



Walsall Council

Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision (AP)

Special Educational Needs, Disability and Alternative
Provision Strategy **2023-2028**



Updated October 2025

Foreword

We are proud of the progress we have made together as a local area in improving the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those accessing alternative provision (AP) in Walsall.

Over recent years, our partnership has delivered significant and sustained improvement. Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan timeliness now consistently exceeds 95%, co-production has been consistently highlighted as a local strength and quality assurance activity demonstrates that plans and provision are increasingly clear, consistent, and outcome focused.

More children and young people are receiving the right help, in the right place, at the right time.

Our improvement journey has been shaped by the lived experiences of children, young people, and families in Walsall. Their voices continue to guide our priorities, influence decision-making and shape the services that support them.

We've built on a period of strong improvement and are now focused on sustaining progress and consistency. The strong foundations we've established mean that partners work with a clear sense of purpose and a shared understanding of what good looks like for children and families in Walsall. Our focus remains on maintaining quality and ensuring that support continues to improve across education, health and care.

Our partnership now extends across the whole local area, bringing together colleagues from education, health, care and the wider community. Together we are building an inclusive system that identifies need early, responds quickly and celebrates progress. This shared ambition is supported by skilled and dedicated professionals who work together to give every child and young person the opportunity to thrive.

This refreshed Strategy draws directly from the evidence within our Self-Evaluation Framework and the updated SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). It recognises how far we have come and sets out how we will sustain and deepen improvement over the coming years. It also introduces a new priority focused on successful transitions and preparation for adulthood, reflecting our commitment to supporting children and young people through every stage of their journey, from early years and school readiness through to further education, employment, independent living and adult life. Together, we remain committed to inclusion, collaboration, and delivering the very best outcomes for Walsall's children and young people.

Our vision

We believe that every child and young person deserves, and should receive, an excellent education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. This means having access to the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

This strategy sets out how Walsall's partnership will continue to develop and improve services for children and young people aged 0–25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and for those accessing alternative provision (AP).

A child or young person has special educational needs and disabilities if they have a learning difficulty or disability that means they need additional education, care or health support.

Alternative provision supports children and young people who need extra help to stay engaged in learning, or who benefit from support outside of their mainstream school or setting. We recognise that many children and young people who access alternative provision may also have SEND, and that their needs are best met through one joined-up approach.

We want every child and young person to feel that they belong, are valued, and are supported to be the best they can be. Our ambition is that all children and young people experience belonging in their education setting, when accessing health and care services, and in their wider community.

This Strategy, Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision (AP), has been co-produced with parents, carers and families (including FACE, Walsall's Parent Carer Forum); children and young people with lived experience; early years settings, schools and colleges; frontline practitioners; the voluntary and community sector; the Local Area Inclusion Board (LAIB); and the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB).

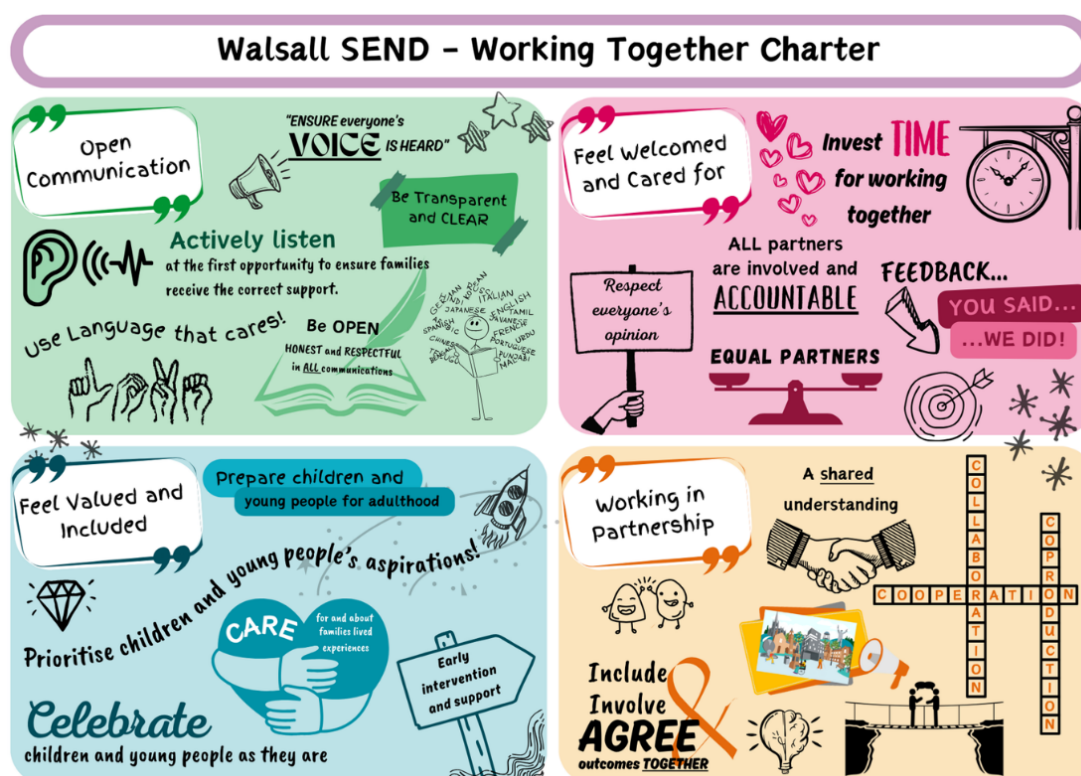


Working together

The lived experience of children, young people and their families with SEND is central to everything we do. Co-production is fundamental to our ongoing improvement and shapes the way we design, deliver and review services.

We value and listen to the voices of children, young people and families, and use what they tell us to inform our decisions and drive change. By working together in partnership, we can provide the right support at the right time for all children and young people with SEND across Walsall, ensuring that services respond to individual needs and lead to the best possible outcomes.

Our co-produced Walsall SEND Working Together Charter sets out the principles that guide how we work with children, young people and families. Alongside our SEND Co-production and Engagement Agreement and In Our Hands Engagement and Participation Framework, it provides the foundation for how we will continue to strengthen our culture of collaboration and inclusion.



Understanding SEND

A child or young person is considered to have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) if they have a learning difficulty or disability that requires additional educational, health or care support. This is defined in law under Section 20 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and Section 312 of the 1996 Education Act.

Children and young people are identified as having a learning difficulty or disability if they:

- Have significantly greater difficulty learning than others of the same age.
- Have a disability that prevents or hinders them from making use of the educational facilities generally available to others of the same age in mainstream schools or post-16 settings.
- Are under compulsory school age and would meet one of the above definitions if special educational provision were not made for them.

It is important to note that children whose main difficulty arises from their home language being different from the language of instruction are not regarded as having a learning difficulty.

Special educational provision refers to support that is additional to or different from that made generally for other children or young people of the same age in mainstream settings.

For children aged two years and older, this means educational provision that goes beyond what is usually available in mainstream schools and early years settings within the local authority area. For children under two years, it refers to any form of educational provision.

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) identifies four broad areas of need which help in planning and reviewing provision:

- Communication and interaction
- Cognition and learning
- Social, emotional and mental health difficulties
- Sensory and physical needs

These areas often overlap, and children and young people may have needs that fall within more than one category. What matters most is that we understand each child as an individual and ensure that support is coordinated, consistent and effective.

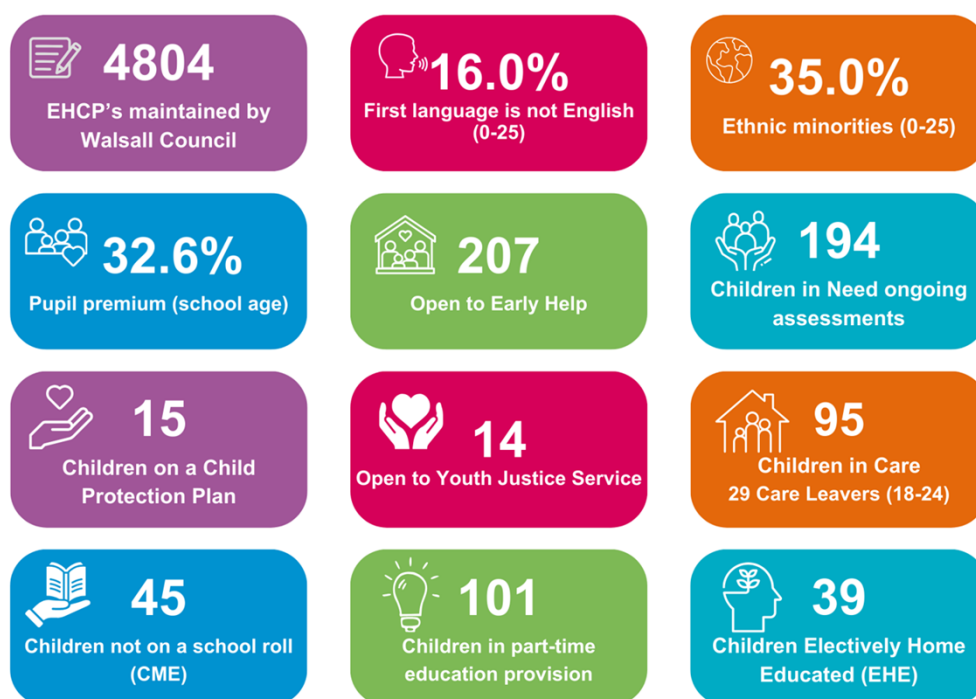


For further information, see Sections 6.28 to 6.35 of the 2015 SEND Code of Practice.

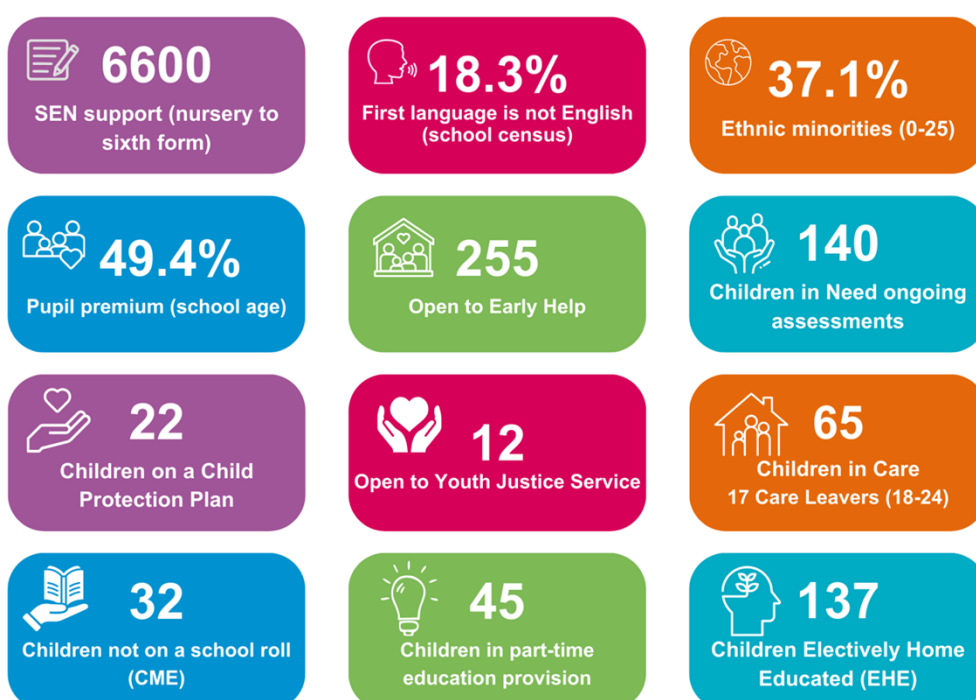
Understanding SEND in Walsall

Understanding what SEND looks like in Walsall helps us to plan services that meet local need and celebrate inclusion across all phases of education. The following information gives an overview of the children and young people supported through Education, Health and Care Plans and those receiving SEN Support within our schools and settings.

Children and Young People in Walsall with an EHCP



Children and Young People in Walsall with SEN Support



Updated July 2025

Understanding changing needs and future demand

Walsall's population of children and young people is projected to increase steadily over the next five years, with the number of Education, Health and Care Plans expected to rise from around 4,700 in 2025 to over 6,800 by 2030. The number of pupils supported at SEN Support level is also predicted to grow by around 250 each year. This rising demand highlights the importance of sustained investment in early identification, inclusive mainstream provision, and workforce development to ensure that children and young people continue to receive timely and effective support close to home.

Our shared priorities for children, young people and families

These priorities set out how Walsall's SEND and Alternative Provision Partnership will continue to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

They reflect the evidence and learning captured through our Self-Evaluation Framework and align with the national SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. Each priority describes our shared ambition, the actions we will take, and how we will measure the difference this makes for children, young people and families.



Priority 1: Localised high-quality provision



Priority 2: Early identification and help



Priority 3: Participate in decisions



Priority 4: Supportive alternative provision offer



Priority 5: Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community



Priority 6: Successful Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood



Priority 7: Joint commissioning





Priority 1: Localised high-quality provision

Our aspiration...

To provide a strong continuum of high-quality, local provision across education, health and care in Walsall that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND and those requiring Alternative Provision.

Our aim is that children and young people can access the right support as close to home as possible, experience a genuine sense of belonging, and achieve their ambitions within inclusive, well-supported local settings.

We will...

- Strengthen inclusive practice in all early years settings, schools and colleges through consistent use of the Ordinarily Available Provision guidance, Early Inclusion Framework and effective partnership working across education, health and care.
- Continue to expand the range and quality of local specialist provision, reducing the need for children and young people to be educated outside of Walsall.
- Ensure every child and young person experiences a positive and inclusive learning environment where they are valued, supported and inspired to succeed.
- Further develop the local health offer to ensure timely access to assessments, therapies and ongoing support for children and young people with SEND.
- Build workforce confidence and consistency through joint training, professional networks and shared learning across education, health and care.
- Celebrate and share good practice from schools, settings and services that demonstrate inclusive and high-quality provision.
- Strengthen links between mainstream, specialist and alternative provision to create a coherent local system of support that meets a wide range of needs.
- Continue to prioritise the development of high-quality local provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and those with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.
- Monitor and address disproportionality across our SEND system to ensure that identification, support and outcomes are equitable for all children and young people, regardless of background, ethnicity, gender or social circumstance.

How we know we have made a difference...

More children and young people with SEND will successfully attend and thrive in their local mainstream schools and settings.

Children and young people who need additional support through Alternative Provision will be supported to re-engage in learning and, where appropriate, to return successfully to their local mainstream provision.

The local area will continue to strengthen the range and quality of inclusive and specialist provision so that more children and young people can have their needs met within Walsall.

Attendance for children and young people with SEND will improve, and the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions will reduce.

Quality first teaching and access to an inclusive curriculum will ensure that the majority of children and young people with SEND make expected or better progress from their starting points.

More young people with SEND will move successfully through each phase of education, health and care with continuity of support, achieving positive outcomes in further education, training, employment or independent adulthood.



Priority 2: Early identification and help

Our aspiration...

We will identify needs early and deliver the right support, in the right place, at the right time. Through strong partnership working across education, health and care, we will ensure that children and young people receive timely and effective help that promotes inclusion and prevents escalation of need.

We will...

- Promote consistent and effective early identification through the Graduated Approach and the Early Inclusion Framework, supporting education settings to embed inclusive practice.
- Strengthen early identification and support in the early years through the Family Hub network, ensuring families can access coordinated help and advice from birth. As children enter early education, we will embed the Early Inclusion Framework to promote inclusive practice and early intervention. We will build on the Best Start for Life approach and work with Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) partners to ensure families receive consistent, timely and joined-up support during the earliest stages of development.
- Improving early years outcomes and school readiness is a key priority for Walsall. In line with the government's national ambition for 75% of children to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, we have initiated a focused programme of work across the local authority and wider early years system to strengthen early outcomes for all children. This work is being developed in partnership with colleagues across education, health, social care and SEND to ensure a coherent and inclusive approach. Children with SEND are an important part of this wider improvement activity, ensuring that early years development supports every child to make the best possible start.
- Ensure that the Local Offer clearly signposts information, guidance and services for families and professionals, helping them to access the right support early.
- Build a confident, skilled and resilient workforce through targeted professional development and shared learning across education, health and care.
- Continue to improve the quality and timeliness of Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments and plans.
- Develop stronger systems for monitoring SEN Support to ensure children's needs are identified, planned for and reviewed effectively.
- Ensure that children and young people who may require alternative provision are identified early and supported through multi-agency planning and review.
- Celebrate and share good practice from schools, settings and services that demonstrate effective early identification and intervention.
- Focus our early identification work on the areas of greatest growth, particularly communication and interaction and social, emotional and mental health needs. We will ensure that staff have the confidence, tools and training to recognise and respond effectively to these needs at the earliest opportunity.
- Work with health partners to review and streamline Walsall's neurodevelopmental pathways, ensuring that children and young people experience clear, timely and coordinated assessment and post-diagnostic support.

How we know we have made a difference...

There will be a measurable improvement in the early identification of need, with children and young people receiving timely and appropriate support before concerns escalate. More staff across education, health and care will feel confident and equipped to meet a wider range of needs through consistent use of the Graduated Approach and inclusive practice.

Parents and carers will report increased confidence that their child's needs are understood and that early intervention is making a positive difference.

More families will be able to find and engage with the right services through an accessible and well-used Local Offer.

Decision-making and assessment processes, including requests for Education, Health and Care plans, will remain timely and based on clear, evidence-led practice.

Young people will have greater confidence that their aspirations are understood and that they are being well prepared for adulthood through early, coordinated planning.



Priority 3: Participate in decisions

Our aspiration...

We will continue to build trust and strengthen co-production across Walsall. By listening to lived experience and acting on what children, young people, parents, carers and partners tell us, we will shape services that are responsive, inclusive and focused on improving long-term outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

We will...

- Embed the Walsall SEND Working Together Charter so that children, young people and families are confident their voices are valued and acted upon.
- Ensure that children, young people and families are central to decision-making at individual, service and strategic levels.
- Use the SEND Co-production and Engagement Agreement and In Our Hands Engagement and Participation Strategy to guide how we listen, respond and communicate.
- Facilitate regular workshops and feedback sessions with children, young people, parents and carers to shape priorities and co-design improvements.
- Create and promote safe spaces for children and young people to share their views and experiences, supported by trusted adults who know and understand them. We will ensure participation opportunities are inclusive, accessible, and reflect the diverse ways children and young people choose to communicate.
- Strengthen the Local Offer as a shared space for information, feedback and celebrating co-produced developments.
- Continue to use evidence from compliments, complaints and engagement activity to drive continuous learning and improvement.
- Share outcomes and progress regularly through accessible updates and 'you said, we did' communications.

How we know we have made a difference...

More children, young people and families will tell us that they feel listened to, respected and involved in decisions about their support.

There will be clear evidence of co-production in action, with children, young people and parents contributing to strategic planning, service design and quality assurance activity.

Feedback gathered through the Working Together Charter, the Local Offer and participation forums will show improved satisfaction and trust in how the local area listens and responds.

Practitioners will demonstrate increased confidence in communicating with children, young people and families, including understanding individual preferences for how they share their views.

Data from dispute resolution, mediation and tribunals will show fewer escalations and more positive early resolution of concerns.

Co-production activity will be visible, celebrated and regularly shared through 'you said, we did' updates across all areas of the SEND partnership.



Priority 4: Supportive alternative provision offer

Our aspiration...

We will continue to develop a coherent and high-quality continuum of support that includes outreach, targeted intervention and local alternative provision. Our aim is to ensure that children and young people receive the right support at the right time, remain connected to their education, and are well prepared for their next steps in learning and life.

We will...

- Strengthen the range and quality of alternative provision options available, including in-house provision and external providers, so that every child and young person can access appropriate and effective support.
- Implement partnership quality assurance processes to monitor the impact of alternative provision on attendance, engagement, progress and outcomes.
- Support smooth and well-planned transitions into and out of alternative provision, ensuring that young people are prepared for successful reintegration to mainstream settings or progression to further education, training or employment.
- Prioritise the safeguarding, wellbeing and personal development of children and young people in alternative provision, ensuring timely access to the support and services they need.
- Strengthen collaboration between schools, colleges, providers, local authority teams and other agencies to coordinate a joined-up approach to inclusion and alternative provision.
- Promote the active engagement and participation of children, young people and families in shaping and evaluating alternative provision services, ensuring their voices influence design and improvement.

How we know we have made a difference...

We will have a clear and consistent system that enables schools and partners to access timely support and alternative provision for children and young people with SEND.

Children, young people and their families will tell us that they have been able to access the right type of support at the right time, and that their experiences in alternative provision are positive, inclusive and focused on their progress.

Schools will report increased confidence in identifying when alternative provision is appropriate and will feel supported through clear commissioning and reintegration processes.

Quality assurance activity will evidence improved consistency across alternative provision, highlighting good practice and addressing areas for development through partnership improvement planning.

There will be a measurable reduction in suspensions, permanent exclusions and reduced timetables.

More children and young people will successfully reintegrate into mainstream education or move on to suitable post-16 pathways, training or employment.

Attainment and progress for pupils in alternative provision will improve, and achievements will be celebrated by children, young people, families and providers.



Priority 5: Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community

Our aspiration...

We want every child and young person with SEND, including those in alternative provision, to feel valued, included and visible within their local community. They should experience a sense of belonging, be able to participate fully in community life, and have the same opportunities as their peers to learn, contribute and succeed.

We will...

- Work with schools, settings, post-16 providers, health and social care teams and community organisations to strengthen inclusive practice and promote belonging for all children and young people.
- Support children and young people to express their views and communicate in the way that feels right for them, ensuring their voices shape local planning and delivery.
- Work with schools, settings and community partners to provide safe, welcoming environments where children and young people can build trusted relationships with adults who listen, understand and advocate for them. These connections will help young people feel secure, confident and able to participate fully in community life.
- Ensure that children and young people with SEND are considered in all local initiatives, events and opportunities across Walsall's communities.
- Continue to collaborate with community partners to raise awareness of SEND and promote inclusive participation.
- Strengthen work with charities, voluntary organisations and local businesses to expand access to high-quality inclusive and specialist activities in the community.
- Further develop opportunities that prepare children and young people for adulthood, including independence, friendships and employment.
- Celebrate inclusion, equality and diversity through our local communications, campaigns and events, ensuring that children and young people with SEND are visible and represented.

How we know we have made a difference...

Children, young people and families will tell us that their experiences in our local mainstream schools with SEND are positive that they feel they are included, belong and are listened to.

There will be an increase in SEND young people who progress to higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships and employment.

There will be a reduction in the number of children and young people who have to travel out of their local community for their education, health and care needs.

There will be increase in positive feedback from children, young people and their families telling us that they learn, contribute to, and take part in all aspects of setting/school/college life.

There will be an increase in children and young people with SEND accessing community-based activities and initiatives.





Priority 6: Successful Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood

Our aspiration...

Children and young people with SEND experience smooth, well-planned transitions at every stage of their journey, from home to early education, between schools, across phases of learning, and into adulthood. Every transition will be supported, coordinated and centred on the child or young person's strengths, aspirations and independence. We will make sure that children are well prepared for their next stage of learning, and that schools, settings and services are equally ready to receive and support them.

We will...

- Strengthen transition planning across early years, school, college and adult services to ensure continuity of support and consistent communication with families.
- Embed the Early Inclusion Framework and Family Hub approach to help children with SEND make confident and successful starts in early education.
- Ensure timely information sharing and joint planning between education, health and care teams for all key transition points, including those into post-16 provision and adult services.
- Build young people's independence, confidence and life skills through clear preparation for adulthood (PfA) pathways focused on employment, community participation, independent living and good health.
- Use transition reviews (including Year 9 onwards) to embed PfA outcomes early, supported by clear health and social care pathways into adulthood.
- Provide accessible information and support for families to understand what to expect at each stage of transition and who to contact for help.
- Celebrate young people's achievements and successes as they move through different phases of education, training and life.

How we know we have made a difference...

Families will tell us transitions are timely, clear and well supported.

Fewer young people will experience gaps in support when moving between phases or services.

More young people with SEND will sustain education, employment or training beyond age 18 and move towards independent living and adult life.

Early years transition data, including measures of school readiness, will show improved outcomes for children with SEND.

Annual review and PfA data will evidence that preparation for adulthood outcomes are embedded and delivered across all services.





Priority 7: Joint commissioning

Our aspiration...

Through our joint commissioning arrangements, we will deliver a joined-up system that plans, designs and reviews services collectively across education, health and care. By working together with children, young people and their families, we will ensure that services are inclusive, efficient and based on a shared understanding of local needs. Our approach will reduce duplication, strengthen early identification and prevention, and improve outcomes through coordinated, outcome-focused delivery.

We will...

- Co-produce and publish a joint commissioning agreement that clearly sets out shared principles, priorities and responsibilities across education, health and care.
- Use joint data, intelligence and lived experience to inform commissioning decisions and ensure resources are directed where they will have the greatest impact.
- Plan and commission services together based on local data and future demand. We will use shared information to make sure resources are used wisely, avoid duplication, and focus on the areas that make the biggest difference for children and young people
- Strengthen alignment between SEND and wider inclusion, early help, and health commissioning to deliver seamless support for children and young people.
- Embed governance and accountability arrangements through the Local Area Inclusion Board and relevant sub-groups to monitor delivery and impact.
- Evaluate commissioned services through shared quality assurance and performance frameworks, ensuring that outcomes and value for money are regularly reviewed.

How we know we have made a difference...

Children, young people and families will tell us that their experiences in local schools, settings and communities are positive, and that they feel included, valued and listened to.

There will be a measurable increase in children and young people with SEND participating in community activities, youth groups and local initiatives, supported by strengthened links between schools, voluntary organisations and community partners.

More young people with SEND will progress successfully to further education, training, employment or independent living within Walsall and its surrounding areas.

Fewer children and young people will need to travel outside their local area to have their education, health or care needs met, reflecting stronger inclusive practice within local schools and services.

Feedback from children, young people and their families will show that they feel confident, safe and supported to take part in all aspects of school, college and community life.





How we will deliver our priorities

Strategic delivery...

Across Walsall, professionals understand that delivering cohesive and holistic support for children and families depends on shared ownership and partnership accountability. We are committed to keeping each child and young person's aspirations and needs at the centre of all planning and decision making.

Our focus is on embedding this strategy into day-to-day practice, ensuring that the priorities of Working Together for Better SEND and Alternative Provision are reflected in service plans, commissioning activity and workforce development across education, health and care.

We will promote a culture of shared learning, reflective practice and mutual accountability, where all partners understand their role in delivering inclusive, high-quality support. Through joint training, professional networks and leadership development, we will build a confident, connected and resilient workforce that models collaborative and inclusive practice at every level.

Local area partnership governance...

The SEND Partnership Operational Group (POG), with representation from parents and carers, the local authority, schools, settings, and health and social care partners, oversees delivery of this strategy and its subsequent action plans.

The Local Area Inclusion Board (LAIB), with representatives from FACE, SENDIASS, Education, Health and Social Care, provides strategic oversight, challenge and assurance.

Both groups work alongside the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Walsall Learning Alliance to ensure coherence with wider local priorities. Together, these structures ensure clear lines of accountability, co-production at every level, and a consistent focus on improving experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

Reviewing and monitoring

Progress will be monitored through regular partnership review and reporting, supported by shared data, performance information and feedback from children, young people and families.

We will continue to strengthen our shared understanding of local need through the development of joint data and intelligence systems across education, health and care. This will include a shared SEND data dashboard and integrated performance reporting, helping partners to track outcomes, identify emerging trends and use evidence to shape ongoing improvement.

Action plans will be updated as priorities evolve to reflect progress, learning and emerging needs across the partnership. The Walsall SEND and Alternative Provision Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) will continue to inform this process, ensuring that evidence from data, audits and lived experience shapes our ongoing improvement.

We will maintain open and transparent communication, using the 'You said, we did' approach to evidence how feedback leads to change. This commitment to reflection, accountability and co-production will ensure that the strategy remains a living document, driving sustained improvement across Walsall.

Together, we will continue to build an inclusive Walsall where every child and young person with SEND can learn, achieve and thrive.