Overview and Scrutiny Board

3 December 2026

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Progress Report

1. Purpose of report

This report sets out the improvements recognised across the Torbay SEND Local Area Partnership and the areas requiring continued focus as the partnership prepares for the SEND monitoring inspection. It updates the Board on progress since the September 2026 report, drawing together the outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny SEND Improvement Task and Finish Group, the November 2026 Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England stocktake, development of the new SEND Strategy, and the SEND Conference held on 18 November 2026.

2. Recommendations

- To note the progress made across the five SEND Priority Impact Areas and the positive assessment received through the November DfE/NHS England stocktake.
- To note the findings and recommendations of the SEND Improvement Task and Finish Group and the arrangements for monitoring the partnership response.
- To note the progress in developing the Torbay SEND Strategy and the engagement undertaken with children, young people, parent carers and education partners.
- To note the strong participation and positive feedback from the SEND Conference on 18 November 2026, and the partnership's continuing focus on embedding improvement, developing Inclusion and Co-production further and demonstrating impact.

3. Background

Following the March 2025 Area SEND Inspection, Torbay's Local Area Partnership was issued with a Notice to Improve. The partnership subsequently developed a co-produced Priority Impact Plan covering governance and co-production, commissioning, multi-agency support, health waiting times and support while waiting, and preparation for adulthood. The September update reported stronger foundations across these areas, while recognising the need to demonstrate that system changes were improving families' lived experiences consistently.

Since September, the partnership has been subject to further public scrutiny and external challenge. This has included completion of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group review, a two-day DfE/NHS England stocktake on 10 and 11 November, and wider engagement with education settings, parent carers and other stakeholders through the SEND Conference on 18 November.

4. Overview and Scrutiny SEND Improvement Task and Finish Group

The Overview and Scrutiny Board established the Task and Finish Group on 6 May 2026. It met on 7 September, 6 October and 2 November, reviewing delivery and impact across all five priority areas. The review considered timeliness, quality, experience and outcomes, and sought assurance on EHCP quality, inclusion, health waiting times, preparation for adulthood, co-production and communication.

The Group concluded that there was clear evidence of significant improvement since the 2025 inspection. It recognised stronger governance and partnership working, improving EHCP quality, expansion of local provision, reduced waiting times in a number of health pathways, stronger preparation for adulthood arrangements and a greater focus on inclusion in mainstream education.

The Group also recognised the continuing focus on workforce and capacity pressures; reducing waits in some specialist pathways; sufficiency of provision and accommodation; consistent family experience; and stronger evidence of lived experience and longer-term outcomes.

The recommendations to Cabinet include continued action to strengthen co-production, inclusive practice, local sufficiency, health waiting times and preparation for adulthood; improved support for young people aged 18 to 24 who do not meet Adult Social Care thresholds; clearer measures of impact; and continued workforce planning, particularly for Educational Psychology and specialist assessment services.

5. November 2026 DfE and NHS England stocktake

Feedback received to date from the stocktake is positive. It indicates that the Local Area Partnership remains well placed to demonstrate effective action across all Priority Actions, supported by strong commitment, increasing collective ownership and a more joined-up approach. The stocktake reviewed the Priority Actions and related Areas for Improvement; reviewers also recognised better use of data, quality assurance, audit and lived experience to understand progress and gaps.

Family experience remains variable. Reviewers advised the partnership to ensure that its positive improvement narrative does not obscure families who are not yet experiencing change. The next phase must therefore focus on embedding improvements and demonstrating consistent impact. Reviewers also highlighted the importance of managing the capacity of the Parent Carer Forum alongside SEND reform, strategy development and other major workstreams.

Key improvements and areas for development

Key improvements since the Inspection	Areas for continued development
Stronger collaboration across education, health, social care, education settings, parent carers, children and young people. Governance is providing more effective scrutiny, challenge and escalation, with the Independent Chair contributing to accountability and pace.	Explain more clearly how governance is changing frontline practice and improving outcomes. Strengthen the systematic use of children's and families' experiences, communication impact and access to impartial information. Embed partnership-wide ownership of the refreshed SEND Pledge.
A dynamic SEND JSNA and stronger joint commissioning oversight are informing action on specialist places, Alternative Provision/EOTAS, health pathways, outreach and local residential provision.	Make the connection between the JSNA, commissioning priorities, SEND Strategy and reform plan clearer. Strengthen the Learning Disability and Autism pathway narrative, evidence the impact of joint resources, and complete the 0-5 sufficiency story.
Clear improvement in EHCP timeliness and quality, stronger pipeline management, progress with the graduated response/OAIP, and more data-led work on attendance, suspensions, exclusions and children missing education.	Sustain engagement with all schools, particularly settings not yet fully engaged in OAIP and graduated response work. Continue to strengthen EHCP consistency, Educational Psychology capacity and evidence from case studies and child-level outcomes.
Health waiting-time recovery is well evidenced in several pathways. Mental health support, Speech	Occupational Therapy waits remain a challenge. The partnership needs a clearer account of

and Language Therapy and support while waiting were recognised as strengths, alongside safer support in neurodiversity pathways.	Community Paediatrics waits, distinctions between ADHD and autism pathways, and consistent outcome and experience evidence across all health pathways.
Stronger oversight and joint working for preparation for adulthood, including earlier planning, improved transitions to Adult Social Care and health, and stronger post-16 education and employment pathways.	Demonstrate impact through outcomes and lived experience, especially across health transitions. Clarify how young people below Adult Social Care eligibility thresholds are identified, supported and enabled to develop independence.

6. Progress across the five priority areas

Priority Area 1: Governance, co-production and relationships

Governance arrangements continue to mature, with stronger oversight through SLAIP, Data and Quality Assurance, commissioning and communication sub-groups. Co-production is increasingly embedded. The refreshed SEND Pledge was designed with more than 30 children and young people, and the new Your Voice in Action framework is strengthening how the partnership explains what has changed in response to feedback. The next focus is consistent application, reach and evidence that families experience the difference.

Priority Area 2: Commissioning and sufficiency

Forty additional autism places were created for September 2026. Alongside this increase in provision, the partnership can evidence stronger needs-led commissioning and joint oversight. The SEND JSNA is now used as a live source of intelligence to support decisions on specialist provision, outreach, EOTAS, post-16 pathways and residential sufficiency. The stocktake recognised this stronger position but asked for a clearer explanation of how identified need and deployed resources translate into measurable outcomes.

Priority Area 3: Multi-agency working and inclusion

EHCP timeliness and quality show measurable improvement, supported by stronger quality assurance and pipeline management. Earlier support and sector-led improvement are being strengthened through the Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP) framework, Leaders of SEND Forum, Belonging by Design and locality working. Attendance and exclusions data is also being used more actively. Continuing risks are inconsistency between settings, exclusions and workforce capacity.

Priority Area 4: Waiting times and support while waiting

The partnership presented strong evidence of improvement in mental health and Speech and Language Therapy pathways and a broader offer of support while children and families wait. The stocktake recognised the quality of this work. Continued priorities include Occupational Therapy capacity, sustained neurodiversity recovery, clearer reporting on Community Paediatrics and consistent measures of the impact of support while waiting.

Priority Area 5: Preparation for adulthood

Earlier and more coordinated transition planning is now supported by stronger governance across education, health and Adult Social Care. Post-16 oversight has improved, with stronger pathways into education and employment and a reported reduction in EHCP-related NEET. The next phase will strengthen evidence of young people’s experiences, outcomes across health transitions, accommodation and support for those who do not meet statutory adult eligibility thresholds.

7. SEND Strategy development

Development of the new Torbay SEND Strategy is progressing as the long-term framework that will connect the SEND Priority Impact Plan, the Local SEND Reform Plan, the SEND JSNA and wider education, health and care strategies. The strategy is being informed by the evidence of local need, the improvement journey and co-production with parent carers, children, young people and partners.

Children and young people have contributed to the five strategic goals, and parent carers and education partners have informed the vision and priorities. The November stocktake welcomed the strategic direction but asked the partnership to articulate more clearly how the JSNA drives the strategy, commissioning and reform activity. The strategy will therefore set out a clearer line from need, to priority, to delivery, to measurable impact and lived experience.

8. SEND Conference - 18 November 2026

The partnership held its SEND Conference on 18 November 2026, attended by more than 160 delegates from across Torbay's education and SEND landscape. The event brought together schools, early years settings, further education, health, social care, parent-carer representatives and wider partners.

Conference feedback received to date had been positive, particularly on OAIP development, the partnership's co-production approach, the emerging SEND Strategy, the refreshed SEND Pledge, and the openness and evidence relating to Torbay's improvement journey since the inspection. The event provided an important opportunity to engage settings in developing OAIP and to move from awareness towards shared ownership. It also reinforced the expectation that inclusion and earlier support are collective responsibilities across the local system.

Learning and feedback from the conference will be used to refine the OAIP framework and implementation approach, strengthen the SEND Strategy and support the roll-out of the SEND Pledge through champions and partnership sign-up arrangements.

9. Overall assessment and next steps

The position in November is one of substantial and externally recognised progress. Torbay now has stronger governance, more mature partnership working, improved commissioning oversight and clearer evidence of performance improvement. The recent stocktake and Task and Finish Group provide assurance that the partnership is moving in the right direction.

The central test remains whether improvements are embedded and consistently experienced by children, young people and families. Priorities before the monitoring inspection are to:

- review the forthcoming formal DfE and NHS England stocktake feedback and use it to inform the partnership's next steps;
- complete and implement the monitoring inspection impact statement, aligned to the inspection evaluation criteria;
- demonstrate the connection between leadership decisions, frontline practice and improved outcomes;
- demonstrate a more systematic and representative evidence base on lived experience and parent-carer confidence;
- demonstrate how the OAIP and the graduated response is being embedded across all education settings;
- show that the partnership can sustain improvements in EHCP performance and health waiting times while addressing workforce risks;
- show how the SEND Strategy, JSNA, reform plan and commissioning priorities operate as a single coherent programme;
- implement the Task and Finish Group recommendations through established partnership governance and report progress through Overview and Scrutiny.