

Newcastle Local Area Getting It Right Together SEND Quality Assurance Framework Annual Report 2023-2024



October 2024

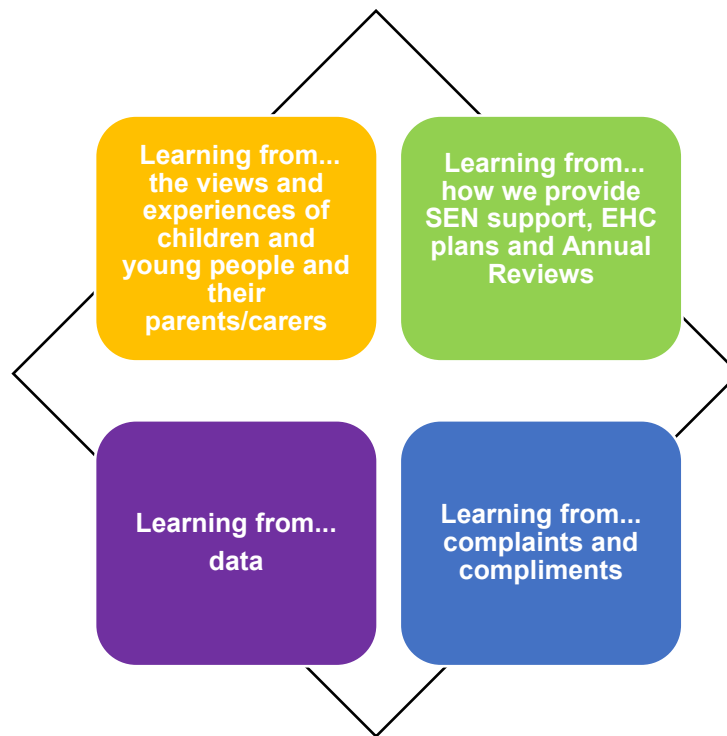
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Introduction

Welcome to the third annual report setting out some of the highlights of the work that has been carried out in 2023/2024 against the aims set out in our [Getting it Right Together Quality Assurance Framework](#), below:

Figure 1: An overview of the Getting it Right Together Framework



The co-produced [SEND Strategy 2023-2028](#) was approved at the start of 2023/24 and we have developed a plan showing how the work of the 'getting it right together' workstream contributes to the achievement of the priorities in the strategy. This was signed off by the SEND and Inclusion Executive Board in July 2024 and is reviewed at each getting it right together workstream meeting. The priority actions for the workstream are set out at Appendix 1.

1. Learning from the views and experiences of parents/carers children and young people

Parent and Carer Voice

The parent/carer forum is an essential partner in Newcastle's SEND and Inclusion partnership. They sit on the SEND and Inclusion Executive Board and all of the SEND workstreams, including the SEND Sub Group of the Promise Board. The Chair of the parent/carer forum (PCF) has regular one-to-one meetings with the Head of SEND and the Designated Clinical Officer and every month parent/carer forum representatives attend the SEND Collaborative Forum, which provides an opportunity for them to raise any issues directly with the Head of SEND, the Designated Clinical Officer and other senior managers across education, health and social care.

Examples of work where the parent/carer forum have made a significant and valued contribution to improving SEND Services in Newcastle are set out below:

Over 2023/2024 the parent/carer forum have been running the PINS project, a national project, funded by NHS England. **PINS stands for 'Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools'**. This brings together the parent/carer forum, the NHS Integrated Care Board, Newcastle

<p>City Council and the school community (children and young people, their families, and school staff), to work together to understand and improve support for neurodivergent children.</p> <p>The PCF has established parent/carer groups in the participating schools and has sent out surveys to all parents and carers, which will help to identify what is currently working or not working. Training and support will be provided for all the schools involved, and there will also be a focus on understanding children's experiences in school to help improve support for parents at the school.</p>
<p>Parent/carer representatives have been involved in setting up the Tree House Early Years Centre which officially opened in September 2023. It is a vibrant but calm Centre and the families using it have told us they receive a warm welcome. A range of services are on offer at the Centre including a range of weekly Early Intervention Groups, an annual timetable of training courses for parents / carers and Early Years practitioners, weekly clinic sessions with NHS professionals including a multi-disciplinary clinic, a SEND Toy Library for families and a Sensory Room. Comments left on our Feedback Tree from parents / carers and other Tree House users have been 100% positive.</p>
<p>Developing the SEND Children and Families webpages which includes the SEND Local Offer: In June 2024 we published our new Children and Families Website, including the SEND Local Offer which is prominent throughout. Parents/carers were involved with the development of the website and in response to their feedback the Things to do webpage has been revamped to make it easier to find mainstream inclusive or SEND specific activities for children and young people.</p>
<p>The parent/carer forum helped to plan the: SEND Celebration Events that took place in June 2024. They identified a list of topics where they felt parents would appreciate more information and from this we produced a series of Webinars.</p>
<p>Development of Education Other than at School (EOTAS) Policy: Parent/carers provided vital information about their experience of EOTAS packages. Their comments have been included in the policy which will be published soon.</p>
<p>The Rapid Process Improvement Workshop, July 2024: Parent/Carer representatives participated in this week-long event, which aimed to find ways to speed up the timeliness of EHC assessments and improve the quality of plans. For example, they are involved in developing a parent guide to the EHC process.</p>
<p>With parents/carers help we have co-produced and published a SEND Transitions Guide. This guide supports young people and their families to access information to help them get ready for their next steps and prepare for adulthood.</p>
<p>The PCF continues to produce newsletters each term which are highly valued by parents and carers in Newcastle. They also meet with Senior Leaders to raise any questions and concerns on behalf of parents/carers in Newcastle. The newsletters and the question and answer sessions are on the local offer with : Parent/Carer Forum Newsletters and Questions and Answer sessions</p>

We are very grateful to the parents/carers who contribute their time and share their experiences with us. The contribution from families is critical to how we improve what we do, and how we do it.

Children and Young People's Voice

Newcastle Council and the North-East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) have jointly funded the SEND Voice team since 2020. The SEND Voice Lead chairs the Voice workstream which is charged with delivering the SEND Voice Plan. Over 2023/2024 the team included two voice trainees and one volunteer. Some examples of their work is set out below:

<p>They ran a 'Safe in the City' workshop, which focused on safety for young people. They found that many young people were unaware of safe spaces in the city where they could go if they were feeling anxious or unsafe.</p>
<p>The team produced the Teen Health Wiki and will continue to add to this information to this resource such as safe spaces in the city and accessible toilets.</p>
<p>The team helped to set up the SEND Art Exhibition, part of the SEND Celebration event:</p>

Our SEND Voice lead, trainees and our volunteer left us to progress their career paths in July 2024. We wish them all the very best for their future. We have appointed a new SEND Voice lead who will take up post soon and start the recruitment of new voice trainees.

3. Learning from looking at SEN support

Our offer of support for children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools is set out in our [Graduated Response](#). A key part of the graduated response is the SEND Outreach Team. Schools/settings access the team via the [SEND Advice and Support Allocation Panel \(SEND ASAP\)](#).

97% of all schools made requests to SEND ASAP in 2023/2024 (compared to 69% in 2022/2023). 74% of the requests made by schools and Early Years settings were appropriate for allocation to a specialist team for advice and support or for individual pupil funding. The remainder received advice on appropriate next steps.

The team carried out an audit of SEND Support Plans submitted for two separate SEND ASAPs (Jan 2022 and June 2024). Evidence for the audit showed an improvement in the quality of the targets and provision outlined in the Plans. Areas for improvement were identified such as providing SMART and child/young person friendly targets, making sure provision is clearly linked to the targets and that the support plan has been regularly reviewed.

From September 2024, there is an expectation that SEND Support Plans will include reference to the SEND Descriptors of Need.

Autism Education Trust (AET) training is rated very highly by those that accessed the training.

The [Locality Inclusion Panels and teams around the school](#) continue to support children and young people at risk of permanent exclusion, as well as students without a school place.

There has been a focus on embedding the [Descriptors of Need](#) and we carried out research of the impact that the descriptors of need were having in schools. Some comments made are set out below:

- It helped me identify specifically what children were struggling with and pinpoint what targets might be appropriate for them.
- Very useful - also clear for staff across the school to see and understand.
- Once a range had been identified it was useful to look at provision examples and consider how we could implement them.
- Made it very clear what provision should be in place to support area of need

[The Inclusion Quality Framework \(IQF\)](#) was co-produced with schools, parents and carers to review inclusion practice in all of our schools. By July 2024 eleven schools have completed the IQF. An additional 7 schools have signed up to drop-ins to find out more.

An **SEMH outreach team** started in September 2023. The strategic aim of the service is to ensure that our primary provision across the city can adapt to the new SEMH pressures and improve readiness for secondary education. Working alongside family partners and the multi-agency Team Around the School they are improving provision across the city and as result we are seeing fewer referrals to the SEND ASAP for SEMH needs.

4. Learning from looking at Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans and annual reviews

The Invision audit tool is now in use for all EHC audits. The criteria used sets a high benchmark to achieve a 'good' audit outcome. A comparison of the outcome of audits carried out in July 2023 and July 2024 is included at Appendix 2. Although this is based on small samples of the plans it shows improvement in completion of most sections of the EHC plan. Performance in completing section D (Social Care) and Section J (Personal Budgets) has not improved. Our Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) is producing guidance to improve the quality of the social care section and guidance and training is to be arranged for caseworkers re personal budgets.

From October 2024 the pool of EHC auditors will be expanded to include SEND and Inclusion Executive Board members, SENCOs and Teachers, Parent/Carer Forum, all educational Psychologists and SEND Caseworkers to audit plans on a rota basis

In addition to the EHC audit we have a programme of audits focussing on specific areas as set out below:

- Multi-agency audits to look at complex cases such as those with EHC plans that are:
 - children in care,
 - receiving alternative provision
 - educated other than at school
 - open to youth justice
- Deep dives of specific cases using a multi-agency audit tool.
- Audits at our specialist schools, Sir Charles Parsons, Thomas Bewick and Hadrian Schools. Auditors included: Caseworkers, EPs, Social care, Health, Head teachers and SENCOs.

' We found the EHCP audit training really useful. As a result of this, as a school, we would like to complete our own audit of EHCP's in a phased manner, focusing on developing each of the sections, starting with section A and E.'

Feedback from the audit of EHC plans at one of our specialist schools

In July 2024 we held a 'Rapid Process Improvement workshop' and from this an audit tool was developed to audit the quality of advices that support the content of the EHC plan. This was trialled at a multi-agency audit in July and a programme of advice audits has been established for 2024/2025 including advice and plan writers.

Seeking feedback from parents and carers

We include a QR code on the final EHC plan for parents to provide feedback. However, this is not well used. In addition, as part of our termly EHC audit we ring the parents directly to get feedback. The feedback varies some parents and carers report they had a positive experience during the EHC process, where others were unhappy with the delays and the lack of communications from the Casework team.

From October 2024 we will widen the feedback received and will call a sample of parents/carers within a week of receiving their final EHC plan to gather views. We are also exploring the possibility of sending text messages to parents/carers which could include sending them the link to the feedback form via text to see if it improves the response rate.

In response to feedback about poor communications we have reviewed the structure of the SEND Support, Assessment and Review team. From October our team will be restructured into four teams which will focus on a specific area of the EHC process:

1. Assessment team

2. Annual review team
3. Age phase annual review team
4. Getting ready for next steps (PfA) team

This structure has been successfully used by a number of local authorities and was suggested by the team themselves. A document setting out the role of the Caseworkers and what is not in their role is attached at Appendix 2 to this report. This will be distributed to our networks in the Autumn term.

Annual reviews

We have been working closely with schools to improve the review process and multi-agency task and finish group was set up to look at the annual review process. From this work an [EHC Annual Review Toolkit](#) for schools and settings was produced and published on the local offer. This includes separate toolkits for parents and carers, including key review timelines, how to arrange the annual review, who should be involved and when it should take place. It includes resources and templates to support in all aspects of completing a successful review with the child and young person.

The data indicates that there has been a reduction in the average weeks taken to receive the paperwork from schools as well as the completion of the review.

We do not currently audit annual reviews but aim to start this from January 2025.

5. Learning from data

The SEND Outcomes framework and data dashboard is reviewed by the Joint Intelligence and Commissioning Workstream, and exception report made to the SEND Executive and Inclusion Board. Click here to see how the framework looks: [SEND outcomes framework data dashboard - BLANK.](#)

We have developed questions to ask and tools to capture the views of children and young people with SEND at their annual review. We have now received over 150 responses which help to inform our understanding about children and young people's lives based on our 5 overarching outcomes (as set out in the picture below). These findings will also be shared back with SENCO's Network in the autumn term.



Meeting the EHC statutory timescales is a key priority for the SEND services. SEN2 data published in 2024, shows 6.5% of EHC plans were issued in statutory timescales compared to 51.7% in the North East Region and 49.1% nationally. New requests for assessments levelled off between 2022 and 2023, but we have seen a higher number in 2024 so far compared to same time point last year.

To improve performance in relation to timeliness and quality of our EHCPs, we have increased capacity, including investing in independent educational psychology support, strengthening the social care and health input into the EHC process, and speeding up the consultation process. In addition, practitioners and managers from health, education and social care attended the Rapid Process Improvement week (RPIW) in July 2024 with our PCF, and a 12-month improvement plan has been agreed.

We have audited the number of EHC assessment requests from January to June 2024 to ensure that the children and young people had received support from SEND services over the previous 12 months. Over this period, we received 408 EHC assessment requests and of these 87% had received support from SEND Services. The remaining 13% were spread over a number of schools/settings who felt that they did not require additional funding or support to meet needs.

Deep dive into compliance with EHC statutory timescales

The EHC assessment process is divided into 4 stages, and we held a ‘deep dive’ which aimed to identify the stages and the reasons why plans had taken longer than expected at each stage.

For stage 1, the request stage, almost all cases were responded to within the 6-week period. Often cases were responded to before the 6-week timescale.

For stage 2 the assessment stage, it became clear that there was inconsistency in how completion of this phase is recorded on the capita system:

- Some Caseworkers record the completion of this stage - when all the advices are received and the draft EHC plan is complete
- Some Caseworkers record the completion of this stage - when they have the education and parental advice and (with parental consent) have included the draft plan on the EHC panel agenda for discussion, but without social care or health advice.

This inconsistency about how information is recorded in capita has undermined confidence in the accuracy of reports produced from the capita system.

The deep dive identified that the processes and the reports are not being used consistently across the five casework teams.

6. Learning from complaints and compliments

Complaints

We received 32 complaints which are classified by the complaints team into the following key issues:

26	Delays in waiting for EHC (sometimes with a combination of other factors)
2	Information and Communications
2	Quality of Service
1	Content of EHC plan
1	Financial issues

Of the 32 complaints:

16	Upheld
2	Partially
10	Not upheld
1	Resolved
3	Resolved informally

We do not wish to receive any complaints and 32 in a year is far too high, but it is a small proportion of the 745 new requests for EHC assessment that we received in 2023/24, and of the 2,995 EHC plans that we are responsible for.

We have plans to improve in all of these areas and the implementation of specific actions relating to complaints are reviewed by the Head of SEND and SEND Service Improvement Lead every month.

Compliments

We do get good feedback and compliments which are shared and celebrated across the service. Some examples below are set out below:

I just wanted to write to say a massive thank you for the support the SENDOS Early Years team provided our school. Walking around the school today, it is clear that your support has really given my team the confidence to put in place the best possible provision for some very vulnerable, but wonderful, children.
I just received a call from a dad that wanted to say thank you that the EHC plan, school and transport is all in place he simply wanted to call to say thank you!.
Thanks for the wonderful work you have done to support us and the children in our school. I would say you've made life changing improvements, which will be there as the children grow and mature.

Tribunals

We have had five tribunals heard over 2023/24. The reasons for the tribunal and the outcomes are set out below:

	Reasons	Outcome
1.	Not naming education in Section I	In favour of LA
2.	Refuse to issue EHC Plan	Found against LA
3.	Type of School / College / institution named	Found against LA
4.	Against the EHCP	In favour of LA
5.	Against the EHCP	In favour of LA

Appendix 1: Next steps

Learning from the views and experiences of children and young people and their parents and carers

- SEND Strategy 2.2: Continue to develop innovative approaches to gathering feedback from all parents, carers, children and young people.
- SEND Strategy 2.3: [How we work and act - SEND Strategy page 23](#) act are embedded throughout all parts of the SEND system. This will be developed further with the revised SEND SAR team structure.
- SEND Strategy 2.6: Join up offer of support for children and young people who have SEND with the early help offer including SEND Networks in schools and the locality family hubs.

Learning from looking at SEN support

- SEND Strategy 1.1: Universal guidance for schools and settings will be co-produced and adopted across the city. This will be tested through the roll out of the Inclusion Quality Framework for schools.
- SEND Strategy 1.3: Continue to raise awareness about the Local Offer website to ensure parents and carers know how to access support. We will continue to promote the local offer as set out in the [Local Offer Development Plan](#)
- SEND Strategy 1.4: [SEND Descriptors of Need](#) will be used in all schools and settings to ensure early and appropriate identification of needs. The moderations of the Descriptors of Need will continue, and all SEND documents will reflect the language used.
- SEND Strategy 1.5: Create an easy and accessible way for schools and settings to access support.
- SEND Strategy 1.7: Further investment to provide support and improve confidence in the SEN Support process. This will include improving the quality and implementation of SEN Support plans.
- SEND Strategy 2.4: Develop an [Accessibility Strategy](#) to ensure all children and young people with SEND can access schools and settings and feel welcome wherever they go.
- SEND Strategy 2.9: Roll out the inclusion quality framework across schools.

Learning from looking at education, health and care (EHC) plans and annual reviews

- SEND Strategy 2.1: Further investment across education, health and social care to improve timescales and quality of plans. Practitioners and managers from health, education and social care attended the Rapid Process Improvement Week (RPIW) in July 2024 with our PCF. The focus of this was to improve timeliness and quality of EHCPs.
- SEND Strategy 2.5: Continue to improve how we communicate with all children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers and gain their feedback at reviews.
- SEND Strategy 2.8: Review the [EHC Annual Review Toolkit | Newcastle Support Directory](#) to encourage involvement, participation and improve the quality of current plans.

Learning from complaints and compliments

- We will continue to monitor complaints and put improvements in place where issues are identified.

Appendix 2: SEND Caseworker Profile

The SEND Caseworkers in Newcastle come from a range of backgrounds, such as education, social care, therapies, careers guidance and children's advocacy. The team have a range of professional experience and many of them are from SEND families or are a parent of a child who has SEND.

SEND Caseworkers in the Assessment Team co-ordinate Education, Health & Care needs assessments and produce Education, Health, and Care Plans. They identify and secure appropriate educational placements for children and young people in Newcastle.

SEND Caseworkers in the Annual Review and Age Phase Review Team oversee and manage the annual review of EHCPs. In liaison with educational settings, they will track individual progress in relation to agreed outcomes. They will consider whether the EHCP needs to be maintained, amended, or ceased. They will work with schools and settings to consider what additional support can be provided, and they will help identify and secure the next educational placement for children and young people transitioning to their next phase of education (such as moving from primary to secondary school).













SEND Caseworkers in our Preparation for Adulthood Team will oversee the EHCPs and secure educational placements of young people in Y9 and above.

The SEND Caseworkers follow the statutory processes around the EHC assessments and reviews and focus directly on producing and reviewing EHCPs and securing school placements. The SEND Caseworkers can:

- Process and co-ordinate your EHC needs assessment requests.
- Collate professional reports and present to the LA Inclusion panel for consideration.
- Be your main point of contact during assessment and review.
- Provide advice around the assessment and review process.
- Consult with educational placements.
- Check annual review paperwork.
- Organise alternative provision and annual reviews for children who are NOT on a school roll.
- Attend complex reviews such as when there is a breakdown of placement or a significant change in the child's or young person's needs.
- Work closely with internal and external contacts and stakeholders to ensure all required information is shared appropriately.
- Sign post sources of advice and information.

Our SEND Caseworkers do not:

- Make decisions to conduct an assessment, issue an EHCP or allocate funding – These decisions are made by a multi-agency EHCP panel.
- Make recommendations or advise on specific educational placements – SEND Caseworkers do not recommend individual schools. The type of placement is made by a multi-agency EHCP panel.
- Deal with complaints about schools. The school complaints policy published on the school's website will advise what to do regarding this.
- Control the response times of other professional services. However, there is an agreed escalation process for health and social care advice.

Appendix 3: EHC Audit Results: 2024 compared to 2023		Date	Outstanding /Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Not applicable	Direction of travel
Section of EHC plan							
A	The views, interests and aspirations of the child and their parents, or the young person	0724	87.5%	12.5%			
		0723	78.8%	22.2%			
B	The child of young person's special educational needs (SEN)	0724	100%				
		0723	66.7%	22.2%	11.1%		
C	The child or young person's health needs which relate to SEN	0724	50%	37.5%	12.5%		
		0723	11.1%	33.3%	55.6%		
D	The child or young person's social care needs which relate to their SEN	0724	12.5%	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%	
		0723	11.1%	44.4%	44.4%		
E	The outcomes sought for the child or the young person	0724	50%	50%			
		0723	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%		
F	The special educational provision required by the child or the young person	0724	87.5%		12.5%		
		0723	22.2%	66.7%	11.1%		
G	Any health provision reasonably required by the learning difficulties or disabilities which result in the child or young person having SEN	0724	37.5%	25%	37.5%		
		0723	11.1%	11.1%	77.8%		
H1	Any social care provision which must be made for a child or young person under 18 resulting from Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (CSDPA)	0724		25%	50%	25%	
		0723			88.9%	11.1%	
H2	Any other social care provision reasonably required by the learning difficulties or disabilities which result in the child or young person having SEN	0724			62.5%	37.5%	
		0723			88.9%	11.1%	
I	Placement	0724	100%				
		0723	88.9%	11.1%			
J	Personal Budget (including arrangements for direct payments)	0724	12.5%			87.5%	
		0723	33.3%	55.6%		11.1%	
K	Advice and Information	0724	100%				
		0723	44.4%	55.6%			

