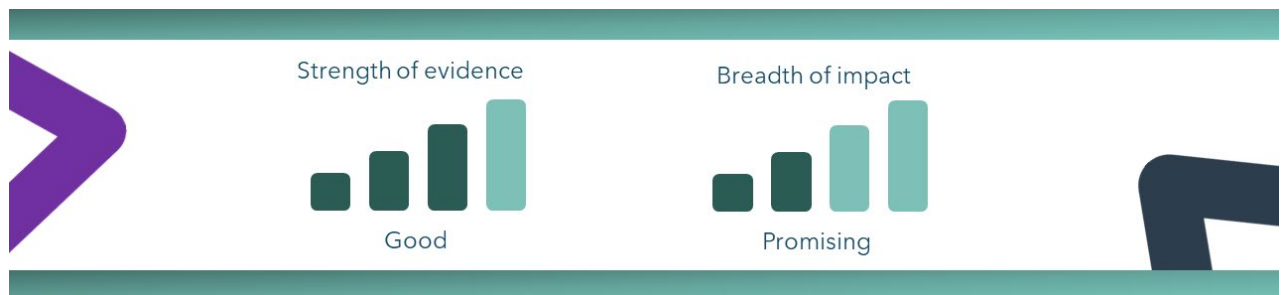


# Effective Practice case study: Developing local schools for children in Barking and Dagenham

## Summary

In 2013/14, Barking and Dagenham recognised that they could not meet the needs of enough children and young people with SEND<sup>1</sup> in their local schools. This meant that children were being educated far away from their peers and their communities. The high use of out of borough independent and non-maintained provision was also placing a significant burden on the high needs budget. The local authority was projecting an overspend of £12 million within five to six years if no action was taken. The local authority therefore worked with its schools, and its parent carers, to grow the capacity, skills and provision that would enable more children and young people with SEND to be educated successfully in local schools.

The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework considers that the "strength of evidence" of this case study is **good** – the work has been evaluated and findings shared internally, and has been sustained for nearly a decade. The "breadth of impact" of this case study is **promising** – there is evidence of impact in terms of feedback from professionals and lived experience of children, young people and their families.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> For ease of reading, we use the term 'SEND' to refer to disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs.

<sup>2</sup> The SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework uses two "signal strength" indicators to present the strength of evidence and the breadth of impact of a case study. Each indicator has four bars – emerging, promising, good and robust. The "strength of evidence" indicator is based on how the project has been evaluated and the length of time it has been sustained. The "breadth of impact" indicator is based on whether the case study can demonstrate impact in four broad areas – the more areas of impact, the higher the signal strength indicator.

## Why was this work undertaken? What did the work aim to do?

In 2013/14, Barking and Dagenham carried out a review of their High Needs spending that identified the borough would be facing a £12 million pressure within five to six years unless action was taken. The borough was seeing a rapid growth in its school population (four times the national average and twice the London average) and rising numbers and complexity of children and young people with SEND. Mainstream schools were finding it difficult to meet the needs of the children in their local area, and access to additional funding and support was too onerous and time-consuming. There were too few specialist places to meet the needs of Barking and Dagenham's children and young people, particularly in the Primary sector, exacerbated by the cancellation of a planned new special school, due to be built as part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

As a consequence, many children and young people with SEND were being placed in out of borough placements in independent and non-maintained special schools (INMSS) because their needs could not be met locally. This was not in the best interests of children and young people with SEND as it meant they were separated from their communities and their peers and often had to travel long distances to school. It was also having a significant impact on Barking and Dagenham's high needs budget. At the time when the first review was undertaken in 2013/14, 73 children and young people were placed in independent and non-maintained special schools.

A project was therefore initiated by the High Needs Working Party under the Schools Forum responding to the rising level of SEND need, the scarcity of specialist places and the rapidly increasing numbers of pupils being placed out of borough in expensive INMSS provision. The work had three main aims which contributed to Barking and Dagenham's Education Strategy principle of 'local schools for local children where possible':

- 1) To build the capacity and skills of mainstream schools in Barking and Dagenham to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND more effectively and to use resources in a way that would get additional funding and support to schools as promptly as possible.
- 2) To develop additional local specialist provision to meet the needs of children with SEND in their local community through an expansion of Additional Resourced Provision (ARP) and an increase in Special School places.
- 3) To develop the collective ownership, oversight and monitoring of High Needs block expenditure to ensure that resources were being used as effectively as possible to meet the needs of children and young people locally.

## What was the impact?



- ✓ Lived experience of children and young people with SEND and their families  
Education, health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people
- ✓ Feedback from professionals  
Long term outcomes for children and young people



The project has been able to demonstrate impact in two of the four areas captured by the SEND Effective Practice Evidence Framework. There is evidence of impact from positive feedback from professionals, both within Barking and Dagenham and beyond, on the quality of provision on offer for children and young people with SEND. There have also been benefits in terms of the lived experience of children and young people and their families, as more are able to be educated locally with their peers and in their communities.

### Mainstream schools have the skills and capacity to meet a greater range of children and young people's needs.

Over the last 9 years there has been a significant increase in the breadth of expertise in mainstream schools, enabling them to meet a wider range of children and young people's needs. This has been evidenced by feedback from Ofsted inspections which have commented on the inclusiveness of Barking and Dagenham's mainstream schools, the quality of the support in place for children with SEND and the appropriate adaptations made to the curriculum. The excerpts below provide a flavour of recent (2023 or 2024) inspection reports:

*"This is an inclusive school. Leaders are committed to ensuring success for every pupil. Pupils study the learning pathway which reflects their skills, talents, needs and abilities. This ensures that no child is left behind. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported."*

*"Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND, including those who attend the specially resourced provisions, receive the support they need. This starts with accurate and swift identification of pupils' needs and starting points. Staff are well trained and supported to ensure pupils with SEND access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers wherever possible."*

*"Leaders identify the needs of pupils with SEND effectively. The support in place for pupils with SEND is exceptional. Highly effective, bespoke and ambitious curricular aims are put in place for all pupils with SEND. Pupils with more complex needs in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND are supported by highly skilled staff."*

*"Teachers skilfully adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEND, including those accessing the specially resourced provision. Leaders ensure that there is tailored provision for their social and emotional development. Pupils with SEND grow in confidence and learn the curriculum well. They are well supported in all areas of school life."*

*"Leaders identify pupils with SEND at the earliest possible opportunity. Through well planned adaptations, these pupils learn well alongside their peers. Those pupils with more complex needs receive carefully adapted teaching, for instance through one-to-one support from adults. This supports their learning well."*

Barking and Dagenham have also bucked national trends in terms of increasing the percentage of children and young people with EHCPs who are placed in mainstream schools or in ARP attached to mainstream schools. Between 2014/15 and 2022/23 the percentage of children and young people with EHCPs in mainstream provision, or in ARP attached to mainstream schools increased from 60% to 63% (excluding those in post-16 provision). Nationally, over the same time frame, the percentage reduced from 53% to 49%. The thoughtful commissioning of ARP in mainstream schools has been an important part of this success story. The number of children in ARPs in mainstream schools has increased from around 180 in 2014/15 to 450 in 2023. There are now 33 primary and secondary schools in Barking and Dagenham with ARPs attached, compared to just 14 in 2014. Internal quality assurance and monitoring shows that in 2023, 97% of these provisions were very effective or better of which 14% were exceptionally effective.

School leaders feel the creation of ARP in their mainstream settings has delivered benefits across their pupil population. As one primary head explained:

*"Having an ARP is one of the best decisions we have made as a school. Children who attend the ARP have access to high quality provision led and delivered by a team of passionate, skilled and talented individuals. The bespoke and enriched curriculum provides a balanced programme covering academic, personal/social and life skill development... progress is strong for all children, with most children experiencing success when joining their mainstream classroom for some lessons, with support."*

Local heads also report that Pupil Buddy Systems in mainstream settings with ARPs have increased interaction and understanding between pupils with SEND and those following a mainstream curriculum.

## More children and young people placed successfully in local schools

As a result of the increased capacity and confidence of mainstream schools to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, the creation of more places in ARP and the creation of new local specialist provision through the Free Schools route, fewer children are now placed out of borough in independent and non-maintained places. This is in line with the council's strategy for "local schools for local children". The number of children and young people placed in INMSS fell from 73 to 40 in the five years after the project's initiation in 2013/14. Despite a significant increase in the number of pupils with EHCPs since the pandemic, and a rise in the number placed in INMSS, there are fewer pupils in INMSS than in 2013/14. As a proportion of the overall EHCP cohort, use of INMSS provision has reduced from 5.9% in 2014 to 2.5% in 2023 – more than halving the incidence of placements in INMSS provision for children and young people with EHCPs. In contrast the proportion of children and young people with EHCPs in independent and non-maintained special schools nationally has remained constant at around 5%.

Barking and Dagenham's 2024 Ofsted/CQC SEND inspection commented that *"more spaces have been identified in existing special schools, additionally resourced provisions, AP and post-16 providers. This is better meeting the growing numbers of children and young people with SEND in the locality."*

A local primary school which opened an ARP in 2021 became a Centre of Excellence following its Inclusion Quality Mark Assessment in January 2024. The assessment report stated that the school *"stands as a beacon of inclusive and diverse education."* An Executive Headteacher of two mainstream primary and secondary schools in the borough explained how having an on-site ARP allows pupils with additional needs to learn and socialise as part of their local peer group:

*"One of the things we are really proud of is seeing ARP and mainstream pupils mixing with no boundaries, chatting about music and games, playing football or basketball, sitting next to each other in lessons, discussing the same lessons, eating together and being together. This has profoundly benefitted our ASD pupils who experience neurotypical behaviour day in day out and now model it."*

Meanwhile a parent explained how the availability of ARP within the borough for their child in nursery, primary and secondary phases allowed them to build a strong partnership with staff which ultimately supported better outcomes:

*"As a parent, it has been great being able to take and collect my son from school myself as the ARPs have been local. Therefore, I have had the opportunity to develop a strong collaborative partnership with all staff as I see them daily. I have found that within every ARP attended by my son, this has been a focus and has really helped him to achieve outcomes beyond what we would have expected."*

## **Better management of high needs block expenditure with more invested in growing capacity in Barking and Dagenham's schools**

The ability to successfully place more children and young people with SEND in good quality state-funded provision that is closer to their homes and their communities, combined with tighter monitoring and shared accountability for expenditure, has enabled Barking and Dagenham to maintain effective control of their high-needs expenditure and ensure that a greater proportion of this is invested in growing the capacity of Barking and Dagenham's schools to meet needs. In 2022/23, Barking and Dagenham was one of only a small minority of councils in England not to accrue an in-year overspend on their high needs block allocation. This is in contrast with the council's 2013/14 projection that without action they would have been £12 million overspent by 2019/20. Barking and Dagenham was one of only eight local authorities in 2022/23 where the percentage of children and young people with EHCPs, the percentage in special school and the percentage in independent special schools were all in the lowest quartile nationally. As a result, per capita high needs expenditure is significantly lower than average, and a greater proportion of this is now funding places, support and expertise in local maintained schools.

## What were the key actions and practices involved?

The actions that Barking and Dagenham took to transform their ability to educate children and young people with SEND in local maintained provision have been based on four key elements. These have become part of the standard way of working in Barking and Dagenham and form the basis of an approach to continuous improvement.

### 1. Creating a borough-wide consensus on the need for change, underpinned by a shared commitment to inclusion

A key foundation for the success of the work in Barking and Dagenham has been the borough-wide consensus that has been built on the need to make changes and what those changes would be. As one senior leader described, *"the project was very much a whole local authority initiative. The review and resulting plans were supported by Schools Forum, the High Needs Working Party, all schools and LA representatives. The support and understanding from our community of schools ensured that we were able to address and plan for the future in the fairest and most transparent way to support all our children."* A head teacher explained how parent feedback had emphasised the benefits of supporting their children's needs in mainstream settings, primarily in terms of encouraging socialisation and providing access to peers and broader curriculum and enrichment opportunities.

Local authority leaders in Barking and Dagenham invested time and energy at the outset of the work in bringing school leaders together in a common understanding of the pressures on the High Needs budget and explaining how these pressures could only be alleviated by supporting children and young people with SEND differently, with a focus on local inclusion.

However, sustaining the coalition of support over time has required an ongoing attention to listening to schools, parents and young people, identifying what is not working as well as it should and then acting decisively on those concerns. The head of a mainstream primary school in the borough with a newly-established ARP explained how the school provides regular opportunities for parent carers to share their experiences:

*"Parent/carer training workshops and coffee mornings offer an opportunity for them to share experiences and learn new strategies and skills. Feedback from parents/carers is overwhelmingly positive."*

Recently Barking and Dagenham have embarked upon work to revise the system of top-up funding for mainstream schools and to look again at support arrangements for social, emotional and mental health in the primary phase as these are areas that had been highlighted as challenging. This ongoing commitment to continuous improvement is at the heart of creating a sustainable approach. In the words of one senior leader *"It is not a project that is finished, it is a way of working."*



## 2. Developing the capacity and skills of mainstream schools to support children with a diversity of needs

In order to enable more mainstream schools to successfully meet the needs of a wider group of children and young people with SEND, Barking and Dagenham have made inclusion a key focus for their training and support for schools. They have worked with schools, [BDSIP](#) (a not for profit social enterprise providing school improvement and other services to schools), inclusion leads and health and social care professionals to develop a set of local inclusion principles; invested in continuous professional development and creating communities of practice with a focus on inclusion; commissioned BDSIP to run an annual inclusion and SEND conference; run a "Readiness for Learning" course pitched for teachers who want to be leaders of SEND, but not SENCOs, and invested in training for mental health advisers in schools.

The vast majority of schools in Barking and Dagenham have forms of supportive provision in place for children and young people with SEND, including ARP, which have helped to inform and enrich classroom practice throughout the school. Almost half of all schools in the borough now host an ARP.

A local Headteacher explained how their on-site ARP helped all teaching staff to effectively support pupils with SEND:

*"We believe all teachers should be teachers of SEND. This makes us better teachers for all pupils. Having an ARP in school makes you focus on Teaching and Learning for all and developing all teachers into outstanding teachers of SEND."*

Meanwhile a parent described how the availability of ARPs within local mainstream settings had allowed their child to access specialist support, alongside opportunities to develop their interests and social skills with their peers:

*"The settings have always been able to personalise my son's educational experience to keep him motivated, focusing on his individual interests as well as his learning and emotional needs. For example, he has always received regular Speech and Language Therapy in the ARP settings. It also creates that safe place for him to develop his confidence and self-esteem to explore the rest of the school with support from familiar staff. This has led him to spending most of his year 6 experience in a mainstream classroom practising his social skills and accessing some mainstream lessons in his secondary school."*



Attention has also been paid to working to support mainstream schools with the financial resources they need to deliver an inclusive offer to children and young people with SEND.

It was also agreed that the top up process needed to be reviewed, partly as a result of the difficulties with trying to manage the substantial increase in applications and to make sure the whole process was fair and transparent for all schools and also for all children. Some of the actions taken to support inclusion through funding are:

- ✦ Additional funding has been made available to schools where children are at risk of exclusion – to help maintain the placement.
- ✦ The process for allocating top-up funding has been reviewed and streamlined to make it simpler and quicker. As a result, schools no longer have to make detailed top up applications for the very large majority of their children. Schools receive provision planning funding and top up payments at the start of the new financial year. EYFS children receive top-up once they have been in school full time for at least a term. Top-up is only agreed after a visit from a member of the central education team. In-year admissions are considered after the child has been in the school for a term.
- ✦ Local school audits are carried out to ensure that appropriate bandings are in place for children and young people with SEND, and schools are supported to use a range of self-assessment models and a set of detailed SEND descriptors
- ✦ A one-off £3.4 million investment was made in mainstream schools to support the growth in numbers of children with SEND, from DSG reserves.

This investment has been possible because the high needs block overall has consistently been managed effectively within the allocated cash envelope, alongside support from DSG reserves, since 2015/16.

### 3. Commissioning and quality assuring local provision

The strategy to enable more children and young people with SEND to benefit from attending local schools depends not only on broadening the depth and breadth of skills in mainstream settings but also ensuring the right mix of more specialist provision being available locally. In addition to creating two new special schools through the free school route, Barking and Dagenham has significantly increased both the number of places and the range of needs that can be met through ARPs.

One key aspect of effective commissioning of places is having real clarity about the range of needs emerging locally that need to be catered for. At the outset of the programme of work, Barking and Dagenham carried out a careful analysis of the needs that could not be met locally and were purposeful in commissioning the provisions that would meet those needs. The ongoing use of projections data to ensure that places meet the needs of the children coming through the system is an important part of their approach.

A second key aspect of the effective commissioning of places is paying relentless attention to the quality of provision. A framework has been put in place that enables a quality audit of provision to be carried out by local authority officers in ARPs every year and which then enables support to be put in place where areas for development are identified. In parallel an externally commissioned evaluation of quality was carried out by a former HMI which confirmed the local authority's internal judgements.

Central to delivering high-quality provision through ARPs is the understanding that they are integral to the school, not a separate entity. It is therefore the responsibility of the headteacher to ensure that progress is being made by all children in the school and the children in the ARP play a full and rewarding part in the life of the school as a whole. The expectation is that ARPs will be prominent on a school's website and will be understood and discussed by Governors. Typically, the lead for the ARP would also be a member of the school's senior leadership team. The conversation and quality assurance of the teaching and learning delivered through ARPs therefore forms an essential part of the school's overall approach to its ongoing improvement.

#### 4. Creating clearer shared oversight of high needs block expenditure

The actions described above have been underpinned by establishing clear and shared oversight of high needs expenditure. In 2014/15, a High Needs working group was established by Schools Forum which has overseen the transition of the system and established a long-term spending plan to meet the needs of children and young people locally. The working group appointed a High Needs Lead Practitioner whose role had a dual function – to provide support to schools and also to monitor expenditure from the high needs block against the long-term spending plan. The close attention to managing spending within the overall agreed budget has enabled the borough to re-invest money in inclusive practice. In the words of one senior leader *"By taking action in line with our principles and containing spending it has allowed us to live within the High Needs Block allocation and also allowed us to make some one-off payments to schools to support inclusion post-pandemic."*

## Has the work been sustained?

The ways of working described above have been embedded in Barking and Dagenham now for nine years and have become an accepted part of how schools and the local authority work together to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. The recruitment of the High Needs Lead Practitioner, on a part-time basis, has been an ongoing cost of around £46K per annum. In addition, there is the cost of support and training that goes into schools, and the time of headteachers, SENCOs and local authority officers to sustain the approach to continuous improvement that underpins this work. However, given the significant projected overspends that were forecast in 2013/14 and were avoided, it would appear that the costs of implementing this approach are more than offset by reduced costs in other aspects of high-needs provision.

There has not, as yet, been any formal replication of Barking and Dagenham's approach to developing Additional Resourced Provision at scale in other local areas, but the council have hosted headteachers and officers from other local authorities who have been keen to understand more about Barking and Dagenham's approach.



The infographic is set against a teal background with a purple arrow on the left and a dark blue shape on the right. It is divided into two main sections: 'Resources required' and 'Value for money'.

- Resources required:**
  - Financial investment (checked)
  - Human resources (checked)
  - Physical space
- Value for money:**
  - Sustained £ needed
  - Cost neutral
  - Savings (+outcomes) (checked)

## Finding out more

<b>Contact to find out more</b>	Martin Nicholson – Virtual Headteacher of SEND: martin.nicholson@lbbd.gov.uk
<b>Useful resources and links</b>	<a href="#">Additionally Resourced SEND Provision in Mainstream Schools (ARPs) - guidance for parents, carers and school professionals</a> <a href="#">Inclusion Quality Mark – Becontree Primary School</a>