



Northumberland
County Council

Education, SEND & Skills Annual Report
for Northumberland
Academic Year 2023-24

Education, Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) & Skills Priorities

Northumberland Education has spent the academic year 2023-24 working productively towards the key priorities highlighted below.

1

Know the strengths and weaknesses of our schools and other educational providers and report their performance to the council and the community.

2

Challenge and support improvement in the performance of our schools and settings so that all children and young people, including disadvantaged and SEND learners, achieve the best educational outcomes:

We will support across the Early Years sector to ensure all children are school ready and that the schools are ready for every child.

We will support all first, primary and middle schools to ensure their pupils have the skills and knowledge required to access the secondary curriculum.

We will support improved transition, progress and performance for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 to promote access for all learners to their first choice destination.

3

Develop and implement new SEND pathways which support fairness, transparency, expectations and a consistency of approach

- Review SEND placement methodology and panels
- Review the SEND Banding system
- Review the statutory assessment process and introduce digital EHCPs

4

Develop the vocational education offer to provide clear pathways into apprenticeships, further education, higher education, and employment for all our young people and adults:

We will develop a curriculum and facilities which both supports the ambition of learners and links to the workforce requirements for Northumberland.

We will build on key relationships between education and industry.

We will produce clear guidance for schools and settings on what good careers advice looks like to ensure all young people are supported to achieve their aspirations.

5

Develop appropriate high quality educational provision that meets the needs of all children and young people as close to their home communities as possible:

We will strive to deliver the right number of places to meet all learner needs in the right place, at the right time.

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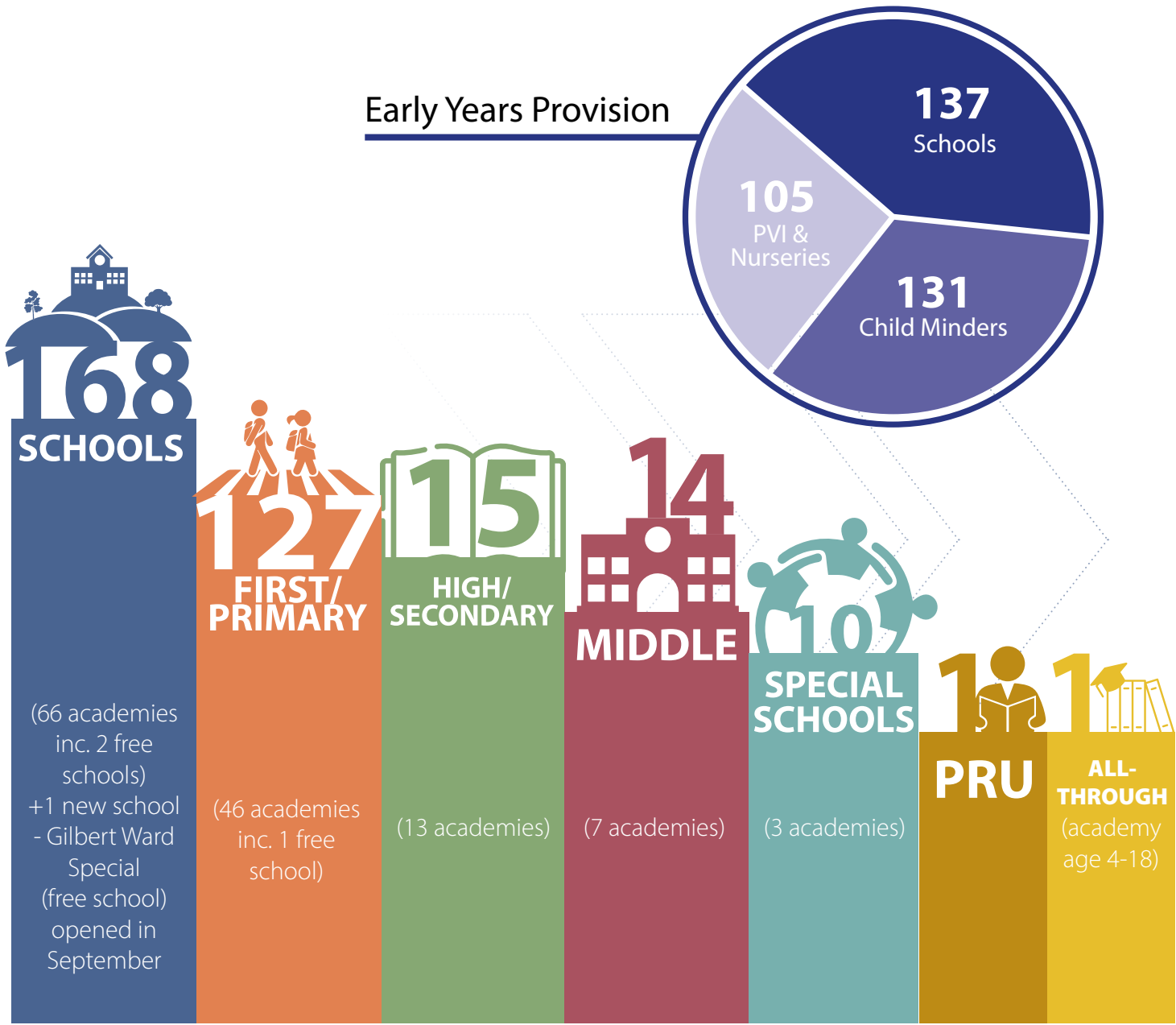
Ensure the Education, SEND and Skills Service fulfils its statutory duties within the legislative framework (including the School Admissions Code, Exclusions, Attendance, Virtual School, School Organisational Regulations, Early Years Sufficiency and those relating to SEND):

We will meet our own statutory duties.

We will further develop relationships with the Regional Director and Academy Trusts to ensure they adhere to their statutory duties whilst ensuring equality of access to education.

The Local Authority will work closely with children, young people, their families, schools, settings and all other partners to deliver on these priorities. They will be monitored and evaluated by the sector-led Education Strategy Partnership Board and the SEND Board.

➤ This report focuses on each priority, the actions taken, the impact to date and identifies appropriate next steps for further development.



“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success”

Henry Ford

Introduction

Welcome to the Education, SEND and Skills Annual Report for 2023/24.

The education landscape continues to be a challenging one. However the impact of our schools, settings and education providers on learners remains very strong.

Our relationships with schools and settings of all types and our partners in health and social care have never been stronger. The priorities we all share will continue to be developed to the benefit of all.

I would like to thank all schools, settings and educational providers for their work, skills and talents highlighted throughout this report. It is the determination of those organisations and the individuals within them that have delivered many successes. The Local Authority is proud to be a key supporting partner with you all.

In addition, I would like to thank the children, young people and their families. You support us with your feedback, direction and at times with your patience. The Local Authority remain and always will be committed to supporting your development to the maximum of our capacity.

I hope everyone will recognise their part in the successes noted in this report and also be committed to support the areas for future development that it highlights.

Kind regards



Audrey Kingham,
Executive Director of Children,
Young People & Education



Guy Renner-Thompson
Cabinet Member



David Street
Director of Education,
SEN & Skills

Northumberland Education, SEND and Skills has spent the academic year 2023/24 working productively towards the directorate key priorities.

The following pages highlight the actions taken, the impact to date and identify the next steps.

Key Priority 1

Know the strengths and weaknesses of our schools and other educational providers and report their performance to the Council and the community.

Our Early Years settings, schools, alternative educators and post 16 providers have been focussed on the task of continual improvement to the benefit of all learners.

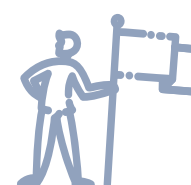
The 2024 outcomes showed limited improvements across the sector. Bouncing back to pre-covid academic outcomes remains challenging. From a positive perspective almost all learners were able to access their next step for education, training and employment and the number of schools judged good or better by Ofsted has remained at a high of 94% (August 2024).

Attendance outcomes are also challenging and are yet to regain the levels from before the pandemic. School admissions remain strong with the vast majority of applicants gaining their first choice.

Challenges remain with meeting the needs of all learners with Special Educational Needs. Growth in this area includes both higher levels of need and greater numbers being presented across the sector. Schools and providers have responded magnificently, with needs being well met, parental satisfaction remaining high and Ofsted reports exclusively stating that SEND provision is at least good.



The ability to deliver specialist provision continues to grow in line with our Strategic SEND Capacity Plan. Special School capacity has been extended across the county and supplemented by the development of Specialist Support Bases at a range of primary schools.



Our Skills Service has again significantly expanded the size of their post 16 SEND courses. Further development in this area will continue to meet the needs of young people with SEND as close to their homes as possible.



Disadvantaged learner outcomes remain an area for development. Although many disadvantaged pupils do reach their full potential, there remains a gap in outcomes between them and their peers which, collectively, we must diminish.

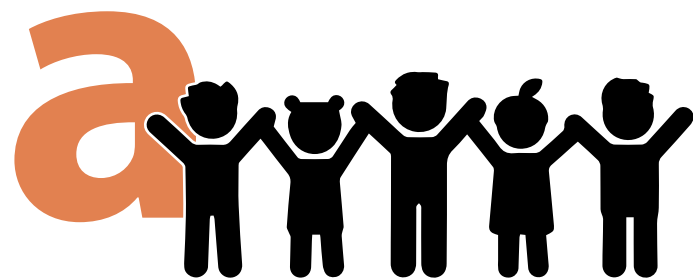


The partnership between early years settings, maintained schools and academies continues to extend from an already strong base. The sector led Education Strategy Board continues to review all the key priorities and direct further developments.

All of these actions and those listed over the following pages demonstrate that Northumberland knows the strengths and weaknesses of our schools and other educational providers and clearly report their performance to the Council and the community (Key Priority 1 2022/24).

Key Priority > 2 <

Challenge and support improvement in the performance of our schools and settings so that all children and young people, including disadvantaged and SEND learners, achieve the best educational outcomes:

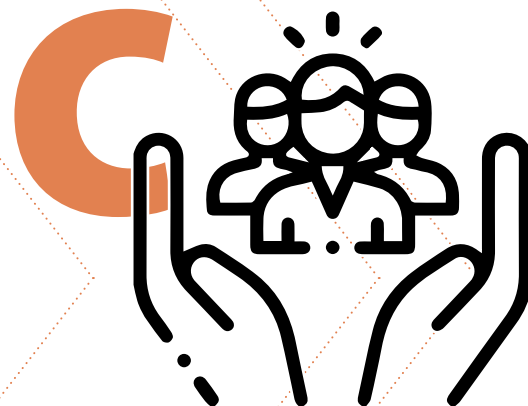


We will support across the early years sector to ensure all children are school ready and that the schools are ready for every child

We will support all first, primary and middle schools to ensure their pupils have the skills and knowledge required to access the secondary curriculum



We will support improved transition, progress and performance for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 to promote access for all learners to their first-choice destination



Early Years Provision >

The quality of Early Years provision in Northumberland is excellent. **98.8% of Early Years providers were rated Good or Outstanding at Summer 2024.**

The take up of 2-year-old provision continues to be good. **91% of all eligible 2 year olds took up their statutory entitlement to early education** in the summer term 2024. This is consistently higher than the National Average of 75%.

The take up of funded entitlements for 3 and 4 year olds is exceptional with **106% of 3 and 4 year olds taking up their early education entitlements** compared with 95% nationally in the year 2023-2024. The over 100% take up reflects some families choosing to take up their early education entitlements in Northumberland who live in other local authorities.

The percentage of children achieving a **Good Level of Development in Summer 2024 was 69.3%** compared to 67.7% nationally.



The percentage of children with **SEND in Northumberland achieving a Good Level of Development in Summer 2024 was 24.8%** compared to 19.8% nationally.



Academic Outcomes

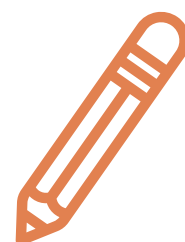
Early Years Foundation Stage:

Outcomes for children at the end of their EYFS are positive, with **69.3% achieving a Good Level of Development**, compared with 67.7% nationally in summer 2024.



Key Stage 2:

56% of Northumberland pupils achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths, a decline on 2023 and 4.7% below the national average. Reading was 2.1% below the national average at 72.0%, writing was 0.8% below the national average at 70.9% and Maths was 3.6% below the national average at 67.3%.



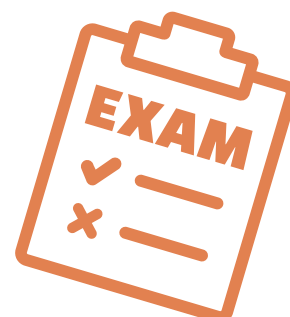
Key Stage 4:

External examinations returned for the third time since 2019. Data is provisional at this stage.

English and Maths:

4+ is deemed to be a standard pass and 5+ a strong pass

	Northumberland	National
English & Maths 4+	64.0%	65.4%
English & Maths 5+	41.5%	45.5%



Progress 8:

No data available at present.



Attainment 8:

Northumberland achieved 44.7, 0.2 above what the county achieved in 2023.



Key Stage 5:

External examinations returned for the third time since 2019. No national comparisons are available at present.

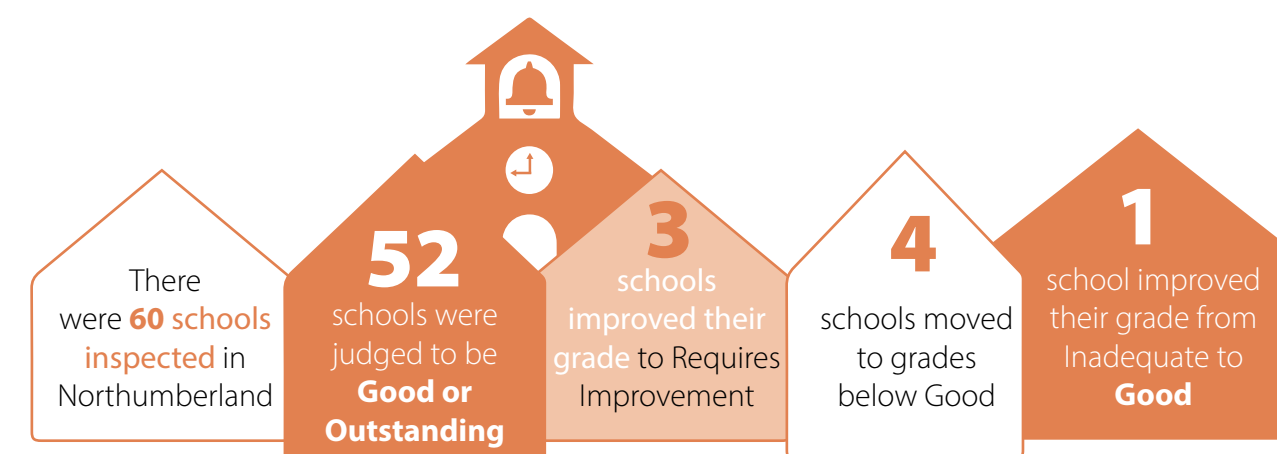
1172 pupils sat A levels, achieving an average grade of C, a third of a grade lower than the performance of 2023.

524 pupils sat Applied General Qualifications, **achieving an average grade of a Distinction minus, matching the performance of 2023.**



Inspection outcomes:

Between September 2023 and July 2024



The hard work of school leaders, supported by the Local Authority School Improvement Team, means that inspection outcomes were at the highest they have ever been.

Key Figures >



94%

of Northumberland schools are **Good or Outstanding**, 3% above the national average.

95%

of primary pupils were in **Good or Outstanding** schools in Summer 2024, the same as the previous year.



84%

of secondary pupils were in **Good or Outstanding** schools in Summer 2024, the same as the previous year.



95%



of primary schools in Northumberland were judged by Ofsted to be **Outstanding or Good** by July, better than the national average of 91%.

87%



of secondary schools in Northumberland were judged by Ofsted to be **Outstanding or Good** by July, better than the national average of 85%.

81%



of our cared-for children and young people attend schools judged by Ofsted to be **Good or Outstanding**, similar to the 82% in the previous year, and just below the national average of 86%.



Key Priority 3

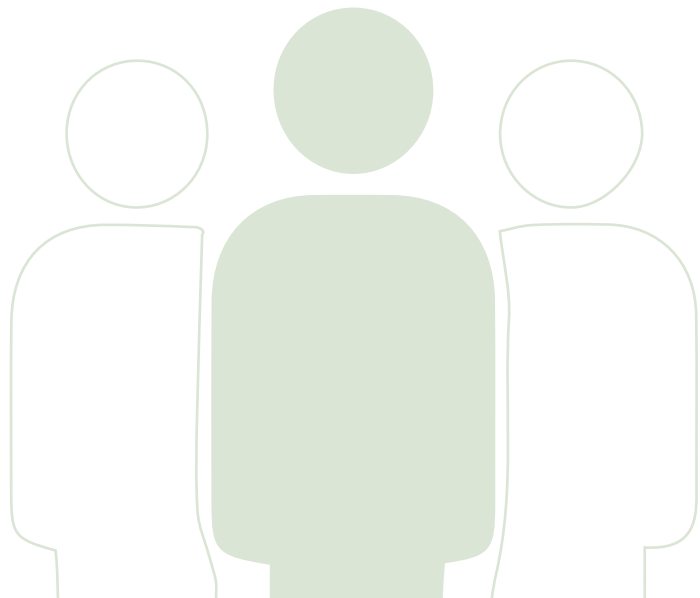
Improve the lived experience and outcomes for learners with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND):

A) We will work in partnership with all stakeholders, including championing the voice of children, young people and their families, jointly working with Health and Social Care, to fully implement the Local Area 0-25 SEND Strategy

The Local Area SEND Partnership consists of Northumberland County Council senior leads for education and health and social care alongside NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board. Work on the delivery of strategic actions described within the Northumberland Local Area SEND Strategy 2021-2024 has been ongoing and the education work is described in this report.

Key delivery highlights from the partnership include:

- The co-production and launch of the Children’s Occupational Therapy Sensory Processing Service for children and young people living in Northumberland.
- A team has been developed to support education providers to initiate Early Help Assessments and facilitate Team Around the Family meetings. This is a significant investment of 6 Education EHA workers. The aim was to reach 200 children with EHAs initiated by school in the 2023-24 academic year. At the end of the summer term there have been 846 children with education initiated EHAs demonstrating the impact this has had on children and young people accessing early support.



B) We will lead on the development of a fully inclusive education system

There has been, and continues to be, an increase in the number of learners presenting with SEND in Northumberland. Correspondingly, the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) being applied for and agreed has increased. Over the last 5 years, the number of EHCPs in Northumberland has increased by 52.3% including 15% in 2023/24.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of EHCPs: January 1st	2173	2392	2650	2877	3310

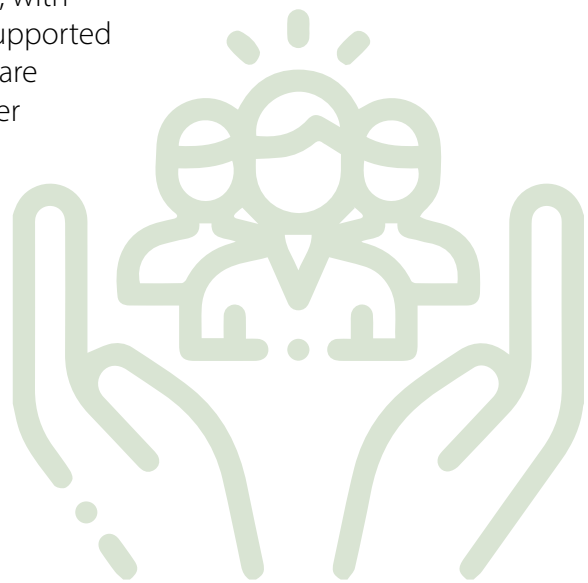
Many schools and settings believe the reasons for this growth include:

- Improved identification of SEND
- Increasingly complex young people with SEND (in part, linked to COVID measures)
- A lack of confidence for some parents that mainstream schools can meet their child’s needs
- The actions in a minority of schools which are less inclusive
- Mainstream schools lack the finances to fully support SEND learners

Special schools continue to operate at capacity, with learners with the most complex needs being supported into such provision whilst mainstream settings are required to make effective provision for a greater number of pupils with EHCPs.

There are many very inclusive schools and settings in Northumberland. The staff and governors of those schools hold similar principles and a desire to ensure all learners are successful alongside their peers and as close to home as possible.

It is a key responsibility of the local authority to support schools with developing and sustaining their inclusive ethos and provision.



Actions and Impact

The High Incidence Needs Team (HINT) provided an amended core offer to schools during 2023-24 in response to the 2022-23 team data showing that demand for each service was seriously outstripping team capacity. **The amended offer placed a greater emphasis on building the capacity of staff in schools to meet the needs of learners** through offering an enhanced whole school offer and reducing the emphasis placed on individual pupil assessments.



Compared to 2022-23 HINT saw a percentage decrease of 37.4% in relation to Individual requests for Pupil Support and whole school support activity saw a percentage increase of 35%

The comparison data between 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic school years shows that HINT's operational objective to move away from individual pupil assessment in favour of an approach that increasingly focuses on building the capacity of staff in schools to meet the needs of learners in their care has been achieved. The changes made to service delivery did not result in a reduction in customer satisfaction levels by either schools, parents, or pupils.

The joint NHS and HINT Speech Pathway became embedded during 2023-24 with the Specialist Assistants for Speech and Language delivering 753 teaching sessions to 38 children with outstanding levels of progress being made by each learner. This service was greatly valued by school staff, parents and carers.



New to the 2023-24 HINT service delivery was the introduction of team video/telephone consultation appointments by all four teams. School staff have accessed 164 appointments across the year.

Feedback received to date shows that users of the consultation line have found the advice and support given by the teams helpful and that they have valued the ease of access to the service that the consultation offer provides.



The Low Incidence Needs Team (LINT) have seen a 17% decrease in referrals to the Portage Service (0-3yrs) during 2023/24 but in those referred there have been higher numbers of younger children with more complex needs. Numbers remain a concern as early intervention is shown to have a significant impact on a child's progress long term. Since 2020 referrals have increased by 183%.

The referrals to both the Sensory Support Service and the English as an Additional Language Team have remained consistent, but the complexities of referrals mean that pupils/families and schools/settings are requiring additional support. There have been 3,940 individual teaching sessions and a total of 7,326 interactions including home visits, individual assessments, and whole school support during 2023/24.



787 educational advices were requested from Educational Psychologists during 2023-24 for Education & Health Care assessment (following request for EHCP).

213 schools / settings received support from the Educational Psychology Service. (This figure includes both statutory assessment work and work carried out through the service level agreements (SLAs).

The Educational Psychology service continues to face challenges aligned to national pictures. There are currently 4 vacant posts for Educational Psychologists. The appointment of Assistant Educational Psychologists has been positive to support the service delivery of the team and also to contribute to the work of Mental Health Support Teams.

In 2023, **timeliness of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks was 8.1% lower in Northumberland than England as a whole.** Northumberland issued 10.7% less of its EHCPs in timescale than the North East as a whole. The proportion of EHCPs issued in timescale have continued to decrease as a result of increased demand and reduced capacity, although summer 2024 saw a significant improvement whereby 54% of completed EHCPs were done so within time scale over the quarter, better than the national average of 50%.

The statutory EHCP assessment and Review Team currently have the 4th highest caseload in the North East. **Development work to improve practice and capacity is planned for 2024-25 within existing budgets.**

Our teams have remained well connected with colleagues on a regional and national basis over the past year, further developing links with Whole School SEND, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and Whole Education.



Key Priority 4

Develop the vocational education offer to provide clear pathways into apprenticeships, further education, higher education, and employment for all our young people and adults:

- A) We will develop a curriculum and facilities which both supports the ambition of learners and links to the workforce requirements for Northumberland
- B) We will build on key relationships between education & industry
- C) We will produce clear guidance for schools and settings on what good careers advice looks like to ensure all young people are supported to achieve their aspirations

Northumberland Skills

- There were 1,933 enrolments onto programmes across eight campuses in 2023-24 for adult learners and 351 enrolments for young people aged 16-18.

Overall achievement rates across the whole Service (all ages) for 2023-24 were 90.6% (excluding Apprenticeships).

- Achievement rate for 16-18 (excluding Apprenticeships) is 88.3%, an improvement of 7.2% on 2022-23 and 12.5% above National Rates, demonstrating significant distance travelled.

- Apprenticeship recruitment and retention continues to remain a national challenge in 2023-24, headline achievement was 70.5%, 3.41% points above 2022-23 and 10.5% above the current DfE Intervention threshold measures.

Northumberland Skills continues to provide training models through apprenticeships in various vocational sectors and have availability in various roles across the county to work directly with internal and external employers. During 2023-24, Northumberland Skills has expanded the apprenticeship vocational sectors and now offer training in Electrical Installation, Welding and Plastering to support the overall Skills Strategy.



- Northumberland Skills' self-assessment grades the service as **GOOD with some Outstanding features**, in terms of OfSTED gradings for 2023-24.

- The achievement rate for GCSE English and mathematics is 89.8% which is an increase of 5.4% from 2022-23 and is well above the National Rate of 77.2%.

- Pass rates for learners with an EHCP is **outstanding at 100%**.

- Adult Learning for those aged over 19 years forms the largest majority of the service and remains as a **GOOD performance with an achievement rate overall of 92.9%**.

- Pass Rate at Entry/Level 1 (all ages) is **92.4%** and remains the largest cross section of the participation at 1,178 enrolments. Pass Rate at Level 2 (all ages) is 92.1% with 567 enrolments, demonstrating an increase by 1.9% for Entry Level/Level 1 and a slight decline for Level 2 of 0.6% but remaining 9.7% above National Rates.

- Given the legacy Covid-19 challenges to ensure **learners remain on programme, engaged and making good progress**, the achievement rates are reassuring.

- Attendance in 2023-24 for 16-18 learners was 85%, Adults (19+) was 86%.

- Apprenticeship End Point Assessment achievement remains positive with more than 30% of apprenticeships achieving **Distinction grades** at the end of their programme of training.

- Learner's attitudes to their education are positive and have been shown to have improved over time.

Behaviour and attitudes of learners is good, with learners demonstrating effective behaviours for learning supporting what we know to be the expectations of employers.

- The Employability Service continues to be well positioned to respond particularly to the North East Combined Authority's Inclusive Growth projects where the prime aims are to support residents into jobs, reduce inequality and disadvantage gaps and to support progression into employment as well as in work progression through training.

Collaborative Projects Strengthen Pathways to Employment

Data driven insights into education outcomes

A relationship has been developed between NCC and the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) to support the delivery of the priority to better understand the aspirations and destinations of all of our children and young people in Northumberland.

CEC, funded by DfE, piloted their Compass+ software nationally in 2022-23 with that platform gathering destinations and other details related to education outcomes.

Many parallels can be drawn between what Compass+ currently offers, has potential to offer, and what Education, SEND and Skills officers wish to gather to the advantage of developing relevant education pathways for Northumberland.

As a result, this partnership working will trailblaze an LA led approach in Northumberland which has since triggered other regional LA's to join the working group to take a consistent and regional approach to understanding and planning for better education outcomes.

Data-driven insights and carefully planned curriculum identify opportunities for learners



Energy Central Learning Hub & Northumberland Skills

Work officially began during the spring of 2023 on the £13.6m Energy Central Learning Hub situated in the clean energy cluster at Port of Blyth. During the remainder of 2023 and in to 2024 the construction works have been taken to a point of practical completion.



A new direction of travel during 2024 was that Northumberland Skills were requested to occupy Energy Central Learning Hub and in doing so to contribute to the outcomes and outputs of the investment resulting in work being undertaken to negotiate terms and to agree a lease to allow Northumberland Skills to occupy ECLH.

Much work has also been undertaken to design a curriculum to support offshore renewable energy and advanced manufacturing sectors alike, to specify training equipment, develop funding solutions, and conduct procurement exercises to obtain the majority of the equipment.

All of the equipment required to commence delivery has been procured with more to follow, but it won't be required until 2024-25.



Northumberland SEND Employment Forum

The fourth Northumberland SEND Employment Forum took place in July 2024. Attendance continued to be strong, and the topics generate much interest and positive feedback.

The forum now appears to have reached a point where it has momentum and can be considered business as usual in creating an environment where all stakeholders in SEND employment can convene.

Supporting SEND learners

Key Priority 5

Develop appropriate high quality educational provision that meets the needs of all children and young people as close to their home communities as possible:

A) We will strive to deliver the right number of places to meet all learner needs in the right place at the right time

Capital

BAM Construction has been appointed to undertake the construction of the new schools for Astley and Whytrig in their new location within Seaton Delaval. Construction works are well underway and the new build remains on programme to open for the new academic year in September 2025.

Kier Construction has been selected as the approved bidder for the rebuild of James Calvert Spence College. Full Planning approval has been granted and designs are complete to RIBA Stage 4. It is anticipated that construction of the new facilities will commence early in 2025 with the new school programmed to be opening for first teaching in September 2026.

In the meanwhile, the former JCSC middle school buildings have been repurposed to become a new SEND facility (operated by Barndale SEND School) and a new primary school for Amble First School renamed to King Edwin Primary School. Robertson Construction completed the remodel and refurbishment in September 2024.

During the summer holidays (July 2024 - August 2024), the capital team undertook a range of capital projects to facilitate the expansion of four of the Coquet Partnership First Schools to become Primary Schools.

Portakabin delivered new classroom buildings for:

- **Red Row Primary School**
(3 classrooms, group room and toilets)
- **Amble Links Primary School**
(2 classrooms, group room and toilets)
- **Grange View Primary School**
(1 classroom, staff room, group room and toilets)
- **Broomhill Primary School**
(classroom, staff room, hygiene room and toilets)

All the schemes were delivered to programme and the new facilities welcomed pupils for the first time in September 2024.

Following Cabinet's decision to proceed with the re-organisation of the Berwick Partnership from a 3 tier to 2 tier education system, **work has begun to facilitate the expansion of a number of the existing First Schools to become Primary Schools.**

The capital team, in conjunction with Mott McDonald technical advisors, has developed a series of RIBA Stage 3 designs for Tweedmouth West, Scremerston, Holy Trinity, Berwick St Mary's and Norham First Schools to become Primary Schools and for a Primary School in Wooler to replace the First and Middle Schools. Plans are also in place for smaller capital works at Lowick, Spittal and Prior Park First Schools. The procurement of contractors is underway and works to enable each school to operate as a Primary School from September 2025 have been programmed.

Robertson Construction has been appointed main contractor for the provision of a **sports building, including 4 court sports hall and 4 zone changing facilities, for King Edward VI School Morpeth.** The sports hall will support 5-a-side football, netball, badminton, trampolining, martial arts, cricket, table tennis and other sports. The changing rooms will also be used for outdoor sports including on a proposed 3G pitch.

As well as supporting a diverse school sports curriculum, the sports building will be accessible to the community outside of school hours. Works are expected to start early November 2024 and complete late August 2025.

The School Capital Improvement Programme has continued through the year and between September 2023 and September 2024 has seen **20 projects completed on site, with a combined value of approx. £2.7 million.**



Key Priority 5



Geographically, these projects have ranged from Berwick in the North, Kielder in the West to Seaton Sluice in the South and have undertaken a range of works including replacing and upgrading roofs, replacing windows, upgrading heating, electrical, fire alarm and drainage systems and improving facilities for pupils with SEN needs. In addition to the projects completed over this period, many other projects are moving through the design stage or have started work on site. As well as maintaining the school estate, these projects seek to reduce operating costs for the schools and help the Council in achieving its climate change objectives. The latter has been helped by additional funding being made available from the DfE specifically to help schools improve their energy efficiency.

Over the last three years, works have been undertaken throughout the county to create a number of Primary Support Bases (PSBs) and Specialist Support Bases (SSBs) that will provide additional support for pupils at a host school. In October 2024, there is one PSB at Cambois Primary School and eight SSBs in the county – Berwick St Mary's First, Cambois Primary, Central Primary, Mowbray Primary, Newsham Primary, Northburn Primary, Red Row Primary and Seaton Sluice First Schools.

To accommodate the growth in pupil numbers attending Cambois Primary School SSB, an expansion project will commence imminently, with anticipated completion by the end of 2024 to create an additional classroom, intervention room, lobby and toilet facilities on the school site. This will accommodate up to twelve pupils.

Work is in the very early stages of creating a Family Hub in Bellingham, on the middle school site. The proposed scope of work includes a lobby, offices, kitchen, accessible toilet, family room and activity room which opens out into a secure play garden area.

The total capital spend for the academic year on Children's Services education capital projects was £37,292,697.31



Key Priority > 6 <

Ensure the Education, SEND and Skills Service fulfils its statutory duties within the legislative framework (including the School Admissions Code, Exclusions, Attendance, Virtual School, School Organisational Regulations, Early Years Sufficiency and those relating to SEND):

- A) We will meet our own statutory duties
- B) We will further develop relationships with the Regional Director and Academy Trusts to ensure they adhere to their statutory duties whilst ensuring equality of access to education

> Early Years Sufficiency 2023/24

During 2023/24 the funded childcare market in Northumberland grew by approximately 1500 places. The statutory Families Information Service was moved under the remit of the Early Years Team in 2024. This enables residents to access support to secure early years and childcare provision should they need it.

To date, we have had no calls to suggest sufficiency is an issue and we can therefore assume parents are able to access their entitlements. The Early Years Team will continue to expand the childcare market over the next academic year to support sufficiency of provision for the new 30 hours-funded Early Years entitlement for working families with children from 9 months of age.



> Admissions

Primary

97.71% of children were allocated their first choice Primary School, 6% above the national average

Secondary

95.04% of children were allocated their first choice Secondary school, 13% above the national average

2,178 'in year' applications for mainstream schools in 2023-24, an increase on the previous year

Between September 2023 and August 2024 the team has processed 106 applications for children seeking asylum and refuge



The Fair Access panel considered 173 referrals between Sept 2023 and July 2024, this compares to 66 in 2022/23 and 44 in 2021/22. The significant increase is from referrals in category 'L' where we have been unable to allocate a school within a reasonable travelling distance.

The admissions portal has now been developed to include 'in year' applications. This will support the efficiency of processing the in year admission applications.



> Permanent Exclusions and Suspensions

There has been a 35% increase in the number of permanent exclusions from 105 in the 2022/23 academic year to 142 in 2023/24, whilst there has been a very slight reduction in the number of suspensions.

The increase in permanent exclusions in 2023/24 has several causes. This includes the growth in the number of learners with mental health issues, the increased waiting times to access some services and the increased demand for Alternative Provisions.

The ongoing solutions to these challenges include strengthening the capacity of support services and extending the availability of high-quality alternative provision both internally at the schools, at the Pupil Referral Unit and across the independent sector.

Amongst the 142 pupils who were permanently excluded in 2023-24, 12 were of primary school age. There is a significant challenge in ensuring permanently excluded pupils receive suitable full time provision by the 6th day. The data also indicates that pupils with SEND and Cared for Children (CfC) are more likely to be excluded.

- In 2023/24 the Inclusion team supported 300 learners in alternative provision. Out of those, 10 learners reintegrated into special school and 17 back into mainstream successfully.
- In 2023/24 the Inclusion Team supported 48 managed moves, 30 were successful and 18 unsuccessful; the success rate is 63%, 11% up since 2022/23. Historically the success rate was 20%.
- The Inclusion Panel considered 83 referrals into the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), Alternative Provision (AP) and Primary Support Bases, with 14 going on to be permanently excluded.
- 64% of the 2023/24 Year 11 PEX (permanently excluded) cohort achieved a qualification in English, 56% of the 2023/24 Year 11 PEX cohort achieved a qualification in Maths.
- Number of PEX learners in AP Sept 2022: 112; number of PEX learners in AP Sept 2023: 144; number of PEX learners in AP Sept 2024: 195. This reflects the increase in the number of children and young people being permanently excluded from Northumberland schools.
- 55% PEX learners were in full-time suitable provision by day 6 in 2023/24. This is a reduction of 19% on the previous year, however there are several contributing factors including availability of Alternative Provision placements, plus the delay in LA receiving notifications of permanent exclusion from schools.

The first Northumberland 'Inclusion Summit' was held in September 2024. 123 school representatives attended and the average feedback was 8.65/10 for the overall experience.

➤ School Organisation and Resources Team (SORT)

Approval for the reorganisation of the Coquet (Amble) Partnership to the primary/secondary structure was given in November 2022 and this September 2024 the remaining first schools in the partnership became primary schools by retaining their Year 4's into Year 5. The primaries will have their full complement of year groups next September when they retain Year 5's into Year 6.

Linked to the reorganisation of Coquet Partnership was the approval to open a satellite site of Barndale School (known as Barndale by the Sea), securing the first specialist provision within Amble. The new site opened in September 2024, offering specialist provision to students with specific primary needs. Barndale by the Sea shares a newly refurbished building with King Edwin Primary (formerly Amble First School) and will grow in a phased way to take up to 50 students.

- Implementation of school reorganisation in the Berwick Partnership is continuing with roll-out of the recruitment process in line with the Staffing Protocol to vacancies in the continuing schools over summer and autumn terms 2024. These posts will be taken up in September 2025 and September 2026, but it is expected that 'ad hoc' posts will continue to arise, offering further opportunity for staff.

- Implementation of the Council's 5-year SEND Capacity and Place Planning Strategy has begun in 2023/2024 with consultation with educational professionals in the Ashington and NCEA Partnerships (Ashington/Hirst area). Proposals for supporting students with special needs in schools in the area are being formulated with a view to consulting with parents, stakeholders and the wider community in the late Autumn term 2024.

- 2 primary schools and 1 secondary school academised in 2023/24.

- Responsibility for Commissioning of specialist places in Northumberland Special Schools was allocated to the SORT Team in October 2023. The team manages the SEND Placement and Transition Panel (SPRT), which now meets twice monthly to address the continuing growth in demand for specialist provision, with an average of 30 cases considered at each panel.

- Between September 2023 and July 2024, the SPRT panel considered 788 requests for specialist provision. Within this figure:



- 562 requests were agreed
- 171 requests were not agreed
- 410 of requests agreed were placed
- 87 requests agreed were in consultation

- The Special School Brochure has been updated for Northumberland Special Schools developed to assist parents in making appropriate school preferences.

- A further £1.09m in S106 contributions to support educational infrastructure if impacted by growth in student numbers as a result of housing development has been requested by the team in 2023/24.

Free School Meals

Continuing to support families across the county through the HUGGG voucher scheme for school holidays. **Last academic year from October 2023 holidays to summer 2024 holidays inclusive saw a total of 47,166 vouchers provided (an equivalent of £2,087,086.00), of which 44,582 were redeemed (a 95% redemption rate).** The vouchers have been used to provide uniforms and food during school holiday periods.



Business Support

School Funding and the National Funding Formula

Northumberland continued its adoption of the National Funding Formula for 2024/25 with the Council classified as a local authority which “mirrors the NFF”. An overall balanced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) position was reported to Schools Forum in July 2023. The significant pressures arising within the High Needs Block, has resulted in a deficit balance across the DSG, in line with the vast majority of local authorities and mitigating action is being agreed, in conjunction with the Schools Forum.

School Balances

A report to Schools Forum in July 2024, illustrated that there was another marginal fall in maintained School Balances overall during the financial year to March 2024. Unlike in 2022/23 which saw particular challenges for First and Primary Schools, the table below shows that Special Schools were responsible for the overall decrease in balances.

This unfunded NJC pay award, was a significant part of this as for the second year this was not supported by additional funding in the way the teachers’ pay award was.

Total balances - All maintained schools as at 31 Mar 24, and movement in 23/24					
Total balances	No. of schools	2022/23	2023/24	Change (£)	Change (%)
First/Primary	82	3,775,751	4,387,905	612,154	16.2%
Middle	7	1,302,742	1,115,904	-186,838	-14.3%
High/Secondary	3	321,327	403,670	82,343	25.6%
Special	8	2,575,709	1,981,356	-594,353	-23.1%
	100	7,975,529	7,888,835	-86,694	-1.1%

SEN High Needs Finance

An additional £430,000 was recouped from other LAs through identifying additional out of county pupils. This was supplemented by a further £87,000 savings made through the annual Import Export exercise.

Personal Budgets

Growth of 294% over 2 years in personal budgets and direct payments was managed within the service despite the increase in demands elsewhere. Savings of £34,000 were made through revising service delivery and VAT arrangements, an approach that was reviewed and agreed by Corporate Finance and Internal Audit.

Service Level Agreement Portal

The Services to Schools SLA portal was responsible for agreeing over £6.2 million of services to support Schools across the whole Council, from premises to various other professional services including a range of services from Education and Skills. This figure was in line with the previous year, despite further academisation which reduces the potential offer available from some of the Council services. School Meals continued their trend of increased takeup, and the Teachers and Support Staff supply insurance schemes continued to successfully support schools in the face of commercial competition.

Schools Forum

Following the retirement of the previous chair Colin Pearson, Alan Hardie , Chief Executive of the Northumberland Church of England Academies Trust succeeded him in the role. Forum continues to play a significant role especially given the challenges faced within the High Needs Block with our expenditure exceeding income by £4.2m for the financial year 2023/24.



The Education Welfare Service

Improving school attendance in Northumberland continues to be a priority. There have been some improvements in some schools in all phases. However, the overall measures for absence, persistent absence and severe absence are not as good as last year.

The two factors most affecting attendance have been the increasing numbers of children with health needs and parental engagement. Consequently, there have been significantly more referrals to the Education Welfare team than last year.

During the year, the Education Welfare team was strengthened, and the SLA was withdrawn so that all schools now receive a universal offer of attendance support in line with statutory guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance.

At the same time implementation of Northumberland's first multi-agency attendance strategy started, Improving attendance to give children the best start in life 2023-28, alongside the attendance campaign Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow, Attendance Matters.

New initiatives and ways of working were introduced during the year with early indications that impact will be positive during the next academic year.

Examples of innovation include attendance reviews for individual schools with their School Improvement Partner, delivering workshops for parents on emotionally based school avoidance and phase change transition, piloting school readiness re attendance through Family Hubs, integrated working with the new Education Early Help Assessment Workers, and prioritising attendance as a protective factor through Northumberland's safeguarding partnership (NCASP).

Joint initiatives with specific school partnerships have had a positive impact and are helpful blueprints for further development across Northumberland schools. Successes include:

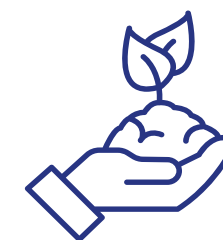
- the Count Us In initiative with schools in Morpeth
- the Prudhoe Pledge with representatives from the Prudhoe partnership of schools

National developments are also helping to promote school attendance, with Ashington's status as an Attendance Hub and more of our schools joining hubs from other local authorities.

The DfE electronic register system was used by the majority of Northumberland schools and made it possible to target resources where they were most needed. Specialist deployment of Lead Education Welfare Officers to special schools and alternative providers with high numbers of permanently excluded pupils are examples of how access to live data can and will make a difference to ensuring that children are in school. Plans are in place to target more resources at schools with the highest levels of persistent absence.

Legal intervention is back to pre-pandemic levels and likely to increase as the regulations under-pinning a new National Framework for Penalty Notices for absence is implemented, in line with Northumberland's revised Code of Conduct.

Safeguarding arrangements for identifying children at risk of missing education (CME) are a strength, as identified by Ofsted in the inspection of local authority children's services in May 2024, and over 300 pupils were tracked through the process and re-engaged in education. Northumberland continues to be one of the local authorities with the lowest number of children missing education. Monthly multi-agency CME Tracking Panels continued and a high proportion of children were no longer CME as a consequence. Focussed tracking panels will aim to reduce the over-representation of pupils with SEND in the CME cohort, especially pupils with EHCPs.



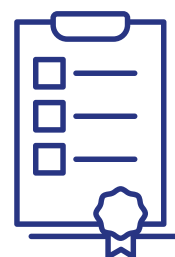
The proportion of children in Northumberland that are electively home educated is lower than the national average. Numbers have continued to rise and reached 564 by the end of the academic year. Arrangements to safeguarding children who are electively home educated were also inspected by Ofsted, with a positive outcome, and a multi-agency strategy is currently under review.



Pupils with health and medical needs who attend Northumberland's Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Health Needs provision continued to learn in Family Hub and community venues across the county. Demand on the service continued to be met by increasing group sizes and developing \ online learning.



Teachers worked with schools to ensure that teaching was matched as closely as possible to the individual needs of learners including entering pupils for entry level GCSEs when needed or entering them for additional GCSEs, such as Statistics.



All teachers were trained in neuro-diversity and a relational approach to working with children. Attendance improvement remains a priority so that barriers to learning are overcome and overall achievement improves.



Safeguarding

School engagement with the Northumberland Children's and Adult's Safeguarding Partnership (NCASP) via the Safer in Education sub-group, **is good and continues to evolve:**



- A refreshed Safer in Education half termly briefing was introduced for Designated Safeguarding Leads, Designated Teachers and school Attendance Leads.
- The electronic Section 175/157 school safeguarding standards audit was fully implemented.
- Learning from the Sophia case review was shared with schools and a review of education presence at the front door to Children's Services is under way.
- Work has continued to strengthen relationships between education providers and children's Social Care.
- **Virtual School**
Education outcomes for our cared for children have improved in nearly all measures since last year. This means more young people are progressing into education, training & employment at 16.
- Gradually more pupils are working in their age-related curriculum alongside their non-cared for peers. Individual achievements for care leavers following Level 3 courses were impressive
- The safeguarding of children not in school was a priority and data and intelligence was gathered about children not attending school due to emotional based school avoidance.
- Multi-agency partners promoted the relational and trauma-informed approach to working with children and attendance at the Relationships Still Matter conference in May was very good, especially the input from Paul Dix and his colleagues and feedback from schools participating in the CARE Northumberland pilot.
- Support from education and health services was in high demand and there was effective multi-agency working to stabilise school placements so that cared for children could engage in learning. For the 16th consecutive year there were no permanent exclusions of cared for children, but reducing suspensions and improving attendance remains a priority.
- For further details about the education of cared for children see the Virtual School Headteacher's Annual Report 2024.

Next Steps ➤

Alongside the many successes highlighted within this report a number of development areas have been rightfully identified.

Moving through 2024-25 and beyond the Local Authority will work closely with children, young people, their families, schools, settings and all other partners to deliver on the following core functions and priorities.

Northumberland Education, SEND and Skills Directorate Core Functions:

- To support all education settings to meet the needs of learners and their families
- To achieve the statutory education duties of the council
- To lead on delivering the educational priorities of the Northumberland Corporate Plan
- To monitor the performance of the education system and report that to the council

Key action areas for 2024-26:

- Plan, support and deliver on the expansion of the Early Years and Childcare sector
 - > Develop the school readiness journey with all partners
 - > Support the financial security, sufficiency and sustainability of providers
- Develop capacity for meeting increased numbers and complexity of SEND needs
 - > Further develop our 'Ordinarily Available Provision' guidance, support and training
 - > Increase specialist capacity in local schools
 - > Develop higher needs capacity in Northumberland Special Schools
- Develop and implement new SEND pathways which support fairness, transparency, expectations and a consistency of approach
 - > Review SEND placement methodology and panels
 - > Review the SEND Banding system
 - > Review the statutory assessment process and introduce digital EHCPs
- Deliver the rollout of the Northumberland School Alliances model
 - > Finalise and launch the 8 alliances
 - > Refine the focus of each alliance
 - > Analyse the impact of each alliance annually
- Increase support for attendance
 - > Ensure the full implementation of the Attendance Strategy
 - > Develop policy, practice and provision to appropriately support EBSA learners
- Development and promotion of the pathways into apprenticeships, further education, higher education and employment for young people and adults increasing the focus on preparing for adulthood



DISCLAIMER

The information provided in this publication is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate at the time of production. Data sources are available upon request.

OTHER FORMATS

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