



Darlington Local Area Partnership

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities



Self-Evaluation
May 2024

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Introduction

The Darlington local area partnership works effectively to deliver better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Our partnerships are strong and are based on transparency, support and challenge. SEND is a key priority for Darlington and is owned strategically and politically at the highest levels. The views of families, children and young people are actively sought and heard, informing ongoing improvements across services/agencies as well as service transformation. Darlington knows itself well and has a comprehensive multi-agency plan in place to monitor and report on the progress of our improvement journey. The mature partnerships Darlington Parent Carer Forum has developed enables the forum to be an effective strategic influence and voice for families in service development.

Leadership across the Local Authority and the ICB is strong, and a clear governance structure ensures that all stakeholders including young people, parents and carers are engaged, accountable, and part of the solutions. This ensures that all services take accountability for their delivery and performance as part of a broader SEND system.

We have completed work on our draft refreshed Local Area SEND strategy and we will be seeking views through a wide public consultation before the strategy is adopted. The SEND strategy has been coproduced with all stakeholders, including professionals, young people, and parent representatives, education settings, health services and the parent/carer forum. The strategy reflects collaboration across the Local Area and will set out our collective aspirations for the next three years.

Darlington is successfully implementing the Safety Valve programme to address the historic deficit on our High Needs Block. We remain on track with our Safety Valve recovery plan. The High Needs Block achieved a balance in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years and is predicted to do so again in 2024/25. This continued progress will support us to building a financially stable and sustainable SEND system.











The local area continues to face significant challenges in delivering our ambitious agenda. The level of suspension from school remains a concern although published data does show an improving performance for the SEND cohort. The Education Strategy Group, consisting of senior leaders from the council and Trusts, have developed Darlington's Inclusion Charter to support and challenge settings to improve their inclusive practice and increase parental confidence that their child's needs will be met through a consistent and inclusive 'ordinarily available offer' in a mainstream setting. Demand for EHCP assessment continues to rise however we currently maintain almost 65% of our EHCP cohort in mainstream settings and have reduced Darlington children and young people who have plans maintained by Darlington who are educated out of borough from 11% to 8.8%. 20-week

timescale compliance has remained effective despite increased demand with 86.5% of requests being completed within timescales.

In this increasingly complex context local leaders remain determined to drive forward system improvements to ensure young people with additional needs can thrive and be, wherever possible, economically active and valued members of their community.



Local Context

 Population	There are 107,799 people living in Darlington 21.1% under 18 58.3% 18-65 17.8% 65 - 85 2.8% over 85	 Education & skills	16,972 people aged 16+ (19%) have no qualifications in Darlington compared with 18% across England.
 Vulnerable groups	6,070 children aged 0-19 (25%) are in relative low-income families in Darlington compared with 20% across England.	 Economy	31,324 people aged 16+ (36%) are in full-time employment in Darlington compared with 34% across England. Ranked 77 th Most deprived (317 Councils)
 Housing	466 households (1.0%) lack central heating in Darlington compared with 1.5% across England.	 Access & transport	25% of households have no car in Darlington compared with 24% across England.
 Crime & safety	The overall crime rate is higher than the average across England. The rate is 120.9 in Darlington compared with 88.2 across England.	 Communities & environment	The % of people 'satisfied with their neighbourhood' (79.2%) is similar to the average across England (79.3%)
 Health & wellbeing	21,104 people (19.6%) have a limiting long-term illness in Darlington compared with 17.3% across England.	 Carers	There are approximately 9800 people in Darlington identified themselves as carers 4707 (48%) were in employment in the 2021 census.

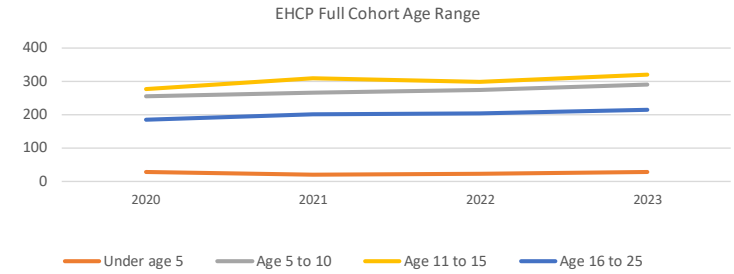
Local Insight OCSI - [Link](#)

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEN/D) Matrix - Full Cohort



Last Updated: 26 May 24

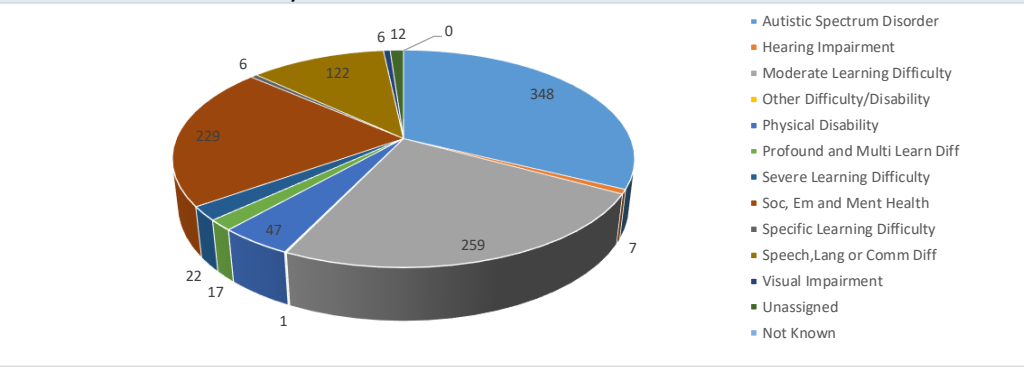
SEN/D	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
EHCP Caseload: Local Data from SEN mi						
Under age 5	28	20	22	27	29	39
Age 5 to 10	253	264	272	290	325	342
Age 11 to 15	277	307	297	318	396	413
Age 16 to 25	183	201	204	213	262	282



Gender (EHCP)		Current Cohort as at 26th May 2024	
Female		285	
Male		791	

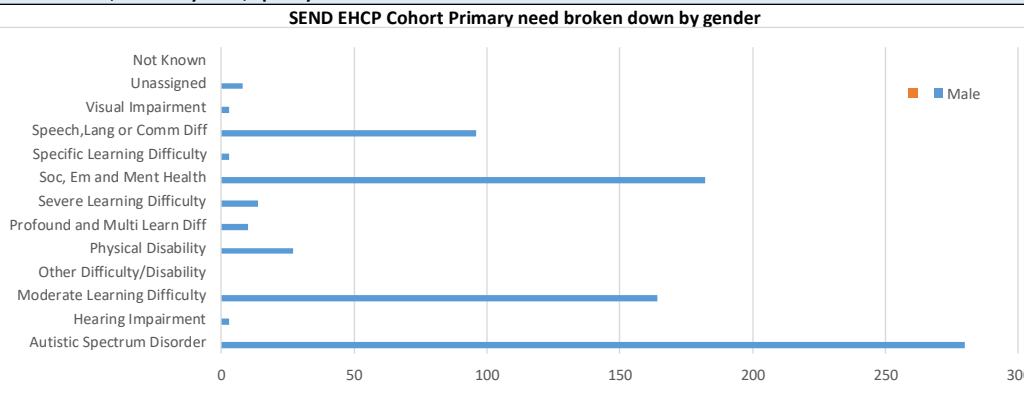
Primary Need of Current Cohort as at 26th May 2024

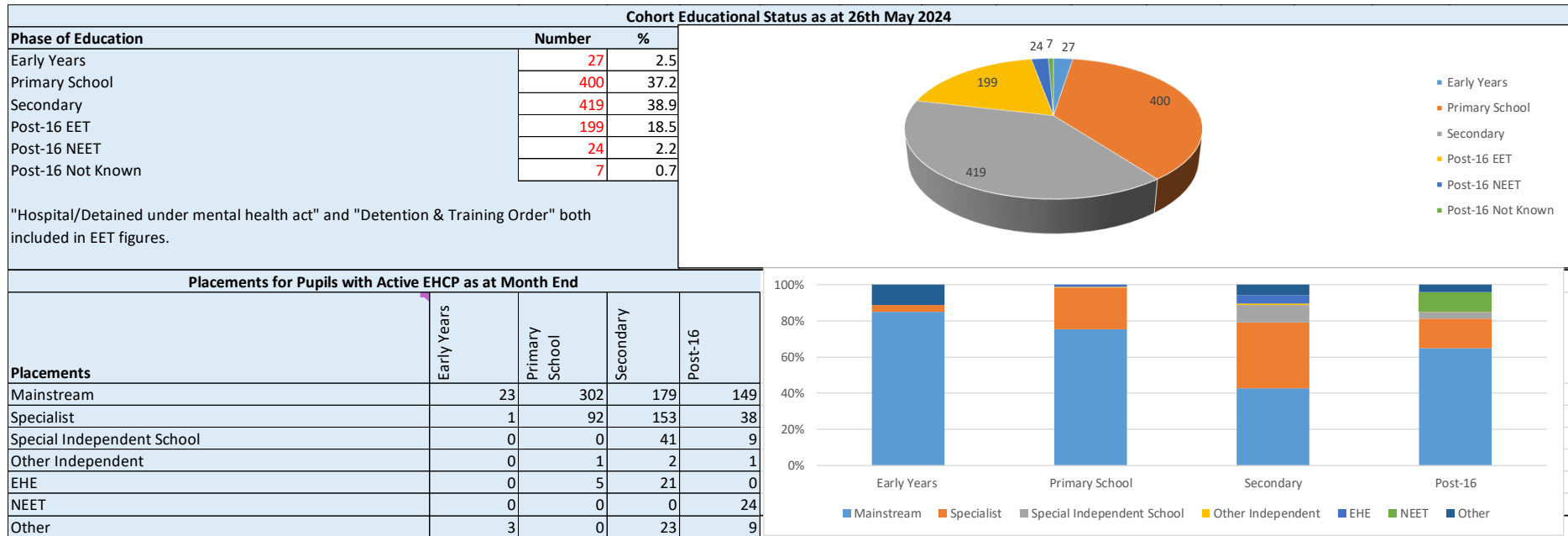
Primary Need	Number	%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	348	32.3
Hearing Impairment	7	0.7
Moderate Learning Difficulty	259	24.1
Other Difficulty/Disability	1	0.1
Physical Disability	47	4.4
Profound and Multi Learn Diff	17	1.6
Severe Learning Difficulty	22	2.0
Soc, Em and Ment Health	229	21.3
Specific Learning Difficulty	6	0.6
Speech,Lang or Comm Diff	122	11.3
Visual Impairment	6	0.6
Unassigned	12	1.1
Not Known	0	0.0



Primary Need of Cohort as at, 26th May 2024, Split by Gender

Primary Need	Female	Male
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	68	280
Hearing Impairment	4	3
Moderate Learning Difficulty	95	164
Other Difficulty/Disability	1	0
Physical Disability	20	27
Profound and Multi Learn Diff	7	10
Severe Learning Difficulty	8	14
Soc, Em and Ment Health	47	182
Specific Learning Difficulty	3	3
Speech,Lang or Comm Diff	26	96
Visual Impairment	3	3
Unassigned	4	8
Not Known		

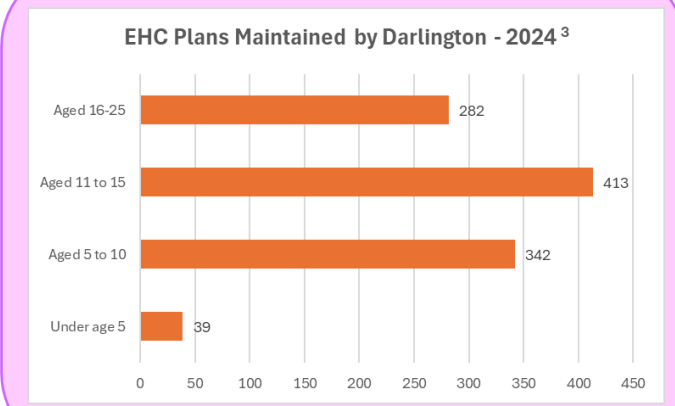
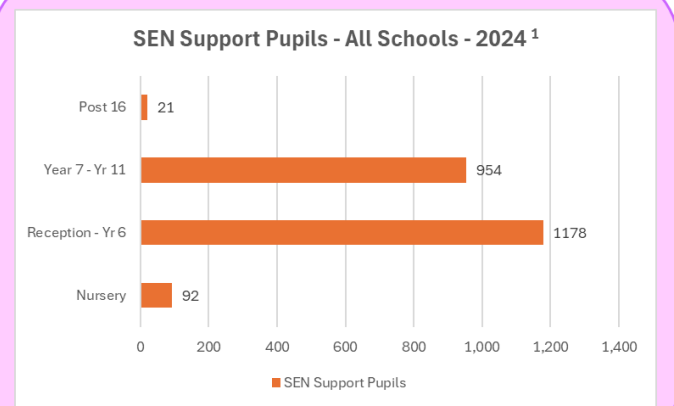
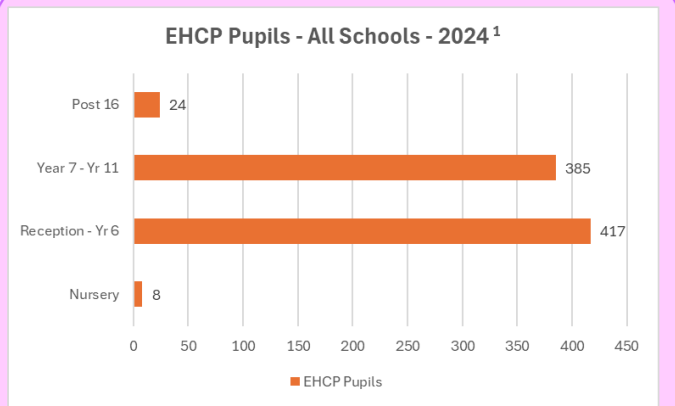
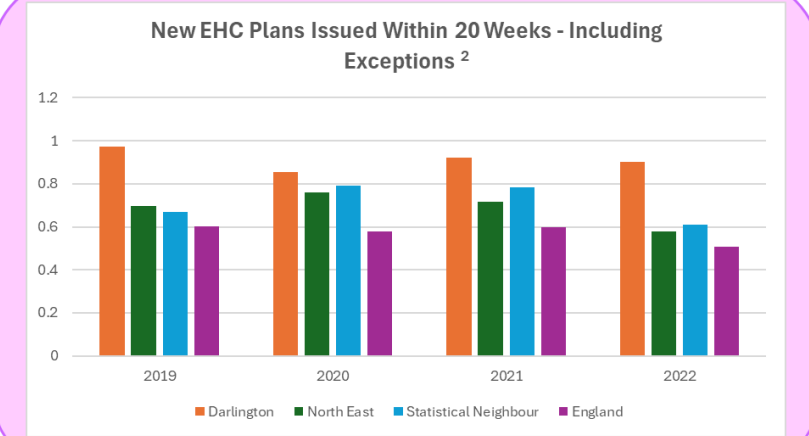
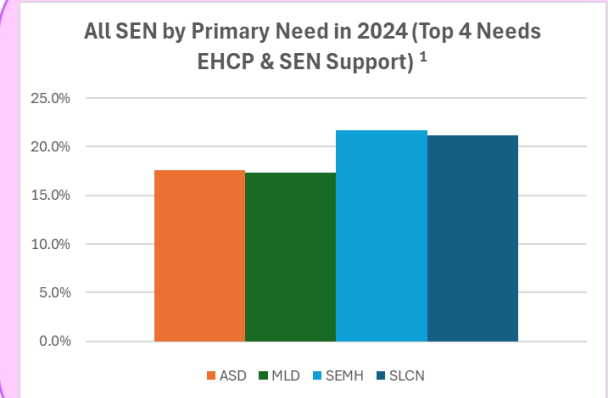
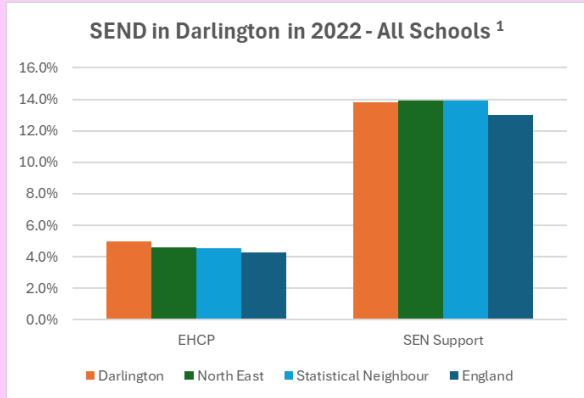




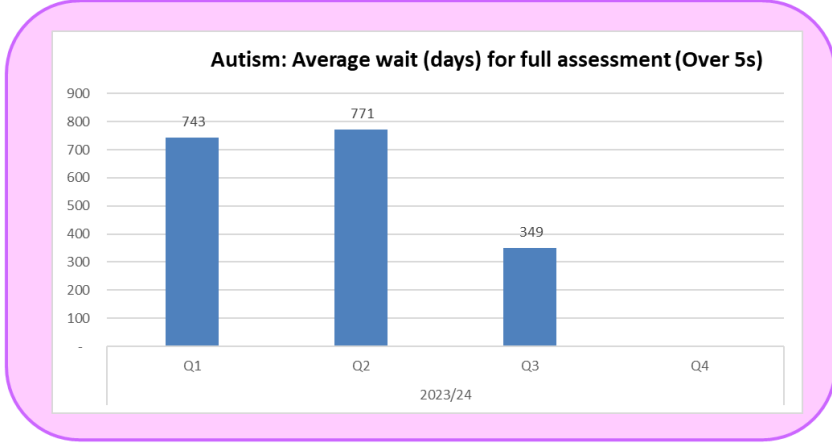
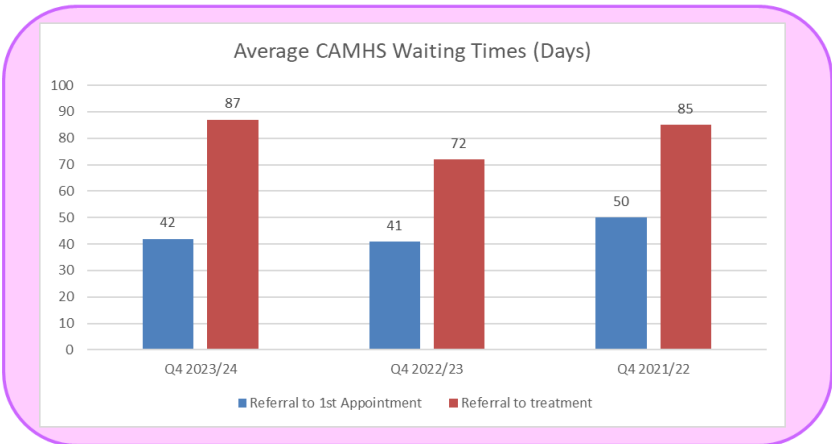
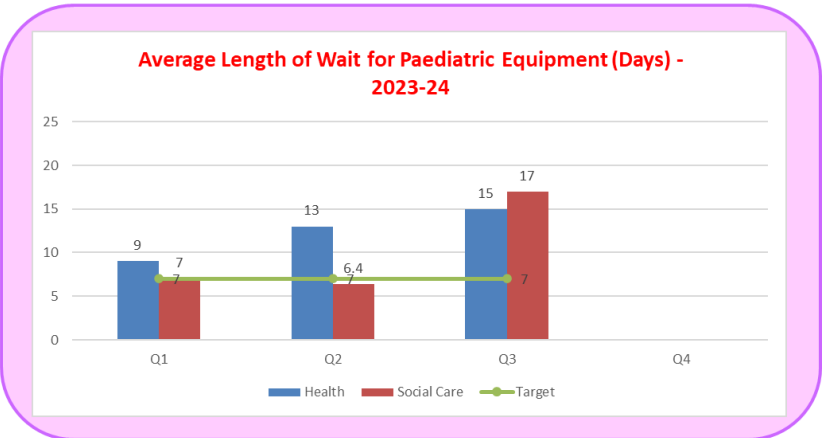
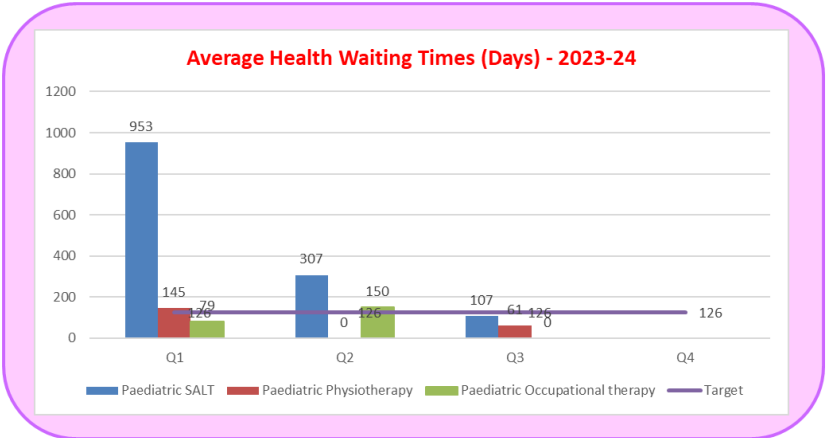
2023/23 Academic Year, Month by Month	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	01/09/2023 to 26/05/2024
No. of requests received	14	33	30	24	28	31	16	16	37				229
Source of request: Parental	2	9	6	1	2	5	6	4	6				41
Source of request: Professional	10	19	22	21	24	24	10	9	27				166
Source of request: Moved into Authority	2	5	2	2	2	2	0	3	4				22
No. declined or withdrawn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				0
No. declined - Request Refused (No. assessment carried out)	1	6	5	4	9	13	8	5	6				57
No. declined - Assessment Refused (Request declined after assessment)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0				1
No. of requests withdrawn (Assessment Stopped)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				0
Total number of EHCP issued/completed	16	10	22	6	10	23	14	26	7				134
Assessments to date for Academic Year 2023/24: 01/09/2023 to 26/05/2024													
Total assessments completed Total assessments completed within 20 weeks Total assessments completed in over 20 weeks Total assessments completed within 20 weeks excluding exceptions Total assessments completed within 20 weeks including exceptions Total assessments completed in over 20 weeks excluding exceptions Total assessments completed in over 20 weeks including exceptions	Number		%		<p style="text-align: center;">Assessments at Academic Year End</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Note: Data up to and including 2018/19 collected from Service spreadsheets; 2019/20 onwards from Capita.</p>								
	134												
	108		80.6										
	26		19.4										
	108		80.6										
	26		19.4										
	26		19.4										
Reviews due in academic year 2023/24					Work in progress to provide review data								
Reviews received from Providers													
Reviews not received from Providers													
Reviews finalised by LA													
Reviews to be finalised													
Review date to be set													
Children and Young People Open to Other DBC Teams - All EHCPs Open and Under Assessment													
	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	
BSF	58	45	53	50	63	66	67	67	68				
Children's Social Care	145	147	149	149	144	149	147	147	149				
YPEAJS	9	11	13	9	5	7	2	3	8				
Adults's Social Care	24	25	25	27	27	27	27	28	29				
EHCP Only- Not open to any other service	748	766	766	776	779	790	796	813	822				
Total	984	994	1006	1011	1018	1039	1039	1061	1076				
Total no. of ongoing (in draft) assessments at month end	57	74	78	90	104	109	109	97	109				

Darlington SEND Dashboard 2022/23 (last updated 12/06/2024)

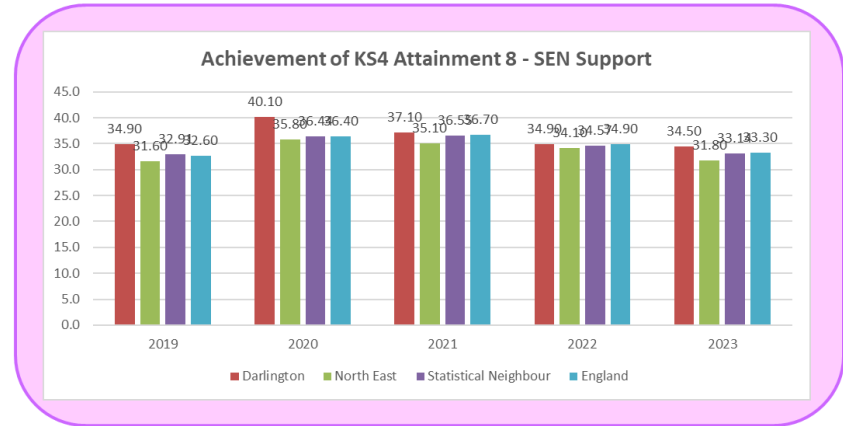
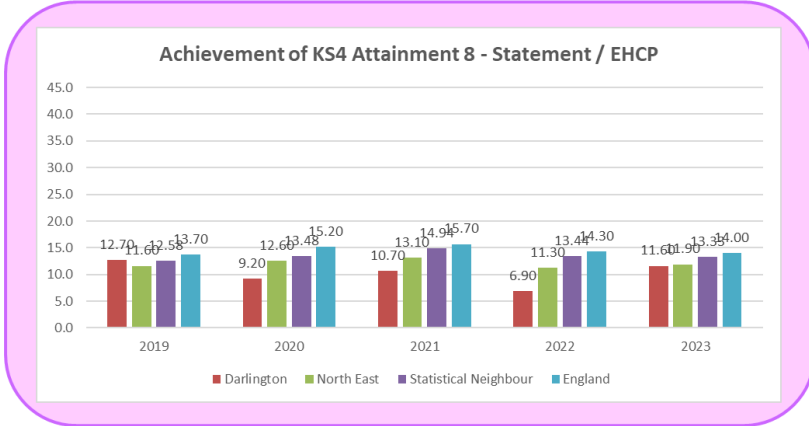
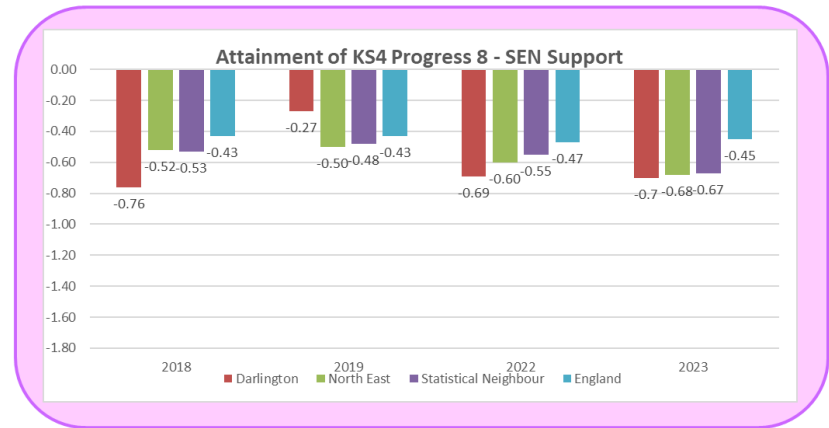
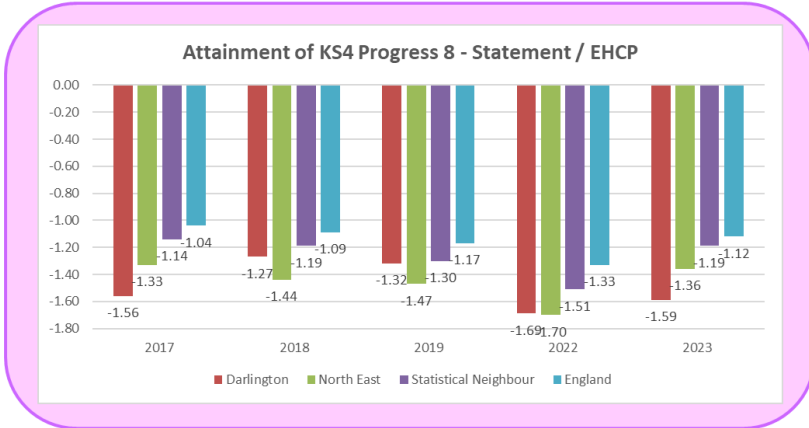
Summary & Local Area Population Information



Waiting List Monitoring (Based on current shared information for individuals with EHC plans)



Sources: 1) LAIT; 2) SEN2 Return; 3) School Census January 2024; 4) Liquid Logic



Leadership and Governance

Governance

There are strong governance arrangements in place in the local area. The strategic SEND Assurance Executive oversees and scrutinises the delivery of Darlington's Written Statement of Action implementation plan and wider SEND work. The Executive is chaired by the Director of Children's Services and Leaders representing ICB, Parent Carer Forum, Mainstream and Specialist schools and the Further Education sector compose the membership. The SEND Implementation Group has responsibility for delivery of the implementation of the action plan and has representation from across the partnership.

North East and North Cumbria (NENC) ICB have acknowledge the importance of SEND within their governance creating the ICB SEND Assurance Committee to support the Quality and Safety Committee to discharge its duties relating to SEND for the ICB. It is noted that although the Assurance committee is ICB wide decision making will continue to take place at a placed based level. Darlington will continue to be one of the five local authorities within Tees Valley area.

Darlington has a Group Director of People who is Director of both Children's and Adults Services, Education & Inclusion and Public Health also fall within the Group Directors team. This is a way to support continuity across the local authority, which is seen as a high priority. Darlington received a Good with area of outstanding grading for the most recent full ILACS visit (October 2022) and were viewed positively during the November 2023 OFSTED focused visit.

Darlington PCF has a strategic role in local governance. The PCF leadership team have regular meetings with Senior Local Leaders to share information and identify emerging themes. The PCF is a very strong body with good leadership and has a wide and noticeable impact on planning and commissioning across both Health and the Local Authority.

https://www.facebook.com/TogetherforBetterDarlington/?locale=en_GB

Darlington Young Advisors have recently undergone a recruitment campaign with a new team of involvement officers in place. They hold a strategic role locally with some specific work on supporting representation both in the Care Leavers, SEND and corporate parenting.

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/young-darlington-advisors/>

Darlington's Health and Wellbeing board are central to the governance of the local area delivery and have recently held a number of well attended workshops as a means of developing a new draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The local area SEND leadership and representatives have been and will continue to be involved.

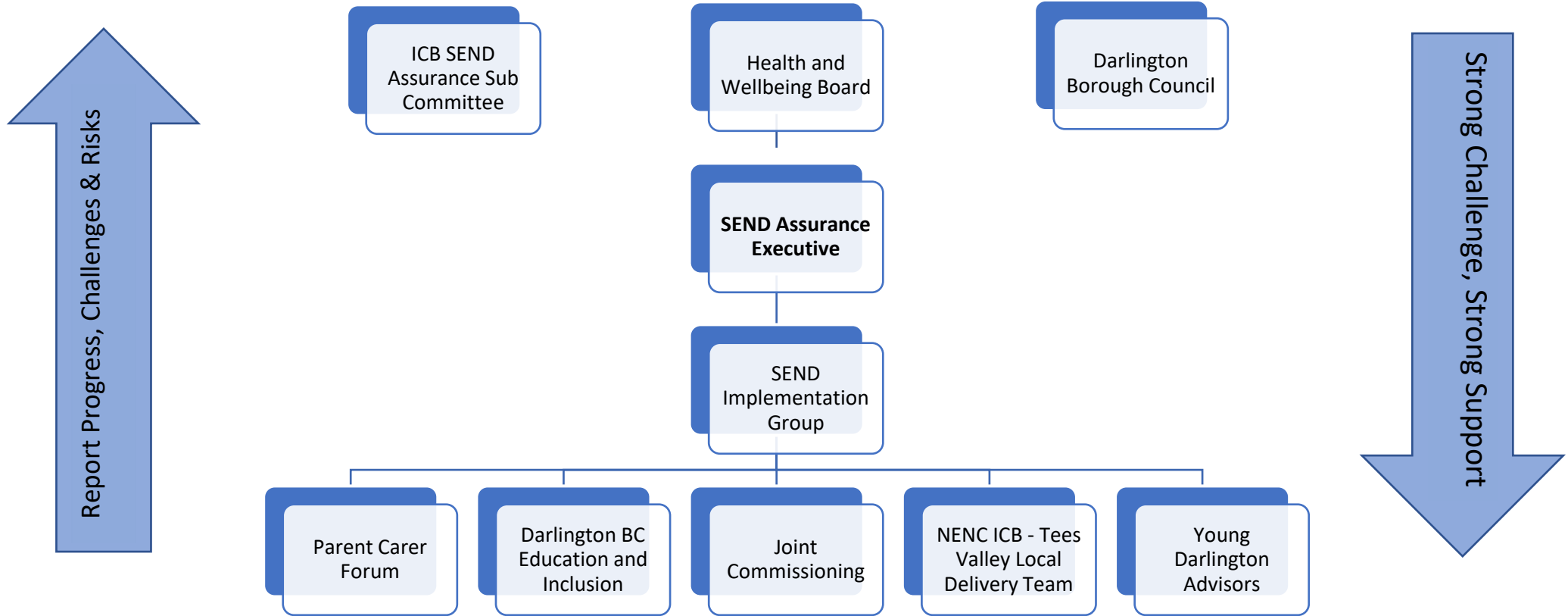
Corporate and political commitment to the SEND agenda is in place. The Council Plan due to be adopted in July 2024 following consultation has clear priorities on inclusion in schools and the introduction of the Special Free School. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is actively engaged on the agenda and receives updates on the progress on the implementation of the WSOA and Safety Valve plans.

There is effective management of the High Needs Block (HNB) in place. School Forum monitors the expenditure on the block closely alongside council officers. The council has established a High Needs Subgroup of the Forum to ensure that a detailed examination of High Needs expenditure can be undertaken outside of regular forum meetings.

There are a range of multi-agency panels that assist with decision making processes these include

- Multi-Agency Placement Panel SEND.
- Complex needs panel.
- Neurodevelopmental Pathway Panel
- Multi Agency Transitions Group for complex learners
- Transition to Adult Social Care Panel
- DSR multi agency panel
- Early Years Inclusion Panel

Local Area Governance structure



Leadership

The council entered into a Safety Valve agreement with the Department for Education in March 2023 to address the historic deficit on the High Needs Block. Strong and effective governance of the Safety Valve plan has ensured significant progress has been made. In year balance on the HNB has been achieved in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years and the block is on track to achieve a balanced position in 2024/25. Since entering the Safety Valve agreement, the deficit has been reduced from £6M to £2M and is on track to be eliminated during the lifetime of the agreement.

Darlington have progressed the co-production of a new **SEND Strategy 2024-27**. Work has been undertaken across many local schools (Primary, Secondary and nursery -mainstream and special provision) with over 70 children and young people. This work has been undertaken by participation officers independent of the SEND Implementation group. Darlington PCF have undertaken the role of working with parents and families again gaining input from over 45 families. The strategy will set the overarching aims for the coming years and are based around the themes within preparation for adulthood.

As part of the Local Area's ongoing commitment to increasing capacity for SEND in Darlington the council submitted a bid to open a **new Special Free School** in 2023, which was successful. We therefore move forward in the process of opening a new school that fits within our strategies for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

To complement our existing provision, we have identified the need for a secondary provision for those pupils with a primary need of autism/ASD. The new special free school will provide 48 full time places for pupils aged 11-19 with autism, who would benefit from a specific environment and staff dedicated to a holistic approach. The capital funding for the new school will be provided from the Government's Free School Programme. The council is working closely with the successful sponsor Trust to ensure the school is open to timescale.

Darlington invested in a "**Valuing SEND**" programme in partnership with Impower consulting during the Autumn term of 2023. In September to October 2023, we undertook an intensive eight-week programme, working with schools and partners across Darlington to:

1. Build consensus around a positive ambition for Darlington focused on inclusion.
2. Introduce and test new ways of working through application of IMPOWER's Valuing SEND tool to promote better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
3. Use the evidence to demonstrate and build confidence in the ability of mainstream provision to meet need while also identifying learning and development opportunities for Darlington schools and settings.

This has led on to the creation of a local School Inclusion Charter led by Schools, which is due to be launched in the coming months. An improving consistency in how school colleagues understand and talk about need, to build confidence in mainstream provision and embed a strengths-based approach in

practice and a system-wide commitment to building independence into adulthood for children and young people in Darlington

Children's and Young Person participation officer is now recruited, who has led on a **Young Darlington Advisors** group being formed – with an emphasis on young people with a EHCP or SEN support plan aged up to 25. This group will have a role working with the local area SEND Agenda, report in to both Corporate Parenting and have links into the Health and Wellbeing Board. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/young-darlington-advisors/>

“Talk about SEND” – termly open meetings - The LA has scheduled termly engagement drop ins sessions for any Darlington parent who registers. Questions are submitted prior to the meeting to ensure that any issues that parents want raising can be addressed at the meetings. This is shared via different mediums including social media to ensure as wide a base as possible is given the opportunity to participate. These sessions have been attended by leaders across the local area within Health, Education and Social Care. We are developing a series of post event podcasts in response to parents who, due to work or caring commitments are unable to attend the meetings in person.

Feedback: “Lovely meeting you both at the SEND event the other day at the Dolphin Centre! I was chatting to Olivia this morning about how useful and informative both myself and the other parents had found the session”

The **SEND Scorecard** (see attached document) provides leadership with Health and Local Authority data quarterly, this has been updated and developed in partnership with a mechanism in place to review quality and challenge anomalies. It is intended that this forms the basis for the development of the Local Area Data Dashboard to better capture information across the system in a more holistic and accessible way.

Data analysis on current and emerging SEND Needs matched with informed by public consultation has driven the ongoing resource base review.

- Our first redesignated resource base will open in September 24 at Northfield.
- Trust approval has been gained for planned expansion of Hurworth Secondary Social Communication Resource Base due to increasing need.

Ensuring the best use of and the potential expansion of our Resource Base offer will increase and further develop children and young people access to support in mainstream. This in turn will increase the capacity of special schools for those learners with the most complex needs within the local area and a reduction in out of area placements.

We have facilitated increased capacity at our special school through the High Needs Place Change Process. The LA are currently working with Beaumont Hill Special Academy to further increase capacity in the school by utilising Capital funding to facilitate the separation of the school's 6th Form.

Furthermore, we have reviewed our Outreach Services and are looking at an outcomes-based model of Outreach ensuring that services are effective in meeting need in a timely manner. Once this work is

complete, the alternative models of delivery ensure that services will report on positive outcomes in the most cost-effective way as well as establishing any gaps in provision we will need to fill.

One of the 4 Goals of **NENC ICB Forward Plan** is "Giving Children and Young People the Best Start in Life"

Improving health outcomes for children and young people requires a high level of partnership working, particularly with local authorities', including for example education, safeguarding and social care. Our Child Health and Wellbeing Network plays a valued role in bringing together partners across the system to have a clear focus on children and young people's health and wellbeing. Key areas of focus are mental health and well-being, long term conditions, vulnerable children and those with complex support needs (supported through the delivery of Core20plus5 to reduce health inequalities), to reduce waiting times for elective care and to meet the regulatory framework for SEND with partners, Best Start in Life, Pre-school and Peri-natal and a focus at place.

The local authority has a number of Capital Programmes underway addressing the SEND agenda this includes

- Beaumont Hill 6th Form (Special School Provision)
- New Free School
- Heathfield Resource Base
- Hurworth Expansion
- Creation of local Skills Centre (Northern Echo Building)

Local Area leaders take a relational approach to their work with schools. In an almost academised environment, Leaders endeavour to know schools well, build relationships and encourage a commitment to shared ownership of standards across the town. Through strong partnership structures Leaders promote honest and open dialogue with schools.

- The Education Strategy Group (ESG)
- The Primary Heads Forum
- 11 – 19 Partnership
- Vulnerable Pupil Panel (VPP) brings together representatives from primary and secondary schools and other agencies such as social care, the police and CAMHS to manage fair access protocols and maintain oversight of issues that affect vulnerable children.

Strengths and Developments

Strengths	Areas for Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Parent Carers Forum working clearly as part of local area leadership • Refresh of SEND strategy has been undertaken with clear linkage to local children’s plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan • Advance stages of Schools Inclusion Charter lead by local schools • Multi-disciplinary Audit process in place • “Talk about SEND” termly open meeting bringing local leadership together with families, parents and carers • Darlington is part of DfE “Safety Valve Programme” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of New SEND Strategy • New implementation plan to ensure comprehensive delivery of the SEND Strategy • Safety Valve Programme (DfE) • Development of strategic young advisors group • Move from local data scorecard to a more accessible Data Dashboard • Development of portals to EHC plan System • JSNA being updated. • Consistency of graduated Response • 3 Tier model of AP is underdeveloped (capacity due to PEX) (to include Primary)

The impact of the local area partnership

Education, Health and Care Plans

The work of the **multi-agency EHC Panel (MAPP)** ensures the sharing of key information to promote accurate identification of need. The panel also ensures that there is a consistent and robust approach to decision making within key time frames. Darlington has seen an increase in the number of requests for statutory assessment since 2020, with 47% increase between 2021 and 2024. A significant majority of these being for children in the early years and foundation stage. The multi-agency panel is also used to inform further training and support for settings to ensure mainstream settings are knowledgeable and confident in dealing with a range of SEND issues. A statutory SEND Clinic has been set up to address any issues arising from submissions to MAPP offering advice, training & support to settings.

In 2023 83.9% of EHCPs excluding exceptions were issued in Darlington within the 20 week timescale compared to 50.3% nationally and 52.7% in the North East region.

EHC plans – clear voice of CYP and Parent Carers. Parent/Carer & CYP view forms routinely shared with requests for statutory advice. We have consulted with parent/carers & CYP on how they prefer their views to be collected and they have overwhelmingly told us that they prefer their views to be recorded in a conversation, preferably with someone with whom they are familiar. This has resulted in redesigning view forms to be a conversation prompt, rather than a questionnaire format, with particular focus on preparation for adulthood. The LA routinely offer a **“Making Sense Meeting”** to families undergoing assessment following the issue of a draft EHCP, where the contents of the plan are discussed and co-productively agreed. “Tell it once” approach is more consistent. Advice givers in statutory assessment have views to hand when speaking to parent/carers and CYP thus reducing the need to tell their story more than once.

100% of families surveyed indicate that they felt involved with the process, were heard and recognized co-production in EHCP's issued.

Quality of EHCP plans is seen as vital to achieving positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The Local Area has continued to develop practice to improve the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans. We have used the opportunity created through electronic EHCP's to refresh the format to ensure that plans are cleaner and focused on special educational needs, special provision and outcomes. All EHCP's have been transferred to a new format, based around Preparation for Adulthood and outcome focused.

Multi-agency deep dive analysis of new EHCP plans are undertaken on a termly basis. Deep dives highlight an inconsistency in the quality of statutory advice with take-up of training opportunities low. There is further developmental work required on a multi-agency level to facilitate the desired improvements. Recent deep dives identify that new EHCP's consistently have an overall rating of “Satisfactory” and above. As a result of this children and young people have EHCP's that are of a satisfactory standard, ensuring that their needs are clear, the provision to meet them is specific and that outcomes are smart and related to aspirations. Deep dives analyses support this.

Annual review procedures are embedded and robust within the SEND system and reviews are conducted in a timely manner and within statutory timescales.

In the 2024 Darlington Parent Carer forum feedback report

The overall rating of EHC plan application/ needs assessment process was:

-3.39 out of 5 for parent/carer

The overall rating of involvement in the annual review process was:

- 3.96 out of 5 for parent/carer

- 3.74 out of 5 for young people.

Ensuring clear timely advice from social care professionals is seen as a specific area of development in Darlington, this is part of our WSoA and was also highlighted during recent quality assurance activity. Traditionally in Darlington most advice has been via the Children with disabilities team. To improve the delivery of advice for EHC plans there is a DfE supported training programme underway to support the Children’s Front Door Team to undertake more of this work.

Mediation & Tribunal - Early and systematic approach to analysing each potential tribunal case on a multi-agency basis is now embedded. Data on mediation & tribunal provides evidence of robust decision making.

“We’ve found Darlington’s response to the SEND Mediation & Dispute Resolution service to be a really positive one. We’re finding that requests for mediation are being responded to extremely quickly by the SEND team. Once the mediation sessions are in progress we find that Darlington’s approach is always one of collaboration and the team seem to really understand and appreciate the benefits of the mediation process. The SEND Team Manager, and the supporting caseworker, bring great knowledge of the overall SEND process and are willing to share that with parents during the mediation session. We believe that every mediation has been a positive experience for parents and has left relations between Darlington SEND team and parent stronger than before.” Joseph Mullrooney – Mediatelegal.

We have seen an increase in Tribunals but where agreement cannot be reached and cases have proceeded to court, tribunals involving Darlington have agreed with the issued EHC plan at a much higher rate than we see nationally.

Prior to January 2022 –	From January 2022 –
6 tribunals registered	14 tribunals registered
6 (100%) were ruled in favour of the appellant	7 were conceded by the LA prior to court 6 EHC plans were upheld 1 ruled in favour of appellant

Local Service and Provision

The Local Area SENDIASS has recently been enhanced with the ICB appointing a SEND Health facilitator, due to commence June 2024. This role compliments and will work closely with the LA SENDIASS which provides both an independent families officer and a young people SENDIASS officer to support children, young people and families to participate in decision making, individual support planning and assist navigation of the local system. The SEND Health facilitator will work at an individual level to support the development of individual health care plans.

Short breaks are available and can be for a short period of time, or longer periods such as overnight. The Council is a direct provider of residential short breaks through its Harewood Hill Lodge service which can provide short breaks for up to 5 children at any one time. If a family chooses to receive a Direct Payment, they will take control over identifying the provider of the short break and will organise their support directly with this provider. The provider may be a family friend or an extended family member or could be an agency or other private provider.

If a family does not feel that a direct payment is suitable to meet their needs, they may choose to access the Community Based Short Breaks Framework which is broken down into five 'lots', as follows:

- Lot 1 – Sport, Art/Craft, Drama, Recreational and Personal Development Activities
- Lot 2 – Holiday Play Schemes and Holiday Opportunities
- Lot 3 – After School Clubs
- Lot 4 – Promotion of Independence Skills, Befriending and Mentoring Services
- Lot 5 – Individual packages of support in the community

The short break offer also is complemented by a designated home care and support commissioned for children with disabilities requiring regulated care in the community.



CAMHS services are mapped around the I Thrive Framework and dedicated teams have been created around Getting Advice and Support (Single Point of Contact/CAMHS Front Door), Getting Help, Getting More Help and Getting Risk Support.

Together we have been committed to embed the I Thrive Framework, which has an emphasis on prevention promotion and earlier support for children's mental health and emotional wellbeing. We are seeing and hearing that many children and families are receiving support much earlier and are evidencing improved outcomes as a result of this. A consultation approach is held regularly with identified schools' mental health leads which

resulted in all Darlington schools having an identified lead to support system navigation, signposting and referrals into support. All schools have access to a whole school approach offer, multi-agency huddles, in-school consultations support case discussion and ensuring right support is given on an individual basis.

The Mental Health Support Teams are part of the overall I Thrive approach which has a focus on prevention, promotion and earlier support which will enable those children with more extensive needs to be supported much more effectively.

Mental Health Support in Schools – The ICB, local authority and schools have worked collaboratively to embed Mental Health Support Team (MHST) directly in schools. Darlington have been successful in attracting more funding resulting in the number of teams doubling in size and increasing its scope; meaning more children will be able to access their offer.

Mental Health Support Teams have a focus on a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, delivery of direct evidence-based interventions, supporting and developing CAMHS pathways. The implementation of I-Thrive and with a single point of contact, multi sector working helps to ensure children and young people are offered the most appropriate level of support at the earliest point. This is complimented by the single point of access (TEWV), commissioned mental health and learning disability service.

There is also a parent peer support offer as part of this service and feedback from children, parents/carers and school staff is consistently better than good. In particular, the “We Eat Elephants” programme has been accessed by a significant number of children in years 5 and 6, in preparation for their transition to secondary school. The feedback from children states that they will use the strategies they are taught and have found the sessions helpful and engaging.

CAMHS single point of contact has supported over 1000 requests for help in Darlington over the last 12 months and has evidenced through a triage process (offered within 1 week of referral) earlier access to support.

Average waiting times	Referral to 1 st Appointment	Referral to treatment
Q4 2023/24	42 days (6 weeks)	87 days (12 weeks)
Q4 2022/23	41 days (6 weeks)	72 days (10 weeks)
Q4 2021/22	50 days (7 weeks)	85 days (12 weeks)

Through a collaborative approach to support and through the integration of resources, we can evidence positive outcomes for children.

Neurodevelopmental (ASD/ADHD) is a national priority and a priority for NENC ICB. Darlington has a need led approach to supporting children and families with neurodevelopmental concerns (Autism and or ADHD) and committed to a **Neurodevelopmental Pathway** [Link](#). This approach means families and children are supported at the earliest possible opportunity, with or without a diagnosis. Professionals (usually education) complete a referral form with the child and parent or

carer. The referral form has been matched against ICD-11 and lists identifying features and criteria which supports a clinical decision for diagnosis. It has been developed with local feedback including parent carer forums. Following initial screening, a multi-agency panel meets fortnightly with representatives including Speech and Language Therapy, ASD clinicians, Education, EP's, Early Help and VSCCE's to review the referral and share information to support decision making and to help determine need. Collectively, they make recommendations to either progress onto the specialist assessment pathway (where there is evidence to support a diagnosis) and or signpost children and families to services to meet their needs.

Local oversight is through a Strategic Tees Valley Neurodevelopmental Group and a joined-up Action Plan is in place which covers early identification of need through to post diagnostic support. However, demand continues to increase and waiting times have been impacted over the last 3 years. A full review taking place of neuro pathway covering Darlington and Durham.

Average waiting times for over 5's	Full Assessment
Q4 2023/24	800 days (26 months)
Q4 2022/23	784 days (26 months)
Q4 2021/22	365 days (12 months).

Evidence shows that almost half (48%) of all referrals do not progress to assessment - the main reasons are attributed to primary needs around; trauma and attachment (impacts of adverse childhood experiences and adversity), behaviour that challenge, mental health and family support.



As a response to this we piloted a consultation approach (pre-referral) via a **dedicated telephone hotline** to support professionals and the provision of evidence-based interventions to support with trauma, attachment and strengthening family relationships. Representation of children's mental

health services including Mental Health Support Teams and Getting Help Teams ensures swift access for any mental health support including anxiety, low mood and support with emotional regulation. Early evidence and impact shows family's needs are being met earlier through access and feedback of Family Support Services and Tees Valley Sleep Services. A pre-referral consultation line has been piloted with positive outcomes and referrers supported earlier, alongside developments of integrated pathways with CYP MH teams. However, demand is increasing.

Waiting List initiatives and support for parent carers and professionals include a new 'Waiting Well' process in place. This includes the offer of a telephone consultation pre-referral to discuss any concerns and support with strategies, advice, and guidance. Alongside this for SaLT there was a planned group intervention for those waiting due to a high level of demand from particular educational settings this pilot included a virtual offer of support and was targeted towards their needs. Impact and evaluation of this is being completed to agree next steps.

Bubble of support is jointly commissioned for CYP and families to access where there are concerns about neurodiversity. No diagnosis is required to access thus ensuring families can access help and support in a timely fashion.



Family Support Services – To support families where there are neurodivergent needs, a jointly commissioned service (provides support across all Tees Valley LA Areas) is due to end in November 2024 following a 3-year contract. Following review, there is clear evidence of positive impacts on family lives and experiences, so a further agreement to jointly commission the services for another 3 years is now in place.

Darlington Education Psychology Service (EPS) currently undertake work in all LA primary, secondary and special schools and the town's SEN Units. Each school is assigned an Educational

Psychologist (EP) or group of EPs who lead a consultation meeting with school SENDCos and SLT each term to identify priority cases for involvement. Comprehensive, individual assessments are undertaken of children both with SEN Support and who have an EHCP. Parent/ carer and school evaluations follow casework and annually.

The most recent evaluations in 2022/2023 found that 100% of schools strongly agreed or agreed that the involvement of an EP supports them in identifying and responding to CYP's needs and 94% of schools strongly agreed or agreed that EPs help them to include CYP more effectively.

Darlington EPS include parents / carers in all assessment work, with the majority of parents / carers consulting with the EP for a minimum of one hour. Parents / carers are asked to evaluate their experience of the EPS following each piece of work. A range of response formats are offered to aid accessibility and encourage responsiveness. Parents / carers are overwhelmingly positive in their evaluations of EP input.

In 2022/2023, over 90% indicated that they felt EP input would contribute to their child making progress in education.

School staff also complete annual evaluations regarding the service.

In 2022/23 97% of schools strongly agreed or agreed that EP involvement helps them to access and respond meaningfully to the voice of CYP and their parents / carers.

A series of guidance documents to support professionals across the LA share evidence-based practice and promote a graduated, consistent response to the needs of children, young people and their families. Such resources can be used to support all children in schools as and when required. Recent guidance includes the **Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)** which is widely used and positively evaluated by schools and colleges, examples of which are outlined below.

'I've used the resources recently with a family whose work with Building Stronger Families was not enough to support the child back into school. I invited the family in to work together using the tools. We carried out the card activity, asking the child to place them into the columns on a large sheet of paper. Parents were shocked by the responses, noting that the child felt better at home as what was on offer was more motivating... Parents are way more accepting and the child is more willing to come in. Still struggling to separate from parents but we have strategies in place and are working with parents to devise the plan that follows the activities in the EBSA resources.'

Other guidance documents that have been developed and shared by the EPS include 'Supporting children with literacy difficulties and/ or dyslexia' and 'Supporting schools with loss, bereavement and critical incidents.'

Our **Early Help Team** work alongside the SEND Team and now share the same recording system. The team works across 0 – 25 ensuring that there is a smoother transition into adulthood for young adults and families the team supports, this is to mirror EHC plan 0 – 25 remit.

“X has settled in really well, and our family is also supported through Early Help. X now attends regularly and participates in lessons, which is a huge change from her old school.” Eldon House – Secondary SEMH Unit

The SALT commissioning group (now called **Darlington Talks**) identified that there was a gap in speech and language development in the Early Years. We have worked closely with early years settings and commissioning to embed the Early Talk Boost Programme across settings. It is available for all settings who have 3 and 4 year olds. A sustainable model has been developed through investing in two train the trainers in the local authority. As of May 2024, 100% of schools with a nursery unit have accessed or have the training planned for the summer term. 77% of the early years’ settings have also accessed the training. The settings who have not will be offered training onsite.

Trauma & Adversity - Rockpool Adverse Childhood Experiences Programme (Darlington) and Tees Valley therapeutic Offer - is a combined adult, children, and young people's Adverse Childhood Experiences Recovery Evidenced Based Programme. The programme aims to look at the impact of ACEs on individuals and how this affects them and their children. In April 2023 Darlington LA and Virtual Heads and ICB jointly funded this programme as part of a wider offer for early trauma and trauma informed support through virtual schools. 6 primary schools were identified, and 3 cohorts of support (2 primary schools in each) were planned over 12 months. Due to the success and positive outcomes across all schools and with the significant engagement and uptake of the programme agreements to continue jointly commissioning these services have been obtained. A further 6 primary schools are part of the Phase 2 into 2024/2025.

“I just really wish that this program had been available when everything started with E, it has done so much for her she is a lot calmer, starting to think things through more not as challenging and I am a lot better my anxiety is not as bad I am going out more and doing more things and doing a lot more with E as I am not as wound up all the time and feel more confident about myself and being a parent”

Parent from Darlington School, with E (Year 5).

Dynamic Support Register - There has been significant work undertaken across Tees Valley to establish a Dynamic Support Register (DSR) for children and young people with Autism/ Learning Disabilities. This multi-agency approach allows the local area to identify children and young people with complex needs that may be at risk of needing a high level of intervention such as Tier 4 services. Care, Education and Treatment Reviews (CETRs) have been established which are health lead and engage all partners involved with the child to plan the provision of support and services to meet need and prevent escalation. In addition, the ICB has commissioned key workers to support this process and offers Positive Behaviour training for parent/carers that have been identified

through the DSR process. In addition to the statutory DSR there has been the development of a Pre DSR register, developed for CYP without a diagnosis who present with complex needs that may be at risk of needing a high level of intervention such as Tier 4 services or residential out of area placement due to breakdown of placement. This process also adopts a multi- agency approach to identify needs and supporting at the earliest opportunity.

A Key Working Service has been developed as a response to the NHS England & NHS Improvement Long Term Plan (LTP) commitment that by 2023/24, children and young people with a learning disability, Autism, or both, who have the most complex needs have a designated Keyworker. This has been aligned to Community Pediatric teams and to the risk stratification (pre DSR) processes within the service to support both early intervention for longer term outcomes, and to address any gaps in support for children and their families already in the system, who experience a crisis or are identified as being at risk of a school exclusion. All children and young people highlighted through the DSR have been offered access to Keyworker support in Darlington.

We are currently seeing increased referrals for younger children into Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy and Community Pediatrics because of developmental delay, or perceived developmental delay, a contributing factor of this increase is a lack of socialisation for young children during the Covid pandemic. Work is ongoing with health partners to address these concerns as a system.

Multi-agency **Attendance Solution Panel** that includes School, LA Attendance Officer, Building Stronger Families worker, social worker, CAHMS and SEND has been established. Weekly panel meeting focused on pupils who are severely absent cohort (absence is below 50%).The panel agrees a plan of support for a young person and/or family where attendance is challenging and support plans to be implemented. Impact of these panels has not yet achieved its potential, but it is still early in its establishment.

SENCOs report a better understanding of good practice in SEN Support Plans. Following a SEN Support Plan moderation event 100% of participating schools (21 schools including all secondary schools and maintained nursery schools) said that they found the moderation helpful. 70% of schools said that they would examine their own approach as a result of the session having gained new ideas for improvement. In addition to the work with SENCOs above, all teachers from Reception to Y5 were invited to a moderation session where they brought pupil writing and SEN Support plans. Over 100 colleagues took part in the session. 79% of the evaluation responses said the session was excellent or above average with comments such as:

'Great to speak to colleagues from different schools about challenges and strategies to try.'
'Good to see tools they use and how they assess and move children along'.

We provide schools with an opportunity to undertake a full SEN audit to assist them to improve their whole school approach to SEN. The audit is focused on supporting a school to embed a targeted graduated response centred around timely assessment of need. Case studies show the

impact of the audits in schools where the school has undertaken audits at two different points, outcomes and improvements are clearly captured.

“Especially as a new SENCO they helped sharpen my focus and gave me clear targets and things to work on. I think they are useful for experienced and novice SENCOs as there is always something we need to improve and work on.” SENCO (Primary)

We provide support and challenge to schools and settings with guidance in the identification process for children with additional needs working at a SEN Support level in schools and settings. a quality assurance and monitoring function. One school using the Social Communication Outreach Service has expressed this in the following:

“As a result of the advice we were given by SCOS O now sits at the front of the class and has improved greatly at working independently. She still has the opportunity for TA help / check ins but a lot less than previously and this seems to be going well at the moment. She is also our class’ school councillor which is a big responsibility and she is very excited about this. She is also given jobs to do throughout the day which helps with her sensory breaks.”

Pupil led support is a strategy that is actively promoted and services such as the social communication outreach are working in innovative ways to support a pupil led approach. Regarding a small group of children who were referred for anxiety, and all had an ASD diagnosis:

“The pupils enjoyed the session. By the fourth session they had developed connections within the group and were talking about their days/ likes/ dislikes. A KS3 peer support group developed. They said that they felt more “relaxed” and that it was “fun”. They were able to be themselves without masking. School will continue to implement a ‘Drop In’ session moving forwards and the staff member feels confident doing this. The relationship between the staff member and the pupils also became more relaxed.”

Resource Bases and SEN Units are monitored on a termly basis and the experiences of families and children and young people are considered at each point in the year. One Resource Base for Primary aged children has noted the following from a family of a child who attends their base:

“With the help of trained staff and a highly adapted environment/curriculum, X has made huge strides. He is now successfully accessing some whole class learning with support when needed. X’s family are very happy with the support he has had since coming to our school.”

Education Outcomes

Education outcomes for pupils categorised as SEND support are showing an improvement in some areas. At KS2 SEND support pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing & Maths increased by 2.5% from 20.6% in 2021/22, to 23.1% in 2022/23.

At KS4 SEND Support pupils achieving English & Maths 5+ percentage has increased by 4.7% from 17.3% in 2021/22, to 22.0% in 2022/23. Attainment 8 score has decreased by 0.4 from 34.9 in 2021/22, to 34.5 in 2022/23. Progress 8 score has decreased by 0.01 from -0.69 in 2021/22, to -0.70 in 2022/23.

For the EHCP Cohort at KS2 pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing & Maths increased by 1.6% from 3.2% in 2021/22, to 4.8% in 2022/23.

At KS4 EHP pupils achieving English & Maths 5+ percentage increased by 4.1% from 0.0% in 2021/22, to 4.1% in 2022/23. EHC Plan pupils achieving English & Maths 4+ increased by 10.2% from 0.0% in 2021/22, to 10.2% in 2022/23. Attainment 8 score has increased by 4.7 from 6.9 in 2021/22, to 11.6 in 2022/23. Progress 8 score has increased by 0.10 from -1.69 in 2021/22, to -1.59 in 2022/23.

Attendance for EHCP pupils is a strength for the Local Area. EHCP overall absence decreased by 0.8% from 10.4% in 2021/22, to 9.5% in 2022/23. Persistent absence decreased by 4.7% from 33.6% in 2021/22, to 28.5% in 2022/23. Severe persistent absence decreased from 3.5% in 2021/22, to 3.3% in 2022/23.

For the SEND support cohort overall absence remained unchanged at 9.8% in 2022/23. Persistent absence decreased by 2.3% from 34.1% in 2021/22, to 31.7% in 2022/23. Severe persistent absence increased by 0.5% from 2.7% in 2021/22, to 3.1% in 2022/23.

Suspension and exclusion rates remain a significant challenge for Darlington. There is evidence of some improvement for the SEND cohort. The permanent exclusion rate for SEND support pupils decreased by 0.13 from 0.81 in 2021/22, to 0.68 in 2022/23. For EHCP pupils the permanent exclusion rate decreased by 0.17 from 0.31 in 2021/22, to 0.14 in 2022/23.

Preparing for Adulthood

People Group Commitment, with DLT agreement and leadership, to improve Darlington offer for transition into adulthood including a Review of 19+ adult service inhouse and commissioned offer currently underway. Review based on progression models. This forms part of Adult Service Transformation Plan



Transition working group in place with membership from SEND Team, Beaumont Hill, Rise Carr, Darlington College, DCO, Children's service and adult service. The purpose of the group is for the attending professionals from a range of key services to collaborate, plan, advise and signpost in readiness for key transitions for young people with SEND and an EHCP, thus ensuring smooth and successful transitions into post 16 destinations, whether it be further education, higher education, day services packages or employment. The success of this work will be measured by the number of CYP's successfully transitioning and remaining in their destination placements following transition.

The Ready Steady Go transitions model being used to support CYP moving from Paediatric services to adult services to promote independence and achieve good health outcomes although impact of this to be determined. There is specific work currently underway to improve the transitions from CYP therapy services into adult learning disability (TEWV) services. There is a particular focus on the age that the transition will start.

Darlington Transition Programme is a comprehensive programme from early years to post-16 for all pupils and promoting enhanced support for children with SEN at all levels. Pupil voice has been used to inform the development of this comprehensive programme.

NEET (16-17 year olds)

The latest published national data (16-17 years olds at the end of 2022 (average of December, January and February) showed that 3.8% of young people in Darlington were NEET or Not Known. This was better than the North-East and National averages of 5.2%. This can be further broken down as follows:

	Darlington	North East	England
No SEND	3.6%	4.5%	4.6%
SEND EHCP	6.3%	12.8%	10.1%
SEN Support	4.5%	9.8%	9.3%

Some local initiatives include: -

Project Search Supported internship initiative with Amazon UK and Darlington College. An initial intake of supported interns is now in planning for September 2024

NHS Choices College has been active in Darlington and offer a Supported Internship programme for up to 12 Young people each year.

Adults Skills Centre Following a successful bid for Town Fund grant Darlington Borough Council has purchased the historic Northern Echo building which will be the home to a new dedicated Adults Skills Centre. Darlington College and the council’s Learning and Skills Service will be co-located on site. It is planned that the centre offer a range of provision including Core skills -such as digital skills, English and maths and employability provision and support. A procurement exercise has been completed and agreed by cabinet in January 2024 to identify an experienced and imaginative development partner to design, redevelop, repurpose, and once complete to operate, manage, and maintain the entire building. The preferred tenderer has submitted a bid which includes a full refurbishment of the building in addition to a full fit out of the Adult Skills Hub on the ground floor. It is anticipated that the overall redevelopment will take circa 18 months

YEI - The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is aimed at supporting young people aged 16-29 into employment education and training. It offers personalised support to remove barriers to employment and help get young people work ready. Since its start in 2016 it has successfully move

97% of participants into education, employment or training, and of those 63% of those young people have been in that positive destination after six months.

Study Programme - Learning & Skills offer a pre-employment study programme for those young people who are unsure of their career aspirations. The programme is designed to improve learner's preparation for adulthood, enhance their skills and improve confidence in social, academic and working lives ready for work or further educational opportunities. At the end of the programme Learners will have gained an academic qualification relevant to their level of study in their chosen vocational area, maths and English, gained work experience in an area of their choice and developed social skills as part of their Study Programme.

BELPS - The Learning & Skills Employment Academy offers bespoke employer led programmes (BELPs) that are intensive one-week upskilling courses for job seekers, delivered by Learning & Skills Darlington, in partnership with employers across the borough. They act as a fast track route into employment.

Each separate course broadly follow the same schedule.

One week course spread over four or five days

Relevant skills studied for the role (i.e. warehousing skills needed for Aldi)

All courses include interview skills and a workshop with the employer

All courses permit a site visit/tour of the employers facilities

Finally, all courses grant a guaranteed, fast track interview upon completion of the course

Youth Employment UK has worked in Darlington over the past few years bringing together Employers schools and colleges. Information can be found on the following link

<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/careers-advice-help/youth-friendly-places-in-the-uk/darlington/>

Strengths and Developments

Strengths	Areas for Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing well at providing EHC Plans within 20-week period • All annual reviews of EHC within statutory timescales • Very high parental satisfaction rates for new EHC plan assessments • Neuro pathway and introduction of Trauma routes • EBSA guidance in place across all schools in Darlington • A well-established which is both strong and robust Parent Carers forum • A range of developments locally for those 19+ • Development of a transitions group working with those with most complex needs • Well attended multi-agency provision panel • Training and development programme for social care colleagues around statutory advice. • Clear and well developed graduated response and ranges. • Deep dive conducted in Dec 23, indicated that PFA was lacking in the majority of statutory advice, indicating a clear training need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key stage 4 outcomes need to improve • Improve the ways to hear the voice of children and young people strategically • Improved Attendance, including suspension and exclusion including development of a multi-agency response and an accessible version of EBSA Guidance – for families and CYP • Clearer access and better advice from Social Care and Health professionals • Local Offer to be improved • Better more clearly understood pathway to adulthood and offers for those 19+ • Improved offer across Darlington local community offering activities outside school and college • Development of an under 5's (Pre-school) Pathway for Neurodiversity • Rockpool Adverse Childhood Experiences Programme Phase 2 2024-25 • Development of outcome based commissioning models

Alternative Provision

Darlington has effective measures in place to monitor the quality of school commissioned alternative provision.

Darlington's **Framework Agreement for Alternative Education Provision** has to date been primarily part of the delivery of education to Key Stage 4 young people. From September 2024 the Alternative Education Provision Framework (the Framework) also includes providers meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

The Framework aims to improve outcomes by

- Clear and consistent terms and conditions for all providers, in line with statutory requirements, guidance on alternative provision and local agreed practice.
- Improved arrangements for safeguarding the welfare of young people.
- Clarity on the responsibilities of all parties (schools, Local Authority, and providers)
- Improved quality assurance and monitoring arrangements.
- Clear and consistent costs against outcomes, supporting the duty to deliver value for money.
- Improved engagement with the market of alternative education providers, supporting innovation, sustainability of providers and improved provision to meet needs.
- Improved operational and strategic partnerships with and between providers to improve outcomes for young people.

The council works with academy trusts to undertake regular health & safety checks, safeguarding checks and quality assurance monitoring of providers.

Oversight of the key performance indicators is through Darlington's Education Strategy Group (ESG) which provides overall strategic direction to educational partnership activity across Darlington. The ESG works with the Primary Headteachers Forum, the 11-19 Partnership, Vulnerable Pupil Panel (VPP) and other partnership groups. It provides overall strategic direction for identified partnership work programmes and funded projects. The VPP is a partnership of Darlington settings that examines service delivery and options for provisions and promotes multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working where appropriate.

Schools which have any pupil off site complete an Alternative Education and reduced timetable return reportable to the VPP, which allows the local authority to identify placements and arrange quality assurance monitoring visits.

Settings provide information as a minimum on the following:

- Pupils attending AP or receiving AP outreach services
- Pupils who have stopped receiving AP in the previous 6 months

- Pupils who are on the roll of an AP but are not attending It can also include where pupils are in unregistered provision, out-of-area and in dual-registered placements and on part time timetables.

The report allows schools to report destination following AP placement, progress regardless of attainment, and attitude to learning.

Overall impact is measured in a variety of ways, including the use of the quality assurance monitoring visits which consist of learning walk reports. Impact can also be ascertained by using pupil voice and annual report summaries from providers.

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/alternative-provision/darlington-alternative-education-framework/>

Future plans include undertaking focus groups and arranging parental feedback.

Local area oversight of the quality assurance protocol

The Darlington Education Strategy Group (ESG) established a working group in 2023 to review and report to the ESG on the use and impact of school commissioned AP in Darlington, refresh the 11-19 AP Framework quality assurance protocol and make recommendations to strengthen local area strategic planning and oversight of AP as required. The working group has representation from the most commissioned APs, primary, secondary and Post 16 representation and local authority leaders which supports their strategy for AP commissioning and oversight (Strategic Commissioning Manager – SEND). The group meet half termly and have established a termly AP network inviting all schools and APs working in Darlington to training and sharing of best practice.

In Spring term 2024 quality monitoring visits were undertaken on 11 of the providers on the framework (not all providers are currently being commissioned). The visits focus on assessment of need; quality of education; behaviour and attendance; safeguarding and transition.

A sample of student voice is gathered as part of the monitoring visit. Student voice questionnaires are returned alongside a visit report. The students are asked questions relating to their learning experience, relationships with teacher(s) and student(s), support for transition and their social, emotional, mental and physical health. Pupils are asked to comment specifically on safeguarding and transition.

Average scores (out of 4.0) are provided for each provider. Of 5 providers, scores ranged between 3.3 and 4.0.

Rise Carr College is the local authority maintained alternative provision provider. The college provides alternative education for pupils aged 11-16. The council is working with Rise Carr College to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the local area to meet need in a context of rising suspension rates.

Strengths and Developments

Strengths	Areas for Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A baseline for tracking AP data in place • The AP framework is a straightforward, effective QA system which applies to all providers across Darlington. • Quality assurance protocol is a positive way to support schools in their commissioning responsibilities. • The quality visit considers what the school has commissioned, and report on the impact. • Good engagement with providers • Schools and providers have received training on the framework, protocols, checklists and forms used in the monitoring QA process. • A peer network has been set up to share good practice, identification of key issues in commissioning. • Development of an audit tool and best practice AP policy for schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data may include tracking of attendance, suspensions, exclusion, outcomes including destination and impact. • A recent survey of secondary settings identified that there is insufficient focus on core curriculum in AP. • The costs of provision and other costs such as transport are identified barriers to schools. • Practical 'hands on' vocational qualifications that help students to build foundations and continue their education are sought. • Providers and schools agreed to provide AP parental/carer views. • Development of case studies will give a better picture of reasons of why AP is used and outcomes. • Training to include how to write, record and report effective outcomes. • Transition working group to look at a common standard for Year 6 into Year 7 transition and how the effectiveness can be measured. • Day 6 provision for primary exclusions • 3 Tier approach to AP is underdeveloped

Parent Carers Forum

Darlington Parent Carer Forum Key Position Statement.

Strategic work

Darlington PCF work with the local authority, education settings, health and other providers to ensure the services that they plan and deliver meet the needs of children and families living in our area. Steering group members represent parents' experiences to local decision makers at strategic boards and during the planning and developing of services and make recommendations for service improvements. Our strategic priorities are influenced by the feedback we receive from families.

Peer support in schools.

Darlington PCF delivers monthly peer support sessions in 9 primary schools, 4 secondary schools and 2 nurseries. We also offer fortnightly virtual peer support, regular male carers support and community-based peer support at Pear Tree Café in Hurworth. The aim of this offer is to prioritise listening, provide a safe space to share experiences, plan and provide training opportunities based on identified needs, share information, facilitate professional representation, support solution focussed communication between schools, parents and professionals, and offer practical advice, support and signposting.

Dolphin Centre community drop-in.

These monthly sessions are open to all parent carers and are attended by peer supporters. These are longer sessions and have an additional strategic focus. These sessions now include regular professional attendance with the aim of sharing information about what services provide and how families can access them.

Legal training for parent carers.

Darlington PCF have offered a suite of annual SEND legal training, this is highly valued by families. Funding dependent, we intend to continue with this and hope to be able to expand this offer to include professionals.

Social media engagement.

Darlington PCF provide a Facebook page for general information and event advertising. In addition to this we also operate a closed Facebook group, this provides a safe space for parent carers to

share experiences, seek advice and support and provide feedback. Parents are able to post to the page anonymously, all posts must be approved, and comments are checked regularly, this ensures compliance with safeguarding processes and procedures.

Events

Darlington PCF strive to reduce isolation and increase family well-being, to support us in doing this we offer a range of inclusive family events. The delivery of these is dependent on funding and volunteer availability, however, steering group members regularly fundraise, and the entirety of this fundraising is used for these events. Recently, to mark Carers Week, Darlington PCF have been able to host a number of events with a focus on parent carer wellbeing. We hope to be able to host more of these events in the future.

Celebrations

In Darlington we continue to prioritise expanding the reach of the PCF. To aid us in doing this we have recruited a new, and vibrant steering group, this includes 2 new co-chairs. Additionally, we have also welcomed a new strategic coordinator.

We continue to use the learning from the Mental Health Support Team roll out to support our peer support offer in over half of Darlington's schools. This plays a vital role in informing our strategic work and has also contributed to our annual SEND and EBSA surveys, which are being used to drive forward local work with strategic partners.

Darlington PCF are committed to working in coproduction with local service leaders to ensure that the services that they plan and deliver continue to meet the evolving and diverse needs of the families living within Darlington.

Steering group members continue to prioritise engagement with families and are excited to plan and deliver future events for children, young people and parent carers with the aim of improving family wellbeing, and providing opportunities for all families to have their voices heard.

We are looking forward to an exciting year ahead and feel that Darlington PCF is in a strong position to embrace any challenges this may bring.

Development Opportunities

- Evaluation of our peer support offer confirms the increasing need for support of this nature. More and more parent carers are dependent on the PCF for increasingly complex advice and support. Whilst we always strive to increase our reach and accessibility without an increase in capacity, our ability to do so is compromised. The peer support offer is currently run voluntarily which presents a significant risk.
- There are an increasing number of children out of education or being home educated. Additionally, we are conscious of other hard to reach families and we are keen to explore opportunities to engage with them in a way that they find accessible.
- Access to tailored training for peer supporters and steering group members.
- An open SEND legal training offer for both parents and professional to ensure transparency around messaging.

A significant concern of ours is when we are presented with a plan or development at information stage. We are committed to working in true coproduction, where all parties are present from the beginning. We would like to see the development of a coproduction charter and stamp to increase confidence and encourage partnership working.



Top 10 Actions for 2024 - 25

1. New SEND Strategy
2. New Local Offer
3. School Inclusion Strategy
4. EBSA and Attendance
5. Pathway to Adulthood
6. New Resource Base offer
7. SEND local area Data Dashboard
8. Open Portals to EHC plan recording system
9. More community opportunities beyond school
10. The Voice of Children and Young People

Conclusion

The Local Area continues to work effectively to ensure that you people with SEND have their needs identified and met and achieve better outcomes. Ther is evidence across a number of indicators commitment to continuous improvement is having a positive impact.

- Most young people supported by EHCP are educated and having their needs met within Darlington. The high percentage of pupils educated in a mainstream school demonstrated the Local area's commitment to inclusion
- The timeliness of ECHP assessment ensures that children and young people's needs are assessed at any early point
- Both state maintained special schools in Darlington are rated "Good" by Ofsted. Leaders work closely with the local area partnership and have high aspirations for outcomes for learners
- All resourced base provision in Darlington is hosted by school which are judged "Good" or above by Ofsted.
- Attendance levels at school for ECHP cohort are consistently higher than regional and national average
- Parent Carer Forum survey feedback indicates parent/carer feel well supported by children's social care services with respondents rating the support they receive at 4.23 out of 5
- There are improving outcomes in recent years at KS4 for both the Send Support and EHCP cohorts

Significant challenges remain in the local area. Increasing levels of demand impact partners ability to improve outcomes in some areas.

- Suspension and exclusion rates in Darlington have remained high
- There has been a significant increase in demand for services since the Covid pandemic and this has been particularly in the early years
- Further work is required to develop a fully tiered approach to alternative provision
- The local area needs to continue to imbed a fully understood ordinarily available offer in mainstream setting to continue to improve parental confidence in mainstream school's ability to consistently support pupils with additional needs

Appendices

Documents attached

1. SEND performance Scorecard May 2024
2. Darlington WSOA Review - Feb 24