

Area SEND inspection of Kirklees Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 June 2025

Dates of previous inspection: 7 to 11 February 2022

Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.

The next full area SEND inspection will be within approximately 3 years.

Ofsted and CQC ask that the local area partnership updates and publishes its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

Information about the local area partnership

Kirklees Metropolitan Council and West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Kirklees.

The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. At this time, the responsibility for health services in Kirklees passed to the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB), which took over responsibility from Kirklees Clinical Commissioning Group.

Since the last inspection, there have been changes to senior leadership in the local area partnership. The executive director for children and families was appointed in May 2023. The chief executive officer of Kirklees Metropolitan Council has also been in post for two years. There is currently an interim chair of the ICB and an interim accountable officer of the ICB. A new director of nursing and quality joined the ICB in April 2025.

The local area partnership commissions a multi-academy trust to provide education for children and young people who have been permanently excluded from school. This provision is in a neighbouring local authority. The local area partnership also commissions a range of alternative provision (AP) for children and young people who cannot attend school due to medical needs or who need personalised education packages. Schools also commission their own AP.

What is it like to be a child or young person with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in this area?

Children and young people with SEND have inconsistent experiences accessing support to meet their education, health and social care needs. However, the partnership is ambitious to improve. Since the last inspection, leaders across the partnership have built on strengths and worked on areas for development. Some practitioners across the partnership state that children and young people with SEND are getting increasingly better experiences.

Many children and young people do not get the support they need through their education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Education outcomes are typically focused and linked to children and young people's needs. However, contributions from health services and social care are often not included in EHC plans. This means that children and young people do not consistently have clear, joined-up support to address their needs. The partnership has already identified this weakness and has started to make improvements to newer EHC plans.

Long waits for some health services negatively impact meeting children and young people's needs. This includes therapeutic services, the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), wheelchair services and receiving a diagnosis of a neurodevelopmental need. This means that children and young people with SEND do not consistently receive the support they need at the right time.

Children and young people with SEND are at the centre of leaders' decision-making. Leaders listen to their views. This means that children and young people shape local developments that affect them, including, for example, the rebuilding of two special schools in the area. Children and young people also influence strategic planning. For example, they renamed the overall SEND strategy as 'The Big Plan' and made public documents easier for children and young people with SEND and their families to understand.

Some children and young people participate in co-produced projects that promote inclusion. These projects, supported by schools and the active parent carer forum, Parents of Children with Additional Needs (PCAN), help them feel valued. For example, a government-funded initiative to improve inclusion for neurodiverse children and young people was praised by many during the inspection. However, some children and young people and their families express wider frustrations. They report that support is difficult to access, and they do not always know what is happening while they wait.

Most young children and families experience positive early years support. They benefit from early identification of their needs by the proactive early years SEND team. In early years settings, a wide training programme helps staff make appropriate adaptations for children. This professional development focuses on quality-first teaching. However, as children and young people grow older, some feel that school becomes harder. This is in part because, along with their families, they want teachers and staff to understand their

needs better and remove barriers to their learning. The partnership is developing geographical clusters to facilitate collaboration between mainstream schools and professionals. This approach is showing early signs of success. However, it is still too early to understand fully the impact of this work.

In the local area, many young people with SEND progress on to college or work, but others struggle due to a lack of appropriate support. For some, routes into education, employment or training in the local area, from the age of 16, are too limited. This restricts how effectively some young people with SEND can pursue their ambitions. As a result, some young people who can work and learn disengage altogether. Another key factor is that children and young people with SEND do not always get the advice or support that they need to plan effectively for adulthood. Some EHC plans miss key steps to help families navigate upcoming transitions. When it is planned, preparation for adulthood often starts too late. This leaves many children and young people and their families unprepared.

Children and young people with SEND who are known to social care receive effective and ongoing targeted support. When children and young people's needs are identified early, they enjoy access to short breaks and other activities. This includes attending youth clubs in their local area. When accessed, these activities help them gain independence and build relationships with other children and their community.

Many children and young people who attend AP access education that is well-matched to their needs. The partnership helps to ensure that these children and young people are safe and progressing well while in these settings.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Leaders have high ambitions for children and young people with SEND. Co-production is a strength of the partnership. For example, PCAN work strategically and operationally with the partnership to help shape services and provision.
- The dynamic support register for children and young people with a learning disability and/or autism is well established in the local area. Clear governance and oversight ensure appropriate wraparound care. This has successfully prevented unnecessary hospital admissions and supported planned admissions well.
- Occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists provide compassionate and considered care. Service improvements, such as a joint speech and language therapy project with the local university, strengthen their work. However, some children and young people wait too long for these services.
- The Healthy Child Programme has improved in both timeliness and coverage since the last inspection. The service demonstrates a proactive, coordinated approach to supporting children and young people with SEND.
- The 'Families Together Gateway' offers a triage service across education, health and social care. Its strong multi-agency model supports children and families with complex needs and builds a shared understanding of their individual needs. As a

result, early intervention is improving for these children and young people.

- When professionals refer disabled children to social care, they complete thorough assessments to meet children's needs and provide appropriate support. The team around the family also provides appropriate support to children with SEND.
- Disabled children and young people, and those with SEND receiving early help, and their families benefit from consistent support from social workers or family support workers who know them well. These practitioners stay committed to supporting children and young people to achieve their long-term goals in their EHC plans.
- The partnership commissions a range of short break services to meet the individual needs of children and young people and their families. These include group activities that promote inclusion and support from care agencies and direct payments. Families appreciate the flexibility and choice. However, some parents and carers would like more support to access these activities. This includes clearer information about what is available, particularly for older children and young people with SEND.
- The small number of disabled children requiring residential school placements or out-of-area provision are well supported by practitioners to make progress and have their medical needs met effectively. This includes effective oversight and relevant partners working together.
- The specialist visual impairment and hearing impairment teams provide strong support to children and young people with SEND. They identify individual needs early, prepare children and young people for their next steps and provide a range of enrichment opportunities. They also train school staff to improve the identification, assessment and meeting of children and young people's needs in mainstream settings.
- The early years SEND team plays a key role in the partnership. It identifies needs early and helps children access education with tailored support that reduces over time. Schools and early years settings value this service highly.
- The local authority's 'access to education team' monitors children and young people with SEND well. This includes those on part-time timetables, those moving to elective home education and those educated other than at school. The virtual school also provides targeted support for children and young people with SEND who have a social worker. For example, the virtual school tracks children's rates of attendance closely and addresses barriers to engagement early and effectively.
- The 'Nexus in school' careers project combines core subjects such as English and mathematics with work experience in key stage 4. This helps participating children and young people with SEND to enter post-16 education, employment and training after leaving school.
- The partnership commissions appropriate short-term placements in AP to re-engage secondary-age children and young people with education. Many of these children and young people return successfully to mainstream settings.
- Some young people with SEND take part in supported internships within the council. While numbers are small, many interns go on to secure long-term employment.
- The inclusion multi-agency panel helps schools find solutions for children and young

people at risk of permanent exclusion. This includes arranging support from specialist outreach teams.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- The quality of children and young people's EHC plans is too variable. Some plans are outdated and lack information from social care and health. Many do not include preparation for adulthood or show enough ambition for the child or young person's future. Due to leaders' improved audit practice, the partnership is aware of the variable quality in EHC plans and has established effective oversight of new EHC plans. This includes the introduction of a robust quality assurance framework. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this improved oversight on the quality of children and young people's new and updated EHC plans.
- Some professionals do not receive requests to contribute to EHC plans and do not receive updated plans. For example, therapists often do not receive copies of a draft, final or amended EHC plan. This creates gaps in support plans and in therapists' clinical records. Therefore, it is harder to work together effectively and ensure that children and young people are accessing the right support.
- Too many annual reviews of EHC plans happen late. These reviews often miss updated views from the child, young person or family and fail to include changes recommended by professionals. These delays and omissions negatively impact outcomes and disrupt the support that children and young people receive.
- The specialist pathway team does not get involved early enough to ensure Care Act assessments support children and young people's transitions into adulthood. These delays leave children and families feeling uncertain and unprepared for the future.
- Parents and carers say communication from the partnership is often unclear or inconsistent. They sometimes struggle to find out how to access support, including when an EHC plan is refused. Some families report that poor communication has led to gaps in their child's education.
- Practitioners do not always know the partnership's timelines or outcomes of decisions. This limits the advice and support that they can offer to children, young people, and families.
- Children and young people wait too long for their wheelchairs to be issued. Some children, after long waits, need a new assessment before receiving equipment that meets their needs.
- Children and young people face long waits for neurodevelopmental assessments. While family navigators support families on the waiting list and signpost them to appropriate services, delays still cause frustration, and some children and young people's needs escalate while they wait.
- Many children and young people wait too long for their initial therapy assessment and support, including for sensory occupational therapy. However, the partnership has created a clear recovery plan to reduce these delays.
- Waits from referral to treatment for the multiple service pathways within CAMHS vary

significantly. Some children and young people wait far too long. However, when children and young people are seen, they typically receive care that meets their needs well.

- The local area lacks enough support for some children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. This is especially true for older children and young people receiving SEN support who do not require specialist provision and primary-age children and young people who may need an alternative education package. Some children and young people with SEMH, particularly those receiving SEN support, are suspended from school more often than their peers.
- Children and young people with SEND and their families lack sufficient post-16 education, employment and training options to meet their needs locally. The partnership's work to enhance employment and training routes is not fully embedded and does not currently reach enough young people.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
<p>Leaders across the partnership should improve how effectively children and young people are prepared for adulthood by ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategic action planning for preparation for adulthood is coordinated and has clear and measurable outcomes • education, health and social care practitioners work together more effectively and at an earlier point to help prepare the child or young people and their families for adulthood • annual reviews reflect a clear focus on how children and young people will achieve their goals and be supported to participate fully in adulthood • there is a sufficient breadth of education, employment and training routes for children and young people with SEND to pursue their ambitions post-16.
<p>The local partnership should work at pace to strengthen and implement its plans to reduce the waits that children and young people face for therapeutic services, CAMHS and access to wheelchair services.</p>
<p>The local partnership should continue to improve the quality and impact of EHC plans, including through timely and robust annual reviews and appropriate contributions to new and updated EHC plans by education, health and social care professionals.</p>
<p>The local area should improve communication across the partnership, including ensuring that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents and carers are informed about relevant universal and targeted support services, are clear about ongoing wait times for services and understand where they can access support while waiting • all relevant partners are informed about timescales and wider decision-making linked to children and young people's assessments and allocation of support.

Local area partnership details

Local authority	Integrated care board
Kirklees Metropolitan Council	NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board
Tom Brailsford Executive Director - Children and Families	Rob Webster CEO of the Integrated Care Board
www.kirklees.gov.uk	www.westyorkshire.icb.nhs.uk
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Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

The inspection was led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors including: one Ofsted Inspector and one HMI from education and social care; a lead Children's Services Inspector from the Care Quality Commission (CQC); and another Children's Services Inspector from the CQC.

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