

# **Inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in schools – how can local areas support schools?**

Full report

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## Acronyms

AP – Alternative Provision

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

CQC – Care Quality Commission

DCO – Designated Clinical Officer

DCS – Director of Children's Services

DMO – Designated Medical Officer

DSCO – Designated Social Care Officer

DfE - Department for Education

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

EP – Educational Psychologist

ICB – Integrated Care Board

ICS – Integrated Care System

LA - Local Authority

AT – Academy Trust (encompasses Multi and Single Academy Trusts MAT/SAT)

Ofsted - Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

OT – Occupational Therapist

PCF – Parent Carer Forum

SALT - Speech and Language Therapy/Therapist

SEMH – Social, Emotional and Mental Health

SEN - Special Educational Needs

SENCO - Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

TAs – Teaching Assistants

WSOA – Written Statement of Action

## 1. Background

This qualitative research focuses on exploring the key ingredients that facilitate the inclusion of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND<sup>1</sup>) in schools (see below for definitions). In doing this, we have particularly concentrated on understanding what local areas can do, to better support schools to become more inclusive, improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

The research reported upon here recognises the continuing challenges that children and young people with SEND face in accessing high-quality education that meets their individual needs, providing them the opportunity to thrive, a sense of belonging in their communities and to fulfil their potential. There is already a significant body of research (for example, Ainscow et al, 2012; Cullen et al, 2020; Curran et al, 2020; Gray et al, 2021; Norwich, 2022; Webster, 2021) and guidance (such as [Department for Education and Skills, 2001](#); [Nasen, 2020](#), [Nasen, 2024](#); [Davies and Henderson, 2020](#)) on inclusion. In this research therefore, we seek to contribute to, and extend this body of evidence and expertise on inclusion: exploring strategies, practices and policies to develop learning between local area partnerships, sharing creative and innovative approaches to support children and young people with SEND and improve their outcomes.

## 2. Definitions and terminology

Inclusion is not consistently defined. The following definitions from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) offer international perspectives, both underlining the need to challenge barriers for educating children and young people: definitions focused on social and human-rights models rather than medical model of disability. The UNESCO definition is not explicit about what is meant by 'presence' and 'participation':

*'A process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners.'* (UNESCO, 2017).

*'Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience.'* (CRPD, 2016, paragraph 11).

We refer to 'local areas' or 'local area partnerships'. By this we are referring to the Local Authority (LA) and their partners, which includes the Integrated Care Board (ICB), the local Parent Carer Forum (PCF), schools and a range of voluntary sector partners.

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

### 3. Research aim and objectives

The broad aim is to identify the key ingredients that facilitate inclusive practices in schools. The objectives are to:

- ✦ Explore and understand the strategic local area context of schools to identify specific practice, policies and actions that facilitate inclusive practices (and the barriers);
- ✦ Explore and understand what encourages and enables schools to be more inclusive in terms of values, culture, and behaviours in the local area context (and the barriers);
- ✦ Explore and understand the journeys of local areas, and schools within them, towards inclusive practices and the steps they have taken to achieve this (and the barriers);
- ✦ To gather examples of the policies and practices at a local area partnership level that help support the values, culture and practice of inclusivity.

### 4. Methods

#### 4.1 The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)/Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspections

In the first stage of research, we reviewed a sample of Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection reports to explore what they tell us about how local areas are supporting and enabling schools to be more inclusive, improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. In analysing the inspection reports we aim to reflect upon the barriers and facilitators for local area partnerships and schools in supporting inclusion.

Our review spanned Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspections undertaken from 2021-2023. This meant that a number were undertaken in accordance with the new framework [Ofsted/CQC area SEND and AP inspection framework and handbook \(2023\)](#) and others according to the previous inspection regime. However, we did not find this to be a significant factor in our analysis, with little difference found around narratives of inclusion in the resulting reports.

Under the new Area SEND inspection framework, Ofsted and CQC evaluate the effectiveness of the local area partnership arrangements on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. Specifically, they judge the extent to which:

- ✦ children and young people's needs are identified accurately and assessed in a timely and effective way
- ✦ children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support
- ✦ children and young people receive the right help at the right time

- ✦ children and young people are well prepared for their next steps, and achieve strong outcomes
- ✦ children and young people are valued, visible and included in their communities

Ofsted and CQC, 2023

We reviewed 45 Area SEND inspection reports (see list in the appendix). The sample was based on the nine regional areas identified by the DfE to ensure an equal spread across England. In each of the regional areas we focused on the most recent five available inspection reports (at December 2023). In the report we have named local areas who were described as having positive inclusive practices as this information in reports is publicly available on the [Ofsted website](#).

Drawing upon a thematic analysis methodology, we identified barriers and facilitators for inclusion of children and young people with SEND in schools.

## 4.2 Qualitative interviews and focus groups on inclusion

In the second stage of the research, we identified three local area partnerships who exhibited good practice to support and encourage inclusion. Our aim was to explore and understand the ways they were doing this, gleaning actionable examples wherever possible.

Qualitative interviews and focus groups were undertaken remotely and in person, with a range of professionals working in local area partnerships, schools and parent carers (see table below).

Local areas	Interviews	Focus groups	Total Participants
LA1	9	1 (3 participants)	<b>12</b>
LA2	9 (10 participants)	2 (24 participants)	<b>34</b>
LA3	8 (9 participants)		<b>9</b>
Additional interviews	2		<b>2</b>
Additional focus groups		1 (30 participants)	<b>30</b>
<b>Total interviews/focus groups</b>	<b>28 interviews with 30 participants</b>	<b>4 focus groups with 57 participants</b>	<b>87 participants</b>
<b>Total in survey to parent carers</b>			<b>89 participants</b>
<b>Overall research participants</b>			<b>176 participants</b>



Roles of professionals we spoke to included: Directors of Children's Services; Directors of Education and Inclusion; Heads of SEND and Inclusion services; Parent Carer Forum (PCF) representatives; Educational Psychologists (EPs); Designated Clinical Officers (DCOs); Designated Social Care Officers (DSCOs); EHCP Co-ordinators; Academy Trust SEND Leaders; Headteachers (maintained/Academy Trusts/special schools); SENCOs; and Inclusion Leads in schools.

Interviews lasted one hour and were undertaken on Microsoft Teams. They were recorded and transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Warwick Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

In addition to our case study research, we also engaged with Whole School SEND, leading a workshop event on inclusion and conducted interviews with experts in inclusion. This added to the richness of our data, providing additional perspectives from those working in education across England including special schools, headteachers, and SENCOs/inclusion leads across school sectors including Academy Trusts. Some participants also had experience of working for LAs and as Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspectors.

### **4.3 Qualitative online survey to parent carers**

In order to capture parent carers' perspectives, the National Network of Parent Carer Forums CIC hosted an online survey on inclusion to parent carers on our behalf. In this survey, parent carers were asked about their experiences of inclusion in schools, the barriers and challenges to achieving this and their journeys with their children in this respect. We received 89 responses, most of which were rich in qualitative detail. We analysed their responses thematically and draw upon these throughout the report. Where individual case studies are drawn on, all names have been changed and identifying information removed or changed.

### **4.4 Information from children and young people with SEND**

Due to capacity and ethical approval limitations, we did not gather the views of children and young people directly, however the voluntary organisation, KIDS, kindly shared findings of their workshop undertaken with approximately 40 children and young people with SEND at the CDC Youth Matters Conference in 2024. This gathered experiences of transition between education settings: this data is also drawn on in the report.

## 4.5 Limitations of the research

In the research, we concentrated on inclusion of children of school age (4-16 years old), and as such spoke to staff from primary, secondary and special schools providing outreach services. Capacity did not allow us to interview more broadly, with Alternative Provision, other providers or in nursery/post-16 provision. As such we recognise this is a gap in the research.

When undertaking research with local area partnerships, they often reflected more broadly on their experiences of implementing inclusive systems for 0-25 age range. Where they did or a broader age range was discussed in Ofsted/CQC inspection reports, we sought to include these perspectives.

### **Ofsted /CQC Area SEND inspections**

Whilst analysis of Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection reports provided an insight into school inclusion, there were limitations to this approach.

Within the 45 Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection reports we reviewed, the degree to which there was a narrative or language of inclusion was limited. Some inspections did refer to 'inclusion' but in the main the work of local area partnerships with schools on inclusion was not centre stage and there were few examples of positive practice to be gained. Reports more often reported weaknesses in systems, for example making reference to suspensions and permanent exclusions.

As narratives of 'inclusion' were not made explicit in the inspection reports, we identified themes within the reports that we see as having a potential impact on whether or not children and young people feel included or that may impact upon their ability to remain included in schools. For example, themes, such as poor early identification of SEND needs and lack of parental confidence in provision, may have considerable implications for children in actively being included and feeling belonging in mainstream school provision.

Lack of information in inspection reports does not necessarily mean local areas were not working on inclusion. Across the 45 inspections, 22 were full Area SEND inspections with 23 joint Area SEND revisits. In the revisits, inclusion will only have been inspected if it was highlighted as an area of significant weakness in their last full SEND inspection. The previous inspection system meant that some SEND provision was not inspected for up to 5 years. Under the new inspection framework this has been changed to 3 years if services fall in the lower two categories: *'local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND'*; or if *'There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND'* (Ofsted/CQC, 2023).

## **Qualitative case studies**

The research focused on three local areas, who were positively engaged in developing inclusive practice. As such, we did not interview in local area partnerships where there was not already an inclusive ethos with leaders on board. This was a deliberate choice to allow us to identify practice examples that may be of use to other local area partnerships. The challenges that are reported upon in interviews therefore may not represent *all* the challenges that may be experienced in other areas who are not as far along in their inclusion journeys, although this limitation should be addressed to some degree through the Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection reports.

Given that the research is qualitative, it does not seek to be 'representative' of the views of all. It focuses on the exploration of inclusion amongst 176 participants and the meanings they attach to their own perceptions. The views expressed therefore may not be representative of more widely held views.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 A values-based approach to inclusion

#### Key findings:

- There was variation in what professionals in local areas, schools and parent carers thought about what an inclusive education system should 'look like' and the role of specialist settings.
- Those we spoke to described inclusion as: necessitating a caring approach; use of Quality First principles, i.e. an emphasis on removing barriers to learning, adapting the learning and environment to the child; and use of reasonable adjustments [and other adaptations] to allow all children to participate fully in school life.
- There were variable opinions about how inclusion in mainstream settings should operate. Opinions amongst participants varied about where they thought teaching of children with SEND should take place, with some favouring learning in mainstream classrooms and others placing emphasis on settings that most support learning for those with SEND, including outside of mainstream settings.
- There was broad agreement on core values at the heart of an inclusive approach in schools, including: feeling safe, valued and belonging; child-centredness; a holistic approach: with the child as part of a family and community; taking a relational approach; treating with equity not equally and inclusion as everyone's responsibility.

In our research, professionals and parent carers were asked their views on inclusion. There was variation in what they thought inclusion should 'look like'. Local area partnerships recognised the value in keeping children within their local communities, avoiding school placements that required travel and took them away from local networks of friends and family. Whilst some saw inclusion in mainstream as the ideal, the role of special schools as part of a continuum of provision was also recognised:

*'There's an absolute principle that children should remain within their family home, their extended family, their friends' network and their community, and they should attend their local school and that school should have the capacity and capability to meet their needs wherever possible. And we know sometimes that isn't. But [offering a range of suitable provision for] children being in mainstream education right through to getting a special place within their local community. That's what we're trying to achieve.'* Director of Children's Services

For professionals we spoke to inclusion was primarily driven by a caring approach, Quality First principles, i.e. an emphasis on removing barriers to learning, adapting the learning and environment to the child, with use of flexibility to allow all children to participate:

*'A school where every person is valued for who they are and who they want to be, that the opportunities are there for them regardless of background, difficulties etc and that they are cared for, completely and utterly by every member of staff' and 'as needed reasonable adjustments<sup>2</sup> are made for children so that everyone is able to do that.'* SENCO

Opinions from our participants varied on the appropriate learning spaces for children to feel included. Whilst some participants believed all children should be taught together with peers in the classroom environment, others were of the view that alternative spaces either within the classroom, or in separate areas of the school, were acceptable if they best supported learning. Some participants thought that inclusion could include a provision within the setting with specialist staff, a tailored curriculum and smaller class sizes, allowing pupils to learn more effectively as well as remain within the community of the school.

In the survey of parent carers, we asked them what they think makes an inclusive school. This parent felt that mainstream provision was not currently suitable for all children with SEND. In order to make it suitable, she set out what she thought ought to exist to support children with SEND to feel included:

*'I would expect a completely separate unit to run alongside the mainstream offering a completely different curriculum and expectations...They need to have a therapeutic nurturing unit with properly trained staff who are dedicated to those children alone with small classes. Therapeutic setting, nurturing ethos, alternative curriculum, flexible teaching methods, different attendance hours, individual approach to learning for each child, acceptance of 'shocking' behaviour as an indication of stress/anxiety/unmet needs'.* Parent carer

A primary school in one of our case study areas had developed a blended approach to inclusion. To cater for several children with complex needs, a nurture space was created, this drawing on a pre-school curriculum during the morning with the afternoon spent back in the mainstream classroom with support from staff in the nurture provision. This was described as addressing the specific needs of these children, all of whom were non-verbal, providing an alternative, calmer environment with bespoke interventions.

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<sup>2</sup> In this quote, the SENCO used the term 'reasonable adjustments'. It should be noted this is her use of the term and may not be the legal definition under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Equality Act 2010 – see [Equality and Human Rights Commission Guidance for Schools](#), 2015. Throughout the report we refer to adaptations, unless we are directly quoting participants.

This participant believed this approach had been successful for these children:

*'Pupils have made massive amounts of progress, especially with regards [to] speech and language development, because what we've tried to do is we've timetabled it so that all their bespoke interventions [are in the morning] ... So a lot of the interventions that we're able to really focus on, what motivates the children and a lot of that is through outdoor play. And then we've also managed to create a... little sensory room as well, so that for some pupils who like just to lie down and to watch the light, we can do interventions through that as well, which has been beneficial.'* Assistant Headteacher

There was an emphasis on adapting to meet the needs of the child and on belonging to a community:

*'[Inclusion] looks like leaders who know their children with SEND and who are always reflecting and seeking to get the best within their setting. It is driving teams, getting high quality training in place as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD), allocating high quality education and always rather than pushing this, 'We need the results. We need the curriculum. We need the assessment'... It goes back to ... children feeling like they are part of the school community and leaders thinking about what those children can learn within their settings, rather than it being, they have to fit within our current curriculum, or what our inclusion looks like, so they need to be educated elsewhere.'* Special school outreach leader

Despite the divergence of opinion about the best 'place' for inclusion, there was a wide consensus across the three local areas, in our focus groups, and with parent carers and professionals about what constitutes an inclusive culture and ethos and that this should be driven by a common set of core values. The following core values were identified as being central to supporting an ethos and culture of inclusion:

### **Feeling safe, valued and belonging**

Professionals and parent carers emphasised the fundamental importance of children and young people with SEND feeling '*valued, safe and secure*' and the right of all children to be part of a local community. Parent carers described the importance of their children feeling happy and understood, having opportunities to make friendships, learn, thrive and have fun. Being treated fairly and kindly (not as a '*number or attendance figure*') and having the same access to opportunities was also emphasised. These aspirations for children were described by all our participants:

*'For school to be accessible for them. For them to feel safe and comfortable at school. For them to be able to enjoy learning (which they do when they are calm and regulated). To be allowed freedom during the school day, to move around and for lessons to be more enjoyable and interactive. For them to have someone they can trust at school to look after them, someone who is consistently there to support them that they can turn to when they feel scared, unhappy, dysregulated.'* Parent carer

To cultivate a sense of belonging, the culture of the school should accept and celebrate diversity. One young person said, *'don't make me feel like my disability is a problem'*. Children and young people wanted positive support and a solutions-focused approach from school staff. This SENCO gave a practical example of how you might see what belonging looks like in his school:

*'A child sits in an assembly with earphones on, with a fiddle toy and with Tourette's and no one bats an eyelid, they are all just focussed on the information in the assembly. If there's a noise, children don't laugh or chuckle, they just accept it.'* SENCO

Intrinsic to supporting a culture of belonging was extending this to the whole family, so parents as well as children feel part of the school community: *'children and the family hearing that they belong within the education system, and they've got the support within the education system'*. Senior leader, specialist outreach provision

Throughout the research, the importance of all professionals and members of a school community developing a deeper knowledge and understanding of SEND was emphasised as important, this premised on a values-driven approach to inclusion. Parents described how this approach should be embedded in teaching and learning, helping children develop a better understanding of their peers, fostering wider societal acceptance and celebrating diversity:

*'It's about them being with their peers [and] are educated about each other so the social side of inclusion and friendships can develop...I remembered my eldest one day sat with another autistic person and he was like 'he makes these noises' and I said, 'well, you know how you think differently. He thinks differently, too. He is also autistic' and he was like 'ohh OK.'* Parent carer

## **Being child-centred**

Actively listening to children's needs was described as paramount. Whilst assessments of needs would necessarily be made by various professionals within the SEND system, ultimately the child's contribution should be prioritised:

*'I've always been called in when things are going wrong...parent narrative, school narrative, health professional narrative and what's right and what's wrong and what this child needs, but at the end of the day, it's all about whether that child feels included within that school community and whether they are able to learn...all the adult narrative around it, is kind of irrelevant. We should be focusing on how that child feels'*. Assistant Headteacher

In one local area, a parent referred to a strong needs-led ethos. This culture was child-centred and strengths-based, prioritising the needs of children and their families over diagnosis and labelling. Appropriate support was more likely to be identified in this scenario, as opposed to lengthy waiting times for formal diagnoses, thus speeding up intervention and providing support at an earlier stage:

*'You don't need an EHCP or a diagnosis to access the services. You should be getting the same regardless of where you are in terms of your SEN support or EHCP. So, if school had identified that there was an issue with the child and they needed extra help or guidance in how best to support that child in school, then they can refer directly into the [special educational needs and disabilities support service] and ask for help.'* Parent Carer Forum representative

In two of our case study areas, local specialist settings provided outreach support to mainstream schools. Part of this support was through role-modelling child-centred approaches to encourage inclusion in mainstream schools, an example of this being the 'Attention Autism' intervention for primary schools. This approach had successfully re-engaged children with learning, as the outreach leader recounted how impact reports had testified to this, one teacher said: *'we had a group of three in a room on their own one-to-one at a workstation but within 6 months we had them sitting as a group doing all this fun stuff, they were communicating'*. This was putting fun and creativity back into learning. The outreach leader described their approach within outreach as being: *'so knowledge intensive on the curriculum...it should still be creative, and it can still be sensory and we can show you how to do that, because that's what we have to do every day otherwise our kids would not learn at all'*. Specialist Outreach Senior Leader

### **Holistic view of the child/family**

Taking a holistic view of children and families was also seen as important by participants. In one case study area, the Director of Children's Services talked about ensuring that they take an approach at a local area partnership level that sees the child as a whole, and co-ordinates a response to the child across agencies, rather than professionals only dealing with discrete issues:

*'We have a value base that children are a whole and the split between SEND and social care issues, youth offending issues etc is a little bit arbitrary and from government departments as opposed to what it feels like on the ground. So just trying to get people to think about their child and the child's needs in a holistic sense rather than siloing them up into little boxes.'*  
Director of Children's Services

This approach extends to schools, where more inclusive schools were described as those schools that *'listen to their families [and] know about the wider needs of the family'*. SEND Lead



## **Relational approach**

Building relationships for improving outcomes for children and young people was a strong theme in the research. At a local SEND and AP system level this was key for establishing and embedding partnerships, between organisations and parent carers and children and young people. One SEND Lead described how relationship-building and sharing an understanding of inclusion between education, health and social care was essential for ensuring that everyone was *'on the same journey'* and *'part of the conversation'*. Developing relationships was described by participants as helpful in strengthening co-production work with PCFs in local areas. They identified that an honest, open approach was needed, in which SEND leadership was visibly engaged and solutions focused.

In school settings, participants highlighted that a relational approach with children, young people and parent carers was also vital. A SENCO described how they dedicated time to ensuring their school had a positive and welcoming entrance and they had reflected upon strategies to build positive relationships with parents. This included ensuring informal events such as coffee mornings or teacher availability during school drop-off/pick up times, to establish connections and build knowledge of children and families. They had also had a planning exercise on parent/staff communication, i.e. how introductions could be made etc and how they might co-produce more effectively.

## **Equity not equally**

A further core value emphasised by participants in the research was the principle of treating children and young people with equity not equally. They talked about the principle of all pupils being able to access the curriculum, with differentiated lessons, teaching, and opportunities for children to learn appropriately with support, interventions or adaptations ensuring those with SEND are afforded opportunities on a par with their peers. The importance of all children being able to fully participate in the community of the school was emphasised with barriers to learning removed:

*'I believe that's about removing as many barriers to learning for a young person as you possibly can. For me inclusion doesn't necessarily mean taking young people out to do something different ...because if that's the way they need something delivered that works for them and enables their learning, that's still OK. And so, inclusion isn't just about being there. It's about making sure somebody's planned carefully about how you're accessing your learning and your education, but also being part of that school community.'* LA Strategic SEND Manager

## **Inclusion as everyone's responsibility – business as usual**

Shared responsibility and ownership for inclusion was seen as pivotal, and for some, non-negotiable:

*'For inclusivity to be facilitated, it needs to be everybody's responsibility across that whole school, at every single level, right through top to bottom and bottom to top.'* Whole School SEND

Incorporating inclusive approaches in schools was described as *'part of business as usual'* with every teacher being a teacher of children with SEND and participants talked about the benefits of this to all children: *'what benefits a lot of autistic students or neurodiverse students actually benefits the whole class.'* PCF representative

Below we highlight an example, from the parent carer survey in which 'Mia's' parent carer describes her journey to an inclusive school:

### **Case example of inclusion – from a parent carer's account**

- ✦ Mia is 7-years-old and has ADHD, autism and selective mutism
- ✦ Her parent carer describes her first experience of mainstream school as unsupportive: [Mia was] *'so traumatised she couldn't speak any more'*.
- ✦ School identified mild social problems but no need to request an EHCP, although non-verbal and self-harming. The support plan was *'adult support to try to make a friend'*. No Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) offered.
- ✦ Mia moved to a school which is *'mainstream adjacent; a mainstream school with a special school ethos...all children have access to support tools such as movement breaks, ear defenders, wobble cushions and are all taught to utilise them. The SENCO describes it as self-selecting. Some kids have special needs and need to use the tools. Some kids just need to feel special for a day or two and gradually forget about it. That is an inclusive school for me.'*
- ✦ Mia had an EHC needs assessment and the family were supported to apply for Disability Living Allowance.
- ✦ The school made *'the most amazing individualised adjustments ... for [Mia].'*
- ✦ Mia has progressed from falling behind her peers at school to working at a similar level: *'it's the most amazing feeling in the world, and shows what well supported kids can achieve'*.

## 5.2 An ethos of inclusion within schools

### Key Findings:

- National barriers were described as impacting upon schools' ability to be inclusive and this was seen as having an impact at the local level – barriers that were identified included the lack of a national vision and strategy for inclusion, within a fragmented education system; misalignment of the national curriculum with needs of children with SEND; funding disincentives to support children and young people with SEND that leads to inequity in provision and an Ofsted regime that does not adequately measure inclusivity.
- Considerable variation amongst schools was reported in relation to admitting children and young people with SEND and this is causing inequities and pressures on more inclusive schools at a local level.
- Participants described how the inflexibility of the national curriculum and a lack of necessary support in school for children with SEND, was contributing towards an inability of children and young people to cope with the demands placed on them in school.
- Inclusion as a 'golden thread' running through all the work undertaken by local area partnerships was reported as helping to implement an ethos of inclusion across the local area. This was supported by the development of a strategic vision for Inclusion and SEND that was embedded in the broader vision of an inclusive community in the LA.
- Local area partnerships described working to develop an inclusive ethos across schools through developing close working relationships and a support and challenge role. The role of leadership in endorsing an inclusive ethos both at a local area partnership and school level was emphasised.

## 5.2.1 Challenges to an ethos of inclusion within schools

### Lack of a national strategic approach to inclusion

Throughout our primary research, professionals and parent carers alike, pointed to nationwide issues constraining inclusion and effecting inclusion at a local level. Thus, it would be remiss of our research if such issues were ignored. At the same time, we highlight, as evidenced by our best practice examples, such national level issues should not paralyse local level agency.

National level issues included the disconnect between education and SEND policies and the fragmentation of accountability of schools, hindering professionals' ability to foster an inclusive approach across all schools. Participants identified fragmentation as being caused by academisation of schools and as a consequence, LAs having less control over non inclusive behaviours of academies towards children with SEND. They also discussed accountability of schools being focused on academic attainment measures and progress measures reflecting a very large and academic curriculum, both of which were described as deterrents to admitting or seeking to keep more pupils with SEND. The system was described as 'outdated', failing to recognise the changing needs of pupils with SEND and the impact of this on teachers managing children with a diversity of needs:

*'Hugely increased pressure on curriculum... the outcomes that are expected from children are incredibly high and then we are asking teachers to be inclusive of children with a huge range of different needs without the resources to support the children who can't access that curriculum without huge adaptations to curriculum, classroom environment and different complexities.'* SENCO

A Director of Children's Services described the lack of a 'national conversation' addressing the joint challenges for schools, social care and health, this having potential impacts for pupil outcomes. According to this participant, a 'roadmap' was needed clearly setting out current challenges with a vision for the future of education including clarification on values, outcomes and infrastructure. This should include, it was suggested, a long-term strategy addressing workforce issues to meet children and young people's needs:

*'There's not a workforce strategy that says, what skills this school needs in order to meet the challenges of pupils. It's not just teachers, it's that whole pastoral support. It's counselling, it's emotional mental health. It's strategies around challenging behaviour at an individual level, a classroom level, a whole school level. It's about trauma informed practice. It's all these things that build a picture that say we are supporting our children and young people in an environment where there are significant and increasing challenges and complexity.'*  
Director of Children's Services

There was a widespread concern expressed by parents and professionals throughout the research that children with SEND were expected to fit into an education system failing to meet their needs and that such a system should be challenged: *'if children don't fit within that system, how are we changing the system?'*.

With more children out of education than ever before, it was felt that there was a '*plastering over*' (Senior leader, specialist school) of key issues that need to be better understood and more appropriately responded to.

### **Variation amongst schools in developing an inclusive approach**

In the research, participants within LAs and schools described tensions around inclusion in their local area, with some schools described as more inclusive of pupils with SEND. Across all three case study areas there was acknowledgement of variation in the approach to inclusion in schools:

*'We see significant imbalances in practice where we see some schools that are really, really strong that work in a highly personalised way, adapt provision in a way that meets a wider level of need, but also on a wider AT footprint or a family of schools' footprint, share and cascade good practice and hold it as a strong air of the graduated approach. We see some real consistency in that space. The opposite end is others take a very rigid approach to behaviour policy, and if you meet this threshold, you move to this level... so it's that inconsistency really that causes some of the significant fragmentation and frustration in the system.'* Director of Children's Services

In our case study areas, there were positive examples of Academy Trusts who promoted inclusion, with strong partnerships between trusts and LAs. However, amongst some of our research participants there was a perception of nationally-led Academy Trusts applying policies that may be at risk of contradicting inclusive practice, most notably on behaviour. Such policies, routinely applied to all schools in large trusts, could be inflexible, conflicting with supporting the inclusion of all children and young people. In one local area, this fragmented support for inclusion prompted one participant to call for messaging on inclusion at the '*highest strategic level*', to combat the failure of some Academy Trusts to buy into locally established inclusion agendas. Weak accountability for Academy Trusts was emphasised in all case studies. Regional DfE groups are responsible for holding Academy Trusts to account, but as they do not hold live data, this is reliant on LAs providing them with information, which requires strong relationships between regional DfE teams and LAs. LAs therefore can only use 'soft' powers to develop relationships with leaders of academies in order to encourage them to be inclusive.

Accountabilities for EHCPs was also a key issue in the context of an increasingly fragmented education system:

*'Even when you've got your education, health and care plan, it's then how are you holding schools to be accountable for delivering what's in that plan?'* DSCO

Evidence from the Ofsted/CQC Inspection reports and our case study areas suggested that some local areas are implementing approaches to tackle school exclusions. However, there was little information in inspection reports about strategies for improving equity of admissions. In our local areas and in individual schools, we were told that the process of establishing equitable admissions of children and young people with SEND was problematic, with some schools less willing to admit children with SEND:

*'Once those children are through the door...I'd be really pretty sure that the school would do what they can to support them. It's about getting their children through the door. That's the problem.'* LA SEND Strategic Manager

Inspection report analysis attested to this, pointing to inadequate processes and practices locally, to address inequalities in school admission for children and young people with SEND. In one area, parents and carers described some schools as reluctant to admit children with SEND, an experience echoed in results from the survey to parent carers, *'from the day we viewed the school, staff were trying to encourage us to go to other schools'*. Parent carer

Many participants referred to disincentives in the system for schools to admit and support children and young people with SEND and suggested that this could impact upon willingness to admit them: *'if your end goal is 'I need to have data that's really high', that's when you get schools that aren't inclusive because they know that they're putting children into the schools that aren't going to meet that data.'* Headteacher

Such disincentives were described as leading to the identification of schools as *'the school'* in the local area for children and young people with SEND, as they had embraced an inclusive ethos and operated accordingly. Participants raised concerns that this was leading to overwhelming demand for certain settings as well as inequitable provision, with some schools taking less responsibility. One school leader described how a child's journey to her school involved passing two other primary schools in a taxi which she felt was frustrating. Whilst she wanted to be able to take all children with SEND, she felt that others in her area were not taking the same approach, with a lack of equitable responsibility across all local schools. Her concern was that under this pressure, inclusive schools such as hers would not be able to continue to operate with such strong practice:

*'We can't just keep relying on the inclusive schools to be managing. They're going to fold and collapse under the weight of it otherwise and we won't have good practice that we can share to other schools because it won't look like good practice anymore.'* Headteacher

In such situations, participants described the LAs' power as limited, reliant on the strength of their relationships and influence with schools in local areas as the only means to challenge (see section on Leadership). In our Ofsted/CQC inspection report analysis, parent carers in one local area expressed concerns that certain secondary settings were unsuitable for their children as strict behaviour policies might disadvantage pupils with SEND.

As a result, in this local area there were disproportionate numbers of parents reported as applying for specific schools considered to be inclusive of children with SEND, high numbers of EHCP applications and requests for special school placements.

Additionally, there were further concerns raised by Ofsted/CQC in the inspection about the equity of allocation of special school places:

*School leaders and local area staff express concern that specialist places are not allocated rigorously according to need, but rather in response to the level of challenge from parents and politicians. Consequently, this adds to inequities in the area's SEND system, and there is anxiety that some children and young people who really do need a specialist place are not able to access one.*

## **Misalignment of the curriculum with needs of children and young people with SEND**

Concerns amongst participants about the misalignment of the national curriculum with the learning needs of children and young people with SEND were widespread:

*'The drive for standards and attainment is contradictory in many ways to being inclusive'*  
SENCO

These concerns were echoed by professionals across LAs, the education system and parent carers who described an overly rigid national curriculum with academic targets potentially detrimental for all learners, but especially those with SEND. This parent carer describes the impact of inflexibility on her secondary school daughter with autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD):

*'Education in general, standards for neurodivergent children needs to change. They are expected to perform work in the same manner as neurotypical children, and it just doesn't work. This leads to burnout then school avoidance.'* Parent carer

An inflexible curriculum and a paucity of support were common themes in parent carers' accounts, these contributing to the inability of children and young people to cope with demands placed on them in school. This led to poor attendance and in some cases, children refusing to attend and/or parents removing them. One parent described herself as 'sadly' home schooling her children due to inappropriate levels of support for her child to function in the school environment.

One SENCO described how the gradual '*narrowing*' of the curriculum, with a focus on more '*traditional*' subjects has had the effect of side-lining subjects such as art, dance, drama and sport. They thought that this had impacted disproportionately on children with SEND as these subjects may be more accessible to these children, giving them more scope to achieve. As one parent described, an increasingly knowledge-heavy curriculum instead obliged children to be '*forced to sit and retain this information*'. Parent carer

The challenge of adapting the curriculum in state-funded mainstream schools to fully meet the needs of children and young people with SEND was a key concern amongst research participants:

*'The main difference between special schools and mainstream, is special schools can adjust the curriculum to the child. The problem we have is the difficulty of forcing the child into the curriculum that we have.'* SENCO

Whilst teachers might be motivated and equipped to adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEND, competing pressures hampered this: *'we've got staff who are understanding what to do but what we can't seem to do is balance that with the other priorities... somebody is asking us 'why haven't you got this group up to this level?''*. Strategic SEND Manager

Academies operate independently of LAs. While they are not legally required to follow the National Curriculum, they must provide a "broad and balanced" curriculum, including English, Mathematics and Science (LA-Maintained schools, community schools, foundation schools, voluntary aided schools and voluntary controlled schools are all required by law to follow the National Curriculum). It was not clear in our research if some Academy Trusts were adjusting their curriculum to meet the needs of children with SEND. As we discuss below, participants described how disincentives in the system, such as a focus on academic achievement and measurement of this by Ofsted in the schools' inspection process may mean they are less inclined to make adjustments.

### **Ofsted school inspection process**

Amongst our participants, the Ofsted school inspection process was deemed to be failing in recognising rising numbers of pupils with SEND in schools and the expertise, time and resources required to meet these children's needs. The pressures of inspection and academic achievement of children had an impact on how able schools felt to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all children:

*'Our staff in schools are very keen to support every single child but they are struggling again to look at sets, look at GCSEs because every child in our school is worth 3.3% regardless of need and we are judged by those figures. We want to provide a curriculum that's accessible, engaging and fun for all our children'.* SENCO

The parent carer survey similarly supported the view that *'exam results shouldn't be the only sign of a good school'*. In one primary school, the SENCO described teachers as 'scared' of Ofsted, a focus on Ofsted results widely regarded as a barrier to inclusion:

*'Some of them are focused more on their Ofsted outcomes and it would be fair to say that it's easier to get a good and outstanding Ofsted, if you aren't taking children that come with additional pressures and that feeds into that.'* SEND Lead



A Director of Children's Services described the absence of an Ofsted 'scorecard for inclusion' as a significant challenge, as schools are not measured on this achievement. This was echoed by a Headteacher emphasising the need for inclusive practices in schools to be acknowledged and celebrated by the inspectorate, to provide an antidote to more formal measurements:

*'There's no celebration of the schools that are doing it. Just think if they celebrated that a bit more and have that as a measure, how inclusive are you as a school, and have that as a grade as part of your grading system, then schools would feel like there's not as much weighting on the data at the end of the day.'* Headteacher

One SENCO described feeling that schools are told what they need to do by Ofsted, but are not given enough guidance on 'how' to achieve improvements for children with SEND:

*'We live in a bit of a culture now where we're told 'what' to do and what the 'goal' is. But there's not enough support with the 'how' and that's the bit that's difficult. So, I will go on a webinar with Ofsted and they will talk through their expectations and what's in their inspection framework document and what an inspector would expect to see in a school if they inspected us. But what I wouldn't get is, much on the 'how' and that's what's missing.'*

### **Lack of a strategic local area SEND vision for inclusion and implementation of this vision**

In Ofsted/CQC reports, poor strategic direction for SEND services supporting inclusive practices was identified as a barrier to achieving a consistent approach. Amongst local areas that have a strategic vision, there could also be problems implementing this consistently across schools, an issue resonating with one of our case study areas. Whilst co-producing and launching guidance, on for example the 'Graduated Approach' was a significant task, ensuring consistency and compliance with this approach across all schools in local areas was challenging due to the sheer volume of schools and the 'job' of ensuring communication across all staff (see section on Support for Inclusion of children and young people with SEND below).

## 5.2.2 Facilitators to an ethos of inclusion within schools

### Strategic vision for inclusion

As has been noted, a local strategic vision for inclusion, engendering an inclusive culture and ethos across all settings was important. This was emphasised in our focus group with Whole School SEND participants:

*'We all felt quite strongly that having a shared vision was a facilitator. And that's obviously between schools and local authority and all stakeholders.'* (Whole School SEND focus group)

In our Ofsted/CQC inspection analysis, we found examples of leaders at local area partnership and school level sharing similar ambitions for inclusion within local communities more broadly and in education. In some areas, participants reported tangible effects of implementation. For example, in Dudley, attempts to embed a culture of inclusion had helped improve parental confidence, this area prioritising inclusion and supporting partnerships between local area leaders and schools. Dudley's SEND strategy works alongside The Inclusive Pathways Strategy (2021) and provides guidance to underpin a well-planned, timely and appropriate continuum of intervention and support for children and young people identified at serious risk of exclusion. Telford's Belonging Strategy, advocates for a consistent, borough wide approach to including children and young people with SEMH within the changing context of LA provision.

Dudley and Walsall along with Oldham, Stockport and Knowsley, had worked co-productively to develop strategic planning documents, working to ensure this reflected the needs of parent carers and children and young people. In Knowsley, co-production has had a positive impact on 'shared ownership of strategic planning and decision making' and strong multi-agency relationships with schools. This approach improved understanding of local need, more support and challenge and reduced permanent exclusions to zero.

In one case study area, inclusion was the 'golden thread' running through all activities in the local SEND and AP partnership, a shared vision set out in their SEND strategy and supported by an Inclusion Charter detailing what inclusive education means for the local area. The Charter supports the delivery of the Children and Young People's Strategy, the Education Strategy, and the ambition to be a Child Friendly area.

## Supporting an inclusive ethos across schools

In our case study areas, local area partnerships were making significant efforts to encourage and support schools with inclusive approaches and amongst the schools we spoke to there was a strong commitment to inclusion. Buy-in from senior leadership in schools, including support from School Governors was fundamental to achieving this (see later section on Leadership):

*'We are very, very passionate about mainstream being able to provide an education for children that have got SEND. And the governors are on board with that as well. One of our Chair of Governors is actually a deputy head of a specialist provision in [name of local area]. So we've got quite a sort of a wealth of experience, which is good because they understand where we're coming from.'* Assistant Headteacher

Supporting schools to work inclusively required considerable investment by area SEND and AP partnerships (see later section on Partnership), with the development of relationships with school leaders pivotal to this, especially with headteachers and SENCOs. There was a particular role for senior leadership to develop relationships with Academy Trust leaders and influence an inclusive approach in this regard. This involved a balance of support and challenge:

*'So, I do try and bring it back to the basics in terms of some of those challenging questions, would you be happy with your child being treated like this or handled like this. What can we do in terms of kind of bringing that round, so I just think everybody comes from the right place. It's just difficult sometimes with the different pressures, that are put on, but it's how we can do that in the best way that supports everybody really. Generally, when it comes down to it, schools are wanting the same things. It's getting there and it's supporting them to get there. So, it's trying to get the balance right between challenge and support. We've got to do both.'* LA Head of Service Inclusion, Strategy and Performance

In one case study local area, there was an example given by a SENCO that highlighted the positive power of the Ofsted inspection process to support inclusion. In this case the inspector positively validated the inclusive approach that the school were taking with a child with SEND:

*'I was telling you about the child who was drawing London at 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon when all the other children were learning. There was a heart in the mouth moment because this Ofsted inspector looked at him and said, 'why is he doing that?' And we explained it and she says: 'Oh that's brilliant.' So that was one positive experience, it's about that validation from above, to being able to take those risks. That's important because if she had turned round and said, 'I think he's wasting learning time', the effect on our school would have been massive in terms of making adaptations to support that child, because it's not just him that needs things changed.'* SENCO

## 5.3 Support for inclusion of children and young people with SEND

### Key findings:

- Parent carers' accounts show a failure of some schools and local areas to recognise and respond to children and young people's individual needs quickly enough and a lack of partnership with parents. Implementation of support plans and adaptations in the classroom to support children and young people were also described as inconsistent.
- School staff were described as not being consistently well trained and supported to recognise and understand how to meet the range of needs amongst children and young people with SEND and lacked confidence in implementing support. This could lead to a reliance on the knowledge of individual staff and SENCOs.
- Transition, particularly from primary to secondary school was described as challenging, as reasonable adjustments may be harder to achieve. Support at this point was seen as critical, in particular, the importance of EHCPs being up to date was highlighted.
- Schools and parents reported they found guidance to implement use of the Graduated Approach and Ordinarily Available provision helpful and empowering. Implementation of guidance was followed up with co-produced ongoing training and support to promote a consistent response across local areas.
- Innovative ways of supporting inclusion described were: a co-produced Inclusion Audit; a model of cluster working with an identified team of qualified teachers to support individual schools and parents with inclusion early on, before needs escalate; outreach support from special schools and a transitions support team.

### 5.3.1 Challenges to support for inclusion

#### Children masking SEND needs

At school, children with SEND, especially those who are neurodivergent may 'mask' or hide certain behaviours, worries, feelings or difficulties they are experiencing from teachers and their peers in order to 'fit' in with other children and perceived social norms. This can mean their needs continue to be unrecognised or misunderstood at school. In the research, parents in one focus group described the exhaustion for their children of masking:

*'It's absolutely burning them out, not being able to be themselves at school'.*

*'It's the exhaustion of masking, it's the sensory exhaustion of holding it altogether and then crunch'.*

Amongst the parent carer survey, children masking symptoms at school was also a theme. Parent carers reported, that as they were achieving academically, and/or not causing problems in school, concerns were not acted upon sufficiently until it was too late and they became unable to attend school.

#### **Case example: from a parent carer's account**

*'From reception class to year 4 my daughter struggled with the school environment, but masked heavily in school. She struggled to get ready for school every morning, and had severe and distressing meltdowns for up to two hours after every school day. As a result of her masking, good behaviour at school, and academic achievement, only minor 'accommodations' were made, and she was still unable to cope with the environment and constant stress of masking. At the beginning of year 5 she had a complete mental health breakdown. At this point the school realised just how serious the situation was and did everything they could to help, including huge amounts of flexibility with timetable, curriculum, uniform, 1:1 support, and much more. We spent two years trying to support her back into the classroom. By this point it was too late though, and my daughter now carries so much trauma that she cannot attend school anymore. Transition to secondary school did not happen.'* Parent Carer

This was supported by findings in Ofsted/CQC inspection reports that also highlighted cases in which children were masking problems at school and therefore schools were not referring into specialist services, meaning children were not identified until problems had escalated. Concerns relating to the identification of neurodevelopmental issues were also documented. The reports showed problems in identification amongst staff in health visiting, early years and schools (including school nursing teams). Staff were not being consistently well trained and supported to recognise and understand how to meet the range of needs amongst children and young people with SEND. This could lead to a reliance on the knowledge of individual staff and SENCOs. A lack of knowledge and confidence of staff was also a strong theme of the parent carer survey.

#### **The challenge of making adaptations in schools to address needs**

In the survey, parent carers reported a challenge with schools not implementing support plans and adaptations for children: in one example a parent described how, *'[the] school refused to make reasonable adjustments'*. In the online survey, parents emphasised that they wanted adaptations to be made as required, and for them to be implemented consistently without repeatedly following up with school staff.

Schools making adaptations for pupils was also cited as important in transitions by children and young people with SEND in the KIDS workshop.

Implementing adaptations in schools, both in the classroom and outside of it, was described as particularly problematic when children and young people transition from primary to secondary school. Accounts from parent carers and professionals in local areas highlighted the difficulty for secondary school teachers in replicating the same adaptations that had been made at primary school because of the nature of the environment, physical space of buildings, corridors, noise, constraints of the teaching system and capacity. This could impact on parental confidence that children's needs are being met:

*'So that's where parental confidence tends to dip a bit or parental anxiety is greater and often it's because of what a fantastic job primary have done. And then the contrast, for the different style of secondary makes a difference.... sometimes they're [secondary schools] not good at selling themselves or being clear about what it is they do offer as standard. But that's definitely where the message has come back from parents that they feel it's not done as well.'* SEND Strategic Manager

### 5.3.2 Facilitators to support for inclusion

#### **Clear guidance for schools and parents on the Graduated Approach**

The backbone of supporting inclusion was described as a strong SEND Local Offer that included establishing and communicating clear guidance for schools to follow in terms of their offer to children and young people with SEND (the use of the Graduated Approach and Ordinarily Available Provision) that was publicly available for school staff and parent carers. The [SEND Code of Practice \(DfE and DoH, 2015\)](#) advises that all settings should adopt a graduated approach with four stages of action: assess, plan, do and review.

There were many examples of such guidance being developed in Ofsted/CQC inspection reports. Whilst these all vary in terms of content, some being more detailed than others, there is much overlap with provision of information about the Graduated Response and/or what should be 'ordinarily available' under universal provision. In Stockport, for example, they have developed an '[Entitlement Framework](#)' and in Bristol they have [Ordinarily Available Provision Guidance](#). In Cornwall they have co-produced a [Graduated Response Toolkit](#) that has been designed to improve the assessment and ability to meet needs of children and young people identified as needing SEND support. A slightly different approach, focused more on SENCOs than parent carers has been taken by Bradford who have a matrix of need (graduated response) and a handbook for SENCOs on implementation. In Kent they have implemented '[mainstream core standards](#)', these similarly set out what schools should do routinely to support children with their learning. Local area leaders in Kent have also developed a new policy and diagnostic tool, the [Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education \(CATIE\)](#). This enables localities to compare data relating to inclusion.

In our case study areas, all three of the local case study areas had developed their own guidance for professionals and parent carers on the Graduated Approach. To help embed consistent use of the Graduated Approach and ensure that all staff and parent carers have the same understanding of assessment and provision, one local area had co-produced a local 'toolkit' for inclusion with the PCF. The PCF were also working closely with the local area partnership to deliver training to schools on the use of the toolkit, that parents could also attend. This was intended to support effective implementation, and the toolkit was intended as a document to support SENCOs and parent carers in identifying appropriate support for children and young people. Providing support for implementation was important and it was intended to address concerns about variation in consistency of approach.

**Toolkit for inclusion of children and young people developed in one local area (0-25 years)**

The toolkit draws together detailed information about SEND needs and sets out the provision available in the local area to support inclusion, including the Graduated Approach, reasonable adjustments, transition support, and Education, Health and Care Plans. It aims to promote consistency in understanding and provision for children and young people across the local area and help to support parent carers to know what should be being made available to children in their schools. The toolkit has been co-produced with parent carers and professionals and the toolkit is being presented in schools to staff and parent carers.

There is a requirement on LAs to set out what special educational provision and special training provision it expects schools, early years and post-16 providers to make available (see [DfE and CDC, 2016](#)). As part of their local offer, our case study areas had developed a clear statement of expectations focused on what should be 'ordinarily available' in mainstream schools. In one example, it sets out how schools can remove barriers to learning, including those within the school environment, attitudes, staff skills, high quality inclusive teaching, performance and funding. It identifies strategies, adjustments, approaches and interventions that may help children and young people with different types of learning needs. This local area had extended their graduated approach to 5 steps because they thought that there was a gap between Quality First Teaching and ordinarily available provision and moving onto the SEND Register. There were opportunities for early intervention that they wanted to clarify with schools to avoid mitigating children going on the SEND Register. They also found this helpful in moderating the SEND Register. In having discussions with parents about moving children off the SEND Register, they were able to show parents what support children and young people will still be receiving.

As a PCF representative explains, such statements were powerful tools for parents:

*'It's that empowerment for parents to be able to go in and say 'my child's on SEN support and it says here this is what you're supposed to be doing, why aren't you?' and challenging them and being able to challenge and having that information and having all schools know about it.'* PCF representative

One of the case study areas was complementing their local area SEND strategic policies and guidance on 'ordinarily available' provision with an innovative, co-produced inclusion audit for schools. The aim was to support and enable schools to review their approach to inclusion, alongside parent carers, children and young people and all the staff in the school and develop an action plan to support changes that they could implement. The audit is supported by an Inclusion Manager whose full-time post is funded to support the work under Delivering Better Value. As part of his role he had researched and developed the audit tool. One of the key strengths of the audit tool is that it encourages a whole school (and family) approach to improving inclusion and raises awareness of inclusion in school communities.

### **Inclusion Audit**

The Inclusive Education Audit is a self-evaluation tool for education settings to use to support with developing action plans in relation to inclusive education. Settings are encouraged to complete the audit (with staff, parent carers and children and young people) on an annual basis reflecting on their inclusive practice and their ongoing journey to co-produce provision for all children and young people. The aim of the audit is to enable settings to identify their strengths and areas for improvement in inclusive practice and to help them produce a development plan and identify training needs. It provides schools with all the templates of tools and letters to parent carers to let them know about the Audit and promote their participation.

The Audit has been rolled out to a sample of 14 schools first and work is underway with schools, parents and children and young people to review their provision.

Unsurprisingly, given the number of research participants who identified the importance of a robust approach to a graduated response and a strong Ordinarily Available Provision framework, not having these in place, was a barrier to inclusion. In one Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection concerns were raised that *the 'success of the support children and young people receive is not guaranteed because the common approach is not consistently applied'*. In another inspection report, capacity, resources and influence of SENCOs to implement the requirements of the Graduated Response were varied, meaning children and young people needing SEND support continue to have a poor experience. In another area, the lack of a co-productive approach by the LA, with Headteachers to developing a Graduated Approach, had led to a lack of confidence around how new processes would operate in practice.



Participants in the research and inspection reports suggested that having clear guidance was likely to support greater consistency and fewer misunderstandings in the service provision experienced by children and young people.

### **A flexible approach to supporting children and young people with SEND**

The importance of flexibility to adapt the local offer was highlighted at a local area partnership level and within schools. In one case study area, the Education Lead emphasised how they would try to support schools as best they could, adapting to need:

*'We're very responsive to anything that comes up, and we're always kind of flexing our offer and our system which, that's quite important.'* Education Lead

Having a flexible approach to provision, policies and practice in school to help with meeting children's SEND was highlighted as important by parent carers and by children and young people in the consultation by KIDS. Parents described how minor adjustments to policies and processes, for example around timetables, eating, homework, bullying, uniform, hybrid-learning and behaviour, supported their children. Having co-produced behaviour strategies that were implemented consistently across schools was another way that SENCOs talked about ensuring approaches were acceptable, understood and upheld by children and young people.

Parents described how having learning and sensory needs met was important, for example, having alternative language displays, visuals, sound buttons, and reducing 'busy' displays. Ways of supporting children's learning, such as use of Google search for supporting learning, access to lessons beforehand for pre-teaching, taking a photo of the board so they do not need to copy, having access to an iPad to type rather than write, were all important adjustments that could make a difference. In transitions, young people asked for: face to face tours, rather than by video; they wanted to visit the school space at a time when it was busy and quiet; and they were worried about maps, locations and support to prevent them from getting lost. They also asked for one key person that could be there to provide them with support.

SENCOs described adjusting the curriculum, or being flexible with building in a nurturing activity for children who were struggling, but it was acknowledged that making adaptations that took children away from the curriculum required confidence on the part of the teacher. For children and young people, small changes however, could make a real difference:

*'He's so frustrated about his day at school, where if someone could just take a couple of stones out of his bucket so he's not overflowing during the school day, so he does a bit of colouring, before he finishes school. He gets chance to debrief with his teacher about anything. Just little things that aren't costing us a small fortune but mean that he's able to go into school and come out on a high.'* PCF representative

During the research we spoke to a school in which staff have developed a model that provides guidance for teachers and TAs to accurately identify pupils' needs and know the level at which they are working to make appropriate adaptations. The model aims to improve the quality of provision for pupils with SEND across a range of settings and provide clarity and support for SENCOs, supporting teachers to make appropriate adaptations and learn ideas and strategies they can implement with all pupils, enabling SENCOs to identify appropriate learning pathways, supporting a whole school approach and driving strategic inclusion. This example, the HIVES (Holistic, Inclusive and Versatile Education Systems) Model is currently being used in over 20 schools.

### **Model to support staff to implement inclusive approaches in schools**

The HIVES (Holistic, Inclusive and Versatile Education Systems) Model is a systematic approach designed to increase accessibility, varied learning and adaptations for all pupils regardless of individual need and level of learning. It is a model that is designed to: complement and enhance existing practice; identify pupil's level of processing; support teaching staff to adapt and vary learning. It can be applied in mainstream or specialist environments;

The HIVES Model consists of the following documents:

- ✦ "Bee Identified" – Designed to identify the learning profile of a pupil and corresponding curriculum pathway.
- ✦ "Bee Adaptable Learning" - Provides examples of adaptations that can be used to support each curriculum pathway throughout the components of learning.
- ✦ "Bee Adaptable Environment" – Reasonable adjustments that can be made to environments to ensure accessibility of learning.
- ✦ "Bee Ambitious – Suggestions of appropriate assessment tools and methods of gathering evidence for outcomes at each curriculum pathway.
- ✦ "Bee Ready" – Emotional regulation strategies for all pupils to ensure readiness to learn.

Schools follow a programme of sequential steps that begin by identifying the needs of pupils within the context of the programme, matching the pupils to specific curriculum pathways and are provided with pre prepared CPD presentations that engage their school community. Over a series of months, schools will disseminate the documents to enrich their existing SEND provision, moderating changes through discussion, testing, refining and feedback.

Such models can help to support inclusion of children in the classroom and may help to address some of the barriers such as poor early identification of need, lack of support for children waiting for EHC needs assessments, inform the quality of EHC needs assessments and help support in transitions for children between schools, all identified as common issues in Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection reports. The following Ofsted/CQC report from one Area SEND inspection linked these issues for children to increased likelihood of poor attendance or exclusion at secondary school:

*'In schools, the delay in the identification of need is impacting on the timeliness of the support that children and young people receive. Some pupils do not have their needs fully identified until they come to the end of their time in primary school. This does not prepare pupils well for the move to secondary school. This can lead to an increased likelihood of poor attendance and exclusion. Consistent early and accurate identification of needs would better support these pupils to sustain their secondary school place.'*

### **Support for children and young people waiting for specialist help**

Ofsted/CQC inspection reports highlighted other innovative approaches some local areas were taking to support children and families when there were long waiting lists for specialist help. In Brighton and Hove, children and young people waiting for neuro-developmental assessments and access to CAMHS benefit from bespoke help while waiting for a diagnosis. In Bristol, they have introduced a team of OTs, SALTs and EPs to review children in schools and support professionals to offer strategies to children and families. A range of support has also been introduced for children and young people who are waiting for CAMHS appointments, such as a telephone advice line. In Kent, they have developed a 'needs-led' offer for families awaiting CAMHS diagnosis meaning that families are not fully reliant on diagnosis to access help and support. Bracknell Forest GEMS service have taken a similar approach to support children and young people awaiting an assessment for autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This means that they can gain support at the earliest opportunity.

### **Health support for children and young people**

Good health support was documented in Ofsted/CQC inspection reports in some local areas, as a feature that may impact upon the ability of children and young people with SEND to be included in mainstream schools. For example, in Greenwich, nursing support for children and young people with complex medical health needs is provided to the child or young person whether they are in an education setting or at home. Some children and young people benefit from packages of care delivered by carers who sit within the school nursing team, demonstrating innovative and effective joint working between health and social care providers. In Buckinghamshire, young children with SEND have a dedicated health visitor who ensures transition into the school nursing service is smooth and school nurses have good links with Mental Health Support Teams and can refer directly into CAMHS.

In Rutland, there is an effective school support programme in which children and young people have access to SALT within a few weeks when needed.

In one of the case study areas, this Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) talked about a need to normalise some health conditions and boost the confidence of staff, including TAs to deal with supporting children with conditions such as epilepsy or diabetes: *'initially it's raising that awareness, it's [telling them] you don't have to be scared, these things ... can be learned'*. This DCO worked with school nurses to provide support to help them to manage more common health conditions. Section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on governing bodies of maintained schools, proprietors of academies and management committees of PRUs to make arrangements for supporting pupils at their school with medical conditions. However in the research the guidance associated with the duties [Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions](#) (DfE, 2015) was not mentioned by participants.

### **Support for children and young people at risk of exclusion**

Ofsted/CQC inspection reports highlighted that children at risk of exclusion or non-attendance were particularly supported in some local areas, with the use of, for example, nurture groups in Enfield and a social prescribing approach in Cornwall that results in the provision of tailored resources to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. This was supporting some children and young people to return to a school setting, promoting inclusion. In Bristol, specific specialist help has also been developed to support schools and young people with issues to do with drugs and weapons. A key worker service has also been introduced for children with severe mental health illness, with a view to reducing the risk of them leaving education or being admitted to hospital.

In some areas, specific work was targeted at reducing exclusions. In Shropshire work had been successful at reducing exclusions, by providing an increased range of support to schools, including the use of inclusion caseworkers who facilitate pupil planning meetings to support children to remain in mainstream settings and multi-agency panels to support schools when there is a risk of exclusion. In Dudley, short-term AP placements were used to avoid exclusion with support to reintegrate into a mainstream setting. This work is aided by the virtual school team, which works closely with children looked after and has a policy which aims that no child looked after will be permanently excluded. This approach is having a positive impact on reducing the number of children and young people with SEND who are excluded. Similarly in Telford, the behaviour support advisory team worked alongside schools and AP as a short-term intervention.

In Shropshire and Walsall, Vulnerable Learners Hubs in schools were supporting children and young people at risk of exclusion. In Walsall the Hub provides support, challenge and strategies to help children, young people and schools. For example, experienced headteachers with a track record of preventing exclusions work with headteachers of other schools. Consequently, a growing number of potential permanent exclusions have been avoided.

## Children missing education

In the research, some children were described by parents as not attending school regularly, on part-time timetables or were 'children missing education' (i.e. children not on a school roll and not receiving a suitable education). In the survey to parent carers, there were examples in which children's SEND needs were not identified and supported early enough, resulting in them no longer coping in the school environment. Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspections highlighted that in several areas, they were trying to address this and support these children and young people. In Walsall, Headteachers were seconded to the SEND and AP partnership to support children and young people with SEND back into long-term sustained education. In Peterborough, the local area partnership works closely with educational settings to review the use and appropriateness of part-time provision, where it exists to support more children and young people with SEND to engage in full-time education.

## Transition support

There were some positive examples in Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection reports, such as Bradford, of local areas working well to provide strong post-16 support and smooth transitions into college, work and training. In Enfield, young people with SEND who do not have an EHCP and may be at risk of missing out on progressing to a suitable placement after school are identified early and offered advice. This means that they typically remain in education, employment or training after leaving school. In Rutland, targeted coaching through the '[Thriving Through Change](#)' approach helps children and young people prepare for changes in their education, for example when going to AP or post-16 education. In Sheffield, SENCOs from private, voluntary and independent providers in the early years sector were completing qualifications and this was increasing their expertise/knowledge of systems and procedures helping children with their transition into primary schools.

In one of our case study areas, the LA was using funding from [Delivering Better Value](#) to develop innovative transitions work, with funding for a small team to look at all transitions across the 0-25 age range and review and improve transition planning, processes and procedures to help improve timeliness, experience of transitions for families and also communicate what is inclusive and available, particularly for children post-16 because families had reported finding information about options was not always readily available. The transitions workers were also working directly alongside families and children to provide practical support:

*'What we find is that quite often even if a child has managed mainstream up to year 11, they may then put in for a bespoke specialist package, or because they don't feel that that child can manage in mainstream post-16. And so, I'm trying to make mainstream post-16 provision more known because it is the risk that there are anxieties [and families] don't know our mainstream providers are really, inclusive. I've had some successful transitions with mainstream providers where they've bent over backwards to try and be inclusive'.*

Transitions Manager

In the research, transition from primary to secondary school was highlighted by participants as a particular 'pinch' point. This was identified as being partly due to poor identification of children's needs in earlier years leading to problems making the transition, and for other children, it was a lack of necessary support at secondary school. This SENCO highlights transition as a key issue in her local area that she feels needs improvement:

*'One [barrier] is with particular year sevens and transition from primary school and there was a bit of work within [local area] at the moment, on trying to improve transition and the quality of information being transferred from the primary schools, but also where need has been met in some form of primary school that then they haven't gone ahead with formal diagnosis or EHCP and they've just kind of nurtured and looked after students which then when they come to secondary school, we then find because provisions haven't been applied for or particular diagnosis, can make that transition even more exacerbated and then trying to get the support for those students when they'll see we do not have teaching assistants (TAs) in every classroom and we do not have the resources that maybe they had in a primary school.'* SENCO

Ofsted/CQC inspection reports also highlighted poor secondary to post-16 transition in some local areas and a lack of opportunities for post 16-year-olds (in part because their education was not sufficient pre-16), with young people with SEND less likely to be able to access post-16 provision as easily as their peers.

### **Improving EHCPs**

Some local areas were improving the quality and timeliness of their EHCPs. This had centred around improving quality assurance processes of advice that informs the EHCP and providing more training for SENCOs and multi-agency staff involved in writing contributions. In Bristol the introduction of standardised documents and regular meetings are leading to good communication and effective partnership working and schools are receiving greater support and advice. Schools are receiving feedback through the quality assurance processes and this helps identify training/support needs and means they are also more closely held to account for the quality of support they provide to children and young people in their care.

## Models of delivery

How local areas were delivering their services to support inclusion differed, but partnership across schools and organisations and with parent carers was important across the board. Specialist services, worked alongside multi-agency professionals, including health (EPs, SALTs, CAMHS, OTs), children's social care services (early help services, social workers, Virtual Schools) and education, health and care planning teams in LAs. In one local area, an inclusion partnership, working alongside albeit independently from the LA, was coordinating and acting to champion inclusive practices across the area. Commissioned by the LA, the partnership facilitates outreach support through a special school. It is linked in with an Academy Trust which is operated as part of a teaching school alliance providing initial teacher training as well as continuing professional development in this and two other neighbouring LAs. Leaders working as part of the inclusion partnership described a support and challenge role to the schools in the local area, and beyond in neighbouring authorities with whom they worked.

In a focus group, SENCOs discussed gaps existing for children with complex needs in mainstream schools (who do not have a special school place but whose needs are very high for the provision available). There was also felt to be a lack of support for families - especially for those children who do not have a specific diagnosis. At times children and young people fell through a gap in provision when the combination of their needs means they do not fit current provision in a special school with an SEMH focus. SEMH in general was regarded as a growing concern. Professionals voiced worries that children and young people tend to be in mainstream but are just '*being managed*' and are not always able to engage with the curriculum. In such circumstances, participants expressed concerns that the gap can widen as SEMH needs have to be addressed before learning.

In one local area, they have developed a cluster model to deliver specialist support to schools.

### **Cluster model of supporting inclusion in schools**

In one local area they have clustered schools together geographically. Each cluster has qualified teachers with a SEND specialism, who are able to provide specialised support on inclusion. They are able to provide whole-school support and training and support to individual children and young people. Every school has a named advisory teacher they can go to and parent carers are also able to refer their child to the advisory teacher. SENCOs value this support and welcome having a route into contacting people with wider specialisms to speak to about problems they are experiencing. The clusters include LA maintained schools as well as Academy Trusts. Cluster working helps support the multi-agency 'team around the school' approach. Based on feedback from SENCOs and parent carers, this approach was being successful in providing support. Clusters were also potentially useful for the purposes of peer support and joint training alongside colleagues across multiple agencies.

This use of organising support through clusters on a locality basis had also been used in another case study area, in this case to help SEND Managers develop better working relationships with Headteachers. By clustering schools together, there were fewer for them to work alongside, and LA staff are able to dedicate time to developing relationships with Headteachers and providing them with support:

*'One of the key vehicles we've got, is we work on a locality basis. So that is about making sure that we carved the city up in small enough chunks so we can develop the opportunity for good relationships with heads. So rather than dealing with 75 head teachers, we've got managers of social care of SEND just working with, 15 or 20 schools. So they can actually know those schools, know those communities, build relationships with their heads. Go to meetings. Have network meetings. Be at the end of a telephone call.'* Director of Children's Services

### **Outreach provision from special schools**

The Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) states that:

*'Special schools (in the maintained, academy, non-maintained and independent sectors), special post-16 institutions and specialist colleges all have an important role in providing for children and young people with SEN and in working collaboratively with mainstream and special settings to develop and share expertise and approaches.'* (p.28)

In our research, participants emphasised the benefits of strong collaborative relationships between mainstream and special schools. As we have seen in previous research (Currie et al, 2023), there is also significant benefit from advice, support and joint working between mainstream schools and APs.

In two of our case study areas, there was a strong outreach provision from a local special school. The outreach from the special school offered whole school approaches to increase the capacity of mainstream schools to develop high quality inclusive practice as well as providing support for individual children and young people with SEND. Key to the provision of outreach was improving the knowledge, understanding and skills of mainstream school staff and both supporting and challenging them. In one example given by a SENCO in a focus group, the school felt that it had got to the end of its ability to include this child, but having a different approach from the outreach service, helped them to 'unlock' the child's engagement. An Inclusion Co-ordinator said:

*'In outreach we've seen so many amazing examples of schools really including those children really well and it's more about, you've got to get the engagement first, because they are disengaged with learning, and then you can uncover the cognitive need. Once you've got them onside you can start to engage with the cognitive side and build that up and we've seen some really successful cases of people harnessing the engagement by boosting up that child and their self-esteem first.'* Inclusion Co-ordinator



Fundamental to the success of outreach was improving understanding in mainstream schools that inclusion benefits all children. The most effective way to demonstrate this was to provide tangible, practical evidence by going into schools and showing them inclusion 'in action'. This Assistant Headteacher of a special school said:

*'I can sit and speak to somebody on the phone, you need to do this intervention, you need to do that intervention. But when you go in and see it happening and that's when you get the staff going, 'this is amazing. I'm going to do it'' and that's really when you see the differences, what does it look like in practice?'; 'until you see it in action...and see how children respond, that's when you saw the glimmers from staff (who) get really excited about doing it with these kids'.*

Outreach was reported to be most effective when the SENCO was linked into the work as there is a high turnover amongst TAs, and teaching staff. With their overview, they know what's *'happening on the ground'* and can monitor implementation.

## 5.4 Workforce

### Key Findings:

- Staff retention and well-being was identified by participants as a challenge across local areas particularly in schools and health settings. The pressures on teaching and non-teaching staff of supporting children with diverse needs without sufficient resources could impact on staff well-being.
- Retention of staff in schools and health was highlighted as challenging, with TAs being required to have emotional resilience.
- Training for all professionals to increase knowledge and understanding of SEND and support children better was described as important to children, young people and families. This needed to be part of an ongoing programme of learning and be followed up with actions, not as a tick box or one-off exercise. The *Autism in Schools* model was well received as it was co-produced and provided a package of ongoing training, support and peer reviews for staff, parents and children and young people.
- Benefits of utilising knowledge and expertise across different school settings – mainstream, specialist and AP were emphasised by local areas to enhance training and provide peer support. Opportunities for peer networking as a way to improve knowledge and support was appreciated by SENCOs.

### 5.4.1 Workforce facilitators

Having a skilled and knowledgeable workforce leading inclusion across all levels, in local area partnerships and at a school level was described as fundamental to creating a culture of inclusion. Four key elements were highlighted as being important in terms of facilitating inclusion: training and development; support and advice; professional supervision and CPD and peer networking.

#### Training and development

Across our discussions, the importance of training was emphasised as a vehicle for improving professionals' knowledge and understanding of SEND and inclusion and promoting the confidence of staff working at all levels and across all organisations. Parent carers identified staff training in schools as paramount and children and young people also talked about the importance of training staff to support them in transitions. They wanted school staff to have a better knowledge and understanding of mental health, neurodiversity, anti-bullying, safeguarding and equality and diversity. They highlighted the importance of regular training so that they can keep up with changing needs.

As shown above, more training and opportunities for the sharing of good practice across settings (mainstream, specialist, AP) was described as important, so that schools could benefit from a deeper understanding of SEND and the ethos of inclusivity:

*'Deep at the heart of inclusive practice, is a focus on the individual and the philosophy that is more evident across the specialist sector, which is, where there are challenges, the aim is to change the system, to fit this child rather than looking at the child to change. And we know that where this works well with local authorities, it's where there's that strong link between specialist and mainstream settings.'* Whole School SEND focus group

Training was described as enabling a better understanding of SEND across agency settings and more multi-agency training for professionals to come together from across education, schools, social care and health was regarded as helpful in breaking down barriers in language and ways of working, developing a more nuanced understanding of each other's settings. A SENCO discussed a lack of understanding between schools and children's social care services and talked about the benefits of having a trainee social worker on a placement at their school during their training. He thought that more such placements and shared training at a pre-qualifying level enabled better shared understanding of each other's work.

Within the Ofsted/CQC inspection reports, training for staff in schools, was identified as a facilitator to inclusion. For example, in Shropshire they have an intervention programme in education settings training school staff to help support children with speech and language needs as access to specialist help is slow. In Luton, staff in schools have received speech, language and communication training so they can deliver programmes to children and young people who need them.

This training is reported in the inspection reports as highly regarded by school staff and leaders. Training school staff to improve early intervention was being undertaken in Enfield, where the Enfield Communication Advisory Support Service provides school settings with a whole school communication approach ensuring that children's speech, language and communication needs are identified and met in a timely way.

In Brighton and Hove, their inspection report highlights that training for school staff to understand the different needs of children and young people with SEND was helping to significantly reduce incidents of suspension and improving the attendance of children and young people. Ongoing training by a range of providers has supported the trauma-informed response of schools in Walsall in responding to school exclusion.

LA education leaders in Essex have provided training and guidance about the identification of children's SEND to schools. This included targeted support to individual schools where there were high numbers of children with moderate learning difficulty. Their inspection report highlighted that most schools have engaged with this support and there have been improvements in identification that have led to an increase in referrals for SEMH and SLCN needs. SALT services were then working more directly with schools to work with individual pupils and training school staff to meet children and young people's needs and with local area leaders to strategically review the impact of training and further commissioning.

Area leaders have also worked closely with CAMHS and other stakeholders to develop a well-thought-through programme to support schools in how to support children and young people whose emotional well-being impacts negatively on their attendance and behaviour at school.

In some local areas, there was positive feedback and evidence of impact for models of training. In the example given below in one of our case study areas, training of professionals in schools formed one element of a wraparound model that took a holistic approach to improving autism support for children, young people and their families. The training was delivered by education specialists from the Inclusion Partnership funded by the LA with parent carers from the PCF. The Inclusion Partnership provides ongoing support, follow ups and workshops to schools.

#### **Positive model of wraparound training and support - Autism in Schools Project**

One local area received funding from the NHS Executive to run this project and were extending it to all schools under the Government's Delivering Better Value funding.

The project was co-produced and co-delivered with a wide range of partners. It included training and development (including learning walks around schools to identify areas for adaptation); voluntary sector support for parent carers of autistic children and young people; a support course for children and young people with autism; a specialist bespoke offer of support to schools; and development of a neurodivergent digital learning platform. At the end of the training, all schools have a Whole School SEND Review on provision for autism. That review is then followed up with action planning support, so that schools can plan what needs to be implemented. Ongoing work continues with an annual follow-up to look at progress, top up workshops and regular bulletins to keep them up to date on the latest research and information about autism.

Initiatives such as this were highly regarded amongst those we spoke to, improving the knowledge base in schools and upskilling staff. It was hoped that this would help children and young people with autism and in doing so, this may have the additional benefit of reducing pressure on outreach services. As the leader of the Inclusion Partnership described:

*'The key is that this is not just training you attend, tick it off and it's finished, it's all this wraparound care so you would go in and do a review, you would go in and support the school with action planning, you'd go back 12 months later and do a follow up. We've got top up workshops to show what's going on this week in autism, that's what we feel is really embedding this knowledge.'* Inclusion Partnership Leader

To this end, the training also encouraged schools to develop Autism Ambassadors (children and young people) who were coming together in schools to develop ways they could improve inclusion.

Co-producing training was highly valued and thought to have more impact: *'sometimes when we deliver the training, we'll have young people co-delivering in schools and settings so that's really powerful.'* LA SEND Lead. Parent carers also being able to attend training sessions was very much valued within local areas. After having co-delivered the Autism in Schools training this parent carer commented:

*'Hearing some of the things that day [whilst giving a presentation from PCF for Autism in Schools project] meeting within the school, you just think, 'yes, this is how it should be'. This is how you make children feel comfortable, able to learn, and all the other things going on behind the scenes. You get better attendance, if you're happy, you go to school.'* PCF representative

SENCOs in a focus group described appreciating the provision of free training by the LA for themselves and support staff in schools, who otherwise would not be able to attend. They thought that training to TAs and other non-teaching staff in schools was also important. In this case study area, all non-teaching staff were receiving training, to help protect themselves from the risk of violence in the school setting. This had come about due to an incident of physical restraint, but it was felt to have been positive for staff, both empowering them and recognising them as valued team members. In one of the schools, we spoke to they were supporting TAs to do additional training, and this was described as invaluable in supporting their large cohort of vulnerable children, including looked after children. One TA was funded by a government scheme, and another was funded through the apprenticeship levy to do a mental health TA qualification. This was free to the school; the staff were enjoying doing it and the Headteacher described it as providing vital additional mental health support to children in school.

## **Support and advice**

Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspections highlighted a range of ways that support and advice to staff was being provided. These included: SEND Hubs in Peterborough; SENCO networks in Dudley and Peterborough and headteacher briefings in schools in Dudley. Peer reviews were being used, for example in Peterborough and were described as being positively viewed by education leaders for providing support and training and ensuring that leaders have an accurate view of the quality of provision and how well it meets pupils' needs.

In the Ofsted/CQC reports, support from specialists, such as OTs was reported as important in schools and was helping with effective early identification of SEND needs. In Hartlepool, the EP team *'provides school leaders with valuable advice, support and training'* and in Darlington, public health nurses and an inclusion officer were also supporting identification in early years, an approach that was described as improving cross agency work and timing.

In Greenwich, in services such as EP, outreach services, and SALT each school had a named professional and this had strengthened relationships and improved equity across the local area.

In Bradford, some schools have a mental health champion who attends monthly training meetings run by EPs, helping raise awareness of mental health needs and supporting early identification of emotional health and well-being needs in schools.

### **Professional supervision and CPD**

CPD for school staff was reported in the Whole School SEND focus group, as being highly valued when it was ongoing:

*'We really felt like ongoing CPD which links to improved confidence and understanding, was a facilitator. But really the key there was on the 'ongoing'. It wasn't a 'there's a bit there, some training', and then that's it. Having that link or the ability to go back, or for that to be ongoing, we felt, was important.'*

Within our research the importance of supervision and mentoring for school staff, that allows time for learning and reflection was valued. A SENCO in an Academy Trust, talked about the benefits of being part of the Trust in terms of getting high quality CPD and weekly one to one supervision. This level of support was unusual amongst the SENCOs we spoke to. She valued the opportunity to meet with SENCOs across different education settings and to learn from her supervisor about approaches that were useful in other local areas:

*'I've been up to [name of town] every half term and been able to work with 50 SENCOs for all the schools in the trust, primary and secondary. In schools, traditionally you work in isolation, primary schools, secondary schools, but working in the Academy Trust with primaries, secondaries, sixth forms, nurseries, that gives that wider context, so there are certainly benefits, support for me as a new SENCO. I have weekly support from the Academy that comes to the school site which is very helpful and just the few additional trainings. But the knowledge behind that and to have a look at some strategies and what works in one school and how you can transfer that, can be really beneficial.'* SENCO

In one school in the case studies, they had upped the hours with the EP so that they can provide TAs with supervision. This, they stated, was in recognition that everyone comes to jobs with their own histories and there may be vulnerable adults working with vulnerable children – so they need to provide them with support in these roles.

### **Peer networking and support**

Peer networking and support, was described as highly valued by professionals in local area partnerships and those in schools, providing an opportunity to learn from what is being developed elsewhere to support inclusion. Within one of our case study areas, we undertook a focus group in a local SENCO forum. This was a well-attended meeting in which SENCOs had an opportunity to get together for learning and knowledge exchange. These meetings were convened by the Local Inclusion Partnership who informed SENCOs about forthcoming events in the local area, new initiatives and acted as a conduit for the LA.

Peer reviews had been found to be helpful in schools in our case study areas. In several local areas they were built into the *Autism in Schools* programme. Professional partners across special schools and the primary and secondary sectors undertake reviews of inclusion and SEND in other schools. This was reported as not only supporting inclusive practice, but also helping to avoid isolation, silo working and encouraging an outward facing approach. Special schools talked about having an open-door policy – inviting mainstream into special school settings for training, to observe.

## 5.4.2 Workforce challenges

### Staff well-being and retention

Within the workforce, staff well-being and retention, was a significant pre-occupation of leaders. In schools, there were concerns voiced about the need to balance the inclusion of pupils with SEND with staff mental health:

*'If we look at for instance SEMH as an area of need and how schools are being inclusive around that, that takes a massive level of resilience in terms of your staffing and then senior leaders are balancing how they manage the well-being of their staff in with the well-being of the child and which one comes first? That really feeds into some of the patterns and some of the behaviours that we're seeing, some of them are absolutely protecting their resources.'*  
SEND Lead

*'We get some really challenging children. They can be really physical; I don't come to work to be hit but if they're hitting you, I'm not getting something right.'* Headteacher

Staff turnover was a particular issue with reported retention issues amongst TAs, Headteachers and SENCOs:

*'If you look at head teacher and teacher retention. Head teachers are leaving by the droves, you know? And teachers as well. I've got a colleague of mine who's a coach who coaches in schools and she says her coaching sessions now are nothing to do with school and curriculum...they're about the new career people want, to get out of that career into another career.'* Headteacher

Recruiting and retaining high quality TAs was described as being particularly challenging because of being *'a low paid role, but they're the most skilled people that are having to read and understand the children, young people that have really complex needs'*- DSCO. In a focus group with SENCOs, they described the amount of 'emotional resilience' that is required of TAs.

## Training and lack of expert knowledge

Several issues were raised by participants about training and lack of expert knowledge about SEND. The first barrier that was described by participants was a lack of time allocated for SEND in Initial Teacher Training (ITT), and CPD to provide teaching staff with an adequate understanding of the range of needs children may have and the ways to adapt teaching. Teachers were described as feeling unprepared for working in classrooms with children with variable needs. This school leader explains:

*'My work now is around staff confidence and staff training and staff understanding what the right thing to do is. I think even teachers who are newly qualified or Early Career Teachers they have the training on generic inclusion theory but seeing that on the ground is quite a different story'. Headteacher*

In one local area, a Strategic manager in a LA described the challenge of delivering training in schools when they have so little time allocated for learning about SEND needs:

*'We were trying to do some work with this school and then they [the school leaders] came back from [a leadership meeting], they said for example we're given 30 minutes to cover SEND each term.'* Strategic manager for SEND

This Director of Children's Services reflected on practice in their local area in relation to SEND and thought that they could be using the expertise in special schools to greater advantage:

*'There are some areas where we under utilise our special schools as well, sitting in splendid isolation strategically, where actually there's such a strong knowledge of practice, very inclusive that trying to align those in a more defined way probably would be useful as well.'* Director of Children's Services

Parents who responded to the online survey perceived expertise and understanding of SEND needs as being low in schools. They reported a lack of knowledge about the law and statutory guidance on processes to access SEN support, EHCPs, AP and about Emotionally Based School Non-attendance. Given the level of time allowed for training and CPD, it was described as hard for SENCOs, and other school staff to stay up to date with knowledge and teaching, especially as learning needs of children and young people are dynamic and constantly evolving.



## 5.5 Partnership with parent carers

### Key Findings:

- Parents and carers reported there could be a lack of partnership with schools and LAs. A lack of empathy could leave parent carers feeling alienated or ignored. Poor and unhelpful communication was also reported in Ofsted/CQC inspections in some local areas.
- The research with parents illustrated examples in which children had not received support early enough and problems escalated, eroding parental trust in the system and leading to poor attendance and in some cases, them not being able to attend school.
- There was a gap in provision of expert advice and support for parents and carers to discuss individual challenges and gain support in working with schools and the local area partnership.
- There were a few examples of positive support for parent carers in our case study local areas, such as live Facebook meetings, a telephone helpline dedicated to parents, the PCF ran 'coffee and chat' meetings in schools and in one area there was a cluster model of support. This enables parent carers to refer children to a named qualified teacher who works in partnership with schools to provide support for children.

### 5.5.1 Challenges to partnership with parent carers

The online survey to parent carers highlighted that partnership between parent carers, schools and local area partnerships could be a particular challenge. In the case studies, this was reported to be particularly the case for parent carers when children moved to secondary school following transition from primary, as expectations of communication and support were not necessarily aligned with what they had previously received. Professionals in local areas also thought that a lack of communication with parents resulted in a decrease in parental trust and confidence in inclusion in schools.

The building of relationships with parents was described as key to working with them, but in the survey to parents, they reported a lack of empathy from school and LA staff, with negative attitudes towards themselves and children and young people. They reported that this had the impact of making children and parent carers feel isolated and alienated. Several LA and school staff spoke about a lack of engagement of some parent carers, this predominantly reported as an issue amongst parents of vulnerable children.

Parents however reported '*parent blaming*' and having their concerns ignored or side lined (see above section 5.3.1). There were many examples in the survey of parents concerns not being listened to or taken seriously, either by the LA and by schools. '*Nothing I've suggested has ever been taken seriously*'. Parent carer

Consequently, parents reported 'battling' and some eventually 'giving up', especially when children's problems escalated. This could lead to periods of non-attendance or removing their children from the education system. The following is one of many similar examples:

*'It's been hell. There have been great SEN teachers along the way who got the most of my child, then terrible teachers who punished and punished her when she was struggling. They ruined her mental health. They didn't understand how to support her. They didn't understand her behaviour. I gave up and she now is home educated. I've had loads of meetings, with loads of actions that weren't followed through. SEND reps who barely participated. Huge documents that don't get to the point. Just terrible. I wanted to move her, but they wouldn't support that'*. Parent carer

Ofsted/CQC inspection reports confirm that in some areas, a lack of appropriate support for children in schools was resulting in a growing number of parent carers deciding to home educate. Similarly, there were examples of poor communication with parents. As well as struggling to get support – in one local area a '*wall of silence*' was described. In other areas, there were examples of '*insensitive*' and '*unhelpful*' communication which could leave parents feeling blamed for the costs associated with having a child with SEND and that no-one cared about their child.

In some area SEND and AP inspections, signposting to services and complaints procedures were poor and parents and staff were reported as being unclear what different services can offer and the extent of the service they should provide. Inspections also highlighted poor support in some areas, such as telephone calls being left unanswered, documents lost, a failure to keep families informed, or inaccurate information provided to professionals. Poor SEND local offers, lack of awareness of the local offer, and websites that are not user friendly were also described as a factor in low parental confidence.

### 5.5.2 Facilitators to partnership with parent carers

During the research, our case study areas were working with parent carers, often through the PCF. In one local area senior leaders in SEND meet with the PCF every two weeks to discuss issues of concern including individual cases:

*'They're invited to any of the strategic meetings they want to attend due to their capacity and they do attend them a lot, but we also have these fortnightly catch up meetings and that's to kind of listen to any kind of noise in the system and so they'll bring individual cases to me if they kind of come across them, causing issues, but also the wider areas around different things that are happening'*. SEND Lead

There were other means being used to reach parents who may not be part of the PCF. In one local area, the SEND Lead runs a monthly live Facebook meeting. This regular visibility and communication with parent carers were described as important, providing them with reassurance that they were being informed and a route for parent carers to find out answers to questions. In another area, they reported having a school survey and then going out to schools to disseminate and discuss the findings or undertake work with individual settings or Trusts. In this local area, the PCF would also run 'coffee and chat' sessions in schools, if schools were struggling with relationships with families, this was seen as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the local area partnership and parents.

Relationships of trust were reported as being built over time with honest and clear communication. In this example the parent carer describes having built a partnership approach with the school:

*'My son is about to embark on his GCSEs this year and has successfully navigated his education without the need for an EHC Plan. He has always received any additional support he needed/wanted and although there have been a few issues along the way, we have always managed to resolve them with school through working together in partnership.'*  
Parent carer

A quick response to parental concerns was highlighted as important by schools, as was taking time to talk informally with parent carers and build a relationship, this helping to enable more challenging conversations that may happen later down the line:

*'Sometimes I'll sit there and I'll literally talk to them about myself or themselves. What does your mum do? Or did you grow up around there? Then that might be it. Maybe not talk about anything else, but you're beginning to build a relationship with somebody so that when you need to phone that person, to say we've had a bit of a tricky day'* SENCO

In one of our local area case studies, in which there was the cluster support model (see section on support for inclusion of children and young people with SEND) parent carers were able to refer their child to the support service. For each school there was a named qualified teacher who could provide support and advice. In this local area, there was also a telephone helpline that formed part of the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) so parent carers could access support in this way.

Another innovative service that offers support and advice to parent carers and schools to support better understanding and communication is called [Finding Common Ground](#). We are including this service as it offers a model of support between schools and parents that we have not seen elsewhere.

### **The Finding Common Ground Project**

The Finding Common Ground project offers:

- Independent advice and support for parents and carers to strengthen relationships with the school and enable issues to be resolved.
- Advice and training for school staff on working constructively with parents and families, particularly of children with additional needs or where the children are failing to thrive in school
- Confidential, experienced support for senior school staff when facing challenging conversations with parents and carers, particularly around provision for children with additional needs.

The project has been set up by a parent of adults who have grown up with additional needs and has previously been a secondary school Headteacher. The independent advice and support to parents and carers is based on voluntary donations so that provision is available to all who need it; staff training and advice, webinars and speaking to groups and conferences are also available. It provides support to parents and schools across England.

In one local case study area, they were addressing parental buy-in to working in partnership by providing targeted support to parents of children that were accessing the outreach service. This was being provided by a programme that aimed to support parents to implement the same strategies at home as at school, providing a more holistic approach for children and promoting better communication across home and school.

## 5.6 Multi-agency working

### Key findings:

- Multi-agency working was reported as problematic at times between schools and other agencies, in part due to a lack of understanding of each others' contexts, constraints and responsibilities.
- Participants described how differing professional perspectives about what support children and young people with SEND required, could lead to fractures in relationships.
- Poor use of data and inappropriate joint commissioning of services for children with SEND were reported as challenges that could lead to children's needs being unmet.
- Strong multi-agency working, a joined-up approach with good relationships across different parts of the local SEND partnership - education, health and social care - was described as important in supporting inclusion.
- Local areas were using the 'team around the school' approach to try to address children's needs early and with a multi-agency response. Cluster approaches in which there was a named LA Lead for each school were also reported as helping to build closer relationships between schools and LAs.

### 5.6.1 Challenges to multi-agency working

For inclusion to work effectively, strong multi-agency partnerships are required, but these were not always described as easy. Lack of shared understanding between professionals of their roles, responsibilities, environments and constraints was at times, identified as leading to tensions in working relationships. A SENCO in a school described how it was hard to respond to demands being placed on their time to support families, when they felt other professionals from health and social care were not so forthcoming with time and responsiveness:

*'Health professionals will often write to ask for a child to have an EHC Plan - costs a school time and money and raises parent expectation even if the school don't agree - or for other service involvement such as EP (same problem as EHC Plan requests) but are not available for meetings for multi-agency approaches'. SENCO*

In an interview with a Headteacher, she described how the EHCP process could be problematic in several regards. This included the way in which health professionals may write advice on EHCPs.

This she described could reflect a lack of alignment between what health and education professionals consider is 'required' to meet the child's needs and/or what is deliverable or suitable in an educational environment. She reflected that such challenges could be especially problematic if the health advice has cost implications for schools (for example, if the child requires 1-1 support) and/or if this leads to misunderstandings between parents and professionals involved. SENCOs in the research also described differences between professionals in terms of their views on whether EHC assessments were required and such disagreements they reported could cause fractures in working relationships.

The Ofsted/CQC analysis supported this and highlighted that in some local areas, poor partnership working and the lack of join up across health, social care and education can impact on inclusion. For example, in one local area, lack of partnership oversight of children's needs, was leading to unmet needs that were escalating. Problems included delays and repeated requests for early help support, inappropriate thresholds for statutory social care and lack of proper social care assessment when needs escalate.

In some local areas highlighted in the analysis of inspection reports, poor joint commissioning of services was also described as leading to inappropriate support for children and young people. For example, in one area, leaders of schools with Resourced Provision reported that in some cases, there is excessive demand for places and in other cases, there is unused capacity. In another area, children and young people with SEND were having long-term placements in AP that were not in their best interests, rather than being supported to re-integrate into mainstream provision.

Inspection reports in some local area partnerships highlighted a poor use of data across agencies that may impact indirectly on inclusion in schools, by limiting local areas' ability to plan services effectively and identify training needs. For example, in one local area, LA leaders did not have a full picture of the quality of school provision, rates of progress and standards achieved by children and young people with SEND. The inspection report describes this as being due to fragmented relationships with schools, differing processes across localities, and an absence of data. For example, information relating to standards and progress of children and young people placed in independent schools that had not been gathered or considered over time.

### 5.6.2 Facilitators to multi-agency working

The Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspections show that where there were strong multi-agency partnerships, this has the potential to strengthen inclusive approaches, for example in Nottingham City, effective partnership working was reported as making a difference to sharing of information across services and earlier identification of needs. Similarly in Darlington and Merton, positive strategic partnerships with health and their Designated Clinical/Medical Officers were leading to improvements in public health nursing and school nursing services. In Stockport, the 'team around the school' approach was described as encouraging families to access early social care advice.

The 'team around the school' approach was also being used in two of our case study local areas. This had been found to be a useful way to get early multi-agency support for children with SEND that helped to address multiple problems in a holistic way for the child and family:

*'The Council has taken a really considered approach building the team around the school model and having their tier where actually you do layer up the right level of early help and preventative support around schools. So, it's trying to build that in and then really that shift from colleagues in health as well and move the results closer to the community. So, you've got those key tenets there and then where there is, the additionality needed, be it education, welfare, be it alternative provision, you're trying to tier in the Support around that, that's a moving process.'* Director of Children's Services

Having meetings between the LA and Headteachers and members of the school governing body was productive in one local area, when there was a child or young person with SEND that wanted to attend the school, but the school were concerned about meeting their needs or were reluctant to admit them. A Service Manager for Inclusion talked about meeting on several occasions in some cases and felt that this was about providing schools with examples of adjustments they could make to accommodate the child and reassurance that the LA would support them if they admitted the child and there were challenges:

*'So they're reassured that we're just not going to abandon them'.* Service Manager for Inclusion

Working on a cluster basis with schools was also reported as a helpful way to develop relationships between the LA and schools (see above section 5.3.2). Working across multi-agency partnerships was vital and required a joined-up approach with strong relationships across different parts of the local SEND partnership: education, health and social care. It was described as important that these agencies were on the 'same page' and all recognised the need to work together effectively to deliver for the best interests and outcomes for children and young people:

*'Our health colleagues are very much on the same journey as us. They're very much part of the conversation, whereas when we're talking to other local authorities, they're like, 'we can't get speech and language therapy' or 'we can't get them on board for this', we don't have those same barriers because we are on the same journey. They're part of the conversation. They're really joined up and I think that relationship building that's been done within those networks really helps effect change'.* SEND Lead

Development of strong partnerships and collaboration was also seen as important to ensure that there was not a duplication of resources, maximising potential for improving inclusion. At a SENCO forum, SENCOs described a close partnership with the LA, who they felt were listening and responding to their requests for training and support and responding, within the constraints they are facing.

## 5.7 Leadership

### Key findings:

- Leadership was described as important for inclusion, both at a local area partnership level and within schools.
- Buy-in to inclusion by senior leaders in schools was reported as variable. Some parent carers reported negative attitudes in schools towards children with SEND, such as feeling their child was not 'wanted' and that inclusion was a 'tick box' exercise.
- Difficulties for leaders of local area partnerships to hold Academy Trust schools accountable for inclusion and variable knowledge about SEND amongst Academy Trust senior leadership were described as national barriers that may make local implementation harder.
- Effective leadership in local area partnerships was thought to require the ability to develop relationships and the bravery to challenge schools when inclusion is not implemented.
- Distributed leadership for SEND was emphasised by participants as important, so that everyone in a school knows their roles and responsibilities in relation to inclusion.

### 5.7.1 Leadership challenges

Our case study local areas were chosen because they were supportive of inclusion and inclusion was endorsed by leadership. However, participants told us there was variable 'buy-in' to inclusion at a school level that could present significant challenges to inclusion across the local area.

As has been discussed, some parent carers described a lack of support from school senior leadership for inclusion and a reluctance to accept children and young people with SEND. They reported their children were not 'wanted' or that inclusion was a 'tick box' exercise or given 'lip service' by leadership. One parent carer described:

*'Outdated authoritative approach to education of the senior leadership team and their lack of engagement with the parent community.'*



Getting senior leadership on board with inclusion was important but could be made more challenging with Academy Trusts who were not accountable to the LA:

*'I would say that in terms of working to change how inclusive a school might be, one you need to have the head on board and the senior leaders. But when you have them working with academies that does add another layer of difficulty. So, they've got those additional pressures on top. So, for those schools, what's the ethos of their Academy trust? What do they want to deliver? What are they saying? They can often be 'No, this is what we deliver across the board'. SEND Lead*

Whilst lack of accountability was an issue raised by participants in relation to Academy Trusts, several participants also raised concerns that there was variable specialist knowledge about SEND needs amongst some Academy Trust leaders. As this participant at the Whole School SEND workshop explains, Inclusion Leads in Academy Trusts may not have an education background:

*'There's a risk that the person that has responsibility for special educational needs does not necessarily have any knowledge of special education needs or a limited knowledge. They wouldn't have been, for instance, a SENCO at any point.'*

This was echoed by an Assistant Headteacher of a special school who described working with an academy school in which the Chief Executive Officer was a finance officer. Her concerns were that employing leaders without an education background in Academy Trusts may lead to a de-valuing of the professional skills and expertise within schools and that without leaders who have specialist knowledge in SEND, it may make securing inclusion for children even more challenging. Having SEND knowledge amongst the Board of Governors in schools was also emphasised as being important, ensuring that SEND and inclusion was understood and supported across senior leadership teams.

### 5.7.2 Leadership facilitators

The Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspection analysis showed that leadership could make a positive difference to support inclusion. In Stockton on Tees, the Director of Children's Services was said to have promoted a '*cultural shift*' with '*healthy tension*' of '*professional dialogue and challenge*' between schools and SEND teams to ensure appropriate services according to need. Similarly in Somerset, following a Written Statement of Action, leaders were supporting more schools to develop their expertise and resources to meet children's and young people's needs. In Kent, they were implementing an 'Inclusive Leadership' programme that was giving opportunities for school and area leaders to identify and share solutions to barriers and challenges, as well as to share effective practice.

Within local area partnerships, leadership was described as all important in terms of securing buy-in to inclusion and driving a strategic vision forward: '*If you've got leaders who understand SEND well, they're more likely to adapt and be inclusive.*' SEND School Improvement and Inclusion Lead.

Within local area partnerships, leaders who were committed, were also reported as visible:

*'I do a lot of visibility stuff. We have all of the meetings which we're absolutely committed to. I think it's also a culture of open, honest communication. The vision is always the mantra. We are a collective. These are our children. We're system leaders. We need to work together and that culture, strong support, strong challenge.'* Director of Children's Services

Honest, clear communication modelled by leadership was described as important. Part of strong leadership was working proactively with schools to challenge where necessary, having difficult conversations around their data in terms of issues such as admissions and exclusions of pupils with SEND. This was reported as requiring brave leadership.

Senior leaders thought that the changing landscape of education, the development of Academy Trusts and the fragmentation of accountability could make these conversations more challenging, as local area partnerships lack levers to hold academies to account. Effective leaders described striving to implement change through developing strong relationships with Headteachers and using influence where possible. A Director of Children's Services reported how he turns discussions with schools around by asking them, if they say they can't 'meet children's needs', what can be done to calibrate local systems so they are able to:

*'Some of it is using some of the means that are within our gift, be it SEND capital, be it other elements and turning that discussion around and saying 'well instead of you being in a position where you say you 'can't meet need', how do we meet need?' and is there adaptations to how we calibrate local systems to do that. SEND provision mapping does allow us some flexibility and moving that more towards mainstream and when you are at 20% EHCPs and SEN support, you can't say SEND is not a mainstream need can you?'* Director of Children's Services

He goes on to describe how he challenges them, asserting that education systems should be flexible and find ways to adapt to changing needs of SEND children:

*'I was trying to articulate back to them, that it's not a stationary process, it's an evolutionary process of how you've adapted to the needs of the community. So you now need to adapt to the need of SEND and trying to hold that mirror back because even sometimes we do get a bit rigid from an LA position that it's a fixed position that this is what the school system looked like previously so it needs to look like that, so it's going to be adaptable in that space as well.'* Director of Children's Services.

Working within a difficult context, with limited power and financial deficits, LA leaders described developing innovative responses to issues – in one of our local areas, it was evident that despite having setbacks, they had the resilience and resourcefulness to look for creative solutions. LA leaders reported looking ahead with the use of data to forecast needs and trying to find innovative solutions.

In one local area, they had realised through mapping the journey of children and young people with SEMH that they may be able to manage needs without EHCPs if they worked with health and the team around the school to support children much earlier and were looking at developing solutions. They were also looking at ways to use capital and revenue funding in more creative ways that allowed schools to meet needs of children in a different way in mainstream settings and where there were several challenges in a particular location, providing initial funding to accelerate change.

At a school level, leadership committed to inclusion was described as equally important in terms of supporting inclusive responses to children and young people and facilitating access to funding:

*'You've got to have your head teacher on board because I don't think you can make change without seeing your leadership involvement.... if your senior leadership team aren't on board, you've got no chance of making change.'* PCF representative

Having 'distributed' leadership for SEND was seen as important across schools. As this Leader of an Inclusion Partnership explains:

*'Where I see really excellent schools, they've got really clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They've got distributed leadership at every level, so it's not sitting on the shoulders of the SENCO, but for instance, every senior leader in the senior leadership team knows what their responsibility is for SEND and every teaching assistant and every middle leader. So it's about everybody being responsible.'* Inclusion Partnership Senior Leader

This meant that teachers within schools were taking responsibility for supporting children, not expecting the SENCO to undertake this work single handed. This SENCO explains:

*'Many years ago [in our secondary school] it would have been, 'that's an SEN issue, we'll send them to the SENCO', I don't think that exists anymore. It's within the maths department, 'this is what we do to support children with SEND' and then we liaise with the English department for example and then we might go to the SENCO but it's very much, everybody is taking a collective responsibility for supporting those students.'* SENCO

Aligned with this, it was seen as important by participants that the messages described earlier in the report, that inclusion is 'everyone's business' 'inclusion as business as usual' and 'all teachers as teachers of children with SEND' are relayed by the senior leadership team.

The SENCO role was pivotal in supporting inclusion, with different configurations of the SENCO role, and this could include an 'Inclusion lead' in Academy Trusts who may provide supervision and support for SENCOs. The status of the SENCO role was discussed as important, with SENCOs needing to be closely linked into leadership to have appropriate influence and decision-making ability. Not all SENCOs were on senior leadership teams, but it was widely seen to be advantageous, as recognised in the SEND Code of Practice ([DfE and DoH, 2015](#)). The SENCO role was described as broad, with a heavy workload and the emotional nature of the work was reported as meaning it is important, they are well supported by the senior leadership team and governors in terms of their own well-being.

Their role was described as pivotal in encouraging consistency throughout the school, ensuring SEND is not seen as an 'add-on' to another role, working closely with parent carers, children and young people and supporting staff to develop their knowledge of SEND and how best to support children and young people. In the survey to parent carers, there was a clear message about the appreciation of parents for SENCOs and school staff when they listened and worked in partnership with parent carers:

*'We have a fantastic SENCO with copious amounts of knowledge and just the most amazing compassionate approach to the pupils. If it wasn't for her, we may have needed to consider specialist provision. She supported us to apply for an EHCP.'* Parent Carer

Strong leaders within schools reported having a key role in modelling inclusion and supporting their staff in school to confidently adapt the curriculum to meet children and young people's needs. In one primary school, the headteacher talked about how she enabled her teachers to feel confident in making adaptations by providing them with reassurance:

*'I can take that fear away from the teachers. So, I'm like, 'I don't care about the results. I care about getting it right for the children and if the results are poor, the results are poor' and we've gone through that. I'm not expecting you to get, so and so down the roads got 80%. Well, we're not going to get 80%. We've got a different cohort of children, so don't worry about it.' And they relax a little bit then into well the pressures off, because the Headteacher's not expecting it of me.'* Headteacher

As we highlight above it was reported as important that executive senior leaders of Academy Trusts, who may not have worked in education previously or for some time, are on board with inclusion. School governing bodies *'who have seen it work really well'* were also described as being able to add to the body of evidence instilling belief that funding is only part of the issue: *'it's not a genie lamp, it's not where you are, it's what you do'*. Having a named SEND governor was seen to help with this, and them having a regular presence in school:

*'It takes a long time and having things like a named SEN Governor, having a governing body who's involved in school and is coming and visiting SEN provision. Are they asking questions? We're lucky in our school, the governing body are in all the time, but I've also seen those who have never seen the governing body. So do they know what's going on in practice? Are they asking those questions?'* Assistant Headteacher at Specialist School

## 5.8 Funding

### Key Findings:

- Funding was described as a disincentive for inclusion as it fails to fully cover the costs of provision for many children and young people with SEND.
- There was a tendency reported for funding to be short-term rather than considering needs over the longer term and investing. These short-sighted approaches could result in more expense in the long-run.
- Lack of funding was seen as impacting on staffing (including TAs) in schools and in lack of support for families from broader social and community services. It was also reported as impacting on physical space, buildings, equipment and resources for children in schools.
- Leaders described being proactive in looking for additional sources of funding and finding innovative ways to distribute existing resources to greatest effect. One local area had created a small capital grants scheme and another was looking to develop a model of devolved funding through local clusters of schools.

### 5.8.1 Funding challenges

*'There's no reward for being inclusive. You're actually penalising yourself financially, for being inclusive'.* Headteacher

Funding was reported as a key challenge by participants. The notional SEN budget, which is an identified amount within a school's overall budget to cover SEN support costs, currently set at up to £6,000 per pupil ([Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2024](#)), was described as frequently insufficient to cover costs, particularly where additional staffing is required to ensure children's needs are supported in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice.

EHCP funding was also argued to be inadequate and therefore to act as a disincentive for schools to take children with SEND:

*'Schools are in deficit budgets, children that have got special educational needs often come with a pressure on your budget and they've got to choose which one that they're managing. Are they going to manage their budget or are they going to manage to do something else?'*  
PCF representative

A SENCO talked about there being a two-tier system of support, because there was not enough funding for children with lower-level needs, after meeting the needs of children and young people with EHCPs.

There were concerns that local areas were not effectively planning for inclusion and accurately forecasting the future profile of SEND needs. In some instances, this could be because funding was short-term. For instance, this participant in the Whole School SEND workshop gave an example of a lack of strategic planning:

*'There was money available, but [it] comes with a bit of a caveat instead of project type approaches. So it can be a bit of short-term sticking plaster solution to things rather than a sustained strategic approach.'*

The lack of longer-term planning and vision for spending was re-iterated by this SEND Lead who described a lack of strategic planning for future needs, this costing money in the short-term and resulting in less appropriate placements for children, that may be a distance from their homes:

*'I don't think we have time to properly strategically plan and commission to look at what's coming through and say, right, OK, we've got a cohort of, I don't know, six children with Prader Willi coming through, what would their lives look like and what can we commission for them that's near to them.'* SEND Lead

Some participants described how the inadequacy of funding for early intervention and social care support has meant the emphasis has been on schools becoming the hub for supporting families, putting strain on education staff and already stretched resources:

*'Education have had an expectation on them since Covid to be more than just education, we are expected to be almost a hub for all things for a child.'* SENCO

Since Covid, participants described a change in the respect and authority afforded to schools and the school/parent relationship with a significant rise in social, emotional and mental health problems, non-attendance and exclusions. Schools were described as taking on additional roles, they felt they were neither equipped nor funded for:

*'So, they feel a bit like the police. They become social workers. They've become mental health workers, and they're all things to all people. There is a real balancing act in there and it takes a cultural mindset shift and a skill set shift to manage some of the complexities they're dealing with.'* Director of Children's Services

Lack of capital funding was also cited as a barrier to inclusion because of a lack of suitable physical spaces, inside and outside. One secondary headteacher described the difficulties they had with old buildings that were not fit for purpose and no outside green spaces for young people. Lack of funding was also reported to impact upon the availability of equipment in schools to support children with SEND; on equipment and on the ability to finance training.

## 5.8.2 Funding facilitators

In our case study areas, LA leaders were cited as being instrumental in proactively working to identify appropriate funding they could use to support inclusion. In one local area, they ringfenced some of their SEND capital funding and had created a small capital grants scheme. They had £400,000 in this and made grants of up to £50,000. Mainstream settings could put in bids for funding from this to develop their settings and in the process must consult with parent carers and children and young people, who contribute by developing videos, pictures and so on to support their bids.

Here the SEND Lead provides information about what has been funded:

*'That's been popular and made a real difference to some of our settings in enabling them to create sensory rooms, we've had a double decker bus at one school, that was changed into a provision for children. We've had sensory rooms. We've had sensory outdoor spaces.*

*We've had one head teacher that wanted £6,000 to convert his office today...he was going to sit somewhere else, but things that can make a real difference, which just kind of shows that commitment.'* SEND Lead

In another local area they were looking at developing a model of devolved funding to clusters of schools in the local area. This was based on a model being used in Croydon and meant the LA would delegate part of the high needs budget to clusters, and this would allow schools to come together to identify local needs and allocate that money in the best way to suit the local context, allowing schools more *'responsibility and leverage to be strategic'*. The main benefit is that schools can pool resources and respond more quickly to needs allowing them to build capacity and skills in the ways they see most appropriate to deliver early interventions, which should help to address children and young people's needs in their communities earlier. They are also considering using these clusters in other ways such as sharing best practice and trading resources/training between them, accessing joint training together, for example speech and language therapy. They have mixed primary and secondary schools to try to encourage relationships between them and support work that may be relevant to both settings, for example transitions support.

Targeted funding was also being used to support inclusion, for example in one local area they were drawing on Delivering Better Value funds to extend the Autism in Schools training offer to all schools – an initiative drawn upon by other case study areas, although local areas varied as to how they organised this amongst schools.

A further local area had drawn upon the DfE funded 'Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools' (PINS) initiative, directed towards tackling issues such as school exclusion, attendance, wellbeing and parental confidence, working with several schools and parent groups.

There were other examples in which leaders were working creatively to access pots of funding for improving inclusion. These were often relatively small amounts, but small grants could allow for improvements in provision in schools, improvements to buildings/facilities/play equipment and discrete pieces of work on aspects of inclusion, for example improving transitions processes or undertaking specific training with parent carers or professionals.



## 6. Recommendations

### **A Three-Pronged Approach to Enhancing Inclusion: National, Local Area, and School Actions**

Below we set out a three-pronged approach for enhancing inclusion derived from our research, highlighting actions that might be taken at a policy level, local area level, and schools level, with actions at different levels necessarily reinforcing each other. We recognise that many of these recommendations require uplifts of funding, so will not all be possible immediately. We highlight improvements that can be made by local areas and schools, even in the face of policy drivers that generate challenges, as illustrated in best practice examples in our report.

#### Summary of National Recommendations

##### **1. Develop a national vision and strategy, championing inclusive schools, to support a consistent national and local approach to inclusion.**

- ✦ Recognise and take responsibility for the disconnect between current SEND policies and the changing landscape of both the education system and the needs of pupils with SEND.
- ✦ Create an implementation plan with relevant stakeholders, including children and young people with SEND and parent carers, that considers how national barriers are impacting on schools' ability to be inclusive and how these challenges to inclusion can be addressed.
- ✦ Any SEND policy and regulatory changes for facilitating a values-based approach to inclusion should be driven by a full assessment of societal and financial impact to ensure that they are robust, financially sustainable and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

##### **2. Develop a new funding model for inclusion and SEND.**

- ✦ Recognise that it has been reported that there is a funding disincentive for inclusion and that schools often feel as though they are disincentivised financially against inclusive practice. Lack of funding impacts on staffing, training, support for families, and impacts on physical teaching space and resources for children and young people with SEND.
- ✦ Consider how funding mechanisms could mitigate disincentives against inclusive practice, for example, creating a mechanism for two tiers of financial support. Currently there is often not enough money left for children with lower levels of need, once the needs of the more complex children have been met.
- ✦ Consider how local areas can be funded in a way which supports them to develop an integrated model of support for children with SEND.

**3. Clear government guidance is needed that stipulates what constitute 'good outcomes' for children with SEND, and that there may be different or additional dimensions to good outcomes for children with SEND compared to those without.**

- ✦ There is increased pressure on schools for children to attain the high academic outcomes expected by the National Curriculum, and a clear disconnect between this outcome and best meeting the needs of children with SEND. The Government's review of the curriculum must ensure that the needs of children and young people with SEND are addressed in any revisions.
- ✦ Provide more detailed guidance for schools to make adjustments to enable children with SEND to access the curriculum (e.g., by receiving differentiated lessons, teaching and opportunities, reducing the focus on traditional subjects for some children so that expectations to follow a knowledge heavy curriculum are reduced).
- ✦ Ensure that the review of the national curriculum fully explores what an inclusive curriculum looks like, and the barriers to inclusion within the current curriculum. This should be undertaken with children and young people with SEND, their parent carers and all relevant stakeholders.

**4. Consider ways for DfE school accountability measures and Ofsted school inspections to better incentivise inclusion.**

- ✦ Review DfE school accountability measures with relevant stakeholders to ensure that they recognise/ measure 'inclusivity'.
- ✦ Currently Ofsted school inspection does not sufficiently recognise/ measure 'inclusivity'. Schools need to be measured on this achievement so that inclusion can be promoted and celebrated.

**5. Review the need for greater emphasis on inclusion in Initial Teacher Training.**

- ✦ Review the content of ITT courses in relation to inclusion and use this review to set standards for more content and teacher competencies on SEND and promote the use of evidence-based strategies that promote inclusion.

**6. Introduce ringfenced funding for multi-agency training.**

- ✦ The research highlighted the value of multi-agency training on inclusion. Having ring-fenced funding would help to support the consistent development of this learning.

**7. Co-produce with parent carers and other stakeholders, a gov.uk toolkit for Inclusion (0-25) to provide information, advice and support for parent carers and professionals.**

- ✦ The toolkit should draw together detailed information about SEND needs, where parents can go to get help and explain provision that should be available to support inclusion. The toolkit should focus on the following areas: (1) A graduated approach to inclusion, (2) Reasonable adjustments and Special Educational Provision, (3) Transition support and education, (4) EHCPs. Once developed, training to schools and parent carers on using the toolkit should be arranged. This approach will help to promote consistency and understanding of the provision for children and young people across the local area, and will support parent carers to know what should be available for their children in schools.

**8. We welcome a review undertaken by the Government of EHCPs, to enhance multi-agency responses to support children and their families.**

### Summary of Local Area recommendations

**1. Develop a local area SEND vision and strategy for inclusion and a local plan of implementation that supports that vision across schools in the area. These local plans should align with the national vision and implementation plan for inclusion.**

- ✦ Recognise that having a shared vision across all stakeholders is a facilitator to implementation. Co-produce any strategic planning documents with parent carers and children and young people.
- ✦ Promote the use of Inclusion Audits or other strategies for supporting learning about SEND in school communities with whole family involvement.
- ✦ Develop strong relationships and communication between the LA and schools. Consider having a named local area lead or service manager for inclusion for each school to help build closer and more positive relationships between schools and the LA.
- ✦ Once the strategy is developed, provide help and support for implementing the vision consistently across schools in the area, for example, by having a designated inclusion workforce helping with implementation.
- ✦ Recruit senior leaders in local area partnerships who are confident about their role, know their local area context and are clear about the importance of inclusion, developing relationships and challenging schools when inclusion is not being implemented in line with the vision and strategy.
- ✦ Senior leaders should be highly visible and active in driving the strategic vision forward, for example, by holding regular meetings with professionals and parent carers, guiding moving forward effective implementation of the strategy.

## **2. Use good communication to develop positive, strong relationships with parents.**

- ✦ Use good communication to develop positive, strong relationships with parents of children with SEND. Listen, understand and act quickly to meet requests from parent carers and the child or young person to better meet their needs. Provide timely responses to telephone calls and emails. Recognise that when parents do not receive support early enough, that this can lead to problems escalating, resulting in poor attendance, or a child not attending school at all.
- ✦ In line with the SEND Code of Practice, work with PCFs and other parent carers to develop regular and open communication with senior leaders in SEND, working together to problem solve, co-produce inclusion guidelines and have regular feedback mechanisms where this is not already happening.

## **3. Provide support services to school staff, parent carers, and children and young people with SEND who are experiencing problems at school or who are at risk of experiencing problems.**

- ✦ Organise specialist support through clusters on a locality basis. Inclusion managers (specialist teachers in SEND) could work with small clusters of schools (15-20), ensuring that they build up a positive working relationship within the school, with head teachers and staff. Support provided from the inclusion manager could include whole school training and support, or specific support for individual children and young people. Each school to have a named advisory teacher that the inclusion manager can liaise with.
- ✦ The local area should facilitate more opportunities for specialist settings (e.g., special schools and alternative provisions) to provide outreach support to mainstream school settings, so that they can develop their own high quality inclusive practices and individualised levels of support. Hereby, child centred whole school approaches can be modelled to mainstream school settings, encouraging inclusion in mainstream schools and reinforcing the message that inclusion benefits all children.
- ✦ Identify gaps in service provision for those children with complex needs in mainstream schools that do not have a diagnosis, for which a place in a special school with a specialism in SEMH cannot be made available.
- ✦ Offer more support for those families that do not have a diagnosis. Local areas that are needs-led and not diagnosis-led, may already be providing additional support within schools for children, around issues such as literacy or SLT. Local areas should consider what support is available for children and ensure that this offer is well communicated to parent carers.

#### **4. Work in partnership across the local area to establish multi-agency responses to support children and families**

- ✦ At a local level, LAs and their SEND partners should cultivate a joined-up approach, to ensure that a holistic view of the child is always maintained, such as a "Team around the Child" to support children and their families. This will have funding and workforce implications for schools which need to be supported.
- ✦ There should be consideration of an advocate or key worker who helps to coordinate a multi-agency approach.
- ✦ Develop models for regular multi-agency training for professionals to come together from across education, schools, social care and health. Develop training with the aim of breaking down barriers in the use of language and developing an understanding across agencies.

#### **5. Get it 'right' for children and young people at transitions**

- ✦ Have timely discussions and provide better targeted information for parents about important decisions and processes, especially about accessing post-16 and post-18 education and social care services. This information could also be clearly referenced on the SEND local offer website with directions as to who can be contacted if the parent carer has any concerns or questions.
- ✦ Consider allocating funding to set up small teams in LAs that focus on all transitions across the 0 to 25 age range. The focus of the team would be on reviewing and improving transition planning, processes and procedures, to help improve the timeliness and experiences of transitions for families, and improve communication as to what provisions are inclusive and available. The transition team should work alongside families and children and young people to provide practical support as and when it is needed.

#### **6. Promote initiatives to identify and respond quickly to children at risk of exclusion and/or with poor attendance**

- ✦ Inclusion caseworkers could facilitate pupil planning meetings to support children staying in their school settings, and multi-agency panels could support schools when there is a risk of exclusion.
- ✦ To avoid children becoming excluded, specialist behaviour support advisory teams to be allocated to work with a child and the staff supporting them, or short term Alternative Provision placements should be provided until such time that the child could be reintegrated into a school setting.

## **7. Improve SEND expertise and confidence amongst staff in schools and in the local area**

- ✦ Leadership at local area partnership and school level needs to be driven by an inclusive approach with shared accountability. There needs to be more training in SEND for all senior leaders in schools, including Academy Trusts and school governors. This will help to promote more consistency with buy-in for inclusion from senior leaders.
- ✦ Use the cluster model, as described previously, to have an assigned inclusion manager working with and training staff in schools.
- ✦ Co-produce training models with professionals, parent carers and young people, ensuring ongoing implementation and peer support and regular review. Training will then be more impactful.
- ✦ Recognise the need to embed training in the school. Training should not just be a tick box exercise. Consider a wraparound approach for improving the knowledge base in schools and upskilling all staff (not just SENCOs but teachers, TAs and non-teaching staff). For example, an advisory inclusion manager of a cluster could do a review/ audit of inclusion for a school, and then support the school with action planning and training/ workshops around the review. Ongoing follow ups and training could be arranged, thereby facilitating ongoing CPD.
- ✦ Jointly produce ongoing support models for staff working in schools: (1) Capitalise on and co-ordinate specialist knowledge and expertise across specialist/mainstream and AP settings, providing school staff with greater access to support and training from these settings; (2) Facilitate peer networks and peer reviews. It can be helpful for staff to undertake reviews of inclusion and SEND in other schools. This helps to support inclusive practice but also helps to avoid silo working; (3) Consider setting up SEND hubs in local areas that could provide peer support and networking opportunities for all school staff; Recognise that ongoing supervision and mentoring for school staff is important. Facilitate regular meetings between SENCOs from other areas to learn about best practice.

## **8. Use data collection and analytics to inform actions that promote inclusion within the local area**

- ✦ SEND leaders in the LA should work closely with schools to encourage the sharing of data, so that they acquire a full and accurate picture of the quality of school provision and rates of progress, and standards achieved by pupils with SEND, and can forecast needs.
- ✦ Reviewing such data over periods of time can help to identify issues with inappropriate joint commissioning, poor attendance, or overly long placements for some children in Alternative Provisions with little support being provided to reintegrate the pupil back into a school setting. Clear data can help SEND leaders have better informed (sometimes difficult) conversations with schools around such issues as admissions and exclusions of pupils with SEND.

## Summary of recommendations for schools

### 1. Build a culture of inclusion

- ✦ Schools should have a clear vision about what inclusion looks like in their school, that is aligned with the national and local vision for inclusion. The school vision should include the school's core values that constitute the inclusive culture and ethos in the school.
- ✦ Foster each child's sense of belonging to the school community and extend this to the whole family. The child and parent carer's voices are important and could be ascertained by offering regular check-ins or well-being surveys, with approaches chosen needing to be made accessible for all. Does the child feel like they belong in the school community? Does the parent feel like their child belongs? If not, seek to understand the child and parents' views on what would make the child feel a greater sense of belonging and what could be changed to achieve that. Moreover, finding ways of enhancing parents' involvement in the school community can have positive impacts on children's feelings of belonging.
- ✦ Recognise that responding to children's *individual* needs is a facilitator for inclusion, and that the structure and systems in mainstream schools may be a barrier to inclusion, for example, children struggling with wearing a school uniform, difficulties with following the school timetable. Consider proactive support and adjustments for all children with SEND. For example, providing access to individualised support tools as needed (movement breaks, fiddle toys, etc) and this is seen as the norm across the whole school.
- ✦ Foster acceptance and celebration of diversity across the whole school. This should be embedded in teaching and learning for all children across the whole school day.
- ✦ Senior leaders in the school to visibly demonstrate their commitment to inclusion throughout the school at every opportunity.
- ✦ An inclusive school should have someone on the board or governors experienced in SEND, helping to ensure that SEND and inclusion is understood and supported across the Senior Leaders in the school. SEND and inclusion should be a shared responsibility across the governing board.

### 2. Use good communication to develop strong relationships with parents

- ✦ Identify any breakdown and gaps in communication/ relationships between the school and parents, and work to improve these relationships/ models of communication. For example, build positive relationships with parents of children and young people with SEND by, for example, having coffee mornings or evening meetings that have SEND specialists/PCFs attend to talk to parents. Try to ensure regular teacher availability for parents to discuss concerns. Taking time to speak informally to parents can help to build up trust and positive relationships.

- ✦ Listen, understand and act quickly to meet requests from parent carers and children and young people, to better recognise and support their additional needs. Provide timely responses to telephone calls and emails. Recognise that when parents do not receive support early enough, that this can lead to problems escalating, resulting in poor attendance, or a child not attending school at all.
- ✦ Provide training for school staff about how to work constructively with parents and families, and how to communicate effectively and sensitively with parents/carers. Recognising that communication is key.
- ✦ Regular visibility and communication with parent carers is of critical importance. It provides reassurance that they are being listened to and provides a route for them to be able to find out answers to any questions that they might have. Provide clear signposting to parents for services and support.

### **3. Use data collection and analytics to inform actions that promote inclusion within the school and more widely**

- ✦ Schools are often providing mental health support to their pupils as part of their provision of pastoral support, support for social and emotional development and identifying/providing early support and well-being. They may be buying additional services without any additional funding, oversight, guidance or evidence about what works most effectively. It would be helpful if schools collected data on the services that they are providing and additional services they buy-in. If this data collection was set nationally this would standardise data collection informing planning of local service provision as well as government guidance to support the wider sector in delivery of these services.
- ✦ Keep thorough and accurate records of the provision provided for each pupil with SEND, including where they transition to upon leaving school, and what difference you believe the provision has made for the pupil. These records could be co-produced with parent carers. The records could facilitate multi agency discussion and inform future research into long term outcomes for people with SEND.

### **4. Prioritise training and CPD on inclusion for all staff in the school**

- ✦ Distribute leadership for SEND and inclusion across the school, ensuring that everyone has a clearly defined role and responsibility. Responsibility for supporting a pupil should not just lie with the SENCO but there should be a collective responsibility - everyone is responsible, from senior leaders to teachers to teaching assistants.
- ✦ Prioritise regular training for all staff in the school on SEND and inclusion, and aim to increase awareness that inclusion is everybody's responsibility. Training should not just be for SENCOs, but for all senior leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and non-teaching staff.



## **5. Prioritise a whole school approach to improving staff wellbeing**

- ✦ Recognise that high quality training alone is often not sufficient for Teaching Assistants who are often at the front end of working with children with complex needs. They need to be provided with good quality support and supervision with time for reflection. Improving their skills and knowledge will enhance their confidence in working with pupils, thereby improving their wellbeing.
- ✦ Provide confidential, experiential support for school staff who are faced with difficult conversations with parents and families, particularly around provision.

## **6. Plan carefully for all transitions from one phase of education to another**

- ✦ Undertake a review and/or research to consider whether the quality of information transferred from primary school to secondary school is thorough and comprehensive.
- ✦ Local areas should review processes for all transitions from one phase of education to another by seeking feedback from parent carers whose children have experienced the process.

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## Appendix – Local area SEND inspections

Local Area	Inspection date	Full/Revisit	Outcome
Gateshead Met	22-26 May 2023	Full	Inconsistent experiences and outcomes
Hartlepool	13 -17 March 2023	Full	Positive experiences and outcomes
South Tyneside	10-12 October 2022	Revisit	All 5 areas made sufficient progress
Stockton	11-13 July 2022	Revisit	All 4 areas addressed
Darlington	24-28 January 2022	Full	WSOA (2 areas)
Oldham	26-30 June 2023	Full	Widespread systemic failings
Warrington Borough Council	6-10 February 2023	Full	Inconsistent experiences and outcomes
Stockport	11-13 July 2022	Revisit	All 4 areas addressed
Liverpool	9-11 May 2022	Revisit	All 3 areas addressed
Knowsley	14-18 March 2022	Full	WSOA
Calderdale	11-15 March 2019	Full	Outcome unclear
North East Lincs	21-23 March 2022	Revisit	All areas addressed
York City Council	14-15 November 2022	Revisit	All areas addressed
Bradford Met District	7-11 March 2022	Full	WSOA (5 areas)
Sheffield	21-23 Feb 2022	Revisit	6/7 weaknesses addressed
Rutland County Council	15-19 May 2023	Full	Positive experiences for children and young people with SEND
Nottinghamshire County Council	30 Jan – 3 Feb 2023	Full	Widespread and/or systemic failings
Leicestershire County Council	14-16 Nov 2022	Revisit	2/3 weaknesses addressed
Nottingham City Council	8-12 November 21	Full	No WSOA
Derby City Council	4-6 October 2021	Revisit	Sufficient progress in all 5 areas following WSOA
Sandwell	3-7 July 2023	Full	Inconsistent experiences and outcomes
Telford and Wrekin	20-24 March 2023	Full	Positive experiences and outcomes
Shropshire Council	21 - 23 November 2022	Revisit	Sufficient progress in 3 areas of weakness, but not in the other 3
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	20- 22 June 2022	Revisit	Sufficient progress in addressing 7 out of 9 significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	31 January - 3 February 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing eight of the 14 significant weaknesses
Southend-On-Sea	6 - 10 March 2023	Full	Inconsistent experiences and outcomes.
Norfolk County Council	28 - 30 November 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing all of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
Luton Borough Council	17-19 October 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing all of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
Essex County Council	17-19 May 2022,	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing all of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
Peterborough City Council	24 - 26 January 2022	Revisit	The area has addressed four out of five of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
London Borough of Greenwich	11 -19 May 2023	Full	Typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes
London Borough of Enfield	20 -24 March 2023	Full	Inconsistent experiences and outcomes
London Borough of Merton	17 - 19 October 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing all 3 significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames	4 - 6 October 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing all four of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
London Borough of Wandsworth	27 - 29 June 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing both of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection
Oxfordshire County Council	13 -21 July 2023	Full	Widespread and/or systemic failings
Brighton and Hove City Council	27-31 March 2023	Full	Typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people
Kent County Council	27-29 September 2022	Revisit	Failed to address all 9 weaknesses
Buckinghamshire Council	7 - 11 March 2022	Full	WSOA
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	29 November 2021	Full	WSOA to address 9 areas of significant weakness

Plymouth City Council	26- 30 June 2023	Full	Widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns
Cornwall County Council	6 - 10 February 2023	Full	Inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people
Somerset Council	28 November 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing seven out of nine significant weaknesses
Bristol City Council	4 - 6 October 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing four of five weaknesses
Devon County Council	23-25 May 2022	Revisit	The area has made sufficient progress in addressing four of five weaknesses



## About What Works in SEND

The What Works in SEND programme is part of a programme of work led by the RISE Partnership bringing together thought leaders from the SEND system who have the necessary understanding of system change and specialist knowledge of SEND.

The RISE (Research and Improvement for SEND Excellence) Partnership is led by the Council for Disabled Children in partnership with ISOS Partnership, the National Development Team for inclusion (NDTi) and the University of Warwick. The What Works in SEND programme is led by the University of Warwick research team encompassing three departments relevant to service improvement in SEND: Warwick Business School; Warwick Medical School (Warwick Evidence); and Centre for Research in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (CIDD), and delivered in collaboration with colleagues in the RISE Partnership, specifically Isos Partnership and CDC.

### **Warwick Business School**

Warwick Business School has considerable expertise and experience in applied research focused upon public services improvement, encompassing health care, social care and education.

### **Warwick Medical School**

Warwick Medical School has considerable expertise in systematic reviews through Warwick Evidence, which constitutes the second institutional component of the University of Warwick research team. Warwick Evidence (2011–2022) is an established, successful, multidisciplinary, academic technology assessment review team.

### **Centre for Research in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (CIDD)**

CIDD is a specialist research-only department in the University of Warwick. CIDD is focused on applied educational and psychological research in the field of special educational needs and disability (SEND) across the lifespan and has a 30+ year history of contribution in this field.

### **Council for Disabled Children**

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC), hosted by the National Children's Bureau (NCB), are sector leaders with an expert senior management team, experienced in working across Government to support decision makers in Education, Health and Care. Our practice teams deliver wide reaching programmes of bespoke intervention in local areas enabling service improvements and system change.

### **Isos Partnership**

Isos Partnership led widely-recognised national research that has explored the enablers of system-wide improvement in local children's services, in the development of local early help offers, the development of effective support for school inclusion, and the development of effective whole-system approaches to SEND.