

EMBARGOED UNTIL FRIDAY JULY 26th 2024

Ministers urged to put early identification and support of children with SEND at the heart of a new strategy to boost school attendance and end families' 'traumatic' battle for support

- Child of the North/Centre for Young Lives report sets out new proposals to tackle a SEN(D) support crisis and postcode lottery which is holding back the life chances of hundreds of thousands of children in England.
- Evidence-based plan proposes rollout of new early identification tools, making Continued Professional Development courses on SEN(D) mandatory for educational professionals, and connecting health, education and other services together to improve identification and cut assessment waiting lists.
- Report shows how only 49% of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans were produced within the 20-week statutory limit, with an average wait of almost four years for an ADHD assessment for young people aged 19-25 years in one local authority in the North.
- Report reveals impact on families of stress of trying to receive an EHC plan, with some begging councils for help and others talking about the impact on their finances and mental health.

A new report published today (Friday July 26th) by Child of the North and Anne Longfield's Centre for Young Lives think tank, "An evidence-based plan for addressing the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) assessment and support crisis", presents new evidence and analysis that reveals the scale of the crisis facing many children and young people with SEN(D), with some families waiting years for assessments. The report puts forward a new evidence-based plan to support the new Government in its mission to widen opportunity, by tackling the poor identification of SEN(D), the postcode lottery of EHC plans, and reducing the huge numbers of children not receiving the support they need to reach their full potential.

It is the sixth in a series of Child of the North/Centre for Young Lives reports published in 2024 focusing on how the new Government can put the life chances of young people at the heart of policy making and delivery.

Today's report shows how the current system is failing many vulnerable children and young people with SEN(D). Over 1.5 million pupils in England have SEN(D), with 40% of children identified as having SEN(D) at some point between 5 and 16 years of age. Yet the current system cannot cope and has been unable to keep pace with advances made in identifying and recognising when children have additional needs and require

extra support. 99% of school leaders have said that the funding they receive for pupils with SEN(D) is insufficient.

As the report makes clear, thousands of children and parents are crying out for a faster and kinder process and better early intervention support. The report includes stark reminders of the impact on families of the stress of trying to receive an EHC plan, with parents describing a traumatic process that leaves them feeling helpless, 'begging for solutions', and that can have a huge impact on their mental health and finances.

The report reveals how:

- In 2022, only 49% of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans were produced within the 20-week statutory limit. The average wait for an ADHD assessment for young people aged 19-25 years is almost four years in one local authority in Yorkshire and the Humber.
- In 2022 the percentage of EHC plans produced within 20 weeks in the North East of England ranged from 98% to only 13%. Similar disparities are present in other regions, such as the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber. There is a clear postcode lottery in the timeliness in which EHC plans are produced.
- There is large variability in the extent to which local authorities run the Healthy Child Programme, which can facilitate identification of SEN(D) before school entry. In one local authority, one in five children do not receive their two-year developmental check, and in another this is as high as one in three.
- By the end of secondary school, the achievement gap between pupils with no identified SEN(D) and pupils with an EHC plan is almost 3.5 years. The gap between pupils with no identified SEN(D) and pupils with SEN support (but no EHC plan) is nearly 2 years.
- Just 30% of young people with SEN(D) achieved a Grade 4 or higher in English and Maths in 2022/23, compared to 72% without SEN(D). In 2021, 57% of children with SEND aged 6-16 years were reported to have a probable mental health disorder, compared with 13% of those without SEND.
- 32% of children with SEN(D) are persistently absent from school and children with SEN(D) are three times as likely to be suspended from school, nearly twice as likely to be persistently absent from school, and three times as likely to be 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEET) at 16-17 years of age.
- The increasing demand for children and young people seeking assessment and support is placing significant pressure on the system. In 2021, councils faced a SEN(D) funding gap of £600 million.
- Children with SEN(D) were some of the hardest hit by COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns, and the transition to home learning was particularly challenging for children with SEN(D).

The report makes a series of recommendations which offer the potential to cut the long-term costs of not acting early enough, including:

Use holistic measures of child development to identify pupils with increased likelihood of having SEN(D). New evidence shows that assessments of academic and non-academic abilities can identify those children at increased likelihood of needing SEN(D) support. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), which assesses academic and non-academic abilities at 4-to-5 years of age, can identify children who are more likely to require SEN(D) support in the future. While teachers and school leaders already have this data at their fingertips, the EYFSP is only conducted once in the early years and so may fail to identify children whose difficulties emerge later in childhood. Tools that assess non-academic skills beyond the early years should be developed and rolled out nationally to facilitate earlier identification and support of SEN(D). The Electronic Development and Support Tool (EDST) is an innovative example of an assessment that has been developed to suit this purpose.

Improve and extend training on SEN(D) for professionals and families. Most educational professionals will interact with and support children with SEN(D) every day but training on SEN(D) is limited. Many educational professionals want to receive more training, and others do not feel sufficiently confident to support children with SEN(D). Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses on SEN(D) should be mandatory for educational professionals. Moreover, a “one stop shop” online resource should be developed to provide professionals and families with information and support on SEN(D). These resources need to be co-produced with individuals with lived experiences.

Connect systems more effectively to facilitate earlier identification of SEN(D) and the provision of more appropriate support. Public services, such as education, health, and social care, often work in silos. As a result, information like health conditions or birth factors that may facilitate earlier identification of SEN(D) is rarely communicated directly with schools. Better connected public services would enable free sharing of information, speeding up identification of SEN(D) and reducing structural inequalities. The extent to which public services work together to produce support plans for children and young people with SEN(D) differs considerably by local authority. Connected services would facilitate a more holistic assessment and understanding of children’s needs, drawing on expertise from across education, health, and social care, enabling more tailored and appropriate SEN(D) provision.

The report highlights innovative approaches illustrating the incredible work that schools, universities, teachers, researchers, and others are undertaking to ensure the best possible SEN(D) provision, including:

Hilltop and Forest View Schools in South Yorkshire provide specialised education and support for children with additional needs from diverse backgrounds which integrates academic, therapeutic, and life skills education. Their curriculum is tailored to achieve EHC plan outcomes, alongside personal, social, and health education (PSHE) objectives, and preparation for adulthood initiatives. The bespoke curriculum acknowledges the diverse learning needs of students, and a re-stabilisation curriculum is offered for those displaying behaviours of concern or trauma. The schools provide a safe and nurturing environment for all pupils and staff undergo regular training. The schools have a dedicated family support team made up of highly skilled practitioners who assist in transition planning, health management, communication strategies, and behaviour management. This collaborative approach extends beyond the school gates, and they actively engage with external services and families to provide holistic support.

Tees Valley Education (TVEd) is a multi-academy trust serving learners from nursery through to secondary, in a range of mainstream, specialist units, and full specialist school provisions. At TVEd, the belief that “every teacher is a teacher of special educational needs” is fully endorsed and founded upon an ethos of highly inclusive practice. A strong culture of support and challenge exists in the Trust and a close working network for SENCos ensures no single person or academy is working in a silo.

The Electronic Development and Support Tool (EDST) is an online standardised tool designed to empower teachers in identifying and supporting SEN(D). Teachers are instructed to indicate whether a child is meeting the expected skill level in communication and interaction, cognition and learning, sensory and physical, and social, emotional and mental health. For skills which a child is not at the expected level, the EDST produces more detailed questions, and encourages schools to complete the final stage of the EDST alongside families. The EDST then generates a report summarising a child’s support needs. The EDST is being trialled in 42 schools within Bradford for Year 1 pupils. The EDST recommends ways in which schools and families can support these students whilst they wait for specialist support. It has the potential to be adapted for each key stage to support children through school transition and secondary education.

FUNMOVES is a freely available universal screening tool that empowers schools with the knowledge and skills necessary to measure their pupils’ gross motor ability. It focuses on six key playground movement skills – running, jumping, hopping, throwing, kicking, and balancing. The tool was co-produced with schools in Bradford and has incorporated the views of teachers nationally to ensure it is feasible for use in increasingly pressured school environments. FUNMOVES enables schools to identify children struggling to develop these foundational motor skills and expedite access to healthcare services for a formal assessment of Developmental Coordination Disorder

when universal intervention is not effective. National roll out of FUNMOVES would enable children with common difficulties to be identified quickly and easily.

Anne Longfield, Executive Chair of the Centre for Young Lives, said:

“The SEND system is broken. Many families talk about the traumatic impact it has on their lives as they struggle to find support for their children. They are often at their wits’ end, deeply frustrated at the waiting lists and the layers of bureaucracy and hoops they need to jump through, fearful that their children’s opportunities to do well at school and beyond are being held back by an inadequate, underfunded, and overstretched system.

“Tackling the delays, the poor early identification, and the postcode lottery they have inherited should be a priority for new Ministers. This report puts forward a new evidence-based plan to identify SEND earlier and cut assessment times.

“I welcome the new Secretary of State’s decision to give responsibility for improving SEND provision to the Schools Minister, and I hope this is the beginning of a fresh start for reforming a broken system.

“We need to level the playing field of support nationally, prioritising those areas of the country which are failing to meet the 20-week goal, and being much more creative about how to achieve it.

“Ensuring that children with SEND have the support they need will also be essential to tackling the school attendance crisis, supporting all children to flourish and succeed in school, and to meeting the new Government’s ambitions to widen opportunity.”

Professor Mark Mon Williams, Child of the North series editor, said:

“Our collective failure to support SEND is a millstone around the neck of the UK. The new government will improve the lives of millions of children and grow the economy by ‘following the evidence’. The time has come to support every child to thrive in school, and ensure the benefits of a healthy and well educated population are reaped by the UK.”

Dr Amy Atkinson, Lancaster University, said:

“The current SEND system is failing children and young people. Urgent action is needed to ensure that children, young people, and their families receive the support they need and are entitled to”.

Professor Uta Papan, Lancaster University, said:

“The SEND system is in crisis. There's a postcode lottery, children and families experience very long waiting times and schools, despite best intentions, more often than not, don't have the resources to help all children in the way they'd like to. But there's a lot we can do. Our report, drawing on evidence based practices and new research illustrates a number of promising approaches and solutions ready to be adopted widely and promising to make a real difference to children and young people with SEND.”

ENDS

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Notes to editors:

1. The report can be accessed here:

https://www.n8research.org.uk/media/CotN_SEND-AP_Report_6.pdf

2. Today's report has been produced by eight research intensive universities in the North of England – the N8 Research Partnership – in collaboration with a wider academic community (the N8+) as part of the Child of the North initiative, and the new Centre for Young Lives think tank, founded in January 2024 by former Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield. It is the sixth in a series of Child of the North/Centre for Young Lives reports to be published during 2024 looking at how to encourage the Government to set out a vision for children and show how putting the interests and life chances of young people at the heart of policy making and delivery is crucial to Britain's future success. They shine a light on some of the biggest challenges facing the Government while also providing rigorous research and pragmatic, evidence-based recommendations which acknowledge the ongoing financial limitations on government spending. Seven principles will be a theme throughout the twelve reports: the Government must “put children first”; inequality must be addressed; place-based approaches must be adopted; public services must work together more effectively; education must be at the heart of public service delivery; universities must become the ‘research and development’ departments for local public services; and information must be shared across public service providers and used effectively.

3. Child of the North is a partnership between the N8 Research Partnership and the Northern Health Science Alliance / Health Equity North and includes partners from across the North of England. Its vision is to develop a platform for collaboration, high-quality research, and policy engagement to support fairer futures for children living in the North of England. The N8 Research Partnership is a strategic collaboration between

the universities of Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and York, and aims to maximise the impact of this research base to enable business innovation and societal transformation. The N8 universities receive around 80% of competitively awarded research funding in the North of England, and employ more than 18,000 academic staff, forming the largest research-pooling partnership in the UK. N8 creates programmes involving a critical mass of world class academics which form networks of innovation excellence with partners in other sectors, to drive investment and economic growth.

4. Health Equity North is a virtual institute focused on place-based solutions to public health problems and health inequalities across the North of England. Health Equity North brings together world-leading academic expertise from the Northern Health Science Alliance membership of leading universities, hospitals, and academic health science networks, with the aim of fighting health inequalities through research excellence and collaboration.