

Everyone's included: co-producing the Leeds SEND and inclusion strategy, 2021 - 2026

Making Leeds a child-friendly city for children and young people age 0 to 25 with special educational needs, disabilities, and additional needs

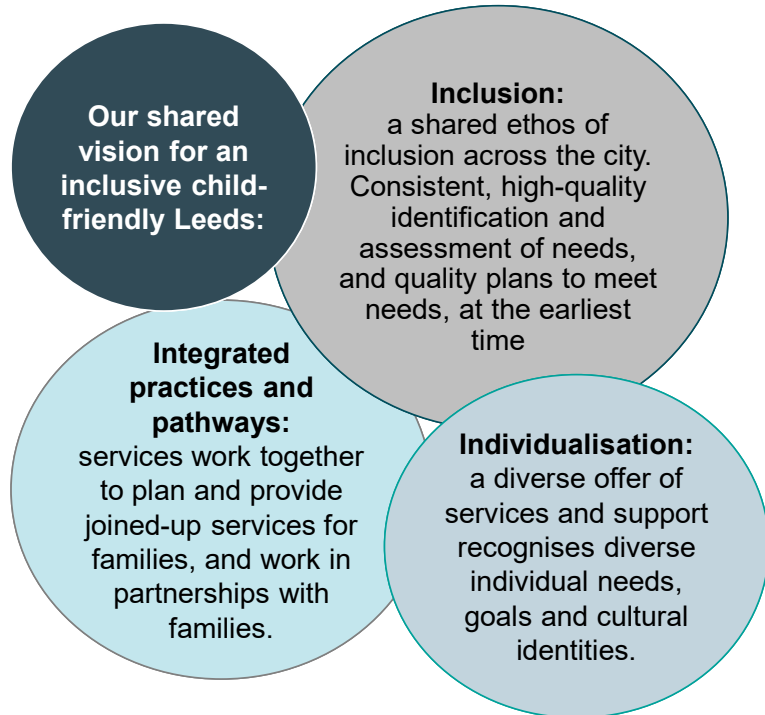
The story so far: information for our partners in Leeds at December 2021



Summary: this report in 2 pages:

Leeds City Council and our partners in local health services are jointly leading a new, revised SEND and Inclusion strategy for children and young people aged 0-25 in Leeds and their families.

In summer and autumn 2021, we brought partners across the city together, including young people with SEND, their families, and partners in education, health, care, youth and voluntary services. Around 550 people took part. Together we talked about what it is like to be a child or young person with SEND in Leeds, and how we can make it better. This helped us to set out a shared vision we all want to work towards, and 6 priorities where change is most needed to achieve that vision:



Our shared priorities for change: together partners will:

1. Promote and support early identification and quality, holistic assessment of needs, and quality holistic planning, at the earliest stage
2. Continue to build a skilled, confident, resilient workforce able to meet educational, social, and emotional needs of all children and young people
3. Support high quality plans for all children and young people, recognising individual needs, circumstances and cultural identities
4. Focus on those in vulnerable circumstances and reduce inequalities
5. Develop a continuum (range) of quality provision to meet diverse needs and enhance choice, access and outcomes.
6. Integrate (join up) practices, working together across services and with families to identify, assess and meet needs and join up pathways to services.

6 workstreams in phase 1 to support our vision and priorities (in brief):

Partners will work together to co-produce the new Leeds SEND and Inclusion Practice Framework. The Framework will aim to combine the ethos and principles of a child-friendly, inclusive city and the legal framework of the SEND Code of Practice, with practical tools, learning and resources, all brought together in one shared approach for practitioners across the city. Co-producing the Framework with practitioners in schools, settings and services will embed a shared ethos and vision, celebrate, share and build on good practice in Leeds, and build relationships. It will support consistent, high-quality inclusive practice in identifying, assessing and meeting needs all our Leeds learning places.

We will work to embed high-quality practice in planning to meet needs across the whole local system of SEND support. Our new SEND and Inclusion Practice Framework will promote consistent, high-quality holistic assessments and quality plans for all learners, at the earliest time. It will also help practitioners to have the right conversations, with the right people, at the right time, if further specialist assessments and plans are needed. We will work with families to produce clear information about the responsibilities of schools and services in assessments and planning, and how families have a voice and influence in the process.

We will work to develop and embed a whole-city vision and approach to inclusion of those in vulnerable circumstances, including children looked after by the local authority, children in need, children with social, emotional, and mental health needs, and children who have experienced trauma. We will pilot new multi-agency approaches to identify learners who have unmet needs, including those with more than one exclusion from school, and joined-up approaches to assess and meet needs at the earliest time. We will develop a new city-wide approach to embed trauma-informed practice in Leeds and reduce the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (such as domestic violence, substance misuse, and mental health issues in the family).

We will develop our local offer of services, focusing on: embedding inclusion as fundamental in all high-level planning of new learning places in the city; more personalised learning options to meet diverse needs; building more specialist education provision to meet local needs; getting ready for adult life; access and inclusion in play and leisure; and new participation opportunities.

We will work to join-up pathways to services which involve multiple services, including the pathway to assessment and diagnosis of autism and social communication difficulties. We will focus on earlier access to support and better experiences for families.

Find out more: read on for more details, find out more about SEND services at www.leedslocaloffer.org.uk or email us at LLO@leeds.gov.uk

What is this about?

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Leeds City Council and our partners in local health services are jointly leading a new, revised SEND and Inclusion strategy for children and young people aged 0-25 in Leeds and their families.

The strategy will set out how partners in education, health, care and youth services Leeds will work together to improve the lives of our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is not about everything we already do in services, every day. It is about a shared vision for an inclusive child-friendly Leeds, and the changes we need to make together, to achieve that vision.

We are 'co-producing' this strategy with people affected by it, including children and young people with SEND, their families, education, health, care, and youth services and voluntary and community groups. These partners are all part of the Leeds SEND Partnership Board, which has oversight of this strategy. The Board asked the Learning Inclusion Service to coordinate co-production of this strategy and make sure all partners have a voice in it.

In summer 2021, we brought partners across the city together to talk about the new strategy. Around 550 people took part. Together we talked about our shared vision for an inclusive child-friendly Leeds, and the changes we need to make to achieve that vision. This update tells you more about these conversations, and how they are shaping our strategy.

NB: our final strategy will be produced by graphic designers, please excuse our appearance for now! A plain text version of this report is also available.

To find out more, or get involved, please get in touch using the contacts on the last page. Thank you for reading!

Val Waite, Head of Learning Inclusion Service, Leeds City Council Children and Families Services

Why do we need a SEND and inclusion strategy for Leeds?

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In Leeds we are aiming high: we want to be a child-friendly city and the best city in the UK to grow up in. To be a child-friendly Leeds, we need to be an inclusive child-friendly city where **all** our children and young people have equal opportunities to:

- Be safe and as healthy as possible
- Reach their full potential in learning and achieve their development goals
- Have fun, and have access to a range of enriching activities to get ready for adult life
- Have a voice and be able to influence change in their own lives, and in their communities and city.

We have strengths to build on as we work to be an inclusive, child-friendly Leeds. Many children and young people with SEND and their families tell us about good experiences of schools and services in Leeds: 'My teachers treat me with respect and understanding.' 'The SENCo has supported me as a parent so much, not just my child'. 'The team have been a lifeline during the pandemic!'

We also have some innovative practice (ways of working) in Leeds that has good outcomes. Our unique partnerships with schools have maintained very low levels of permanent exclusion from school in Leeds for several years. Strong partnerships across Leeds health agencies and the Council have recently helped us to make big changes to offer for those with social, emotional and mental health needs, including investment of £45 million in brand new, purpose-built education provision. We have increased our offer of specialist education provision by hundreds of school places in recent years. We have introduced new systems bringing partners together to support some of our most vulnerable learners, which are working well to keep children in learning and make sure their needs are met.

However in other ways, we are not yet where we want to be. We know we have work to do to get there, especially in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic. (continued)

Why do we need a SEND and inclusion strategy for Leeds? (continued):

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While many young people with SEND and their families tell us about positive experiences of using services in Leeds, others do not. Some talk about mixed experiences and inconsistency across the city's schools and services. They sometimes feel frustrated by a lack of quality information about support their child should be able to access. Some feel that their child's needs could have been met earlier. Some talk about gaps in services. Young people tell us they need more support to get ready for adult life and employment, and greater access to fun activities and social opportunities.

We also don't always achieve the outcomes for children and young people that we would like to. Our learning outcomes for those with SEND don't appear to compare well with those in other areas, and we don't know exactly why this is: there are unique systems in Leeds that make it difficult to compare us with other areas. While we are often considered a wealthy city, many of our children and families live with less advantages and may be vulnerable to inequalities. We need to make sure we really understand the context for our children and families and be confident that we can support their best outcomes.

We face unprecedented challenges in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had the most impact on our most vulnerable children and families. It has also had a big impact on funding and resources in services. The first phase of our new strategy will focus on the work that responds most to the pandemic and reducing its impact.

The context of this strategy is challenging, and we may not achieve everything we would like as quickly as we would like. But partners in Leeds agree that the way forward lies in the strong partnerships we have in the city and in working together, across services, and in positive partnerships with families. We must not let go of our high aspirations for our children and young people and for an inclusive, child-friendly Leeds.

What do our partners tell us about their priorities for the new strategy?

In summer 2021 around 550 Leeds partners, including around 150 parents and carers and 30 young people with SEND, took part in conversations about the new strategy. They commonly shared these priorities for change in Leeds:

- Consistency in our schools, education settings, and services in the city was the priority partners raised most often. Partners talked about inconsistency in ethos, attitudes, policies, and practice (ways of working) in our city's schools and services. 'We had very mixed experiences and it can feel like a postcode lottery.'
- Identifying and meeting needs earlier was also raised often. Many families wanted their voices to be heard more: 'we know our child better than anyone, especially if they are good at hiding their needs in school. We need people to listen when we have concerns.' Partners were also concerned that sometimes children may be excluded from school, or have lower attendance levels, because their needs have not been identified and met. They lose vital time in learning.
- Many families stressed the need for quality, clear plans that set out a child's needs, the outcomes (goals) for them to work towards, and the support they will access, with regular reviews of progress. They wanted to be involved in assessment of needs and planning. Families who had been involved in this way, all found it helpful: 'The key-worker and I worked as a team to support my child'. Quite a lot of families did not have accurate or complete information about different types of assessment and plans that children and young people may be entitled to.
- More joined-up practices (ways of working) and pathways to services were also a priority. Sometimes families managing multiple plans or pathways to services felt they could be more joined-up. This would make their experiences easier and help children access support earlier. The pathway to autism assessment and diagnosis, and transitions from primary to secondary school and from children's to adults' services, were raised most often here. (continued)

What do our partners tell us about their priorities for the new strategy? (continued):

- Practitioners in Leeds schools and services told us that they struggle in the time they have available to navigate different systems and changing policies, find information, complete referrals and requests for support from services, and record information. This was also one of the biggest concerns in a recent national study by [NASEN](#), which also noted impact of the pandemic too. 'Like most people working in schools, I do it because I want to help children thrive, but I'm overwhelmed'. Some had found support in working with others: 'I network with other SENCOs to share good practice. But we are doing this on our own initiative, we need wider support and networks'.
- Partners also agreed that we need to focus more on those who may be more vulnerable to inequalities because of their circumstances. In Leeds around half of 'children looked after' (by the local authority, instead of their families), and over a third of 'children in need' (of support from a social worker) have SEND. Some will have experienced trauma. Low attendance at school, and multiple fixed-term exclusions from school, are more common for these children and young people and this can make them more vulnerable to disadvantage.
- Gaps in the local offer of provision of support and services were also raised. Partners felt that specialist education provision needs to be increased and become more diverse to meet individual needs, especially for learners who would benefit from aspects of both mainstream and specialist provision. Some partners felt that the offer at post -16 lacks choice, and the offer at post-19 is very limited. Young people felt that careers advice and supported employment opportunities, and safe, fun social activities, needed to improve in the city. They also need to feel safe on transport and have more access to safe, clean toilets.
- Young people and families we spoke with wanted to have more of an ongoing influence in this strategy and a role in the work to make it happen, rather than one-off activities to share their views.

Our shared vision for an inclusive child-friendly Leeds: the city we all want for our children and young people:

Children and young people in Leeds with SEND and/or other additional needs have equal rights and opportunities to: be safe and well; have fun; have a voice and be listened to; attend, achieve and attain in education (the 3As); meet their personal development goals; and get ready adult life.

Inclusion

Every child and young person in Leeds can access inclusive, high quality services and support.

All schools, settings and services welcome children and young people with SEND and/or additional needs, remove barriers to their inclusion, and aspire for them to achieve their best possible outcomes.

All partners in Leeds are committed to pro-actively reducing inequalities.

Additional needs are identified and met at the earliest time.

Integrated practices and pathways

Education, health, care and youth services work together. Practices (ways of working) and pathways to access services are joined-up and promote access to support at the earliest time.

Services work in positive partnerships with families, enabling them to be involved in conversations, decisions and plans that affect them.

Services work together and with families to identify the services we need in the city, and how to deliver them ('joint commissioning')

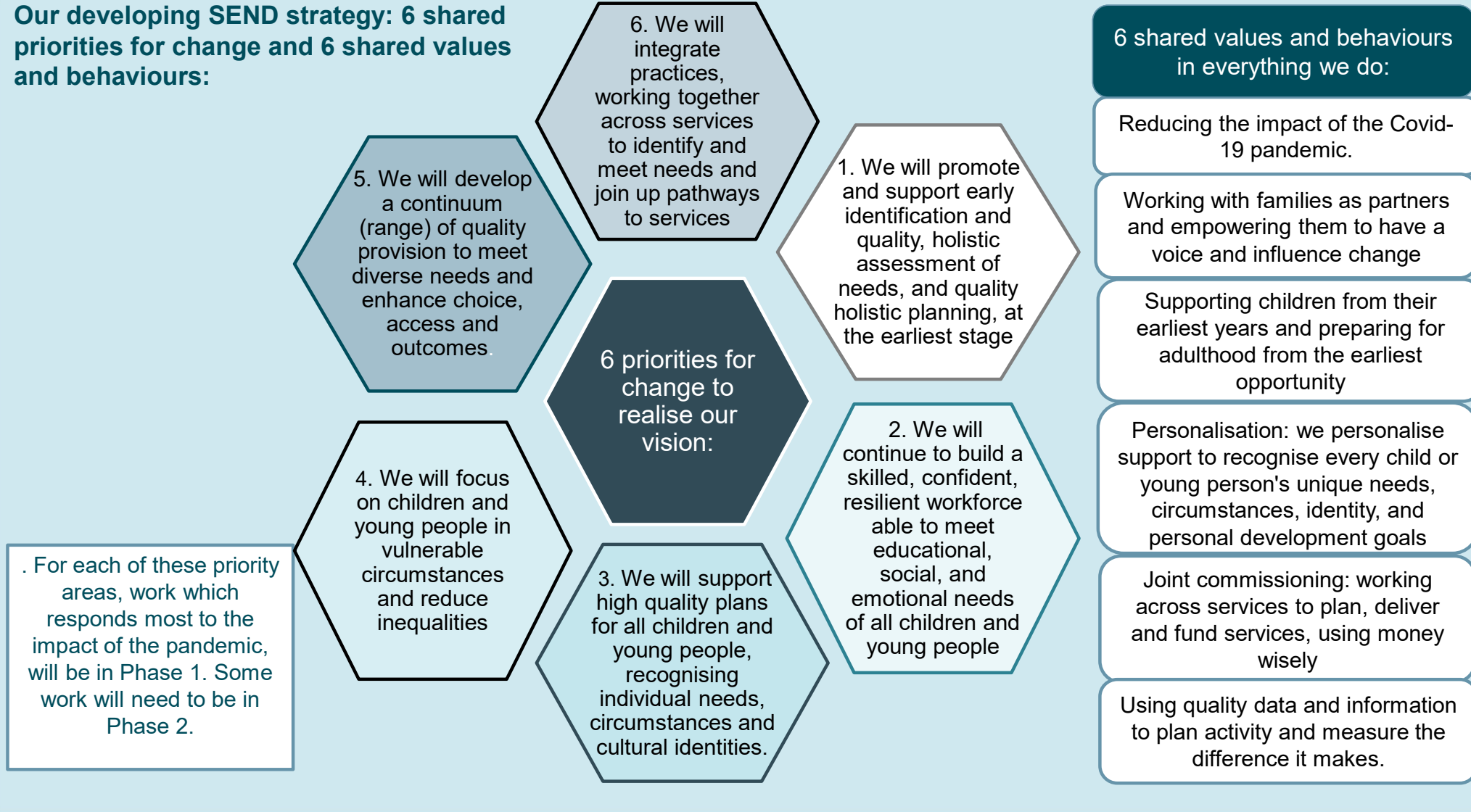
Individualisation

Support and services are personalised and recognise children and young people's individual needs, goals, and cultural identities.

A range of high quality specialist services and support is offered, to meet diverse needs.

Families and young people have access, choice and control.

Our developing SEND strategy: 6 shared priorities for change and 6 shared values and behaviours:



Making it happen: the key actions to support our shared vision and values:

Partners said: we need a shared ethos of inclusion and consistent best practice (ways of working) across all our Leeds schools and learning settings. Best practice in identifying, assessing and meeting needs at the earliest time is key, especially as we respond to the pandemic. We need a structure to share learning and build on best practice we already have in the city.

We will: work together to co-produce the new Leeds SEND and Inclusion Practice Framework:

The Framework will aim to combine the ethos and principles of child-friendly, inclusive city and the national and legal framework of the SEND Code of Practice, with practical tools, learning and resources, all brought together in one shared approach for practitioners across the city.

Co-producing the Framework together as partners in schools, settings and services will enable us to embed a shared ethos and vision for Leeds, celebrate, share and build on the good practice we already have in our schools and settings, and grow relationships and partnerships. Building the Framework within the wider Leeds context of 'early help', with a shared language and shared, joined-up practices will support quality conversations between schools, services and families, and timely referrals and requests if extra support is needed: 'the right conversations, with the right people, at the right time'.

The Framework builds on the principle that 'every leader is a leader of SEND, and every teacher is a teacher of SEND'. It will aim to support all our schools and settings to consistently deliver quality, holistic assessment of needs, and quality plans to meet individual needs, at the earliest time. This will support our children and young people to achieve their best possible outcomes in learning and achieve their goals.

1. Early identification and assessment of needs, and quality holistic planning, at the earliest stage


2. A skilled, confident, resilient workforce able to meet educational, social and emotional needs

3. High quality plans for all, recognising individual needs, circumstances and identity.

Partners said: high-quality plans to meet needs at the earliest time are vital. We need consistent, quality approaches to planning across all schools and settings, at all levels of need. Families need to be partners in planning and making decisions that affect them.

We will: work with partners to embed high-quality, joined-up practice in planning across the whole local system of SEND support, at all levels of need.

Under the SEND Code of Practice 2014, schools and education settings are required to lead assessment of needs and plans to meet needs for the majority of learners with SEND. Our new SEND and Inclusion Practice Framework will enable practitioners to share learning, best practice, and practical resources to consistent, high-quality assessments and plans for all children and young people. Using the Framework's resources will help practitioners to make requests and referrals to services for additional support, at the right time and with the minimum paperwork, so that children access support at the earliest possible time.



3. High quality plans for all, recognising individual needs, circumstances and identity.

While most learners with SEND will have their needs met by an early support plan led by their school or setting, in line with the Code of Practice, a minority with very complex needs will require a specialist assessment and an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to meet their needs. We have seen rising demand for EHCPs in recent years. Many other areas have too, but not to the same extent. Sometimes when children's needs are not identified and met at an early stage, things can escalate, reach a crisis point, and an EHCP becomes necessary as a result. Partners tell us that they see evidence of this in Leeds. Our focus on quality planning to meet needs at the earliest time in the SEND Practice Framework will aim to avoid this.

We will also develop new systems across the partnership, and re-organise teams who work on EHCPs, to manage increased demand while still producing high-quality, timely EHCPs with timely reviews. We will aim to minimise paperwork and avoid delays and duplications that sometimes waste time and slow down access to services. We will also work with families who have had experiences of the EHCP process, so we can learn from them and improve experiences.

Partners said: we need additional focus on our learners who are vulnerable to inequalities, especially in the wake of the pandemic. We need to reduce time in learning lost due to fixed-term exclusions, low levels of attendance, and children missing education.

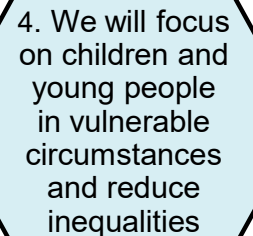
We will: work with partners across education, health, care, youth, and youth justice services to develop and embed a shared vision for inclusion of our children and young people with SEND in vulnerable circumstances, including children looked after by the local authority, children in need, and children who experienced trauma.

We will aim to embed a shared understanding of the context for these learners, and joined-up practices across agencies to identify, assess and meet their needs holistically, at the earliest possible time.

We will pilot new partnership approaches to more pro-actively identify and meet the needs of these learners, with an emphasis on regular attendance at school (or other places of learning). Low levels of attendance, and multiple fixed-term exclusions from school, are more common for these learners and impact not only on learning, but on access to services that work around schools, and enrichment activities like sports, music and work experience. These learners may also become more vulnerable to permanent exclusion and to exploitation by adults and other young people, with life-long implications.

We will also develop a new city-wide approach to embed trauma-informed practice and reduce the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental-ill health in the family. We know that the pandemic has made children more vulnerable to ACES and it is vital that we recognise trauma, respond to it and reduce its impact.

We will align these developments with wider Leeds strategies tackling inequalities in our city, including the strategy for recovery from the pandemic, and the Thrive strategy which aims to reduce the impact of poverty.



4. We will focus on children and young people in vulnerable circumstances and reduce inequalities

Partners said: we need more provision (of education and support and services), and more diversity in the local offer of provision to meet diverse needs. Young people need careers advice and employment opportunities that recognise their needs and aspirations, and accessible, safe fun things to do and places to go.

We will: develop and build on our Leeds local offer of inclusive and accessible provision. We will embed inclusion in the planning of all new education provision in the city, based on the principle that all Leeds schools and education settings are schools and settings for learners with SEND. Our Good Learning Places Board will ensure that access and inclusion are fundamental in all plans for new provision.

We will also develop 400 new specialist education places. We will open a new specialist free school and expand an existing specialist school. This will include places combining aspects of mainstream and specialist provision, to meet diverse individual needs. We will expand our specialist post-19 provision at Leeds City College. We will also explore opportunities to enhance our offer of remote, digital learning options.

We will develop our offer of support for young people with SEND as they prepare for adulthood. Young people have asked us to focus on careers advice and employment in phase 1 of this strategy. We will work with them and local employers to build a network and provide our first large-scale accessible careers fair. This will also include wider services, such as housing and independent living. We will also provide new supported internships in the Council and promote their benefits to local employers.

We will set up a new group to work on inclusion and access to fun things to do, places to go, and spaces to play. We will build on existing networks like our Child Friendly Leeds Ambassadors, aiming to embed an ethos of inclusion across the city's play and leisure offer and make sure any new projects maximise access, including access to safe transport and toilets. We will also develop new participation opportunities for children and young people and families. We will also improve information about services, co-developing our Leeds Local Offer website with young people and families.

5. We will develop a continuum (range) of quality provision to meet diverse needs and enhance choice, access and outcomes

Partners said: we need more joined-up pathways and practices to streamline access to services and make sure needs are assessed and met from earliest possible time. The pathway to assessment and diagnosis for autism and social communication difficulties is not as effective as it should be in Leeds.

We will: explore possible ways to improve our pathway to assessment, diagnosis, and support of autism and social communication difficulties. We would like to focus on this pathway first as it affects a significant number of children and young people in the city and their families. In later phases, we can use learning from this to review other pathways to services in Leeds which involve multiple agencies.

We will develop and enhance our partnerships and collaborative practices across our Leeds schools and Leeds City Council teams, including our Leeds Area Inclusion Partnerships. These Partnerships are key in consistent, quality approaches to keeping children and young people included and engaged in learning and able to access the protective factors of regular attendance at school.

We will also develop our teams within Leeds City Council Children's and Families Services to make sure that we can embed best inclusive practice, and knowledge and understanding of the needs of our most vulnerable learners, consistently across all our teams and services for children and families. We have recently re-structured services so that our teams supporting inclusion now work alongside teams supporting learning more widely. This will help to make sure inclusion is at the heart of all we do to promote learning, and make sure that the needs of vulnerable learners, or those not attending education in the usual way, are always understood, recognised and responded to at the earliest time.



6. Integrated practices, working together across services to identify and meet needs and join up pathways to services

Making it happen: accountability, oversight and next steps:

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- Our SEND Partnership Board, a multi-agency board including representatives of parents and carers, has oversight and governance of this strategy and a high-level action plan supporting it.
- We will also offer a new parent/carer governance group and a youth governance group for this strategy, which will enhance the voices of parents/carers and young people at the SEND Partnership Board and have a direct line of 2-way communication with the Board. Both groups will build on existing participation forums. This will respond to the voices of families who told us that they want on-going involvement in this strategy, an opportunity to contribute to and support its actions. These groups will also be able to provide meaningful, informed evaluation of our progress.
- We recognise that partners have shared concerns about resources and staff to make this strategy happen, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Evidence suggests that spending on early help and support for children and families is 'spending to save'. Meeting children's needs before they reach crisis point is morally right and also makes sense financially, avoiding the impact on costly specialist services when needs are not met and escalate. An example: one study estimated that the costs in England of permanently excluded learners in 1996/97 were over £81 million across agencies including the police (Parsons and Castle, 2006 at Times Online retrieved at September 2021). We are continuing to explore the best ways to resource this strategy across the partnership and will keep updating partners.
- Our SEND practice improvement group is a multi-agency work group responsible for co-producing the strategy and will continue to develop and refine plans described here. The SEND and Inclusion Practice Framework will also be co-produced with a multi-agency working group.
- Any partners, including young people and families, who want to get more involved are welcome to contact us using details on the last slide/page.
- The practice improvement group will keep reporting on their progress to the SEND partnership board and provide updates for all on our Leeds Local Offer site www.leedslocaloffer.org.uk
- The practice improvement group will also keep working on the strategy document and high-level action plan. We hope to share the final strategy in winter 2021/22.

Find out more or get involved:

- Find out more about services in Leeds for children and young people with SEND and/or additional needs: www.leedslocaloffer.org.uk
- For impartial and confidential information, advice and guidance for parents and carers in Leeds: Leeds SEND Information Advice and Support Service (SEND IASS): <https://sendiass.leeds.gov.uk/> 0113 378 5020 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm. Outside of these hours, you can leave a message using a 24-hour answer-phone service).
- Find out more about the Leeds SEND and Inclusion strategy and opportunities to help to develop it: contact the Learning Inclusion Service, Leeds City Council via our Leeds Local Offer email address: LLO@Leeds.gov.uk It would be helpful to include 'SEND and inclusion strategy' in the title of your email so it can be quickly sent on to the right person.
- Find other opportunities to have a say about services in Leeds: <https://leedslocaloffer.org.uk/#!/directory/33458>

Thanks for listening today or reading this information!

