



Draft York Inclusion and Belonging Special Educational Needs & Alternative Provision Strategy 2025-2029

A city that works for all

A note on this document.

This is a very early draft of the strategy.

There is still more consultation taking place across the local area partnership and with families and children and young people. This feedback will further shape and define the strategy.

It will be published in the Autumn term 2025

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Vision

‘York will be a city that works for all. We want all children and young people to get the best start in life, to be happy and healthy and to develop the skills and relationships they need to thrive into adulthood.’

Thank you for reading this strategy. The aim is to improve the lived experience and outcomes of our children, young people and their families in York. When we get this right, children, young people, and their families feel heard and have greater trust that their needs will be met.

Families have told us that this strategy is about helping children and young people feel they belong. We also know that the term 'Special Educational Needs' does not always reflect the full picture of need. Some children and young people may not be identified as needing support, as they can sometimes mask their difficulties. This ability to hide their needs can make it more challenging for adults to recognise when help is required. In some cases, children may not attend school because their underlying needs have not been recognised or addressed.

This strategy prioritises early help, timely support, and improved coordination across education, health, care, and community services for all children and young people in York. This includes those on SEN support, with or without a diagnosis or an EHCP, as well as those children and young people who are home-educated, out of school, in alternative provision, or at risk of exclusion.

We are developing this strategy during a period of anticipated national reform. Despite the changing landscape, we will focus on the work around inclusive mainstream schools, while maintaining the flexibility to adapt and review as needed.

Schools and settings are key partners. We will support mainstream settings to deliver a flexible curriculum which can include the need to create safe, secure, sustainable, multi-disciplinary provision to manage the growing number of children and young people whose complex and layered needs require a bespoke arrangement to enable them to be safe and to meet their outcomes.

In York, strong partnerships with key organisations, including the York Schools Academy Board (YSAB), maintained schools, Schools Forum, the Teaching School Hub, and the Research School, enable us to commission high-quality support that ensures continuous improvement and positions our schools as regional and national leaders. We aim to strengthen partnerships with York's universities and cultural institutions, like museums, theatres, and music academies

This strategy aligns to the Autism and ADHD strategy 2025-2030 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Partnership Board will oversee the implementation.

Context

Our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) identifies and assesses the current and future health, wellbeing, and social care needs in York. A summary of the JSNA called [Our City Health Narrative](#) tells us that children aged 0-11 years are experiencing more unhealthy weight, worsening inequalities in speech and language and school readiness and poor oral health.

For young people aged 11–15-year-old in York, there are now more young people aged 11-25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), we have concerning trends around emotional and mental health, young people's experiences of relationships are poor, and we have higher levels of school absence post COVID.

- York's Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2027 indicates that across our 63 schools 89% are good or outstanding (Ofsted) and 94% of our playgroups and day nurseries in York are good or outstanding
- 241 young carers in York
- 1,062 16+ year olds identify as transgender or non-binary
- 93 children and young people are known to belong to Gypsy and Travelling families.
- 232 children are in care
- 1,064 (4.49%) 10-19-year-olds have a mental health diagnosis
- 4,000 children and young people are seen in York every year with severe mental health difficulties.
- 1,785 (2.6%) 10–19-year-olds have a neurodiversity diagnosis
- 66% of children were achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception (50% for children with free school status)ⁱ
- 15.9% of primary school age children are eligible for free school meals and 14.3% are eligible at secondary school age
- 15.3% of primary school age children are persistently absent and this rises to 26.2% at secondary school age
- 4,011 children and young people (CYP) who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- 24.4% of all SEND needs in York are for social, emotional and mental health needs.
- 1,693 individuals aged 0-25 with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP)

Our Children and Young people's Outcomes

- I am healthy
- I have a choice, and I am heard
- I am safe
- I achieve my goals
- I am included
- I can overcome challenges and difficulties on my own or with support
- I am becoming independent

Our families and our partnership priorities

- The voice and visibility of children and young people and their families is paramount.
- Children and young people's needs are identified at the earliest opportunity.
- The right support is in the right place at the right time.
- Effective preparation for independence and adulthood strategies secure opportunities for young people and adults with SEND to reach their full potential.

Our Pillars are:

- We will change society for inclusion – We will consider what needs to change across our city to enable inclusion levelling up and social mobility by expanding our partnerships
- We will ensure early identification –We intervene early and effectively to ensure that any gaps in children and young people's learning are rapidly closed, providing effective pathways to support
- We will meet need - We will work across teams in neighbourhoods to support provision in the local areas with a focus on 'what holds us together' in our local system.

Our Practice Standards are:

- We commit to being impartial, fair, and equitable, delivering honest and supportive communication to our children, families, and partners.
- We collaborate openly and courageously, offering both support and challenge to ensure York is a place where every child and young person feels a true sense of belonging.
- We are a partnership that improves, reflects and learns to ensure we make a difference.

Children and young people's feedback

Feedback from CYP – 'Nothing About Us Without Us' is a children and young people's mental health advisory group, aiming to influence the services professionals say are meant to support young people aged 10 to 25, with different things that influence our mental health. An engagement event was held during May half-term where the group gave valuable insights into their lived experiences that are covered within the children and young people's plan.

- *More communication across the health, schools and education system is imperative to moving things forward, as we all want the same thing.*
- *Better understanding of mental health and how it impacts upon school life.*
- *Improved access to mental health support in comfortable, community-based settings, particularly for young people with SEND and neurodiversity.*
- *Shared record system, shared values and shared ownership*
- *Provide support for children and young people whilst on waiting lists for diagnostics.*
- *Share more information about activities, groups, and social opportunities.*
- *Greater integration of Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN) and mental health is needed.*

What our families have told us

We would like:

“Clear explanation of the reasonable adjustments that are available to people with or without a diagnosis, including in schools and mental healthcare services

Simple and clearly explained referral routes and timeframes, with help to navigate the referral if necessary.

Clarity on the mental health care that they can expect to receive before and after a neurodevelopment diagnosis

More training for teachers on Autism and ADHD and staff to understand masking

Settings to listen more to families when we ask for help

More specialist Enhanced Resource Provisions (ERPs)

Improved communication between staff in school to support children

Classrooms allowing more movement breaks and settings to have more consistency with staffing

More activities to do in the holidays

Better access to sensory integration and speech and language therapy

More quiet and inclusive spaces that meet the sensory needs of neurodiverse communities in the city. By following autism and ADHD good practice in designing public spaces and public services, everyone can benefit”

What our practitioners across the partnership have told us

We would like to:

Reduce the paperwork for reviews and assessments so we can focus on supporting children

Develop the Send Hub and other agencies to work on a universal programme - where they talk about hot topics, behaviour, wellbeing, sensory, diet, toilet training, sleep.

Work more closely with our Post -16 providers so there are more choices for pupils after Year 11

Be able to have more support and guidance on how to support provision for children with complex needs and those who are pre-verbal in school

See more consistency on how settings implement specialist advice

See more opportunities for sharing good practice in York - open sessions for Emotional Literacy Support Assistant, ELSA / SEND Teaching Assistant and SENCOs to go to see some good practice in York or create an online viewing.

To have a clearer understanding of the services that can offer support for families with children with SEND.

Have more understanding of the challenges faced by schools and to have practical support available

Our SEND Partnership Priorities

1. The voice and visibility of children and young people and their families is paramount

"You have chance to say what you want" - Young person

Our ambition: We want every child and young person with special educational needs to be heard, to feel truly welcomed, and to thrive in their communities.

These are all priorities in the first phase of implementation

We will:

- Ensure that all children, young people and their families know what support is available, so that they can make informed decisions.
- Review the Local offer to make it easier to use and ensure information about referral routes, timeframes, key contacts and support is accessible.
- The SEND Hub will establish a welcoming space where children, young people, and families can access support, training, and social activities.
- Improve service design with input from children, young people, and families via the Joint Voice Partnership Action Plan, and keep families informed of their impact through the partnership communication plan.
- Ensure all individual plans for children and young people are ambitious and consistently informed by the views and opinions of children, young people and their families when making decisions
- Support young carers to come forward to ask for help and to know what support is available to them.
- Ensure information contains signposting for children, young people and families who need financial support including information on discounts, foodbanks, and support with transport.
- Work with York Disability Rights Forum, all parent groups, and our Parent Carer Forum to ensure a wider reach of engagement.

2. Children and young people's needs are identified at the earliest opportunity

'Inclusion is not an outcome. Inclusion is an ethos, a set of values and a philosophy that we should all promote from within' - Primary school, York,

Our ambition: We will work across education, health, and care to provide timely, appropriate support that meets the needs of children and young people at the earliest opportunity

We will prioritise the first five priorities in the first phase of implementation

We partnership will:

- Will reduce variability in inclusion practices and improve consistency across all settings (ages 0-25), focusing on an Inclusion challenge, leadership, culture, adaptive teaching, inclusive classrooms, and trauma-informed approaches.
- Coordinate existing training to develop an Education, Health, and Care Workforce Partnership Training Plan that strengthens the partnership's ability to support children and young people
- Create an early integrated help offer for vulnerable families including making the vision of the SEND Hub model a reality.
- Review the EHC needs assessment process and reviews to reduce bureaucracy and improve service delivery
- Build on the early intervention models of speech, language and communication support for children and young people for York. This will meet individual needs, include regular monitoring, reduce escalation and potential future needs for speech and language therapy.
- To work alongside colleagues in the police to provide a co-ordinated offer and raise awareness of child criminal exploitation and vulnerability.
- Develop the provision of the Learning Support Hub outreach model to upskill staff in settings to meet the needs of children and young people.
- Establish community-based models of paediatric services delivery in partnership with primary care and healthy child teams and other colleagues e.g. mental health, early help, social prescribers.

- Revise the neurodevelopmental pathway and associated support for children pre-assessment and post diagnosis with ASC, ADHD/other neurodiverse conditions.
- Ensure organisations have robust and consistent waiting list management protocols, including a fair and equitable approach to people moving into area in line with guidance, and clarity around what to expect when receiving out of area support through right-to-choose, including subsequent consequences on prescribing.
- Ensure that there is health screening through health visitors' mandated health checks, Children Looked After health checks, and increased take-up of learning disability health checks at ages 14-25.
- Develop and support around the Dynamic Support Register across the partnership to reduce the risk need for young adults to be in tier four hospital provision.

3. The right support is in the right place at the right time

'Every child is valued. Every child is included in all aspects of school life. Every child is accepted by all. Every child has a true sense of belonging and feels to be a valuable and loved member of the school community' - York School

Our aspiration is to achieve the right support at the right time for children with special educational needs. This support will be provided early and tailored to meet individual challenges, to promote inclusion and belonging, and to maximise each child or young person's potential.

We will prioritise the first five priorities in the first phase of implementation

We will:

- Review the sufficiency of specialist placements in York, from Early years, Primary, Secondary and Post 16. To include a review the sufficiency of specialist provision for Social Emotional and Mental Health needs including more internal setting alternative provision and specialist Enhanced Resourced provisions.
- Improve the quality and consistency of statutory decision making for EHC needs assessment and Education, Health & Care plans. Thereby improving the support for children and young people and reducing the need to go to mediation or tribunal following statutory Local Authority decisions.
- Increase the number of jointly commissioned SEND provisions between the Integrated Care Board and the Council, including a jointly commissioned core offer for children and young people, with sensory processing difficulties.
- Ensure reasonable adjustments are in place for children and young people on reduced timetables
- Improve school attendance and engagement in learning through further developing a multi-agency strategic and operational partnership response
- Provide innovative short breaks to meet individual needs.
- Extend the Mental Health Support Teams, working in York schools to support emotional well-being and mental health in school.
- Increase the number of children and young people who are struggling to attend school to reintegrate into schools with support.

- Make effective use of effective digital transformation and AI to support our systems to be as efficient as possible.
- Ensure early years and childcare sufficiency across the city to ensure that equitable access to the extended entitlements.
- Create more affordable and safe spaces for young people to meet.
- Further develop quality assurance and oversight of children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE), children who are educated other than at school (EOTAS), those in alternative provision and children who are missing education in line with changes in legislation and statutory guidance.

4. Effective preparation for independence and adulthood strategies secure opportunities for young people and adults to reach their full potential

“I have made a lot of progress since joining in Year 7 through support from my teacher” Young person, York school

We want to support young people in becoming well-prepared for the next stage of learning to foster a strong sense of belonging in their new educational environment.

We will prioritise the first five priorities in the first phase of implementation

We will

- Enhance the transition process across all phases, drawing on best practice models. This includes guidance on how transition works between children and adults' services.
- Improve the effective data sharing and forecasting take place between children and adult services.
- Provide training and upskill professionals across education, health, and social care to result in improved quality contributions to reviews of children and young people's plans.
- Make sure that all EHC plans focus on preparation for adulthood and consistently specify the type of health and care support that should be available at different stages of a child or young person's life.
- Further develop routes to employability, including increasing the number of supported internships in York.
- Settings will adapt their approaches so that children and young people with SEND receive high-quality individualised independent careers advice to support their transitions, aspirations and next steps in education, employment, or training.
- Invest in improving public transportation in the York region, expanding routes to rural areas to ensure young people have reliable and accessible transport options.

Measuring how we make a difference

This will be completed after full consultation
