area partnerships to use the partnership maturity assessment descriptors to inform their reflection and capture their assessment and evidence in the accompanying Local Partnership Maturity Tool. This will help local partnerships understand what effective practice looks like – not only when planning and commissioning support that enables settings to better identify and meet special education needs but also ensuring effective sufficiency planning and the join up required across education, health and care. It includes 7 key pillars, which put outcomes of children and young people and their families at the heart of strategic planning and commissioning.

The descriptors for each principle have been developed through consultation with key stakeholders from local authorities, health, social care, and education sectors, and will support you to measure existing local partnership arrangements and practices against a scale of maturity ('not yet emerging', 'emerging', 'developing', 'maturing').

How to use the guidance and the tool as a local partnership

DfE and NHS England encourage SEND and AP partnerships to:

- review the toolkit and assess current practice against the maturity scales for each principle and to consider how they are embedded in their local area to support the conditions for inclusion in mainstream settings. (For principle 5, please rate these for education, health, and care)
- discuss the actions required to move along the maturity scale

This activity will enable local partnerships to understand the activity required to support the system shift towards inclusion and enable more children and young people's needs to be met within a mainstream setting. The Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool contains summaries of the maturity descriptors in this guidance and can be used to guide your assessment.

Where the local partnership considers that they are not yet 'emerging' they will need to assess themselves accordingly, along with plans for improvement.

How assessments will inform DfE's work with local areas on SEND improvement and reform

The SEND Local Partnership Maturity Assessment will form a vital foundation for implementing SEND reforms in a way that reflects areas' unique contexts, is underpinned by data and evidence and delivers improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families. This will be an integral part of the Local SEND Reform Plan we will ask you to develop in the new year.

The SEND and AP partnership should jointly consider the 7 pillars:

Pillar 1: Co-production with parents and carers and Children and Young People

Pillar 2: Effective system leadership and governance

**Pillar 3: Accurate understanding of needs through effective use of data
(Understanding and evidencing the needs of children and young people with SEND and children and young people who may benefit from AP)**

Pillar 4: High Quality Service Delivery at universal, targeted and specialist level to promote inclusion

Pillar 5: Effective partnerships working across education, health and social care

Pillar 6: Skilled workforce across the partnership

Pillar 7: Targeted, judicious and sustainable use of resources including sufficiency, place planning and capital

Pillar 1: Co-production with parents and carers, and children and young people

Co-production ensures a better understanding of the current experiences and outcomes of parents, carers, children and young people, and their future needs, helping to put their needs at the centre of decision making.

The SEND and AP partnership should ensure that parents, carers, children and young people are central and equal partners, and that local partnerships give regard to the importance of them participating as fully as possible in decisions and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions.

We would expect the local partnership to engage families through parent carer forums (PCF), young people's forums and other local groups in order to shape and support improvement to practices and provide improved parent carer engagement across all services. (Note: Wherever we make reference to a PCF in this document this can also apply to other representative parent and carer groups that might run in the local area.)

This should be reflected when creating and designing, planning, delivering, commissioning, and reviewing and monitoring support and services a local area provides to achieve shared outcomes. Embedded properly, co-production can build parental trust in the system and prevent disagreements arising. Contact provides [guidance for PCF engagement with local authorities](#).

Pillar 1: Co-production with parents and carers and children and young people		
Emerging	Developing	Maturing
The area has a parent carer forum (PCF) that has a formalised structure but is not always supported to actively engage with local partners or is a recent newly formed forum.	The area has an active, effective, and sustainable PCF. It has a good relationship with most partners and is largely representative of the local area. The local partnership has begun reaching out to seldom heard groups of parents and carers.	The area has an active PCF which meets regularly with the system partner. It has wide reach with a diverse make-up of membership which is representative of the local area and runs a variety of engagement methods for families to gather views and feedback.

<p>The PCF strategic leads of the local PCF do not regularly attend partnership board meetings and there is limited engagement.</p>	<p>The PCF strategic leads regularly attend and engage with partnership board meetings, ensuring discussions are fed back to PCF members at the earliest opportunity.</p>	<p>There is clear evidence that PCF representatives contribute substantively to the SEND and AP partnership board.</p>
<p>Partnership board meetings have limited accessibility for parents and carers (for example sessions are not delivered in a variety of ways or at varying times to enable attendance.)</p>	<p>Partnership board meetings are fully accessible to parents and carers and clear attempts are made to encourage and support their participation.</p>	<p>The partnership actively considers and addresses the training needs of all partners to support and develop their engagement in the partnership.</p>
<p>The partnership is beginning to work with parents and carers to establish the aims of their participation, mark progress, and build trust, but this has not fully evolved.</p>	<p>Parents and carers are part of assessing local need and strategic planning documents are co-produced with the PCF as part of the partnership. This includes feedback from parents and carers who benefit from AP.</p>	<p>The partnership ensures strategic planning documents are co-produced and extensively reviewed with a broad range of parents and carers.</p>
<p>The views and experiences of parents and carers are considered at times. Individual AP settings may work with parents and carers on an ad hoc basis.</p>	<p>Local SEND and AP youth forums or user groups are engaged with throughout planning and delivery.</p>	<p>There are strong feedback mechanisms to ensure parents and carers know how their views influence decisions, with an emphasis on 'you said, we did', that closes the feedback loop</p>

		and shows the impact of feedback and engagement.
There is little evidence that parents and professionals see outcomes at the core of decision making and monitoring.	There is evidence that parents and professionals see outcomes at the core of decision making and monitoring	There is strong evidence of outcomes being broken down in a tangible, measurable way and at the core of decision making and monitoring.
There are limited opportunities for discussion between local partnerships and their families.	Communication channels between local partnerships and their families exist but are underused.	Communication between local partnerships and their families is transparent, regular, well-planned and reaches seldom heard groups allowing feedback to be received.
Schools are beginning to engage with parents and carers, but a clear approach of co-production has not yet been fully embedded as best practice.	Schools are actively collaborating with parents and carers and starting to adopt co-production principles. There is growing awareness and some structured efforts to involve families in decision-making.	Schools consistently co-produce with parents and carers, with embedded structures and feedback mechanisms to ensure that parents and carers know how their views influence school policies and practices.

Pillar 1b: Engagement with children and young people

Pillar 1b: Engagement with children and young people		
Emerging	Developing	Maturing
The partnership is beginning to work with children and young people to establish the aims of their participation, mark progress, and build trust, but this has not fully evolved.	Children and young people's voices are part of assessing local need and strategic planning documents are co-produced. This includes feedback from children and young people who benefit from AP.	The partnership ensures strategic planning documents are co-produced and extensively reviewed with a broad range of children and young people.
The views and experiences of children and young people are considered at times but there are limited structured feedback mechanisms.	Local SEND and AP youth forums or user groups are engaged with throughout planning and delivery.	There are strong feedback mechanisms to ensure that children, young people, and parents and carers know how their views influence decisions, with an emphasis on 'you said, we did', that closes the feedback loop and shows the impact of feedback and engagement.
There is little evidence that children and young people and professionals see outcomes as being at the core of decision making and monitoring.	There is evidence that children and young people and professionals see outcomes as being at the core of decision making and monitoring.	There is strong evidence of outcomes being broken down in a tangible, measurable way and at the core of decision making and monitoring.

<p>There are limited opportunities for discussion between local partnerships and children and young people and their families.</p>	<p>Communication channels between local partnerships and children and young people and their families exist but are underused.</p>	<p>Communication between local partnerships and children and young people and their families is transparent, regular, well-planned and reaches seldom heard groups allowing feedback to be received.</p>
<p>Schools are beginning to engage with children and young people, but a clear approach of co-production has not yet been fully embedded as best practice.</p>	<p>Schools are actively collaborating with children and young people and starting to adopt co-production principles. There is growing awareness and some structured efforts to involve families in decision-making.</p>	<p>Schools consistently co-produce with children and young people, with embedded structures and feedback mechanisms to ensure that children and young people know how their views influence school policies and practices.</p>

Pillar 2: Effective system leadership and governance

Effective leadership at all levels across the partnership is an essential foundation for improvement in the SEND system. This includes leadership at the highest level: chief executives (from education, health, social care and the parent carer forum); political leaders; directors of services; leaders of SEND systems and managers of services for children with SEND.

Leaders from across the partnership should be clear about their collective and individual responsibilities, with governance structures clearly defined and understood by all partners. These structures must provide clarity on how strategic and operational decisions are made and how they influence implementation.

Delivering services and provision for children and young people with SEND effectively involves processes and decisions at a variety of levels. The SEND and AP partnership should be responsible for the commissioning cycle and ensure that:

- the services commissioned are well suited to the needs of the overall group of children and young people with SEND
- the quality of the service or provision delivers the best outcome for the children and young people they support
- a wide range of feedback is sought regularly or continuously – and on ongoing basis – to ensure that the services commissioned meet the needs of the majority who need early support
- children and young people are able to access services that meet their needs

This means there should be collaboration and review structures that enable partnership working at both individual and strategic levels, supported by feedback pathways that ensure strategic decisions are informed by frontline practice. These structures should promote shared ownership, where all partners feel collectively responsible for outcomes and are empowered to contribute meaningfully to system-wide, active decision making.

Pillar 2: Effective system leadership and governance		
Emerging	Developing	Maturing
Across the local area governance structures and membership are not fully established, and local partners are unclear where and how decisions are made	Local area governance structures and membership are established but not fully functioning. There is a lack of clarity about operational governance and how it	There are clear local area governance structures understood by all local partners for operational and strategic governance which are used to make strategic

<p>about SEND and AP provision and services.</p>	<p>reports into the SEND strategic governance on aspects of improvement delivery.</p>	<p>and operational decisions to deliver improvements.</p> <p>Leaders in key positions have a strong understanding of the SEND system and their individual and collective responsibility.</p>
<p>Some leaders across the partnership are new to post or interim and still developing understanding of the local SEND system to influence change and commission services.</p> <p>Some committees or forums are new and yet to be embedded in local systems.</p>	<p>Stable and knowledgeable leadership at all levels across the partnership is working with the wider system to influence collective responsibility.</p> <p>Governance structure clearly established but not all partners fully understand their responsibility in implementing change although open to working towards this.</p>	<p>All leaders across the partnership understand how to effect change and use the most appropriate forum to stimulate system improvement.</p> <p>Ongoing improvements are made to ensure the right people are involved at the right level to be able to make decisions.</p>
<p>The local partnership uses a limited range of quantitative and qualitative data to actively create cycles of review.</p>	<p>The local partnership reviews strategic planning documents consistently, drawing on the wide range of local data sets to inform the planning and delivery of services and the monitoring of how well services have secured those outcomes.</p>	<p>The local partnership actively seeks data and information which evaluates the services and provision outlined in strategic planning documents and uses this to make improvements.</p>

<p>The local partnership reviews the effectiveness of strategic planning documents on an annual basis.</p>	<p>The local partnership gathers feedback from a wide range of groups including, children, young people, parents and carers and families, schools including AP settings, early years settings, further education and training providers, and is using this to identify gaps in provision.</p>	<p>Feedback is gathered and shared at SEND and AP partnership board meetings where it is considered and acted upon.</p>
<p>The local partnership reviews strategic planning documents annually, but the wider peer reviews from other local authorities are not actively sought.</p>	<p>The local partnership is beginning to consider how it can work with other local areas to share ideas and peer-review practice.</p>	<p>There are established peer-review arrangements between local and regional areas with clear evidence this improves outcomes for children and young people with SEND.</p>
<p>Communication identified as an area for improvement.</p>	<p>Communication channels established but still needs improving for some parts of the system.</p>	<p>Effective communication to all parts of the SEND system.</p>
<p>Schools and the Schools Forum have limited understanding of their role in commissioning and how their decisions impact wider system outcomes. Decisions are being made as</p>	<p>Schools and the Schools Forum are beginning to engage with commissioning conversations and understand their role in shaping provision. There is growing confidence among practitioners, but</p>	<p>Schools are active commissioners, taking ownership of outreach and support services. Leadership is distributed across the system, not just top-down from LAs. There is shared ownership of decisions, with</p>

<p>'supportive' rather than 'active' decisions.</p>	<p>relationships with local authorities and DfE in commissioning roles are still being clarified.</p>	<p>schools exhausting appropriate local options before escalating. Practitioner confidence is high, and commissioning relationships with local authorities and DfE are well understood and embedded.</p>
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Pillar 3: Accurate understanding of needs and experiences of children and young people through effective use of quantitative and qualitative data

The partnership should work collaboratively to establish a shared understanding of how well the services and provision available meet the current and future special educational and health and social care needs of the area's 0 to 25 population, including those who may benefit from AP. The better the understanding of the area's current practice and future needs, the more informed commissioning will be.

Having a good analytical process to identify gaps between local needs and levels of provision is vital. This will involve gathering, collating and analysing a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and evidence.

The local SEND and AP partnership should have a good understanding of the existing performance and sufficiency of the local SEND and AP system, including being able to evidence understanding of trends in need, demand, supply and workforce, integrated care board health data using SEND quality assurance mechanisms and tools such as [SEND Quality Assurance Framework](#). There must be effective ways to gather data on parental confidence and satisfaction in different services for children and young people with SEND. Local partnerships must work with mainstream settings in their shared ambition to develop inclusive systems to appropriately meet children's needs.

Alongside its role in delivering direct provision for children and young people where that is necessary, the local partnership will commission the special school and AP sector to provide outreach support and expertise.

To improve maturity of practice in this area, the local partnership should consider the depth and sophistication of their analysis, any gaps in evidence, the data capabilities within their workforce and the investment in qualitative evidence gathering to support understanding.

Pillar 3: Accurate understanding of needs and experiences of children and young people through effective use of quantitative and qualitative data.		
Emerging	Developing	Maturing
Data is collected but not consistently used to inform decisions.	There is an understanding of current levels of need and historic trends.	Shared, evidence-based vision informs priorities and future projections.

		Diagnostic processes guide decisions on service capacity and commissioning.
The local area has a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) which has been completed using quantitative data from limited sources across education, health and social care.	A broad range of quantitative data sources are regularly used to inform strategic planning. The JSNA is completed using a range of data sources.	The JSNA and joint health and well-being strategy have a clear focus on SEND and demonstrate that local leaders understand the needs of their SEND population.
Some attempt has been made to gather qualitative data to inform strategic planning (for example, parents' views).	Qualitative data is actively collected from important partners (for example, ICBs and health provider organisations, PCFs, other parent groups and schools).	High-quality data (quantitative and qualitative) is systematically gathered from across the partnership to inform strategic planning. Case reviews are used to answer specific diagnostic questions. Qualitative data, such as lived experience and case studies, are systematically gathered and used to complement quantitative analysis.
Data analysis techniques are simple and largely descriptive.	Data analysis techniques are more robust but still lack in-depth analysis.	There is depth and sophistication to data analysis techniques (for example, data matching, regression analysis, reviewing distributions of provision types alongside need.)

Local partnerships use a limited range of data when informing decision and monitoring outcomes.	Local partnerships use publicly available data to monitor their performance and develop robust and evidence-based outcomes for children and young people.	Local partnerships effectively use a broad range of qualitative and quantitative data in strategic planning with clear metrics for success providing accountability for progress. There are clear metrics that allow children and young people, and their families to access information on the partnership's progress.
Data sharing is adequate but only reviewed periodically.	Data sharing across health, social care, and education is regular.	Data sharing is strong and integrated across sectors and with other areas.
The local authority and integrated care board understands the types of placements it has made for children and young people with education health and care plans (EHCPs).	The local partnership is actively reviewing the specialist provision for quality, affordability, and suitability.	The local partnership engages the full range of education providers in discussions about current and future need for specialist provision and has a clear plan for how special school provision including outreach can play a key part in the SEND system.
There is limited evidence of local authority and integrated care board collaboration on health needs in education placements.	There is evidence that the local authority and ICB work to ensure there is adequate support and provision for children's	The local authority and integrated care board work closely to ensure there is adequate support, provision and oversight of children's health

	health needs within their education placements.	needs within their education placements.
The local authority understands the types of provision available for pupils who need specialist provision.	The local partnership is actively reviewing the specialist provisions available to the local authority – including quality, affordability, sufficiency and suitability for all children and young people who need to access it.	The local partnership engages the full range of education providers in discussions about current and future need and has a clear provision plan for how specialist provision can play a key part in the SEND and AP system. There are clear and transparent processes for changes to provision (for example, expansion or reduction in places or change in the types of provision).
Schools show some understanding of children and young people needs, but responses are inconsistent.	Schools gather structured evidence and adapt approaches to individual needs.	Schools have robust, co-produced systems to understand and respond to children and young people's needs.
The SEND local offer is up to date and legally compliant.	The SEND local offer is compliant, co-produced, and gaps are being addressed.	The SEND local offer is up to date, legally compliant, co-produced, highly regarded and well matched to local needs.

Pillar 4: High quality service delivery at universal, targeted and specialist levels to promote inclusion

Most children and young people can have their needs met through ordinarily available provision, without the need to rely on requiring an EHCP or a placement in specialist provision to access the support they need. Local SEND and AP partnerships should strive for high-quality mainstream provision where children and young people have access to an engaging, relevant and inclusive curriculum. They should feel a sense of belonging in their school and classroom, have their needs identified early, and receive prompt, evidence-based and targeted support when they need it. The partnership will have an established education workforce development offer that enables education settings to develop their skills in early identification and support, including training and development opportunities for education, care and health professionals.

Pillar 4: High-quality service delivery at universal, targeted and specialist levels to promote inclusion		
Emerging	Developing	Maturing
Local partners have a limited and fragmented understanding of children and young people's needs. Identification often relies on formal medical diagnoses, and pathways for support are unclear or inconsistent across education settings	Local partners share a growing understanding of needs and begin to use educational evidence alongside health input. Pathways for support are becoming clearer, but confidence in identifying needs without a medical diagnosis is still developing and varies between settings	Local partners have a deep shared understanding and confidence across education partners to identify children and young people's needs and pathways to provide support without waiting for medical diagnoses.
Schools have some evidence of understanding children's needs	Schools have begun to gather structured evidence of children and young people's needs and have adapted both individually focused and whole-school approaches to meeting those needs. This includes some input from children and young people and parents or carers.	Schools have robust systems in place to evidence their understanding of children and young people's needs and consistently tailor responses within the setting, both at an individual and a whole-school level. These systems are co-produced with children, young people and families and inform strategic planning.
Local provision caters for a spectrum of needs and there	An up-to-date statement of ordinarily available	Local partners have a strong understanding of what should

<p>are some effective routes for accessing different levels of support, though gaps remain.</p> <p>There are different interpretations of what ordinarily available provision looks like, resulting in disparities of outcomes across the area.</p>	<p>provision, agreed by local partners, is available as part of the local offer.</p> <p>Local partnerships are developing shared clarity on what good evidence-based provision looks like, who is responsible for paying for it and from which budgets. It is clear how the AP system in the area intersects with the ordinarily available provision offer.</p>	<p>be ordinarily available in every local education and training setting (as well as health and social care), who specifically should be paying for it, and are working together effectively to deliver and improve this.</p> <p>This includes educating a higher proportion of SEND children and young people in mainstream providers over time. An effective AP tier 1 outreach service is available to support children and young people and staff in mainstream settings.</p>
<p>There is an over-reliance on specialist settings for children and young people with an EHCP. Parents lack confidence in the mainstream offer.</p> <p>There is an over-reliance on long-term AP placements, with little sustained reintegration into mainstream schools.</p>	<p>Local partners have identified strategies to improve quality-first teaching in mainstream settings, with input from health and education specialists, and to use evidence-based SEN support and interventions to enable more needs to be met without the need for EHCPs.</p> <p>There is an understanding of the 3-tier AP system. Fair access protocols are in place to support reintegration from AP into mainstream schools, but they are not yet applied consistently.</p>	<p>Quality-first teaching in mainstream settings, combined with evidence-based SEN support and early engagement with parents, is helping to build knowledge and confidence in mainstream schools and SEN provision. This is resulting in both fewer children and young people requiring an EHCP and more children and young people being educated in mainstream settings. The AP system facilitates sustained reintegration into mainstream schools alongside a strong tier 1 offer in mainstream settings.</p>
<p>SENCO networks and other forums may meet regularly but there is limited engagement with local partners.</p>	<p>Regular SENCO networks and other forums provide opportunities for collaboration across partners.</p>	<p>Regular SENCO networks and other forums provide opportunities for collaboration across partners.</p>

<p>Local partnerships use a limited range of data when informing decisions and monitoring outcomes.</p>	<p>Local partnerships use publicly available data to monitor their performance and develop robust and evidence-based outcomes for children and young people.</p>	<p>Local partnerships make effective use of a broad range of qualitative and quantitative data in strategic planning, supported by clear success metrics that provide accountability for progress.</p>
<p>Decision-making and practice relating to statutory decisions is an area for improvement. There is a plan in place but little evidence of improvement to date.</p> <p>Root cause analysis is in its early stages.</p>	<p>Decision-making and practice relating to statutory decisions is an area for improvement, but there is evidence of effective quality assurance and positive improvement.</p> <p>Root cause analysis has informed improvement planning.</p>	<p>Decision-making and practice relating to statutory decisions is consistent, timely and resulting plans are of high quality.</p>
<p>Transition planning in place but practice still needs developing, including Preparation for Adulthood (PfA).</p>	<p>Local partners contribute to some effective transition planning and offer opportunities to develop practice further, including Preparation for Adulthood (PfA). The local PfA network is included in local area planning processes.</p>	<p>There is strong transition planning for all children and young people with SEND across all phases of education. The local Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) network is a key driver in local area planning processes.</p>
<p>A high proportion of EHCPs are in special schools but there is some improvement in the number or percentage of children and young people attending their mainstream settings regularly.</p> <p>There is limited analysis and evidence of progress.</p>	<p>Improvement in the percentage of EHCPs in mainstream, with regular attendance comparable to mainstream peers.</p> <p>Analysis shows evidence that children and young people are able to participate and progress.</p>	<p>A high percentage of EHCPs are in mainstream. There is a developed analysis of attendance for children and young people with SEND in comparison with non-SEND peers and this shows positive trends.</p> <p>There is analysis of attendance and progress, along with evidence that most children and young people enjoy their education.</p>

<p>Care services are planning to develop family support but have yet to integrate it into the SEND local offer.</p> <p>Local authorities and their partners are planning to transform family support services in line with the expectations of the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme – which aims to rebalance the children’s care system toward earlier intervention.</p>	<p>Care services have a sufficient and clearly defined offer of support for families of disabled children, including accessible short breaks.</p> <p>Local authorities are starting to embed reforms to Family Help, multi-agency child protection and family group decision making as part of the FFP programme.</p>	<p>Care services have a strong and clearly defined offer of support for families of disabled children, including accessible short breaks.</p> <p>Local authorities have embedded the reforms being delivered through the FFP programme. There is a clearly defined early intervention offer to support families with a range of needs, including disabled children.</p>
<p>Local authorities are in the process of developing family hubs, including developing links with health partners, integrated care boards and early years settings.</p>	<p>Local authorities have developed Family Hubs. Family Hub staff are knowledgeable and can refer parents of children with additional needs to appropriate services and specialist support. There are established relationships with health partners, integrated care boards and early years settings.</p>	<p>Family Hubs have a children and families professional specifically trained in working to support inclusion for children with additional needs – helping parents to navigate services, including making links to early years settings and health services. Family support staff working in hubs are trained in the early identification of children who may be in need of support.</p>
<p>Schools are beginning to explore available resources across education and health but there is not yet an embedded strategic approach. There is some specialist support, but this is not consistently identified or integrated by individual school settings. There is some awareness of the shared responsibility with the wider system for workforce</p>	<p>Schools are increasingly using available resources across education and health to build capacity and are starting to integrate appropriate specialist support at a whole-school level. There is growing collaboration with the wider system to understand workforce strategy.</p>	<p>Schools strategically use all available resources across education and health to build capacity and have embedded specialist support within their systems at a whole-school level. There is a clear, shared responsibility with the wider system to maximise workforce resources through a coordinated local area workforce strategy.</p>

<p>planning but there is scope for this to grow.</p>		
<p>Schools are unclear on the commissioning approach and do not see outcomes as being at the core of decision making and monitoring by the local partnership. Tiered support is inconsistent, and universal provision could be strengthened.</p>	<p>Schools recognise the local partnership’s role in outcome-based accountability supporting broader system tiers. There is growing emphasis on strengthening universal provision before escalation, and some turnaround models (such as in-year fair access) are in place.</p>	<p>Schools are confident that the local partnership sets a high standard for outcomes-based accountability. Tiered support is robust, with strong universal foundations and effective turnaround models. The local partnership focuses on outcomes, not just processes, with a shared ambition for excellence.</p>

Pillar 5: Effective partnership working across education, health and social care

Creating collaborative relationships is vital for an effective local SEND and AP partnership that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND and in need of AP. The local partnership should be greater than the sum of its parts. All members should see themselves as collectively responsible for ensuring there are good services and provision for children and young people with SEND and those requiring AP across the local area. This will mean developing a shared vision and plan for the way the cohort's needs are met and considering the best way to deliver this vision.

Because of the wide range of needs, many different bodies need to be involved and strong partnership working, backed up by clear responsibilities and accountability systems, is essential if different agencies are to work together effectively in the interests of children, young people and their families. Partnership working should recognise how one partner's ability to fulfil its responsibilities impacts the others.

Positive working relationships are the foundation of effective partnerships. Key partners – especially senior leaders across education, health and care – should prioritise investing time in building strong relationships with each other, as they are best placed to support the SEND and AP partnership in achieving its objectives. Succession planning is critical to maintaining these strong relationships when there are changes in personnel.

Pillar 5: Effective partnership working across education, health and social care		
Emerging	Developing	Maturing
The most recent Ofsted or Care Quality Commission (CQC) local area inspection judged the relationship and working arrangements between local sectors as an area for improvement following a judgement of inconsistent or systemic failings.	The most recent Ofsted or CQC local area inspection judged the relationship or working arrangements between local sectors as an area for improvement following a judgement of 'inconsistent'.	The most recent Ofsted or CQC local area inspection judged the relationship and working arrangements between local sectors as being effective following a judgment of consistently positive experiences or a judgement of 'inconsistent', but where this was not an area for improvement.

<p>There are limited processes or forums that enable leaders across education, health and care to work effectively together. This limits transparency and collaboration in areas such as place planning, transition planning, improving 'ordinarily available' provision, and supporting the appropriate movement of children and young people, where needed.</p>	<p>Leaders across education, health and care work closely to develop processes that ensure transparent and effective place planning, transition planning, 'ordinarily available' provision improvement, and appropriate support for moving children and young people where needed.</p>	<p>There is evidence that the processes developed by leaders across education, health and care have a positive impact on children's and young people's outcomes and parent, carer or family experiences in effective place planning, transition planning, improving 'ordinarily available' provision in mainstream schools (aiming to educate more children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools), and appropriate movements of children and young people, where needed.</p>
<p>Shared discussions about workforce development are limited or in their early stages.</p>	<p>There is a shared understanding of the workforce strategy across partners.</p>	<p>There is a developed workforce strategy across the partnership, which is regularly reviewed.</p>
<p>There is little evidence of trusting and respectful relationships within the local partnership.</p>	<p>Strong relationships are beginning to emerge, with trust and respect developing. However, collective accountability has not yet been established.</p>	<p>There is strong evidence that relationships have been strengthened, fostering respect and trust, and continue to thrive. These relationships have enabled genuine collective accountability.</p>

<p>There is limited collaboration between the partnership when developing place planning and specialist workforce strategies for early years settings.</p>	<p>The partnership is beginning to effectively collaborate to inform place planning and specialist workforce strategies for early years settings.</p>	<p>Strong collaboration between the partnership informs detailed place planning and specialist workforce strategies for early years settings.</p>
<p>Some setting types are represented on SEND and AP partnership boards, and are involved in producing the local offer, but there are varying levels of engagement.</p>	<p>All setting types, including AP, post-16, and early years are not only represented but actively engaging with the work of the local partnership and are consulted on aspects of the local offer.</p>	<p>All setting types, including AP, post-16 and early years providers feel that their interests are represented on the SEND and AP partnership board. They know how to feed into strategic planning discussions and effectively report back to those who they represent.</p>
<p>There are limited processes or forums by which education leaders and local partners can work effectively together to ensure transparent and effective place planning, transition planning, 'ordinarily available' provision improvement, and supporting for appropriate movements of children and young people, where needed.</p>	<p>Education leaders work closely with local partners to develop processes for ensuring transparent and effective place planning, transition planning, 'ordinarily available' provision improvement, and support for appropriate movements of children and young people, where needed.</p>	<p>There is evidence that the processes developed by education leaders and local partners are having a positive impact on children's and young people's outcomes and experiences. The processes support effective place planning, transition planning, improvements to 'ordinarily available' provision in mainstream schools (with the aim of educating more SEND children and young people in mainstream</p>

		schools) and appropriate movements of children and young people where needed.
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Pillar 6: Skilled workforce across education, health and social care

The workforce operating within the SEND system spans a diverse range of organisations, professional settings, and disciplines. This creates complexity that makes coordination, development, and support of these professionals challenging.

Yet the effectiveness and sustainability of any local SEND system depends on the quality of everyday interactions between practitioners and families. To reach the right standard, the workforce must have the knowledge, skills, and professional knowledge required to manage these interactions with confidence and competence.

A proactive and structured approach to workforce communication and engagement is essential. The [SEND training assurance framework](#) enables all health organisation to plan and monitor SEND training requirements across their workforce. This includes establishing regular opportunities for practitioners—both within their existing roles and across multidisciplinary teams—to convene, share and refine practice, exchange insights, and receive timely updates. Such efforts are essential to fostering a cohesive and informed workforce capable of delivering high-quality support to children and families within the SEND system.

Pillar 6: Skilled workforce across local authority, education settings, health and social care			
Not yet emerging	Emerging	Developing	Maturing
	Workforce planning is reactive rather than strategic, with high turnover or reliance on temporary staff impacting service delivery.	Leaders recognise the importance of a stable workforce and are beginning to implement strategies to address recruitment and retention challenges.	Leaders prioritise a stable and permanent workforce and have a workforce strategy which takes account of current and future demand for services.
	Training and supervision for the local area workforce	The local area workforce has access to training	The local area workforce is well-trained, regularly updated, appropriately

	are limited or inconsistent. Staff may lack confidence in managing complex cases or promoting inclusive practice.	and some supervision, but this is not yet consistent across all services. Support for decision-making and inclusive practice is improving but varies in quality.	supported and managed and supervised (decision making, quality of casework, managing difficult conversations, promoting inclusive practice.)
	The wider education workforce has limited access to SEND-specific training. There is little evidence of structured professional development or the inclusion of lived experience in training.	The wider workforce in education settings is receiving some SEND-related training, though this is not yet systematic. There are early efforts to incorporate lived experience and best practice into professional development, but this is not yet embedded.	The wider workforce across education settings is skilled in meeting the needs of children with SEND. There is pro-active shaping of training and development of all practitioners in the local SEND system to ensure there is a broad understanding of best practice, incorporating lived experiences into practitioners' professional development.
	The workforce strategy across the partnership is in an early stage of development.	There is a workforce strategy linked to strategic priorities (specifically, to increase universal access to specialist professionals such as educational psychologists and	Specialist professionals, such as educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, are deployed at a universal level to support early

		speech and language therapists.)	identification and support.
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Pillar 7: Using a range of sources to monitor effectiveness and enable continuous improvement ensuring a targeted, judicious and sustainable use of resources

The final stage of the commissioning cycle is the joint review of the service offer. SEND and AP partnership board meetings should be used to consider and act upon feedback from partners and to review the effectiveness of SEND and AP provision. Having an agreed set of measures that assess progress against strategic priorities is an effective way to hold all partners to account. Comparing reform readiness with other local areas can provide valuable perspective on the performance of the local area.

Conducting deep dives into areas of poor performance – using qualitative evidence from children and young people, their families and other stakeholders highlighted through review processes – can help uncover root causes and inform targeted action. We recommend prioritising key areas for improvement rather than attempting to address everything at once.

Pillar 7: Targeted and judicious use of resources including place planning, sufficiency, use of capital			
Not yet emerging	Emerging	Developing	Maturing
	Resources are allocated reactively, with limited alignment to strategic priorities.	Resources are increasingly aligned to strategic priorities, with some consideration of value for money and equity.	Targeted and judicious use of resources aligned to strategic priorities, with a focus on value for money and equity.
	Limited transparency about funding use; partnerships are informal or underdeveloped.	Some transparency with partners about funding decisions; partnerships support some strategic priorities.	Transparent funding use supports strategic partnerships and addresses local SEND priorities.

	Basic understanding of performance data; demand drivers are not well understood.	Performance data is reviewed regularly; some analysis of demand drivers is undertaken.	Clear understanding of performance data and demand drivers, with projections based on cohort characteristics.
	Limited awareness of unit costs or how they relate to provision types.	Some knowledge of unit costs and provision types; links to capital planning and commissioning are developing.	Shared knowledge of unit costs including specialist units or resource provisions (SURPS) and use of AP are aligned with capital funding plans on an 'invest-to-save' basis, as well as commissioning services.
	SEND, commissioning, finance, and place planning operate in silos.	Increasing collaboration across teams to support inclusion and specialist provision.	Shared strategic approach across teams to target resources for mainstream inclusion and sustainable specialist offer.
	SEND, commissioning, finance, and place	Increasing collaboration across teams to support	Shared strategic approach across teams to target resources for mainstream inclusion

	planning operate in silos.	inclusion and specialist provision.	and a sustainable specialist offer.
	<p>SEND is mentioned in the Joint Special Needs Assessment (JSNA) and health strategy but is not a central focus.</p> <p>There is no strategic approach to cost sharing.</p>	<p>SEND is increasingly prioritised in JSNA and health strategy; plans are forming to improve outcomes.</p> <p>Cost sharing is discussed but inconsistent.</p>	<p>JSNA and health strategy have a clear SEND focus, with plans to improve needs met and outcomes achieved.</p> <p>Cost sharing agreements are in place.</p>
	Dedicated School Grant (DSG) management planning is reporting a worsening picture with limited mitigating actions.	DSG management plans are forecasting an improving picture with more judicious use of resources.	DSG management plans are forecasting an improving picture, evidencing judicious use of resources and a focus on value for money.