

Friday, 28 August 2026

SEND IMPROVEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

A meeting of **SEND Improvement Task and Finish Group** will be held on

Monday, 7 September 2026

commencing at **1.00 pm**

The meeting will be held in the Banking Hall, Castle Circus entrance on the left corner of the Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

Members of the Committee

Councillor Douglas-Dunbar

Councillor Fellows

Councillor Law

Councillor Tolchard

Councillor Twelves

A Healthy, Happy and Prosperous Torbay

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Governance Support, Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

Email: governance.support@torbay.gov.uk - www.torbay.gov.uk

SEND IMPROVEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP AGENDA

1. **Apologies**

To receive apologies for absence, including notification of any changes to the membership of the Task and Finish Group.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

- a) To receive declarations of non-pecuniary interests in respect of items on this agenda.

For reference: Having declared their non-pecuniary interest members may remain in the meeting and speak and, vote on the matter in question. A completed disclosure of interests form should be returned to the Clerk before the conclusion of the meeting.

- b) To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of items on this agenda.

For reference: Where a Member has a disclosable pecuniary interest he/she must leave the meeting during consideration of the item. However, the Member may remain in the meeting to make representations, answer questions or give evidence if the public have a right to do so, but having done so the Member must then immediately leave the meeting, may not vote and must not improperly seek to influence the outcome of the matter. A completed disclosure of interests form should be returned to the Clerk before the conclusion of the meeting.

(Please Note: If Members and Officers wish to seek advice on any potential interests they may have, they should contact Governance Support or Legal Services prior to the meeting.)

3. **Draft Scoping Document**

To agree scoping document for the SEND Improvement Task and Finish Group.

(Pages 3 - 4)

4. **Progress Update Following Inspection**

To receive an update on progress since the last Inspection.

(Pages 5 - 18)

5. **Future Topics**

To agree discussion topics for future meetings.

Overview and Scrutiny – SEND Improvement – Scope and Timeline Draft V1

Scope

The purpose of the review is:

- a. review the implementation of the Priority Impact Plan focussing on one priority area per meeting, including a consistent set of measures of impact (timeliness, quality, experience and outcomes);
- b. seek assurance on Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) quality and timeliness improvement by requesting quarterly reporting of: audit outcomes (including social care and health advice quality), learning actions taken, and feedback from families and settings about whether plans are usable and outcome-focused;
- c. request a deep dive update on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support and inclusion, including what is changing for children without EHCPs and how the partnership is addressing persistent challenges such as attendance, suspensions and exclusions;
- d. request assurance on health waiting times and the 'support while waiting' offer, including how families are informed, what interim provision is available, and how equity of access is monitored;
- e. request assurance on preparation for adulthood: transitions governance, pathways into employment/training, and how gaps in referral routes and tracking are being closed; and
- f. request evidence of strengthened co-production and improved communication with families (including what has changed as a result of feedback as well as the voice of the young people, their families and carers) and how this is being measured.

Methodology

Review Panel was established to receive briefing notes and information arising from Call for Evidence at the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 6 May 2026 see - [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Board on Wednesday, 6 May 2026, 5.30 pm](#).

Agreement of Scope and Timeline and Future items for discussion to be agreed at initial meeting held 7 September 2026.

Overview and Scrutiny Board to meet on 9 December 2026 for final agreement of recommendations for presentation to Cabinet and/or Council.

Communications and Engagement

- Direct emails to (to be agreed at the first meeting).
- Invites to meetings.
- Publication of final report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval.

Information required

Department for Education (DfE) & NHS England feedback against deep dives / progress review against local area partnership 5 priority action areas Letter.

Membership of Task-and-Finish Group (5 Members politically balanced)

Councillors Law (Scrutiny Lead for Children's Services - Chair), Douglas-Dunbar, Fellows, Tolchard and Twelves

Support Officer: Lorraine Rawles

Timeline

Meeting/Milestone	Action
Overview and Scrutiny Board – 6 May 2026	Establish review
Task and Finish Group – 7 September 2026	1. Agreement of scope and timeline. 2. To receive an update on progress since the last inspection. 3. To agree future items for discussion.
Task and Finish Group – 6 October 2026	
Task and Finish Group – 2 November 2026	
Wash Up meeting to confirm report – 23 November 2026 (private meeting)	
Overview and Scrutiny Board – 9 December 2026	Agreement of final report to Cabinet/Council



Department
for Education



Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services (DCS), Torbay Council,
Anne-Marie Bond, Chief Executive, Torbay Council,
Mark Hackett, Interim Chief Executive Officer, NHS Devon (ICB)

08 July 2026

**RE: DfE & NHSE FEEDBACK AGAINST DEEP DIVES / PROGRESS REVIEW
AGAINST LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP 5 PRIORITY ACTION AREAS**

Dear Nancy, Anne-Marie and Mark,

We would like to begin by thanking all colleagues across Torbay Council, NHS Devon ICB, Children and Family Health Devon (CFHD), schools, and parent representatives for their active participation in the deep-dive sessions held over March 2026. We are grateful for the openness, the commitment and the evidence of significant work progressing across the partnership.

The purpose of this review was to understand progress against the Priority Impact Plan (PIP), test Torbay's readiness for the forthcoming monitoring inspection, and evaluate the effectiveness of partnership activity across the five priority areas: governance, commissioning, multi-agency working, reducing waiting times, and preparing for adulthood.

We reviewed materials you shared, including the updated Joint Strategic Needs analysis, PIP documentation, governance papers, data dashboards, and local evaluations, as well as the discussions across each deep-dive meeting and the feedback presentation summarising findings from all five sessions.

Summary Findings

Across all priority areas, there is clear evidence that Torbay has taken positive steps to address the areas of weakness identified at inspection. We observed strong signs of a maturing partnership, with improved collaboration, strengthened governance and greater alignment across education, health and care. This was evidenced through examples shared during the review, including the early impact of the exclusion pilot (which remains an area for improvement) and the work to strengthen the Local Education Board, both of which are contributing to more distributed leadership and shared ownership across the partnership.

While the emphasis has been on ensuring the timely implementation of the Priority Impact Plan, the intention is now to also focus on evidencing the difference the

improvements are making to children and young people with SEND and their families.

The partnership has correctly identified the 3 challenges that require particular attention during 2026 as the time taken to issue new EHCPs, exclusion from secondary schools and waiting times for health services.

A recent focus of the SEND Local Improvement Partnership Board has been on improving communication at all levels and embed co-productions with the aim of improving relations with parents as recommended in the inspection report.

The following sections set out our detailed findings across the five Priority Areas.

Priority Area 1 — Governance, Leadership & Collaboration

There is clear evidence that governance arrangements in Torbay have been strengthened since the SEND inspection. Partners described a more mature and constructive partnership culture, supported by the introduction of an independent chair whose leadership has helped increase pace, sharpen accountability, and build confidence across services. Implementation of the actions in the Priority Impact Plan are broadly on track with examples of partners taking prompt action to address issues.

The multi-agency quality assurance and data arrangements have also developed significantly, with the QA and Data Subgroup now working more cohesively to review audit findings, resolve quality issues and track progress across services in a more systematic manner.

The partnership has also taken steps to rebuild trust and improve relationships with parents and carers. There are more opportunities for young people and parents to express their views and influence the development of services. The partnership recognises further work is required in to embed co-production and improve communications so that its SEND pledge to families becomes a reality

We heard a small number of examples where gaps or delays in communication with parent carers reduced the impact of otherwise positive work taking place across the partnership. For instance, some parent carers reported that they only became aware of the neurodiversity hotline after the navigator pilot had closed. This illustrates how important, timely and proactive communication is in supporting understanding and confidence in service developments. Given the historical context of distrust and frustration for some families, continued emphasis on clearly explaining what is changing, why, and how parent carers are being engaged throughout implementation will help ensure that positive developments are fully realised.

We are pleased that you have recruited a SEND programme manager who can support with this as well as progressing key aspects of the Priority Improvement Plan and reporting on its impact.

Priority Area 2 — Commissioning

There has been positive progress across your commissioning workstreams. The recent co-produced Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) provides an up-to-date understanding of needs across the partnership. JSNA themes are informing further education commissioning, adult social care planning, early years work and specialist outreach programmes. The creation of a commissioners' group should focus on ensuring that Torbay can evidence how the JSNA is being used to accurately identify and effectively manage risks when service gaps are identified across the partnership.

Substantial progress has also been made in sufficiency work, including new autism provision at Combe Pafford, School, a widening of post 16 opportunities and support, enhanced resource bases in mainstream schools, strengthened commissioning of Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision and a clearer approach to transitions for children with moderate learning difficulty.

There are signs that providing support around localities of schools are producing benefits. The evaluation of the locality pilots along with the use of the Improvement Support Funding recently provided by the DfE should be helpful in informing the development of the partnership's Experts and Hands offer.

Inspectors reported that a small number of children with SEND had been placed in unregistered children's homes, with some remaining in these placements for extended periods, in the "what the partnership needs to do better" section of your SEND inspection report. As part of the area partnership's preparation for the SEND monitoring inspection, it will be important to evidence how it has responded to this observation. Given the limited time spent on this issue during the stocktake, we were not able to explore it in sufficient detail to draw significant conclusions regarding current practice or impact. We would welcome the opportunity to consider this area in more detail as part of the next full stocktake review.

The learning disability pathway has been reviewed and information for families updated but were unable to see how this work had benefited children and young people. For example, whether there had been improvements in identification and support or more young people registered for and receiving their health checks from the age of 14 years onwards.

Priority Area 3 — Multi-Agency Working (Identification, Assessment & Meeting Need)

The deep-dive discussions evidenced that multi-agency working has improved markedly across Torbay.

Partners reported a noticeable uplift in the quality of EHCPs, supported by clearer processes, the Designated Social Care Officer and the application of the EHCP standard operational procedures in the health services. School representatives we spoke too reported an improvement in the quality of plans. Torbay's well embedded quality auditing process is reporting an improvement in the overall quality of EHCPs.

Improving the timeliness of EHCPs is proving to be a considerable challenge mainly due to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining educational psychologists alongside the increase in requests for EHCPs adding to the workload of on staff working in the statutory assessment service. The service managers have been diligent in reviewing systems and processes for improving efficiency and additional capacity has been provided to reduce the number of children who have been waiting over 20 weeks for their EHCP as well as increasing the proportion of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks. However, the rise in requests for EHC needs assessment remains a significant challenge to the partnership.

The appointment of a head of service for quality first teaching is welcomed. Her work in evaluating the graduated response to identify its strengths and barriers to its adoption in schools will be helpful in informing plans for ensuring its implementation throughout Torbay. There is evidence of increased engagement of schools such as involvement in the Whole School SENDQA. The training offer and support to schools has improved since the inspection and has received favourable feedback.

The introduction of the balanced model for providing speech and language services complements the development of the graduated response in schools.

The introduction of the Team Around the Special School (TAS) approach has improved identification of emerging needs and provided rapid multi-agency problem-solving.

A number of initiatives have been introduced to support pupils at risk of exclusion and provide support and training for schools identifying those with the highest exclusion rates. There has been a reduction in overall exclusions however work to date has not reduced the exclusion of pupils with SEND.

Priority Area 4 — Reducing Waiting Times & Strengthening Support While Waiting

The partnership has made meaningful progress in reducing waiting times in several areas, particularly mental health. CAMHS (MERS) waiting times have reduced to 18 weeks, supported by a new triage model that will offer contact within four weeks of referral. Early-help and pre-diagnostic support has also improved through the ND advice line, parent support programmes, expanded school-based outreach, and integrated Family Hubs and Health provision. Multi-agency risk management has strengthened, with high-risk children consistently prioritised through triage and escalation panels. The palliative care pathway is well-established and well-regarded, and there were pointed discussions around conferring with local other areas to ensure there is a clear narrative around sleep support pathways.

Waiting times for Autism assessment and speech and language therapy (SALT) waiting times — particularly for over-5s — remain a concern and will require continued prioritisation. There was also some feedback from parent carers & families that they continue to be uncertain about where to access information or how to

navigate the system, emphasising the need for clearer, more cohesive communication.

The work to clarify map the neurodiversity offer across Torbay should be helpful to practitioners and families.

Priority Area 5 — Preparing for Adulthood

There is encouraging evidence of improved pathways and commissioning arrangements that support young people moving into adulthood. Targeted investment over the past three years has strengthened supported internships, SEND employment pathways, the post 16 education opportunities, adult social care and mental health services to meet the needs of young people when they reach 18 years. The multi-agency SEND employment forum is increasingly effective in bringing system partners together to shape pathways, share intelligence and address gaps.

The partnership has taken steps to improve the pathways from children to adult services. This includes identification of children and young people who may require support, starting transitions planning earlier and improved liaison between services. However, we are unsure of the extent to which the partnership's arrangements meet the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) quality standards on transition from children's social care and health services to adult services and comply with the Department for Education's guidance on the use of Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) to support young people's participation in education, employment and training. the).

The six multi-agency audits of the PfA experiences of six young people undertaken in November 2025 has been helpful in identifying what has been working well and what improvements are needed. The partnership should be in a position by the end of the year to demonstrate the impact this audit has had in improving support of young people as they transition to adulthood.

Next Steps & Recommendations

In summary the partnership has made good progress in implementing its Priority Impact Plan across all 5 priorities with some early evidence of it having a positive impact.

For the next stocktake we think it would be helpful to focus on:

- a) the impact of the improvements achieved on the experiences of children and young people and their families across all 5 of the priority impact area.
- b) The extent to which it is possible to demonstrate communication and relationships with families is improving.

How the partnership has responded to the 3 risk areas it has identified.

Please do continue working with your SEND and NHS England Advisers, Brian Gale and Mark Tucker and Mohamed Jimale as your DfE Case Lead, who will all continue to provide you with support and challenge.

If you have any questions or require any further support, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Mohamed Jimale



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Date: 25/08/2026

Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services (DCS), Torbay Council,

Anne-Marie Bond, Chief Executive, Torbay Council,

Mark Hackett, Interim Chief Executive Officer, NHS Devon (ICB)

**RE: DfE & NHSE FEEDBACK AGAINST DEEP DIVES / PROGRESS REVIEW
AGAINST LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP 5 PRIORITY ACTION AREAS**

The team were delighted to meet with you and colleagues across the Torbay Local Area Partnership on 16 July, to discuss progress made in responding to the Priority Action in the SEND inspection report that:

'The local area partnership, including school leaders, must strengthen its multi-agency working to ensure that children and young people's needs are identified, assessed and met in a more efficient and timely manner through cohesive pathways across health, education and social care. This includes the following:

- the effective use of the graduated response,*
- EHC plans accurately reflecting need, next steps and provision for children and young people,*
- reducing levels of suspension and exclusion from secondary schools.'*

The discussion also included how the partnership has responded to recommendations in the inspection report regarding improving multi-agency work to prepare children and young people for adulthood, and to identify and support children at risk or who are missing out on their education.

We are grateful to all who contributed to such a valuable day, and who demonstrated the commitment, collaboration, and hard work that has gone into making the considerable progress since the SEND inspection.

The team would also like to express thanks to Combe Pafford school for warmly hosting the day, and to the young people at the Yellow Frog Café who provided such delicious refreshments. Our feedback is based on the presentations and materials you shared, and on the productive discussions held during the Deep Dive and the initial feedback session on 22 July.

Executive Summary

We feel the partnership is on track in responding to the recommendations in the inspection report and should be well positioned for the monitoring inspection.

Since inspection in March 2025, stronger multi-agency working has become evident across education, health and care services. We heard of the commitment to working collectively to identify and meet needs. There has been good progress in implementing the Partnership's Priority Impact Plan, which set out the required improvements to respond to the recommendations in the inspection report.

The majority of actions in the Plan have been implemented, and there is now increased focus on demonstrating the difference these improvements are making for children and young people with SEND. We heard examples of the positive impact of some of the improvements have already made. These impacts will become increasingly evident as the LAP continues to strengthen its evidence and narrative of improvement in the lead up to the monitoring inspection.

Key Findings

The Effective Use of the Graduated Response (PA 3)

The partnership has taken a number of positive measures to improve the application of the graduated response in education settings which have included:

- the creation of a new post the Head of Service for Quality First Teaching and School Improvement, to take a lead role in promoting the use of the graduated response in schools;
- the provision of training, practical support and advice to education settings, and advice through the Belonging by Design and outreach programmes;
- bringing in DfE-commissioned support, for instance, from the Council for Disabled Children, the National Development Team for Inclusion, and linking with the DfE's regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) initiative, which offers support to schools;
- the introduction of the speech and language therapy balanced model;
- a survey to understand the barriers to schools adopting the graduated response, in order to inform future planning.

The partnership has been able to demonstrate increased engagement in the graduated response from both early years settings and schools, through their participation in briefing and training sessions. Levels of engagement from schools still vary, but to a lesser extent, and the partnership has plans in place to sustain the progress made. In December, the LAP will host its first SEND conference, at which schools will be able to develop their own OAIP self-evaluation tool, further demonstrating a sector-led approach.

The co-designed locality model pilot, focused on Speech, Language and Communication Needs, and a good approach to its evaluation, provide strong examples of impact generated via increased schools' engagement. 29 of 31 targeted primary schools participated, as well as 5 early years settings. There have been positive impacts for children and young people and their families as result of the use of Linked Speech Therapists, Educational Psychology teams, earlier intervention pathways, and more consistent identification and support.

The capital strategy is designed to develop a range of provision: support bases and specialist places in mainstream schools, alongside an increase in the number of places in special schools for children with autism.

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) - timeliness and accuracy in reflecting need, next steps, and provision for children and young people (PA 3)

In 2025, the very significant level of requests for EHCPs (above the national average) presented a substantial challenge to Torbay in providing timely EHC Needs Assessments and EHCPs. The local area's performance in issuing EHCPs within 20 weeks was below the national average in 2025, and in the first quarter of 2026. However, we saw that action taken by leaders to address the challenge is having a positive impact, with the proportion of plans issued within 20 weeks in quarter 2 of 2026 rising above the national average for 2025. We note that during 2025, the average number of weeks taken to issue a plan in Torbay was comparable to the average for England, and better than the average for the South West as a region. We were also pleased to see that that no plans took more than 52 weeks to complete, compared with a national average of 11%. There is strong performance in the completion of EHCP phase transfer reviews; in the spring of 2026, for instance, the local area partnership achieved 100% compliance with the statutory deadlines.

The Torbay local area partnership has also strengthened multi-agency EHCP quality assurance processes, including quality checks before an EHCP is issued, and post-issue audits of a sample of plans to identify areas for improvement. These audits demonstrate improvement in quality over time – something echoed by school representatives – and they have helpfully identified areas for further improvement. These areas for improvement include, notably, the health and social care sections and the provision section of EHCPs. It will be important for the partnership to make improvements in these areas during the autumn term 2026, as weaknesses in these sections of EHCPs were highlighted in the SEND inspection report.

In response to the concern in the inspection report that EHCPs were not adequately preparing children and young people for their next steps, the LAP has developed a revised 0-25 EHCP template, co-designed with young people, aimed at strengthening the Preparing for Adulthood content and increased the focus on outcomes, next steps, and transition planning. We saw evidence that forward planning for significant life transitions is

increasingly reflected in plans. The significant reduction in the number of young people with EHCPs who are not in education, employment and training is a positive impact of this work. This progress is, however, more difficult to see from the grading system used for assessing the quality of EHCP improvements in PfA content. It will also be important to demonstrate that Section E of all EHCPs include (as required by the SEND Code of Practice) *'forward plans for key changes in a child or young person's life, such as changing schools, moving from children's to adult care and/or from paediatric services to adult health, or moving on from further education to adulthood'*.¹

Reducing Levels of Suspension and Exclusion from Secondary Schools (PA 3)

Since the SEND inspection, DfE figures published in July 2026 for the 2024/25 academic year have shown that Torbay's permanent exclusion rate for secondary schools was below the averages for both England and the South West. Torbay's suspension rate for secondary school pupils is similar, with the LA below the average for the South West, and with only one of its ten close children's services neighbours² at a lower rate.

Torbay is aware that the exclusion and suspension rates from primary schools is much higher than national averages. It has also identified a concern over the relatively high levels of exclusion of children with EHCPs. The local area partnership has therefore rightly taken the decision to broaden the focus of its work beyond secondary level. It has commissioned a review of the exclusion of pupils with EHCPs, to try to identify what measures are most needed to avoid them.

The support that Lodestar Academy has been providing to mainstream schools operates within a strong evaluation framework, with evidence of the initiative having a positive impact on reducing levels of suspension and exclusion.

We note that the proposed secondary risk of exclusion work was discontinued, as schools wished to focus on the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) work commissioned by the DfE on using powers under section 29 of the Education Act 2002 to direct a pupil off site for their education with a view to improving their behaviour, and in-year school managed move arrangements, as a way of reducing exclusion. It will be helpful for the local area partnership to be able to provide details of the outcomes from this initiative during its inspection.

Improving Preparation for Adulthood Arrangements (PA 5)

Torbay has responded positively to the recommendation in the inspection report that the partnership should improve their oversight and strengthen joint working across services to

¹ SEND Code of Practice (2015), p. 166.

² The ten children's services authorities in England with the most similar profile of needs to that of Torbay are Tameside, Sunderland, Plymouth, Rotherham, Redcar and Cleveland, Isle of Wight, Barnsley, Gateshead, Rochdale, and Telford and Wrekin.

support preparation for adulthood arrangements in several key areas.

Transitions from child to adult health services

A number of measures have been taken to improve the way that child and adult services are joined up across all health services for children and young people with SEND, so that the journey into adult health services is easier and more accessible. These include:

- improved governance and oversight through the Children and Family Health Devon transitions steering group, covering physical health, learning disability, mental health and neurodiversity pathways;
- use of recent NHSE guidance to improve practice in a number of services and the inclusion of transition pathways in provider contracts;
- ensuring that transition planning is taking place earlier, with a clear expectation that planning begins by Year 9 and, in some services, from age 11-14. Occupational Therapy services have embedded transition planning from age 14 through collaboration with Adult Social Care teams, and there is a process in place to identify young people who may need transition support and were not previously known to social care. This work is subject to increased quality assurance processes, which includes auditing to inform future practice and training;
- improvements in information and advice to help:
 - families navigate the transition pathways;
 - young people develop skills in independence and managing their health needs.

The partnership was able to illustrate impact by comparing the typical experience of a young person at the time of the inspection versus now, and via feedback from families and young people.

Transitions from child to adult social care

Measures have been taken to improve transitions to adult social care, including:

- adult social care staff attending EHCP reviews where a young person is likely to have eligible needs under the Care Act 2024;
- transition panels to oversee transition planning in the areas such as current placements and support packages, joint work between child and adult services, issues relating to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and the Mental Capacity Act; joint working between a young person's social worker and their personal advisor, and preparation for independence;
- training of staff in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and the Mental Capacity Act.
- Improvement to information, such as Year 9 information packs and information on direct payment.

As a result of these changes, the partnership was able to report transition planning starting earlier and better co-ordination between services.

Post 16 education training and employment

In the areas of post-16 education, training and employment, increased partnership working across services, education providers and employers is evident.

The partnership now provides enhanced oversight, reviews and support for young people with EHCPs who are not in education employment or training (NEET). As a result, the number of 16-25 year olds who are NEET decreased by 55% between January 2026 and July 2026. Furthermore, the proportion of young people whose destination is 'Not Known' reduced from 2.4% to 1.2%, without a corresponding increase in NEET figures, indicating more proactive tracking and engagement. We note that recent data published by the DfE³ shows that the proportion of 16 and 17 years olds with SEND who are NEET is below the average for Torbay's close children's services neighbours.

We also heard of strong progress that has been made in employment pathways. Supported internships have increased by 500% through NDTi-funded work, with 80% of NHS internship participants moving into paid employment. Innovative programmes such as the UKSPF-funded Sound Futures, King's Trust 'Eat That Frog', the SEND Employment Forum and work experience partnerships have broadened participation opportunities for those with SEND and who are at risk of being NEET. For example, Sound Futures (hosted by Sound Communities) supported 75 young people aged 16-24 who were NEET, and reported high levels of engagement and a number of positive outcomes for young people. Partnership working with South Devon College has created additional curriculum opportunities through the development of the pathways into adult programme.

Children at risk of missing out on their education

In the time available, we were unable to discuss in detail the multi-agency support for children and young people at risk of missing out on their education through poor attendance, part-time timetables, missing education altogether, exclusion and suspension, inappropriate elective home education, or poor commissioning arrangements for alternative provision. However, we noted:

- the significant improvements in the commissioning and quality assurance of providers of education other than at school, and alternative providers not registered with the DfE as schools, aimed at ensuring compliance with standards and ensuring that provision meets needs;
- the recent reductions in numbers of pupils on part-time timetables;

³ [Participation in education, training and employment: 2025 - GOV.UK](#) (July 2026)

- the recent reduction in number of children at SEND support who are electively home educated;
- improvements in attendance of pupils at SEND support in most education settings, but a small number of schools with high absence rates;
- the focus on reducing exclusion and suspension rates in primary schools, which are higher than in similar areas in England;
- evidence of positive impacts in attendance and suspension and exclusion rates in schools that have received targeted support.

Next Steps & Recommendations

In summary, the partnership has made good progress towards meeting its targets across Priority Area 3 and the areas for improvement relating to preparing for adulthood and children missing out on their education. There is early evidence of impact that can be built upon during the autumn term. In particular, we suggest that the work on impact focuses on:

- (i) evidencing the improvements in the social care, health and provision sections of new and reviewed EHCPs, and ensuring that they include the arrangements for supporting transitions;
- (ii) the initiatives taken in secondary schools to reduce exclusion and suspensions, and initiatives to reduce the exclusion of pupils with EHCPs;
- (iii) ensuring there is a strong evidence base to demonstrate the improvements made in multi-agency and partnership work and pathways to identify and support children at risk of missing out on their education.

We would also encourage the local area partnership to ensure that the improvements in multi-agency pathways (particularly in the areas of preparing for adulthood, and children at risk of missing out on their education) are included in the local offer. This will help families to become aware of the enhanced support now available to them, and how to access it.

Please do continue working with your SEND and NHS England Advisers, Brian Gale and Mark Tucker, and Mohamed Jimale as your DfE Case Lead, who will all continue to provide you with support and challenge.

If you have any questions or require any further support, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Salam Katbi
Head of Vulnerable Children's Unit, South West Region's Group

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