# Northumberland SEND Consultation Autumn 2017
## Summary

**Context**

Between September - December 2017, Northumberland County Council undertook a consultation around the current Vision and Strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) following the 2014 changes and the new Code of Practice. This followed a self evaluation exercise carried out in 2015 that had engaged parents and the publication of a development plan in 2016 for operational developments across health, social care and education in 2017-18.

5 consultation events were held in Berwick, Hexham, Ponteland, Alnwick and Cramlington, with a specific aim of improving our engagement with parents, children and young people and documentation for completion was also available via the Local Offer. This was a result of the operational plan priorities identified in 2016, where it was identified that further engagement on strategic issues was required.

Respondents were asked for agreement or otherwise on a series of 9 questions. Each featured a strategic statement, and invited a further written response.

**Response**

206 full responses were received and have been collated, analysed and reported upon in the following pages. It was clear that contributions were received from parents/carers, schools, other settings, professionals who work in SEND services and school governors. The 2 largest groups of respondents were received from parents or carers (39%) and from schools (30%).

**Consultation responses received**

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent / Carer | 83 |
| Child / young person | 7 |
| Head Teacher | 22 |
| Health Professional | 7 |
| NCC Employee | 29 |
| School Governor | 11 |
| Member of School Staff | 41 |
| Parish Councillor | 5 |
| Post 16 Provider | 2 |
| Private or Voluntary sector | 5 |
| Early Years Provider | 1 |
| TOTAL | 213 (Some respondents selected more than one field) |

**Parents and Carers**

**Ages of children and young people in the families of parents and carers who responded**

| 0-4 | 5-10 | 11-15 | 16-18 | 19-25 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 | 0 | 44 | 13 | 10 |

**Types of special educational needs or disabilities identified within the families of the parents and carers who responded**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Specific Learning Difficulty (Dyslexia) | 21 | Hearing Impairment | 5 |
| Cognition & Learning Difficulty | 38 | Visual Impairment | 5 |
| Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty | 7 | Multi-Sensory Impairment | 20 |
| Social, Emotional and Mental Health | 49 | Physical Disability | 14 |
| Speech, Language and Communication Needs | 34 | Autistic Spectrum Disorder | 54 |
| *(Some respondents selected more than one field)* | | | |

**Findings**

Overall there was broad agreement that the key strategic objectives within the draft strategy were suitable to drive the improvements necessary to ensure that the code of practice was fully implemented.

The highest level of support received from the respondents, 92%, was for question 2 (on the theme of developing stronger links and better partnership working across education, health and social care) and for question 3 (the development of earlier identification of children and young people with SEND). The lowest level of support, which was still high at 75%, was the final question (raising attainment at KS2 and 4 and widening post 16 options). Question 4 relating to the vision around inclusive practice in mainstream provision achieved the next lowest number of 'agree' responses.



Percentage of 'agree' responses by question
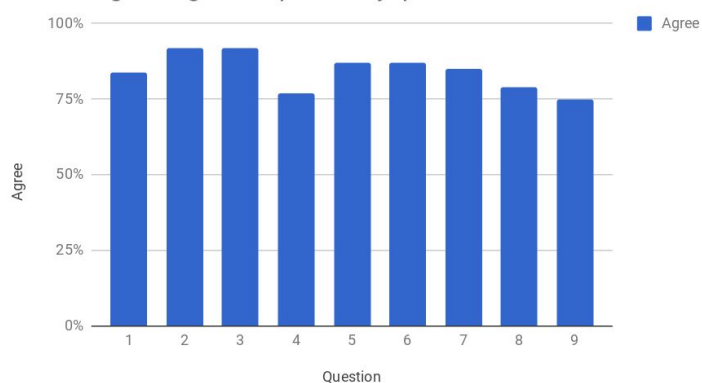
Across all the consultation questions common themes were evident. It is important to note that the consultation was not run as a 'referendum' however this level of agreement does indicate the broad level of agreement with those who responded.

**Capacity, Funding and Resources**

In terms of qualitative feedback, this was the most frequently raised issue in the responses to five of the consultation questions, but featured as a theme in all. Where views expressed agreement with the statement, they were often followed by concern that funding issues may affect its achievement. In addition there were many comments around the fact that meeting SEND effectively in our schools is at present compromised by lack of resources and/or inequalities in funding. Concern about lack of a continuum of support was frequently raised; a lack of places in specialist provisions combined with the geographical challenge of the county. Suggestions were made about additionally resourced provisions being established to meet need in local communities.

**Training and workforce development**

For 2 of the questions this was the dominant theme, but it featured in another 5. Concerns cited were particularly around an urgent need to develop skills in frontline education and health staff so that early identification is more achievable and staff are confident in meeting identified needs. The SLA (Service Level Agreement) arrangements for SEND support services are frequently cited as having had a negative impact on training and capacity building in schools. There were a number of responses which suggested that there is significant mainstream provision which is not inclusive in its philosophy.

**Listening to Children, Young People and Families**

This theme ran through 7 of the 9 questions. There were strong responses from parents/carers whose experiences had clearly been poor, but the widespread view was that the voice of learners and their families should hold higher value than it currently does.

**Communication, Collaboration and Multi Agency Working**

Responses citing this as an area for focussed development were plentiful across all questions. It featured as a theme in 8 questions. Developing joined up working across health, education and social care was the subject of an entire question but it was identified as being a priority across others. Communication between agencies including schools and other professionals and between professionals and parent/carer/learner was often perceived to be poor. The communication of information to parents and children/young people in accessible formats was raised a number of times.

**Timeliness**

Time taken to identify needs, response time following referrals (particularly to CYPS) and delays associated with unclear pathways were all frequently cited within the response to all questions. It was referenced in questions relating to early identification, school aged SEND provision and for post 16.

In addition to these themes, there were others. These included:

- **Increased accountability** within the system to ensure equitable allocation of scarce resources. This covered internal LA (Local Authority) data systems and those for additional fund allocation (EHCP and top up) and also systems by which schools could be held to account to ensure the appropriate use of funds to effectively meet need.
- **Sharing best practice** between some of the highly inclusive mainstream settings in Northumberland.
- **Delivering a curriculum which suits individual learners** in specialist and mainstream provisions, i.e extending school curricula to include vocational courses at post 16 in particular.

Also evident in responses was reports of some very good practice. Comments were made relating to both mainstream provision and support services, and it was evident that many staff who had completed responses were highly committed to meeting need effectively.

**Next steps**

The area strategy and area self evaluation has been amended to reflect this consultation.

| | |
|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 113 |
| Agree | 59 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 11 |
| Disagree | 6 |
| Strongly disagree | 4 |
| NULL | 13 |
| Total | 206 |
| Total written comments received | 133 |

Overall, 84% of responses were in agreement (agreed or strongly agreed) with the proposed vision. There were 133 written responses made in answer to this question, and they could be grouped within a number of themes:

22 of the responses agreed with the vision. Examples included:

- 'We need to do our very best and work together to support our most vulnerable children to give them the best chance in adult life. This vision states exactly this.'
- 'Nothing to disagree with!'
- 'It is both ethical and inclusive. We should be growing talent in all our children and young people…'
- 'Who wouldn't want this for children - with or without SEND?'
- 'The vision seems to present a more coordinated approach to SEND services across the county…'
- 'It is a good, strong vision'

3 responses indicated a need to go further:
- 'You need to think of a much more focussed and brave vision'
- 'I'm not sure it contains enough detail. As a parent I would read it and think 'surely that's what they do anyway?' To that end I wonder if it is ambitious enough'
- 'Vision sounds great but it's a lot of words without much depth specifically aimed at valuing and encouraging the strengths our children have. There is also little mention of educating others…'

64 further responses reflected agreement with the statement whilst identifying current potential barriers to it being fulfilled. These barriers could be seen to fall within the following areas:

**1. Capacity, Funding, and Resourcing**
15 written comments included references to funding being a potential barrier. These related to many areas; lack of funding being allocated to individual learners, insufficient funds to provide suitably qualified teaching and support staff and insufficiently funded support services. For example:

- 'Agree with the vision in principle but have doubts about how well it can be delivered due to the lack of resources in Northumberland'
- 'Some children are missing out on support due to the way we are working this year as schools are having to prioritise their money for the more severe cases which leaves some children receiving no support or very little so changes have to be made'
- 'Additional resources need to be found to enable professionals working with children to fulfil this aim. I believe that additional resources should come from the central government rather than the Schools Block of funding'

4 comments referred specifically to the challenge of geography, for example:

- 'There are too long waiting lists for specialists, children aren't given the diagnosis, support or education they need or deserve and the specialist schools as well as being massively oversubscribed are geographically poor.  They are unfair and biased to the Ashington/Blyth/Morpeth area.  The Tyne Valley does not have the cover it needs.  Our children are therefore distanced from our communities'
- 'Provision for SEND children in North Northumberland is woefully lacking in the current situation'

## 2. A need to further develop mainstream inclusive practice
This was cited within 14 comments, for example:

- 'I feel in my sons case the school system let him down as SEN provision is not deemed important enough'
- 'You let them down.  Not enough support in mainstream and not enough special schools'
- 'Services and support arrangements for young people must arise through scrutiny of our mainstream environments….and the nature and culture of mainstream schools'
- 'The need to look at inclusive practices in schools and the perceptions of staff of their ability to meet the needs of CYP'
- 'No opportunities provided by County to develop independence for children with ASD who attend mainstream who are academically able but struggle socially'
- 'Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities'
- 'We would ask for greater clarity around what mainstream schools are expected to provide to SEND learners.  This would help parents and carers understand what their children and young people are entitled to receive'

Additionally, some of the comments made specific reference to the need to have support services more easily available, these included:

- 'I completely agree with this vision...however I do think, from my experience that we don't support children to reach their full potential as we now can't afford to refer all children for support, given that we now have to pay for the time'
- 'All children and young people deserve access to appropriate provision, support and guidance from any professional regardless of age, impairment or family history'
- 'I strongly agree with the vision but it completely contradicts what has happened to SEND in Northumberland over the past year.  Parents, children and young people have been seriously let down as well as teachers who are managing higher levels of need with no support or training'

## 3. The Need for Additional Specialist Provision
There were 10 responses which highlighted the need for additional specialist provision, these included:

- 'Urgent need for more provision'
- 'More places in SEN schools would help'
- 'There is insufficient provision at the current time for children and young people with SEND'
- 'Middle schools closing has left a gap in specialist provision'
- 'There are increasing numbers of CYP with complex needs emerging. Waiting lists for specialist provisions are long and often inappropriate as mainstream schools cannot meet the needs of these pupils'

## 4. Listening to children, young people and their families
8 comments indicated a perceived need for the Local Authority to pay greater attention to the voice of the child, to work more consistently with families and respond more quickly and favourably to requests for EHCP assessment.  These included:

- 'The vision should mention that it is the young person's perception of their lives that is paramount.  This would need to be accompanied by an emphasis on child voice'
- 'This would need to be accompanied by an emphasis on young people's participation, remaining sensitive to accurate representation of child voice and participation of parents/carers in the assessment of whether something is highest quality and having maximum impact'
- 'NCC is not capable of providing this service across the board.  They refuse to listen to parents views'
- 'A genuine belief in our children is essential and a commitment to their lives means stepping into alternative approaches for education health and social care to avoid a disconnect between what they are being 'taught' and what they need for real life'
- 'Sometimes children with special needs are not given the EHCP required for them to get the best possible help they need, this needs to be addressed.'

**5. Improved working together across agencies** was identified by 7 respondents as being required.  For example:

- 'I think early intervention and collaborative working is essential'
- 'We agree with the partnership approach with SEND students...working together across borders and legislative boundaries is so important to be successful'

**6. Develop post 16 provision**
6 of the 45 responses in this section made reference to the need to develop post 16 provision if our vulnerable learners are to be better prepared for adult life. For example:

- 'Our son needs this support to maintain support to adulthood'
- 'There needs to be further consideration to suitable opportunities post 16 such that pupils do not need to travel out of County, e.g. to Newcastle College'
- 'Nationally only 5% young people with an additional need gain employment when leaving education. This needs to be addressed as a great majority of these young people have aspirations which with support, guidance and advice could be met. Relationships with businesses and potential employers need to be made stronger'
- 'There is little in supported internships for the 18-25 age group.  I am concerned at the drive to exit EHCPs at age 18 thus denying young people with SEND access to further education'
- 'For those between 16-25 there needs to be an age appropriate setting which meets the Preparation for Adulthood aims'

There were 2 comprehensive responses from schools which made specific suggestions/proposals around extending specialist provision in the local areas around Ponteland and in the north, where there was concern expressed around the impact of the redesignation of the units currently attached to Berwick Middle and High Schools.

Question 2 - We will develop stronger links and better partnership working between education, health and care to enable services to improve the ways they provide support to children and young people.

| | |
|---|---|
| Agree | 189 |
| Disagree | 2 |
| No response | 15 |
| Total | 206 |
| Written responses | 91 |

The majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective. The following themes were identified in the responses and are placed in order of from most to least frequently raised.

**1. Communication, collaboration and multi agency working**
31 respondents cited communication as an area for development, with communication between schools, education staff and health professionals being the most common.

Strategically, the following examples of comments were made:

- 'LA to encourage more effective and more consistent collaboration between all services within the LA and external provision'
- 'Less bureaucracy and better timely communication'
- 'More communication and commitment is needed between health and education'
- 'Each service works to particular protocols which makes it extremely difficult to share information'
- 'Consultation between services working through Partnership days'

Alongside the following examples of more general comments:

- 'Need to be more open with each other and communicate needs better'
- 'Fast and accurate sharing of information'
- 'Talking to each other would be a start'

The need for improved communication with schools from health and social care agencies was cited by a number of respondents, for example:

- 'Professionals from all areas in regular contact with schools'
- 'Better sharing of information between agencies so that all have a clear and up-to-date picture of a person and their needs' (Parent)

Several respondents mentioned the need for timely reports and advice following visits to schools and that these are sent to everyone involved with the child. These included:

- 'Partnership working has already improved over the past few years, however the NHS often does not automatically include schools when disseminating reports on specific children. There appears to be an assumption that parents will pass any such reports on. However parents assume that the NHS will pass reports on'
- '…ensure copies of reports and minutes of meetings led by colleagues in health and care are provided to schools and parents'

A number of respondents queried systems and the use of IT to help support better communication, for example:

- 'Create a database where all relevant information between services can be accessed'
- 'One format for recording progress and information that all professionals are familiar with. This provides ease of access to information and seamless transition as everyone can read info quickly and easily'

Several respondents queried whether the Northumberland County Council directory of staff could be expanded to include health and social care staff to make it easier for professionals to get in touch with each other.

Others suggested a 'coordinator' role to promote better communication, these included:

- 'Having a link professional for social care and health assigned to each school to increase communication'
- '(need) A one stop shop for health information to be shared with Education and social care'
- 'Put in place key staff to link between education and health'

13 respondents commented specifically on the attendance of professionals from health and social care at meetings. Examples include:

- 'Health and care professionals need to understand the importance of their attendance at multi agency meetings.' This included EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) meetings.
- 'The idea of a 'Team Around the Family' is great, but happens infrequently'
- 'More health care workers attending EHA meetings'
- 'Processes are still heavily driven by education and often health professionals do not attend multi agency meetings'
- 'Health need to have a co-ordinator separate to schools to help with coordination for meetings'

One respondent noted:

- 'Often what is lacking is not will on the part of the professionals but time.'

## 2. Capacity, funding and resourcing

25 respondents raised capacity and resourcing across the SEND system, these included:

- '…(services) to meet at a strategic level and identify what is currently available, where the gaps are and how these can be addressed'
- 'Provide all the resources required and give financial commitment to see it through'
- 'Increase funding to all areas. Change mindsets to holistic approach rather than a medical model 'within child' model, use person-centred approach'

One parent noted that discussions focussed on provision:

- 'Too often it is all about Northumberland being a big county, there being more needy cases, not meeting thresholds….essentially all about what is not available'

A number of correspondents raised concerns about there being a lack of some services, for example:

- 'Having sufficient health professionals available to help our young people'
- 'A lack of health professionals in some areas is also a concern'

In some cases this was about individual services. These included:

- 'More resourcing of CYPS to ensure they can attend every EHA meeting'
- '…school are now supposed to implement his SALT as well as all the other extra support and classes he goes out for, when they are run off their feet…'
- 'Not having to wait so long for specialist appointments (18 weeks is unacceptable)'
- 'Increased funding for more primary mental health support into schools'
- 'Create a fairer way of allocating School Nurses'
- 'NHS SALT should be commissioned for all non verbal or partially verbal ASD children. NHS OT should be commissioned for sensory issues for ASD children.  Social care should be prepared to carry out their statutory duty under section 17 for children with a diagnosis of ASD'

One parent wrote:

- 'The main lack of services that I and my family have experienced is in OT, Speech Therapy and specialist autism services.  Appropriate advice and consistent therapy received early can make a huge difference to an individual's well-being and development; and perhaps decrease the later prevalence of emotional, behavioural and mental health problems regardless of the main diagnosis'

3. **Training and workforce development**
   12 respondents commented on the need they perceived for more training and support, for example:

- 'Give teachers and schools proper training as all the schools I've dealt with have no idea and have all organisations actually speak to each other regarding each case'
- 'As a teacher we need people in school  giving us targets and advice as to what should be included in children's plans and help to achieve this and administer this help in school while delivering the curriculum'

Several respondents identified that professionals would benefit from knowing more about each others roles and systems, these included:

- 'In my opinion there is still often a lack of understanding about each others roles so some sort of joint training where services present to each other on their roles and responsibilities would be helpful'
- 'Opportunities for professionals to be briefed on the SEND system and different services available to families so they are aware of what is available and how it can be assessed'

While one respondent suggested:

- 'Perhaps some training from CYPS to schools teaching staff and LSA's who work directly with kids to help support work needing to be done with adults in school that already have the trust and good relationships with youngsters'

4. **Service Level Agreement (SLA) for SEND Support Services**
   8 respondents (parents and carers and school staff) expressed concern about the SLA. These included:

- 'My son desperately needs speech and language therapy. He had to wait until school had enough children lined up to make the payout worth their while'

- 'The new SLA is a way forward however, the cost of £300+ per day is very demanding on our school budgets particularly for small rural schools with children who have high needs'
- 'The premise of early intervention and preventions as being the key to SEND working has been lost, in part, since the introduction of the SLAs meaning that proactive, targeted working has taken second place to reactive working'
- 'The SLA makes it difficult for professionals to stay 'in the loop' as not all schools can afford or have bought the time to enable SEND support staff to gather information and share up to date specialist knowledge'

Another respondent felt that there was a need to clearly fund arrangements for children and young people to participate in school so that:

- '….SLAs are not obstacle to participation'

One respondent wanted

- 'Opportunities for SEND Support to work with parents as well as schools…'

### 5. Listening to children, young people and their families
5 respondents talked about the importance of communicating with and listening to parents and carers. For example:

- 'More joined up communication which includes parental and child visions and concerns'
- 'By talking to parents listening to what they see as the problems between the three sectors'
- 'Listening to the children and parents'
- 'There should be support for parents / carers of children with SEN, so they can access advice'

### 6. Education Health and Care Plans and Early Help Assessments
There were a variety of comments around EHCPs and EHAs. Examples include:

Accountability around EHCPs
- 'Checking up on schools that they are giving the support (i.e. spend the money across the school instead of that child)…..If the child has an EHCP, it is a legal document and schools should be made to act on it'

Annual reviews
- 'Social care and health colleagues to attend EHCP reviews'

SEN process
- 'Clear pathway for parents so they can see what their child's targets are'

SEND Team at County Hall
- 'Continuing the easy access to SEND officers at county – it saves a huge amount of time to ask a question and get a quick answer'

EHA
- 'Whilst the concept of an EHA is good, Health and / or Social Care can have a wider understanding of what support is available to a family that than which may be understood by schools, therefore I believe the role of the EHA Coordinator should sit within one of these two agencies, preferably with a Family Worker assigned to each case.'

| | |
|---|---|
| Question 3 - We will develop early identification of children and young people with SEND to enable support to be provided as soon as possible. | |

Question 3 - We will develop early identification of children and young people with SEND to enable support to be provided as soon as possible.
   a) Do you think this should be a key target?
   b) Please suggest ways in which this might be achieved

| Yes | 189 |
|---|---|
| No | 2 |
| Null | 15 |
| Total | 206 |
| Written responses | 133 |

The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective, summed up by the below:

'YES! Please, please, please do this!'

The following themes could be identified in the written responses, cited in order of prevalence from the most to the least:

**1.   Training and workforce development**
36 of the written responses related to the perceived need for training in the identification of SEND for all professionals engaged with children and young people at all levels.  This included training and support of staff in mainstream early years and school settings.  For example:
  ● 'Needs should be recognised by schools at a much earlier time in a child's life'
  ● 'Better training in SEND for mainstream staff, particularly at nursery level'
  ● 'Well trained staff in early years and KS1 to monitor and then identify children who may encounter difficulties later on in their education'
  ● 'Perhaps the SEND Early Years team could develop a screener or key things to look for that could be shared with all provisions and completed prior to school entrance'
  ● 'Yes agree but once your child is identified the support especially in mainstream is not there.  What there is is erratic and substandard.  It becomes a battle'
  ● 'Extra funding for training school staff to identify SEND so parents aren't fighting everyone, every step of the way'

In addition, there were comments which referred to the need to develop the workforce within other groups such as health professionals and youth groups, for example:

  ● 'Awareness could also be raised by providing training to local youth groups'
  ● 'More contact with health visitors.  Further milestone checks and additional education for children now who are the parents of tomorrow.  My child had all the signs of ASD yet this was not picked up by any medical professionals.  It was identified by school staff in secondary within months'

**2.  Increased accessibility to specialist SEND services**
26 responses related directly to feeling the need for wider involvement of the Local Authority SEND support services, with particular reference to Educational Psychologists, these included:

  ● 'Educational Psychologists should be available readily to support mainstream staff who have identified possible needs'

- 'Early access to educational psychologists is essential for the identification of specific needs'
- 'Pay for educational psychologists to go into preschools, children's centres and work with Portage'

Many of the responses under this theme referred to the need for better and easier access to the services with clear referral routes and there were a number of comments which identified the introduction of the SEND SLA as being a barrier to access. In addition, some comments suggested wider involvement of the teams into early years settings to provide support and training. For example:

- 'Priorities for primary/middle schools to work with a range of specialists to ensure this is the case'
- 'Increase the number of specialist staff who can come into schools/speak to concerned parents and allow them to support the children that need them. At present the lack of staff from county (the old LIST) teams were disbanded and changed again meaning the continuity of support was essentially lost. Children build relationships with these people and then all of a sudden their cases are changed and those adults are no longer in the child's life. Explain that to a child who struggles emotionally'
- 'Additional support for early years. Main focus is SALT. Other support teams tend to wait and see'
- 'This can't be fully achieved whilst SLAs operate'
- 'First and Primary schools need better access to SEND Support Services and other agencies as a priority'
- '...proactive SEND professionals who are assigned to work with EY colleagues and provide training and develop links between EY SENCOs'
- 'Develop capacity of early support services - portage. ...early years inclusion team.'
- 'Remove the SLA - this inhibits schools from referring to our service and therefore receiving the earliest intervention'
- 'Get specialist teachers into nursery schools and schools to support pupil, staff and parents!'

### 3. Improving systems
There were 24 comments reflecting a perceived need to improve systems and processes to help achieve the aim. Some referred to the internal processes within the local authority, these included:
- 'Quick response to early needs without all the necessary form filling'
- 'To streamline the number and complexity of forms required to seek assessment and support for young children'
- 'There needs to be a route into support services for PVIs. Mainstream schools need to have good staged approach'
- 'Schools etc. need to have flexible processes in place so that things don't drag on too much. Need to curb paperwork - would be especially helpful for schools dealing with high numbers of SEND children'

Others made reference to systems, for example:
- 'It seems that with this 'hub' system, children are being pushed from pillar to post and many don't actually get seen, or delayed being seen to a ridiculous extent, or labelled as 'anxious' and turned away'
- 'I believe that the early intervention hubs has enhanced the early intervention offer in Northumberland and should continue but that more streamlined pathways and threshold documents need to be created for each service and made readily available to all staff and families'
- 'A return of the Early Years panel and ensure that education based professionals are involved in the medical diagnostic pathways'

One comment related to the challenge of working between the different systems associated with education and health:

- 'More resourcing and improved systems seem to have been developed in recent years, for example google drive systems and Schools 360 but it is difficult to ensure consistency of this across organisations for example health when they don't follow the same systems'

### 4. Timeliness and early intervention

The 22 comments related to this were broadly around three themes; the time taken to identify needs, the response time following referrals, and delays associated with pathways being unclear. Examples include:

- 'Listen to parents - it took 4 years to diagnose my son. He was pushed from one person to the next, was almost diagnosed and medicated for something he didn't have'
- 'My daughter waited 5 years no one picked up on it even though I mentioned it/worked/showed always supported help even failing screening test!'
- 'Referrals to be made sooner and time scales to be shortened'
- 'A system that allows children to be inputted into as soon as a professional has a concern'
- 'Clear paperwork that remains the same and isn't changed on a regular basis. Clear directory of support available. Quick turnaround of referrals with prompt responses from health and officers at NCC, especially when situations are challenging'
- 'Have more assessments for people, the waiting list is always very long. However, even if people are waiting for an assessment keep talking to them'
- 'My sons issues were picked up in school and sent to me and the school nurse when he entered Year 1 but due to changes in the school nurse and then SENCO at the school it took till he entered Y6 before relevant things were put into place'
- 'CYPS assessments should not take so long'

### 5. Communication, collaboration and multi agency working

There were 19 comments which suggested there is a need to have good communication and joint working. This covered communication, collaboration and multi agency working between parents and schools, parents and professionals, schools and professionals and external agencies between each other. Examples include:

- 'Information should be shared and seen by professionals instead of different professionals working independently and information being repeated'
- 'Target primary settings, before the child is in secondary school and speak to the parents - they know more about their child'
- 'Better intervention for children with suspected special needs and keep families fully informed at all times'
- 'Good communication between school and parents'
- 'Better liaison from health services with early years settings'
- 'Ensure progress and intervention is monitored in primary schools and that records are passed on to feeder/receiving schools'
- 'Work alongside health agencies rather than being independent and separate'
- 'Getting specialist teachers into nursery schools and schools to support the child, staff and parents! Joined up working with health visitors, CYPS and education services and provision'
- 'Better information and more support for parents/guardians to include a fully resourced team for assessing needs...some parents don't know how to access support or feel that they aren't' offered adequate support and are left feeling very isolated'
- '..why wasn't this disorder proposed before he went to a new school because issues had been present and talked about a whole year before at previous school in the same authority with same SS and CYPS support. Who isn't talking to each other and why?!'

- 'SEND support officers being linked to areas/localities is key.  A clearer pathway of services available and who is responsible for what in terms of need e.g. NHS SALT or SEND?'

## 6.  Listening to children, young people and their families

There were 18 written responses which included specific reference to the importance of listening to families and learners, these included:

- 'Listen to parents'
- 'Early identification essential with parents involved who may have concerns about their child'
- 'Health workers and parents views should be heard'
- 'No wonder there are so many unhappy children with mental health issues.  Many are not listened to'
- 'Speak to the parents'
- 'Listen to concerns from parents'
- 'Teachers need to listen to parents and do something about it'
- 'Please develop a culture of listening to parents.  I knew my daughter had SEN when she was in nursery but she was not screened and diagnosed until year 7 despite numerous requests.  What a waste of valuable time!'
- 'Take more notice of parents concerns earlier'

> Question 4 - We want our mainstream provision to be welcoming, accessible and inclusive, so that it can meet the needs of most children and young people aged 0-25 who have special educational needs or disabilities. This means you can expect your local mainstream school or setting to make every reasonable adjustment to meet the needs of your children and young people.

| Agree | 159 |
|---|---|
| Disagree | 26 |
| No response | 21 |
| Written responses | 146 |
| Total | 206 |

The majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective. The following themes could be identified in the written responses, cited in order of prevalence from the most to the least:

**1. Training and workforce development**

66 responses referred to the perceived need for increased levels of training/awareness raising for staff in schools in order to achieve this aim. Of these, 39 referred directly to additional training for frontline teaching and support staff. For example:

- 'Educate teachers properly. I have found many teachers do not understand behaviour issues and punish inapporpriately which can escalate certain children with special needs'
- 'School staff to be correctly trained'
- 'Schools to be understanding of needs and trained where possible to meet needs'
- 'Training for teachers - they need to know how the various disabilities can impact on children at the most subtle level and then how to adapt their teaching and overall ways of communicating with these children'
- 'Real in depth training is needed'
- 'Provide more training for staff about the diversity of SEN children'
- 'Improve expertise in schools'

22 further comments were made about improving the culture/philosophy of mainstream schools. For example:

- 'Mainstream, especially large schools can be intimidating. SEND children can hide or live in fear of ridicule. However, it can work well with enough staff and the right location'
- 'I have seen that a number of mainstream schools are very rigid in their approach and expect the learner to adapt rather than altering practice'
- 'It's hard being the 'special needs parent on the school yard - so it must be horrendously difficult being the special needs kid in the class'
- 'Training for school leaders so that inclusivity becomes the norm that filters down'
- 'Integrate all abilities and stop special needs children from being mocked, teased or bullied'
- 'Help staff to find ways to meet needs rather than say 'we can't''
- 'Educate staff and pupils to realise that children with SN may be different in some ways but they are still children like all others in school'
- 'The ethos of valuing the whole child and progress from a starting point rather than purely attainment results, needs to be cultivated, promoted and shouted from the rooftops!'
- 'First school teachers teach 'children' whereas secondary school teachers teach 'subjects''

In addition, 5 further comments referred specifically to the role of the SENCO, for example:
- 'Greater importance given to the role of SENCO and time given to execute the job'
- 'SENCo should be trained, particularly in ASD'
- 'Have the SENCO specially trained and not just a glorified headteacher'

## 2. Capacity, funding and resourcing

52 responses referred to funding being key to achieving the target. Many respondents felt that additional funding would be required. These included:

- 'Speaking from experience the main reason that inclusion is a problem is funding'
- 'I do absolutely agree but this can only be done if schools are provided with additional funding to make reasonable adjustments'
- 'Funding needs to be increased to reflect the growing number of individual needs in mainstream schools'
- 'You need to decide where you will spend the money; on more or better special schools or improving the SEN capability of mainstream schools. There isn't a magic money tree to do both, unfortunately'
- 'Funding to match needs of support'

Some comments referred to fairer distribution of funding and more efficient and transparent processes associated with this, for example:

- 'SEND support both school and external agencies need to be held to account through robust SEND funding and SEND Support review arrangements. This would ensure that children receive the level of support that they both require and deserve. Funding would be clearly and transparently targeted at children and young people with the greatest needs'
- 'More notional funding for schools who have many pupils who have not been identified until reaching High School. Schools are expected to fund the first 15 hours out of this 'notional budget pot' but this is unreasonable given the number of students whose needs have not been realised sooner and thus who arrive at high school with no funding and are therefore not part of the notional funding. Massive gaps between what is needed and what is actually given'
- 'Schools with positive support for SEND children become well known for their strong support but are then economically disadvantaged'

## 3. The availability of a continuum of school placements

19 comments indicated the view that mainstream provisions should be available alongside good special schools and other options. For example:

- 'Numbers of specialist provisions need to increase so that the needs of more complex children can be met appropriately'
- 'In many cases mainstream schools are not suitable however mainstream schools with specialist unit attached may be more successful'
- 'I would prefer more specialist schools. High SEND children in mainstream schools know they are different '
- 'MOST children will be fine in mainstream schools, however most SEND pupils may very well struggle and with the best will in the world, mainstream schools struggle to cope'
- 'I feel there is a gap in provision in Northumberland for academically bright children with ASD who find mainstream difficult'
- 'Schooling split between mainstream and specialist provision'
- 'This area needs more specialist provisions units attached to some mainstream schools to ensure that children with more complex needs that are having to remain in mainstream due to a lack of spaces are supported'

## 4. Better access to specialist SEND services

16 respondents cited the opinion that current arrangements for accessing specialist support services might be a barrier to meeting the objective. For example:

- 'Support from SEND Services needs to be ongoing and available to schools and settings for the long term future'
- 'Schools cannot afford to buy in professional services and therefore need to have staff in school skilled up to ensure high quality provision and knowledge'
- 'The introduction of the 'traded service' SEND SLA has imposed a postcode lottery for SEND support'

- '...specialist skills and support from specially trained qualified special needs teachers is not there. The other support services for managing behaviour or confidence are not available'
- 'Involving external services is important as there is no 'one size fits all' for SEND'
- 'Allowing schools easier access to support from services'

## 5. Sharing best practice and increasing accountability

12 responses indicated the view that sharing existing best practice would be a way in which the target could be achieved, these included:
- 'Highlight outstanding schools that have developed inclusive practice'
- 'Highlight impact of progress and zero tolerance on exclusions and labelling as SEND young people'
- 'Share good practice and develop parent/pupil ambassador programme'
- 'Understanding of 'reasonable adjustments' to be underpinned by examples of outstanding inclusive practice in our schools'
- '(Create) an award for recognition of being welcoming, accessible and inclusive'
- 'The LA should identify first schools excelling and link them with others needing support'

Conversely, 7 responses indicated the need for increased accountability of schools and/or the local authority. For example:

- 'Develop an inclusive school audit that could be completed by schools and submitted'
- 'Schools must not use unlawful exclusions'
- 'Make schools more accountable and make it more difficult for them to 'refuse' pupils'
- 'My son is not getting his extra time that was recommended by Educational Psychologist in Y9 as they say they have to retest him….why??'
- '….are only welcoming for what money they can get….make the school implement everything on the EHCP and train the staff connected with the child. If things go wrong or are not working support etc. should be changed as quick as possible and the child/family not left in limbo'

In addition there were a small number of comments relating to the pressures that schools are under in terms of OFSTED, reporting and managing the curriculum requirements which work contrary to the positive inclusion of learners with SEND. This included a lack of options different to GCSE at KS4 which would promote development of life skills and suitable literacy and numeracy.

**Additional points/suggestions made:**
- Replacing attendance awards (which are divisive for young people who require multiple absences from school due to complex needs) with 'getting through a school term/week/day in the face of HUGE adversity'
- Suggest delegation of top up funding accompanied by increased accountability measures
- Sorting out transport in rural areas
- Insisting that entry requirements to school 6th forms for over 16s do not discriminate against those with educational needs
- Good communication is required between all parties involved in the inclusion of SEND children

Question 5 - We will review specialist educational provision across Northumberland to ensure that we have the right places available that are matched to children and young people's needs and at the best possible price.

| | |
|---|---|
| Agree | 179 |
| Disagree | 7 |
| No response | 20 |
| Total | 206 |
| Written responses | 132 |

The majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective. The following themes were identified in the responses and are placed in order of from most to least frequently cited.

## 1. Capacity, funding resourcing
66 responses included concerns around this. There were a number of different areas identified:

**The need for more special schools:**
For example:
- 'There should be more specialist provision'
- 'More places available. There seems to be such a demand for specialist provision'
- 'In age range 19-25 there is definitely not enough provision'

**The need to increase local specialist provision for both moderate and severe learning difficulties across all of Northumberland, and even out geographical inequalities:**
For example:
- 'There needs to be more places available, in a wider area for all needs. E.g in Hexham where we live there is no middle school suitable for him. His EHCP states he needs special education from September, but The Priory won't take him as he doesn't have a profound learning difficulty and both Collingwood and Cleaswell Hill have waiting list with waiting lists and do I really want my 9 year old child travelling that far every day - out of his community"More specialist provision is needed in North Northumberland'
- 'West Northumberland does not currently offer suitable provision for young people with MLD'
- 'More special schools in the south east'

**The suggestion of increasing capacity in mainstream schools to include SEND children more effectively:**
For example:
- 'More opportunities for mainstream schools with a passion for inclusivity in their schools to be able to develop units or additional provision within mainstream sites that support areas of specialism that mainstream schools already have'
- 'Clearly the geography of the county is a huge barrier to finding an effective solution. Several small provisions attached to mainstream schools across the county would surely be the most efficient use of funds'
- 'One of the issues that has been highlighted in Northumberland are high transport costs by citing the majority of facilities in the south east of the county transport cost will always be an issue to those of us living in the north, I believe that developing facilities elsewhere may help to reduce transport costs but also give the opportunity to develop more bespoke facilities that would be more fitting to some conditions. A smaller more rural facility may be better for many autistic individuals especially those with sensory issues'

A further suggestion around funding was:

'The funding should go with the child not the provider'

## 2. Listening to children, young people and their families

15 responses included reference to the importance of this. The general feeling was that parents/learners should be able to express their choices around a school place, with their views taken into consideration. For example:

- 'Child with Special Needs should be allowed to pick what school they feel best at not getting pushed into mainstream'
- 'Seek the views of parents who currently have children who are not in education due to the difficulty in finding an appropriate provision and see what sort of setting they feel would be best able to meet the needs of their children'
- 'No, I'm sorry but you don't get to decide what's best for the child.  That's the child and parents decision, go ahead and review the education provision but you need to work with the child not for the child'

## 3. Data around SEND

14 respondents suggested that in order for the right provision to be made available, it is important that data held is accurate and up to date. These included:

- 'NCC need to gain an understanding of what areas of need are the greatest within the county and then cater for these'
- 'Reviewing current demand in key areas related to specific learning needs, age of children and location'
- 'Clear specialist entry criteria shared in a public forum'
- 'Data driven look at current provision and mapping the holes, equipping more school to be SEND hubs for partnership groups'

## 4. Communication, collaboration and multi agency working

10 responses included comments on the importance of good communication between all parties. This included schools, the local authority, parents and health partners. For example:

- 'More effective collaboration and communication between the Local Authority and all Providers so that the LA is fully aware of all provision and can match young people to the best provision'
- 'Consult with head teachers, SENCO's and specialist SEND support services to establish their views
- 'No feedback is given to schools, pupil or parents on why the specialist provision is unsuitable'
- 'Shared resources, information and knowledge across different schools.  Mainstream should have links with special school in their area
- 'Listen to children, parents carers and school/college educators'
- 'Close communication with parents'
- 'Nurses carrying out 2+ screening checks should be forwarding information to LEA annually to feed into long term accommodation plans'

## 5. Training and workforce development

3 responses referred to the need for more highly trained and experienced staff:

- 'More expertise is desperately needed to meet the demand'
- 'Investment in trained staff to allow for more places to be available within the specialist settings
- 'we want teachers/support staff to have relevant training to best teach and cope with children with certain conditions'.

## 6. Accountability

3 respondents raised the following points with regards to accountability:

- 'Actually employ someone to check on schools and what they provide and how they spend the money'
- 'Holding schools to greater account in the spending of Top up Funding'
- 'Special schools are not held accountable on a daily basis for their entry requirements or selection criteria'

**Additional points raised:**

**EHCPs:** 'Continuing to review EHCP's so that progress can be monitored and taking an individual approach to each child.  To be prepared to be flexible, taking into account the views of parents and teaching staff as to the progress of the child.'

**Accessibility of Specialist Services:**  It was suggested that An online schedule of services would be available that would allow schools to select provision via an online portal.  This would allow a standardised approach across the county and also highlight provision to institutions that may have been unaware of them previously.'

**6.** We will further develop the services for children and young people with Autism and social emotional and mental health needs to ensure they are consistently effective and match existing need.

| | |
|---|---|
| Agree | 180 |
| Disagree | 4 |
| No response | 22 |
| Total | 206 |
| Written responses | 132 |

The majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective. The themes below were identified in the responses and are in order from the most to least frequently raised.

**1. Capacity, funding and resourcing**
There were 52 comments from respondents relating to access to services. These stated the view that increased capacity and resourcing of services is needed. The request for increased capacity spanned both health and education services. Examples included:

**Education**
- 'Allow specialist teachers to work on a one to one basis with these young people'
- 'Use the existing wealth of experience within the SEND Autism Service…'
- 'Continue to promote the skill set of Speech and Language teachers…'
- 'Consider how schools who cannot afford the SLA will access support for children with ASD'
- 'Look at the commissioning of services who can support this in county e.g. educational psychology, ASD SEND services, behaviour etc'
- 'The need for support for children with Autism and Social Emotional and Mental Health needs is increasing and the requirement for professional support both teaching and support workers is going to be key. Providing more time for teachers to work with these children without SLA barriers will be important and key'

**Health**
- '...employing healthcare specialists OT or psychiatric nurse would certainly help pupils with ASD'
- 'CYPS workers to be placed in schools or partnerships'
- 'More health workers are needed'
- 'Greater access to CYPS and school nurse'
- '...high quality services provided by qualified professionals providing a range of therapies'
- 'More funding to increase number of staff'
- 'Post diagnostic support is needed'

**2. Provision (including out of school)**
There were 34 responses in total relating to the provision available for children and young people. A sample are below:

- 'Expand existing provision. Outreach from special schools'
- 'Consider provision at each stage of education'
- 'An additional special school'
- 'Opportunities for pupils with ASD to attend ARCs (Additionally Resourced Centres) within the local authority'
- 'Do not place children in mainstream if they are not ready'
- 'Additional schools with SEMH provision'
- 'There should be a pool of checked and vetted professionals across the arts, engineering and scientific sectors who can be commissioned to work on projects that will increase the social skills of the SEMH population as well as progress them academically'

- 'The vast majority of need could potentially be met in mainstream if handled appropriately'
- 'Short stay provision'
- '...more support for high functioning ASD kids in mainstream school…'
- 'Smaller schools and more of them'

Some comments were made about the location of provision across Northumberland being affected by the large size of the county, for example:

- 'Appropriate provision to be made available in West Northumberland to reflect travelling time and lack of access to schools locally'
- 'For all of Northumberland not just north and east'
- 'Provision attached to mainstream schools, catering for all pupils across the range of need, and adequately preparing them for the world of work.  We have a proposal that we feel would be ideally placed at James Calvert Spence College in Amble'
- 'Specialist facility set up centrally with specialist staff'
- 'North Northumberland has been cut off yet again'
- 'Specialist ASD provision in North Northumberland'
- 'Make settings such as HBHS into a lead provision for West Northumberland in order to share best practice and support wide range of needs in Tynedale'

Comments were also made about the current provision of out of school provision that young people can access. Comments included:

- 'More social groups activities for young people'
- 'Social interaction is vital for these children, my son now goes to Youth Club in Longhoughton with other children with SEND and it is invaluable, more of this is needed'
- 'My son just wants friends, but there is hardly anywhere around where he can go to after school or at weekends to be with others like him'

### 3. Training and Workforce Development
There were 32 comments made which stated the importance of the perceived need to train and develop the workforce.  They largely related to mainstream school staff and included the following:

- 'We need to skill up all schools to successfully meet the needs of all pupils within an inclusive environment'
- 'Improved quality training planned throughout the year'
- 'More training for mainstream staff to raise awareness of SEMH'
- 'Specialist training for staff in mainstream schools'
- 'Share good practice both within and beyond county'
- 'Need to highlight systemic practice in schools for meeting individual needs'
- 'Ongoing support is needed by specialists in this area to build capacity within mainstream settings'
- 'Consistent whole school approaches are a necessity'
- 'Schools should be looking outside of the county to broaden provision - for example receiving training from Adoption UK, Barnado's, Place to Be'

### 4. Timeliness of support (early intervention and waiting lists)
18 respondents in total made a comment in relation to the length of time learners had to wait for services, or to the need for early Intervention so that timely support could be put in place.
The following samples of responses were made about the length of time it has taken to access services, a sample:

- '18 week wait time for CYPS is not acceptable'
- 'It took 6 years to finally have his autistic traits diagnosed'
- '...accessible in a reasonable time frame at every phase…'
- 'Speeding up the referral process.'
- 'Waiting lists are too long'

- 'Current waiting times which are unacceptable'

The importance of a child's needs being identified early was also commented on:

- 'Early identification and subsequent prompt action are key'
- Continued investment into early intervention mental health work'

## 5. Communication, collaboration and multi agency working

14 responses included comment on the need for increased partnership working between all the agencies involved in supporting young people. This related to requests for specific joint working and also to improved communication and coordination, for example:

- '...a coordinating role across the county to ensure consistency'
- 'Better links with social care'
- '...more clarity in working relationships and collaboration between services backed by adequate financing'
- 'Work in partnership with the three local universities to trial new ideas'
- …'there needs to be a clear leader in the field that will coordinate the efforts and ensure no child is left without adequate support'
- 'Ensure close liaison with CYPS'

## 6. Listening to children, young people and their families

13 comments were made about  parental voice and also the support available to families.
There were specific comments about the need to listen to parents and the families of the young people as part of any assessment process.

- 'Speak to the parents as they have their child 24/7…'
- 'You should ask the parents as they know the child better'

There were also comments relating to what wider support there was available to families. These included:

- 'Offer further training and support for parents of children who have received a diagnosis'
- 'Ensure that funding is available to support families and carers with the likes of CYGNET courses and parent support opportunities'
- 'Far greater support for parents following a diagnosis - support groups'
- '...there's no sibling support either, that too needs address'
- 'Bring back the parent groups'

## Additional points raised

In addition to the main themes discussed above there were several comments asking why SEMH and ASD have been singled out for discussion.

There was also a comment relating to the wording of EHCPs so that schools could be monitored on the support they are providing for a young person.

Question 7 - We will develop transition pathways from childhood into adulthood so that it is clearer how young people are supported into adulthood. As part of this we will review personal budgets across health, and care and ensure that there are clearer pathways and information available for children and young people, enabling timely access where it is required.

| | |
|---|---|
| Agree | 176 |
| Disagree | 10 |
| NULL | 20 |
| TOTAL | 206 |
| Written responses | 128 |

The majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective. The following themes were identified in the responses and are placed in order from most to least frequently raised.

## 1. Capacity, funding and resourcing

38 respondents cited thoughts that capacity, funding and resourcing could be an area for development with a significant number of comments made specifically about careers advice and support.

Strategically, the following comments were made:
- 'More appropriate provision required for post 16, and particularly for 18-25 years'
- 'More services needed at transition time, more supported living schemes with employment opportunities attached '
- 'Increased funding needed'
- 'Transition into supported living vital'

Further comments included:
- 'Support required for young people who have Top Up funding and who are struggling in Sixth form'
- 'Develop involvement with Disabilities team until 21 years'
- 'Look at other authorities for good practice & develop resources accordingly'
- 'Greater opportunities for higher education for young people with disabilities that is equitable across county with consistency'

The need to develop the current careers information, advice, support and provision was cited by a number of respondents:
- 'Needs to be relevant career advice'
- 'Opportunities required to develop interest in the work environment with possible extended work placements, supported internships and volunteering opportunities'
- 'Greater opportunities for career advice from KS3 through to KS5'
- 'Greater career planning opportunities with a SEND focus'
- 'LA to lead on providing better careers provision'
- 'The LA to provide the correct level of support without relying solely on schools'
- 'Involve local businesses to support work experiences'
- 'Develop purposeful experiences for young people'

One respondent noted:
- 'There is a need to highlight the expertise of the career service'

The need to develop a role of a 'key worker' to support successful transition was also suggested within a number of responses:
- 'Have someone families can speak to'
- 'A key worker of some kind to work with the whole family'
- '..a single point of contact who is skilled and knowledgeable'
- 'A professional advocate'

- 'Possible Lead worker who takes lead across all disciplines'

Several respondents mentioned the need for funding across a variety of placements:
- 'Increased capacity in colleges to fund SEND learners'
- 'Invest at transition time in additional specialist & hybrid mainstream/specialist provision'
- 'More funding specifically to meet needs of severely autistic to high functional autistic adults'

With one respondent stating:
- 'One size does not fit all'

One parent expressed the view that:
- 'Once our children reach 19 they are forgotten about, currently education don't want to know and social care say get on with it!'

## 2. Communication, collaboration and multi agency working
25 responses stated that communication is an area for development making a number of comments and suggestions for improvement, for example:
- 'Lack of information-not just a list of names - a map with facility located along with age range suitability'
- E.g. Newcastle - Pass it on to parents Newcastle upon Tyne. FaceBook constantly updated with events etc'
- 'Parents need to be informed of their rights'
- 'Advice required in key years'
- 'Clear information needed about post 16 outcomes'
- 'Information of where parents can go for help & advice in order to support their child even though chronologically he/she is deemed to be an adult '
- 'More accessible information shared via social media apps books etc'
- 'Good communication needed between agencies so parents aware of services available'
- 'Greater communication between mainstream schools and possible college placements'
- 'Better timely communication of transition information'
- 'Communicating relevant information  and guidance to parents to help inform choices around alternative provision'

Additional suggestions around communication included:
- 'Open information sessions to inform'
- 'Translations in key community languages available on request. Easy read versions, large print, braille of key pathways on Local Offer'
- 'Sharing of information of alternative options to sixth forms for non-academic courses'
- 'Organise parent visits to alternative provision'

## 3. Partnership working
25 respondents expressed the view that  partnership working across agencies and with parents is of great importance, these included:
- 'Work with carers more closely as they know their children best'
- 'Involvement with all services and parents'
- 'Closer links between education, health and social professionals - possible co-location'
- 'Strong and meaningful working partnerships with employers'
- 'Develop greater links with health & adult care settings'
- 'Collaboration between children/adult services'
- 'Better liaison with post 16 provisions'
- 'Schools and colleges working closer together to help young people and carers/ parents make informed choices'
- 'More robust Y9 transitions involving a multi disciplinary approach'
- 'Build stronger relationships between secondary & higher education to facilitate next step approach'

- 'Partnership working towards supported living arrangements and quality life after leaving school'
- 'Working with parents, schools and other agencies for smooth transition'
- 'Transparent joint working from early years onwards'
- 'Liaison with careers service'

Some respondents made specific reference to Social Care.  For example:
- 'Partnership with Social Care attending Y11-13 reviews to listen then support in home if needed'
- 'C&F assessment if requested & care assessment to ensure services are in place prior to child moving to adult services'
- 'Accessible partnership working to proactively prevent families reaching crisis point and breakdown'

There were further suggestions for future working:
- 'Central HUBS developed across county so standardised information can be shared via a network of professionals'
- 'Work with those who have been through the process-peer advocacy'
- The Local Authority to talk to other councils about good practice. Talk to Preparing for Adulthood organisations'
- 'Gain voice of all parents without just relying on voices from parent carer forum'

## 4. Training and workforce development

17 respondents stated that training and staff development across a number of agencies would support the achievement of this strategic objective to be achieved. These included:
- 'Staff need to understand what adulthood means for young people with high needs and how to enable full independence and how genuine employment can happen'
- 'Staff need to be able to inform carers of their rights'
- 'Staff need to be able to work with families giving consistently up to date information and support'
- 'Training for  providers  and all professionals to develop collaborative approaches'
- 'Staff need training to help them to give young people a genuinely more active role
- within EHCP reviews'
- 'Staff need training to be able to support young people once they are no longer in a school environment'

A sample of comments on the implications for training in schools:
- 'Staff need to be able to offer support for young people accessing Top Up in mainstream who are struggling to access Sixth form'
- 'Staff need to be able to prepare young people for life after school more effectively and entering the workplace as they move into adulthood'
- 'Staff need to be able to offer more comprehensive guidance around pathways and career choices'
-  'Train staff in schools to support young people into relevant provision at the optimal time'

One respondent posed the question around colleges:
- 'How will this be achieved when local colleges have absolutely no understanding and no funding for SEND learners?'

Some suggested training for parents, for example:
- 'Offer guidance to parents to make more informed choices about alternative provision'

Several respondents mentioned training opportunities from outside of the Local Authority, for example:
- 'Staff should take up the offer of transition training from outside independent organisations'

Finally, one respondent commented:
- 'Help is still required (for young people) at 25 years'

## 5. Personal budgets
11 respondents cited the need to look at the issue of personal budgets with one carer commenting that this could almost be considered as, 'a stand alone target.' For example:

- 'Bring Northumberland in line with other local authorities and all direct payments to parents'
- 'Personal budgets need to be available to students with EHCPs to help prepare for adulthood'
- 'Local Offer should have criteria for eligibility for Social Care personal budgets clearly linked'
- 'Access to more money for support'
- 'Personal budgets don't seem to be widely used or encouraged-clearer transition pathways may help here'
- 'Pathways are no good without budgets'
- 'Difficult for families to gain access to additional support & respite due to current criteria. Greater accessibility could prevent family crises. Need for a proactive working'
- 'Listen to parents when they wish to discuss personal budgets'

One respondent commented:
'It seems that Northumberland does not want to issue them'

Several respondents referred to the need to offer greater advice to parents/carers:
- 'Parents don't understand use of personal budgets well enough - open information sessions required'
- 'Make information readily available without the need to check out SEND websites'
- 'Provide more information on personal budgets'
- 'Some carers are fearful of personal budgets as they have limited knowledge of them'
- 'A great deal of personal support and instruction on the best use of budget needed to further the career of the young person'

2 responses stated that communication of information relating to personal budgets was very important so that more families were aware of the option.

## 6. Listening to children, young people and families, and supporting them
7 responses made reference to the importance of actively listening to carers and young people. For example:
- 'Ensuring plans are easy to follow and reviewed regularly'
- 'Offer of counselling to families'
- 'To discuss difficulties experiencing'

One carer explained in greater detail:
- 'Support needed by carers to help young people through transition process-where to go for help/support. Parental support is essential as the young person is not really an adult'

Another respondent commented:
- 'Listen to what parents have been saying.There is no joined up thinking or working between sectors. Parents are unsure where to go. Get parental views independently of the parent carer forum'

Another theme within this was the value of person centred practice. There were 6 responses which mentioned this, these included:
- 'Person centred practice. Collaborative approaches. Aspirational approaches'
- 'More accessible information delivered in a person centred way'
- 'Adequate planning and recording time needs to be given to teachers so that personalised education plans stay with the child'

- 'Person centred planning. What about aspirations?  Re-build personal advisers/connexions team'

**7.  Timeliness**

6 respondents made general comments pertaining to timeliness, for example:
- 'The earlier transition is considered the smoother the process'
- 'Timely careers service involvement'
- 'Good transition at every stage in childhood should set the foundation for transition into adult services'
- 'Transition plans need to begin at 14-16 years not just before the young person is 18 years'

**Additional points raised:**
- 'Specialist schools seem to handle transition better than mainstream schools'
- '..my son was let down by providers'

8. We will develop joint commissioning to ensure resources are used fairly and effectively to provide maximum impact on outcomes. This means education, health and social care working together and pooling their money to ensure best value and outcomes for children, young people and families.

| | |
|---|---|
| Agree | 162 |
| Disagree | 18 |
| No response | 26 |
| Total | 206 |
| Written Responses | 96 |

The majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective. The following themes were identified in the written responses received and are placed in order of most to least frequently raised.

**1. Capacity, funding and resources**
27 respondents commented on the funding arrangements for this strategic objective. One person felt that joint commissioning would result in the effective use of money:

- 'This is probably a good target as it is an effective use of money'

Others felt that levels of funding would need to be increased to enable the current needs of the children and young people in Northumberland to be met effectively, for example:

- 'Every service requires more money. It's really the only way things will improve'
- 'This can only be solved with better funding and resources so that these items are not a factor in the decision'
- 'Increase funding in the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS), social care, Primary Mental Health Service (PMHS) and SEND Support Services so all posts are filled'
- 'At what cost? Pooling money? A very small pot that goes nowhere to start with?'
- 'Pooling money won't create more money, you just need a bigger budget in education health and social care'

Two people felt that the current funding restrictions faced by services would present an added challenge for the commissioners trying to secure services and improve outcomes.

- 'Money in the system is so low it will be very difficult'
- 'No idea how this could be done fairly without more cost involved'

There was also concern as to whether joint commissioning was a means by which costs and services could be reduced:

- 'Do not cut budgets under the guise of pooling resources'
- 'Joint commissioning sounds like a way of reducing budgets still further to gain the same outcomes'

A number of respondents shared the view that the funding of need was currently not fairly distributed between health, social care and education services. As a result, they were keen that any future funding arrangements would ensure that costs were fairly distributed between all service sectors. Comments included:

- 'Social care and health need to provide more funding towards education as many of the needs of these children are not educational but health and social related'
- 'Good idea as education has been providing the majority of finance, other services need to be made aware of the pressures placed on school to meet health and social care outcomes and that they have a vital role to play in this'
- 'Not sure as schools and education may take the majority of the pot of money'
- 'As long as health financially contribute and social care doesn't have to cover what is essentially a 3 way support model for most children'

Some parents also expressed the opinion that services were too preoccupied by their finances. For example:

- 'Money, commissioning… all good and well but this money is for the young people with the disability.  At times it comes to a point where nobody does what's needed to help the young person for fear of whether it is in their remit and if they are paid for it'
- 'I don't think this will work.  I think more changes to all services again will not benefit children or their families.  Use money on people who actually work with children rather than on managers and people to move money around'
- 'Joint committees need to be made up of those people who deal with the real issues and not made up of bureaucrats who only consider the bottom line.  Financial considerations for children with SEND should not be part of the bigger picture'

A number of suggestions were made around trying to ensure the fair distribution of funding, these included:

- 'I have no direct experience of joint commissioning but as a non-expert in this field it does appear that health and social care are very protective of their budgets.  Maybe a referee or ombudsman type of post with sufficiently high status could ensure that each service pays their fair share to meet children and young people's needs'
- 'Appoint children's champions to hold services and departments to account'
- 'Ensure there is transparency and a person centred plan, not a one box fits all approach to secure funding'

One respondent felt that there were significant benefits to agencies and services sharing budgets:

- 'By sharing the budgets you will see an increased sense of ownership between agencies as the key performance indicators will dictate the levels of success needed.  Sharing best practice will also provide cost efficiencies (shared locations, resources and professionals)'

## 2.  Communication, collaboration and multi agency working

25 respondents noted that to improve outcomes through a joint commissioning process good collaboration and communication between all services would be required. The following are examples of general comments received:

- 'The key to success will be the coordination and the communication with all relevant parties'
- 'Do exactly what has been identified - joint working and joint commissioning'
- 'Working together definitely!'
- 'I don't think joint commissioning is needed but joined up working is'
- 'We desperately need joined up working but not one commissioned service for all areas'
- 'Better communication between services - opportunities to collaborate. Joined up working and flexibility between services'
- 'Communicate with involved parties. Do away with commissioners being protective over their pots and instead see the bigger picture.'

Others felt that particular services should be brought together and that co-location of staff would lead to improved outcomes and a better understanding of each others roles. For example:

- 'Co-locating professionals will build greater communication and coordination'
- 'Improved understanding between services should lead to improved cooperative working and therefore improved outcomes for young people'
- 'Diagnosis and services related to the needs identified should be funded as one and located in the same building'
- 'SEND and NHS Speech and Language Services to fit together'
- 'Ensure the diagnostic pathways, where appropriate, incorporate advice from all services involved/ available'

A small number of respondents also noted the importance of commissioners seeking the views of interested parties when commissioning services:

- 'The commissioning process must seek the views of the child, parent and service providers'
- 'By providing families with information about what is available and involving them in decision making'

One stressed the importance of the local authority taking a leadership role in the collaboration process:

- 'Local Authority to lead on more effective and more consistent collaboration between all services, including between services within the LA and external provision'

The importance of services working together to gain a holistic view of the needs of children and young people was also shared, summed up in the following:

- 'The more services involved the more holistic picture of a child we get'

Related to this theme, attendance at meetings and engagement with already established processes was specifically raised by 12 respondents, for example:

- 'A starting place would be for professionals to begin to use the existing frameworks and vehicles for this joint work e.g. the EHCP process. I don't think for this to take place the EHCP process itself would have to be altered'
- 'A starting point would be for all professionals to be required to take part in and use the existing SEN processes e.g. the EHCP process'
- 'Joint systems e.g contribution to EHCP'
- 'Consultation and collaboration by all parties to Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs).'
- 'Consistent contribution from all parties to the EHCP process'
- 'Ensure that all agencies are present at reviews'

In addition, the contribution to the EHCP process by health and social care services was raised, examples include:

- 'Health and social care to contribute to EHCPs'
- 'Historically some NHS services have not attended meetings for children (i.e. TAFs, EHAs or EHCP), have not supplied appropriate support to schools and even in the past pulled out when others are involved with the child'
- 'Health and social care to contribute to EHCP and attend multi agency meetings if they are involved with the child'
- 'If health staff regularly attended EHCP reviews they could suggest ways that they could could support learners'

One comment stated that a possible way to ensure best value and outcomes for children young people and families could be to consider joint appointments between health, social care and education.

- 'Perhaps shared appointments between health, social work and education services within a partnership'

**3. Clear Pathways, Thresholds and Responsibilities**

11 respondents shared the view that for joint commissioning and closer working relationships between agencies to be successful it is important that clear pathways, processes and responsibilities are developed and implemented. For example:

- 'Clear pathways and lines of responsibility'
- 'Clearly identify which needs would be best met by specific agencies. This might reduce apparent in fighting and protection of their own budgets'
- 'Systems in place so that money can be held and used jointly'
- 'There would need to be clear guidelines as to whose role is whose and a clear system of working together'
- 'Produce clear pathways and threshold documents that incorporate services from each sector therefore reducing or eradicating the current crossover of services'

One respondent stated that referral systems needed to be simplified to make access to services easier for parents.

- 'Simplified referral processes so that a parent doesn't have to work out whether a GP or school referral is best'

A concern was shared by a respondent that too greater emphasis on the coordination of services may be placed on education staff.

- 'I would be concerned that education will again have to do the coordination which we don't have the expertise or time to do'

**4. Fair Access**

7 respondents commented with views that there was a need for fair access to funding and services by all. For example:

- 'It gives all departments and children a fair share, far better than individuals getting bigger pots'
- 'The allocation of funds needs to be fair and needs based'

A number of people held the view that services needed to be fairly distributed across both urban and rural areas of Northumberland, for example:

- 'Resources will only be fairly distributed if Northumberland County Council start to understand how restricted the services are past Morpeth'
- 'Ensure resources are distributed fairly - in the north as well as the south of the county'
- 'Making sure resources are available fairly across the county, how money is pooled and used effectively is crucial. People living in rural areas often feel isolated when trying to access adequate resources for the needs of their children'

9. We will continue to work with all partners to raise standards of attainment for SEND children with special reference to key stages 2 and 4. We will widen options for post 16 learners and strengthen contracting arrangements to include the provision of individual performance data

| | |
|---|---|
| Agree | 154 |
| Disagree | 28 |
| No response | 24 |
| Total | 206 |
| Written Responses | 95 |

The majority of respondents agreed with this strategic objective. The following themes were identified in the written responses received and are placed in order of most to least frequently raised.

**1. Questioning the particular reference to attainment at key stages 2 and 4**
20 respondents expressed an opinion about the question being asked specifically about attainment in key stage 2 and 4. Two written comments supported the strategic objective but the general view cited was that support should be offered equally to all children across all educational phases rather than just in phases which include national assessments and therefore generate national performance data.

The following is a selection of the written comments made by respondents opposing the strategic objective on this basis:

- 'Key Stage (KS) 2 and 4 are only important due to national assessments. Without due care and attention to KS1 and KS3 the pressure on achieving at KS2 and KS4 is unmanageable'
- 'I have no issue with raising standards of attainment but I am concerned about the special reference to Key Stage 2 and Key stage 4 which could focus attention on years 5 & 6 and 10 & 11 possibly at the expense of other pupils'
- 'No key stage should be prioritised over another'
- 'The ridiculous expectations of KS2 and 4 need to be changed. Children should have access to support they need in school at all times'
- 'Why just KS2, KS4 and Post 16? Is this to please OFSTED? I'd prefer all children and young people had equal status/priority'
- 'I don't because practically speaking it just becomes a paper exercise with too much focus on data and not enough focus on the child'

**2. Curriculum widened to include vocational courses and life skills**
17 respondents felt that the curriculum offered by schools would benefit from being widened to incorporate opportunity beyond the attainment of purely academic qualifications. Comments included:

- 'Schools should be challenged to provide courses for children and young people with a range of abilities rather than solely focusing on GCSEs'
- 'Schools should be challenged to provide courses suitable for a range of pupils'
- 'Children need to have equality of opportunity as they compete to find employment, develop skills and try to live as independently as possible'

In particular, a collection of views indicated that young people should be given greater access to vocational courses. These included:

- 'Alternative pathways to GCSE need to be offered by all high/secondary schools'
- 'Offer vocational training alongside GCSEs or functional qualifications'
- 'Schools should be supported to increase vocational based programmes within mainstream schools'
- 'Offering a range of vocational and non-vocational options when children are able to choose options for GCSE'
- 'Schools should offer a range of qualifications to ALL pupils and not just focus on GCSEs as the only offer/measure'

Two respondents highlighted the need for a more holistic approach to education where the development of social, emotional and life skills are given as much emphasis as the development of academic skills:

- 'A greater emphasis on social and emotional aspects of learning for all'
- 'Meeting children's needs is about providing life skills alongside their educational attainment - more bespoke flexible curriculums and emphasis on life skills where appropriate'

**3. Raising standards of achievement through individualised attainment and assessment**
16 comments indicated the view that children and young people with SEND must have realistic academic expectations placed upon them.  For example:

- 'By being specific in requirements for each child (reasonable adjustments) and having high but realistic expectations that may not be in line with school or national figures'
- 'For appropriate targets to be set for individual students for which providers are held to account'

One suggestion offered was that:
- 'We need secure assessment procedures for SEND pupils.  The new 'life without levels' assessment procedures have resulted in confusion when tracking and assessing SEND pupils' progress and attainment'

This view was supported by comments made by others:

- 'A culture and system of tracking and recording performance progress to inform next steps/options.  More focus on outcomes as well as provision'
- 'Think about how children with special needs are assessed.  Do we need different ways to assess children?'
- 'Encourage special schools to develop a common approach to assessment enabling progress to be accurately measured'

One parent expressed their concern about the assessment of his/her child as always being below average expectation and the impact that this had on the child's self esteem/ self worth.

- 'My son was always 'below average expectations for his age group - surprise surprise. STOP LABELLING CHILDREN WHO ARE TRYING THEIR BEST AS FAILURES'

Another stated that:

- 'As a parent of a child with SEN I care little about performance data. I just want her to be valued, loved and engaged in learning. Whilst I fully understand the reasons for emphasising attainment , I think this is a government driven target and an irritating one to many parents and carers.'

One expressed the view that:

- 'Too many children with SEN fail because teachers are under pressure to raise standards and come up with 'a good final grade' that they do not connect properly. All of our children deserve better than this, especially our children with special needs.

## 4. Access to services and suitable provision to raise standards

15 people submitted written responses that raised concern about the accessibility of services and the availability of specific provision within Northumberland. Examples of requests made included:

- 'Better adult care provision in Northumberland'
- 'Specialist Additionally Resourced Centres (ARCs)'
- 'Specialist KS3 provision'
- 'More alternative provision at KS4'
- 'A mentoring service to be commissioned to support transition into post 16 life'
- 'The development of services to provide ongoing training, education, support internships for those in the 18-25 age group'
- 'Specialist Teachers needed to meet needs of children with SEN and more appropriate learning environments in some cases'
- 'Effective support services that are able to respond in a timely fashion'
- 'More places in special school'
- 'Better access to correct placements/provisions and staff training to develop capacity and flexibility of support'

Two comments were received specifically in relation to the availability of post 16 provision.

- 'There are many options currently available to post 16 learners there was also the potential to widen and improve the offer with support from existing providers and the Local Authority e.g. work experience opportunities and help in identifying potential employers for supported internships'
- 'A mentoring service to be commissioned to support transition into post 16 life'

One respondent raised significant concern about the availability of secondary provision within Northumberland for children with SEND.

- '...There is a huge gap in the provision of secondary education for special needs. The current government structure favours larger mainstream secondary schools, there is a crisis in Northumberland. ...Rural areas do not have more than one secondary school within their catchment area which means no choice if your child's needs are not met. Children are either missing out on a formal education, being home schooled or are having to travel ridiculous distances to other schools that still might not meet their needs but they have no other option available.'

## 5. Improved communication with an emphasis made on multi agency working

Good communication between agencies, schools and parents was cited in 14 responses as a potential route by which raise standards of attainment could be raised. Some general comments made were:

- 'Responsibilities to be taken on board by all agencies and an atmosphere of trust developed'
- 'Alternative providers to work closer with schools for shared outcomes of attainment of young people'
- 'Secondary schools and colleges working in unison with each other'
- 'Clear communication regarding what are realistic targets for students with SEND.'
- 'To create and maintain good relationships with other providers of courses at each stage including other mainstream schools, special schools and colleges'
- 'Ensure the information gleaned is always passed on… so work can be continued through the key stages'
- 'Liaise with mainstream to help children to achieve'

In relation to widening options for post 16 students one response suggested that better communication with children young people and their parents regarding options available would be beneficial:

- 'Post 16 education needs to embrace and engage with workplace options more strongly. Many teenagers (and their parents) have little idea about what options they have other than further, purely academic options'

One view shared was that:

- 'Parents are currently being abandoned, blamed, belittled and treated with utter contempt by schools and the local authority'

## 6. Capacity, funding and resourcing

11 respondents felt that improved funding would help to improve attainment and opportunities for children and young people.  Some of the general comments about funding received were:

- ' Your biggest current failing is post 16. Direct more funding to this area!'
- '...don't have funding or training to cope with the majority of SEND pupils'

Others felt that increased funding for staff training and to increase support for schools and colleges would be beneficial, for example:

- 'Funded training for staff (including support staff) in schools and FE colleges'
- 'By providing more Teaching Assistants in a classroom setting'
- 'FE/Post 16 education needs more learning support workers to help transition'
- 'More funding to ensure support in current mainstream schools is appropriate and capable of supporting already vulnerable children'
- 'Support teachers, teaching assistants and schools with children with special needs'
- 'Adequate staffing to deliver an efficient service'

SEND Support Service Level Agreements (SLA) were raised as a barrier to improving attainment within two responses.

- 'Removal of SLAs would allow education targeted work in schools for all children with a focus on SEND'
- 'Whilst I understand the need for budgets the current SLA in many cases does not meet the needs of children with SEND or ther schools'

## 7. Timeliness, early help and intervention

7 respondents shared the view that an emphasis on early help and intervention would lead to increased attainment and improved opportunities for older children and young people.  For example:

- 'If the money is put into younger children then some of the issues that arise may not arise as the child gets older and some children may not require as much support in Key stage 2 and 4'
- '...I think special reference needs to begin in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) then perhaps the next key stages'
- 'The focus should be on early identification and support so that early intervention  can be personalised and targeted to reduce gaps in learning later on in the child's education'
- 'Please don't forget early years/ key stage 1!'
- 'Early identification and ongoing monitoring'

One person shared their view that a focus on Key stage 2 and 4 attainment could be detrimental for younger children:

- ' At what cost… SECONDARY AND SPECIAL in preference to developing from roots up?  It seems to me that in answering all these questions the focus for funding is very much on secondary/special I can see massive problems and inequality for primary and nursery'

**Additional points raised:**

**Travel:**  2 respondents raised concern about their children having to travel excessive distances to access suitable  educational provision, for example.

- '... We live in Alnwick and both our children have to travel over 25 miles to get to their schools/college'