

SEND and Inclusion newsletter



Derby City Council



Ensuring every child and young person in Derby lives their best life

Leading SEND and Inclusion is not just the responsibility of the local authority SEND team. It's the collective responsibility of all education settings, health providers, social care and early help and education services in the local authority in partnership with parents/carers and young people.

Leaders across the city recognise the challenges that many local areas have been facing in making sure that there is an inclusive system in place that supports children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those accessing alternative provision, and their families/carers, to deliver the very best outcomes for them.

Over the last two years the Area Inclusion Partnership has worked alongside over 1,000 people including parents and carers, young people, the third sector and those working in education, health and care services to consider the success and impact of the SEND

Strategy 2020-2023 to assess where we are in meeting the duties in the Code of Practice 2015 and meeting the needs of children and young people in the city.

These conversations have shaped this self-assessment and led to the development of the Local Area Inclusion Plan 2025-2028 and to ensure that *every child and young person in Derby lives their best life*. Improving the experiences of children, young people and their families has been at the centre of driving change in the system across Derby.

Leaders are committed to learning and improvement; therefore, we shall never stop improving, never stop exploring how we can meet needs earlier and never stop listening to our parents/carers and young people.

In response to these voices, over the last 12 months there have been significant changes in how we support children and

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young people with SEND, those attending alternative provision, or who are out of school. Young people tell us they want to be in school with their peers from their communities, to get a good job and to live independently. Parents tell us they want more local schools to meet the needs of their children earlier.

The purpose of the newsletter is to ensure that you are up to date on all processes, performance and the local offer.

Sharon Buckby, Director of Learning, Inclusion and Skills.



Our new Inclusion Team

The Inclusion Team has been set up to monitor children and young people's inclusion needs both in school and home settings, preventing an escalation of needs. These could relate to the child or young person's additional needs, such as behavioural or medical needs, reduced timetable considerations, alternative provision, or absence due to medical reasons, suspension or exclusion, children with a social worker or who are from new communities.

Every school in Derby has a specific person of contact (SPOC) within the team, who will hold regular meetings to discuss the support needed for pupils. The teams take a multi-agency approach alongside a locality-based model, seeking solutions for schools and individual pupils' additional needs.

The service also manages the In Year Fair Access process, for those pupils who cannot access a school place through the usual admissions route or through the SEND process, ensuring pupils have access to a full-time education.

The service is designed to support parents/carers through meetings with their allocated team member, where they will discuss school placements for children requiring careful reintegration or transition planning, whether that's due to additional needs, suspension or exclusion, or those currently home-educated.

You can contact the Inclusion and School Attendance team via ISA@derby.gov.uk and the In Year Fair Access team at IYFA@derby.gov.uk).

Paula Nightingale, Head of Inclusion



Employment and skills updates

Our Youth Guarantee Trailblazer and NDTI Internship Works

At Derby City Council's Employment and Skills Hub we're supporting young people into employment through work experience, employability training and 1-2-1 support. In the previous newsletter, we shared updates on our Journey to Work Programme, which continues to go from strength to strength. I'm delighted to share news of two exciting new contracts secured this year:

Youth Guarantee Trailblazer

Part of a national programme, the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer means that thousands more young people will receive training and work support.

What does this mean for Derby specifically? We're able to offer 1-2-1 intensive support to young people aged 17-21 (up to 25 with SEND or care experienced) who are not in education and employment (NEET). In real terms, this means we're currently supporting 105 young people who are registered for support; 50% of these have SEND.

DfE Internship Work

Running our Journey to Work programme as a mini supported internship, we combine learning and skills development with 1-2-1 support, and currently have three strands available: digital, engineering, and general internships, with a total of 25 places available across the three. The same number of places will also be available in the January 2026 term. To be eligible for our DfE funded programme, a young person must be 16-19, have SEN needs (including social and emotional health conditions) but no EHC plan. Please do get in touch to refer a young person, to help with preparing them for the next cohort, or simply to find out more, at **employmentandskills@derby.gov.uk**

If you would like the Employment and Skills Team to come and talk to your team about the opportunities we offer young people, please email **employmentandskills@derby.gov.uk**

Head to **<https://tinyurl.com/bddrx423>** to see a video case study of Angel, a Leaving Care young person who secured her apprenticeship with DMC via the Journey to Work programme. We proudly watched Angel accept her Here For Derby Award with her team this autumn.

Many of our work placements are offered by DCC services; if you are interested in offering a work experience, or would like to know more about the scheme, please do get in touch via **employmentandskills@derby.org.uk**

Anna Mimms MBE, Head of Service for Employment, Skills and Adult Education



EHC process improvements and feedback

We have been working hard behind the scenes to improve our processes, strengthen communication, and ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Derby City.

Improving our processes

We have recently reviewed and refined the paperwork used for Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments and annual reviews. This will help us to gather the most relevant and accurate information, ensuring that decisions are well-informed and in the best interests of each child or young person.

To make the process clearer for families, we've also updated the Derby City Local Offer pages, particularly the section on EHC assessments and plans. We have also produced a visual guide to explain the EHC process step-by-step, making it more accessible and easier to understand.

Engaging with families and schools

We recently took part in a Let's Talk SEND session, hosted with our Parent Carer Forum, where we explained the EHC process and answered questions directly from parents and carers.

As part of our school training programme, we have also delivered two Hot Topic sessions focused on the EHC Needs Assessment process—highlighting what makes a strong referral and what should be included to support the best outcomes.

Staying on track with statutory timeframes

We are proud to report that, for July, August, September, October and November 100% of EHC Plans were issued within statutory timeframes. We currently have no backlog of referrals and are committed to maintaining this standard moving forward.

Focus on quality

As part of the EHC Needs Assessment process we go through a rigorous quality assurance (QA) process. This includes both internal reviews and multi-agency audits with our education, health, and social care partners. During this process, we assess:

- The child or young person's journey and voice.
- Their strengths and needs.
- SMART outcomes.
- Suitability of the provision.
- Parental aspirations and views.

Plans are judged against Ofsted-style ratings (Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, or Inadequate), and clear actions are taken where improvements are needed. We also share QA findings with our Parent Carer Forum and develop improvement plans together.

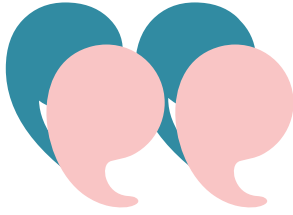
Supporting transitions

Following feedback from the Parent Carer Forum, we learned that many families were unsure about the phased transfer process (e.g. starting school for the first time, moving from infant to junior or primary to secondary school). In response, we co-produced a clear, easy-to-read booklet, which has now been sent to all parents of children with an EHC Plan due to transition in September 2026.

Listening to your feedback around EHC plans

We've recently started conducting telephone surveys with parents once EHC plans have been finalised. We want to say a big thank you to all those who took part. Your feedback is shaping our QA action plans and helping us improve the experience for other families.

Here are a few comments we've received:



'The service has been 10/10 and has really helped with my little one, and dealing with school.'

'Really lovely, explained [everything] in detail and was really helpful.'

'Very impressed with the educational psychologist report.'

'Educational psychologist was really good and went through everything and gave some good advice was very knowledgeable.'

'Felt very involved. Kept up to date all the time.'

'I felt very involved with the meetings.'

'Everything was explained very well.'



Better information and training

We also heard that different professionals were sometimes giving mixed messages about the SEND Support and EHC process. To address this, we have:

- Created a comprehensive booklet explaining SEND Support, EHC Needs Assessments, and the different panels involved.
- Developed a training programme for our social care and health colleagues.

We are pleased to announce the appointment of a Designated SEND Social Care Manager, who will lead on training and the quality assurance of EHC plans across services.

Improving communication

We understand that it hasn't always been easy to get in touch with the SEND Team. To improve this, we've:

- Streamlined our email contact system.
- Ensured that each mailbox is monitored by a dedicated officer.
- Clarified response time expectations in line with Council policy (within 5 working days).

Contact details for the team

EHC Assessments (new referrals, consultations): ehcpassessments@derby.gov.uk

Annual Reviews and Plan Requests: SENDReviews@derby.gov.uk

SEND Tribunals: SENTribunal@derby.gov.uk

Please remember that each SEND Officer manages a full caseload, including school visits, meetings, and writing/amending plans. While we aim to respond as quickly as possible; meeting statutory deadlines must remain our priority.

We hope this update gives you confidence in the work we are doing to support you and your children. We are committed to continuous improvement and to working together with families and professionals to make the SEND journey as smooth, transparent, and supportive as possible.

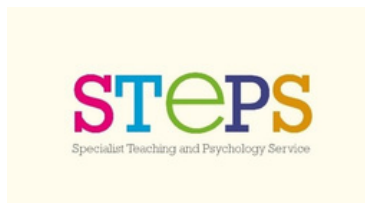
Louise Bartos, Head of SEND Sufficiency, Partnerships and Compliance

Support in schools for SEN

SEN education services and specialist support teams

Hello, I'd like to introduce myself. I am Mhairi (pronounced like Barry but with a V sound at the start). As well as being a qualified teacher, I have worked as a School SENCO at two points in my career, and for a number of local authorities in a range of SEND and specialist service roles. I oversee Derby's SEND Advice Line (SAL) and Specialist Teaching and Psychology Service (STEPS) teams, where there are lots of exciting developments happening.

Derby SAL continue to deliver Moving Forward Together meetings, and co-ordinating support to schools and SENCOs. This year they're also delivering our SENCO networks and new Hot Topic briefings - sessions that drill down into one topic at a time, and are delivered by a range of staff depending on what the focus is. The topics are selected based on information requests, and there's scope for more of these over this academic year.



STePS continue to deliver many valuable services to schools and settings within their new structure. The Intervention First Team have launched some new support offers this term, including a new school-level support offer developed around evidence-based programmes that've been trialled across our region and country.

The Educational Psychology Team are leading some of our Communities of Practice and key areas of strategic development, including the SENCO Toolkit (available now on the Schools Information Portal) and Local Area Inclusion Plan inclusive curriculum and workforce development plan.

If you would like more detail on these groups, contact Derby SAL via <https://tinyurl.com/26p36x3n> and we can set up a Hot Topic on the projects.

Mhairi McDonald-Junor, Head of SEND Quality and Improvement

New SENCO toolkit launched



Being a SENCO can sometimes feel like spinning plates- juggling learning needs, wellbeing and the practicalities of school life. To make things easier, Derby City Council has developed a SENCO Toolkit, co-designed with SENCOs, to give SENCOs and school staff practical guidance for supporting pupils at all stages.

The SENCO Toolkit brings together key information, support and local services to help SENCOs feel more confident and consistent in their role. It's a central hub of information designed to provide practical strategies for supporting children and young people with SEND.

Launched this autumn, we've been hosting some special Hot Topic briefings to explain more about its contents and uses. Colleagues from social care, health and our Parent Carer Forum have all provided invaluable feedback and suggestions during the creation of this toolkit.

Derby SAL will continue to capture feedback over the first term of its use.

To access the SENCO toolkit, please login in to the Schools Information Portal at <https://schoolsportal.derby.gov.uk>

To contact Derby SAL, please use <https://tinyurl.com/26p36x3n>

Friar Gate Studios: skills for work; skills for life



We officially opened our new Skills Centre at Friar Gate Studios in November. This vibrant facility is designed to empower young people living with SEND to live their best life, through access to independent advice and guidance, training and employment opportunities, improved confidence and independence, and getting involved in their local community. Young people, families and service providers gathered in the Glow & Grow Café, as hospitality students on supported internships served refreshments and discussed the things they're learning, including travel training, health needs, personal safety and keeping uniforms clean - essential skills for independent living and work.

David Hook, Managing Director of Cosy Direct, gave a presentation on the importance of supported internships, and the reasons his company got involved with the Skills Centre's programmes employing people with additional needs. He highlighted ways that thinking differently and making small adjustments can give a young person the opportunity of a lifetime. Other employers including Severn Trent, ASDA, Rolls-Royce, NHS providers, and Derby Museums have worked with the Skills Centre to create supported internships, showing openness to thinking differently about recruitment.

Friar Gate Studios' Skills Centre was created after consultation with members of the Derby SEND Voice parent carer forum and over 100 young SEND ambassadors, ensuring that they're provided with a space truly tailored to their needs and wishes. It forms part of the Council's £24million capital investment programme, designed to strengthen Derby's SEND opportunities and education provision.

Georgia, aged 19, has been at the centre since September. She said: 'It's been really good here because I was struggling with my confidence and self-esteem but I'm a lot more confident now. You get to do a lot of different things and I enjoy working in the cafe. I'm interested in getting a job in the area of catering. I love making cakes and cooking makes me feel like I'm doing something good for people.'

Services on offer at Friar Gate Studios & Skills Centre include:

- Derby City Council's Employability Hub – help with navigating education, employment, and training options. Includes the presence of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), giving access to employment and benefits advice.
- Independent careers advice and guidance access to a wide range of post 16 education, training and employment opportunities across the city.
- Shaw Education Trust and St Martin's School's Horizons 6th form centre – programmes for 16-18 year olds, focussed on pathways to supported internships, further learning or employment.
- Derby City Council's Transition2 - post-18 Vocational and Preparing for Adulthood programmes, including a variety of supported internships.
- Glow & Grow – a student-operated training café, open to the public on Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10am – 2pm (and Fridays from January).
- BeConnected – a membership programme for all young people aged 16-25 with SEND. Including regular group sessions on wellbeing, movement, and social connection, aimed at encouraging friendships and confidence.
- Derby SEND Voice - offering advocacy, learning opportunities and peer-to-peer support for local families with SEND children/young people.
- Health Space - providing wellbeing advice from the NHS and multi-agency professionals.
- Travel Training Hub - managed by Derby City Council's Transition2, developing the confidence and practical skills to travel independently.

The centre is managed by Transition2. To find out more about the opportunities available at Friar Gate Studios Skills Centre, visit **[Transition2.co.uk](https://www.transition2.co.uk)**

Derby Promise events for the calendar



The Derby Promise is a manifesto commitment from Derby City Council Cabinet and is driven by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills.

The guiding purpose of the Derby Promise is to galvanise the collective minds and commitment of public and private sector organisations to raise the aspirations of all residents in Derby by building a bridge into the economic growth and development opportunities in Derby.

The Derby Promise has an exciting line up of events planned throughout the next academic year, to inspire young people and showcase the diverse range of career pathways available to them in Derby. Kicking off in November, **Creative Careers Month** will shine a spotlight on the vibrant world of the creative industries, offering students unique insights into careers in art, media, design, and performance.

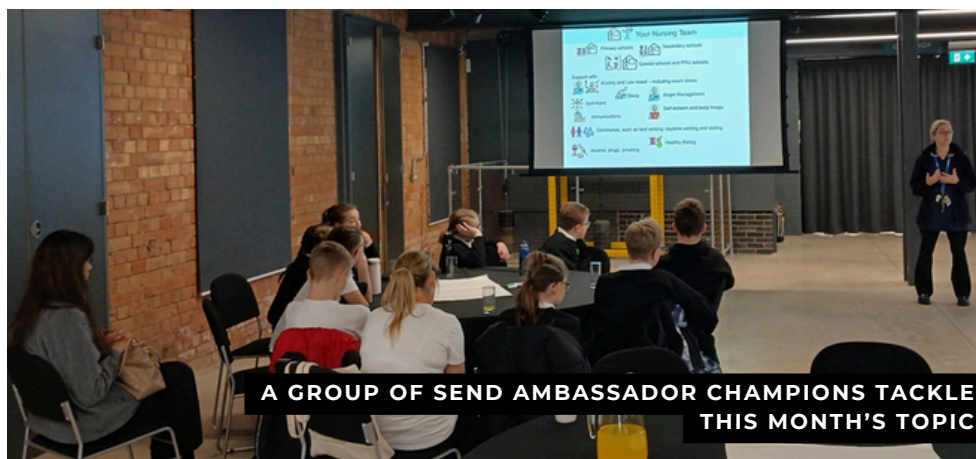
Schools can look forward to the **Festival of Ideas** on the 18th March, focusing on climate change, sustainability, and green careers. This event will encourage students to think creatively about global challenges and explore how they can make a positive impact through environmentally focused careers and innovation.

Dream Fest returns for its second year from 30th April to 2nd May, inspiring the next generation of creatives and performers across Derby. Students will perform alongside West End stars from Matilda and Wicked, raising awareness of The Lewis Sewell Trust. The festival includes four in-school workshops led by industry professionals, culminating in a two-day school festival at Derby Theatre, followed by a family friendly Dream Fest at Derby Market Hall.

The **Festival of Sport** will return for its third year from the 3rd to 7th August, inspiring young people to explore the careers and opportunities connected to sport, health, and wellbeing. By partnering with local clubs, organisations, and employers, students build confidence, develop new skills, and access community sports opportunities. The event encourages active participation, promotes wellbeing, and broadens aspirations by showing how a passion for sport can lead to rewarding future pathways.

Schools can now register on the Derby Promise website to access a growing library of resources, including a support directory, employer experience opportunities, a regularly updated calendar of events, and the latest news.

Register with Derby Promise to view resources and the upcoming calendar of events at **DerbyPromise.org.uk**



A GROUP OF SEND AMBASSADOR CHAMPIONS TACKLE THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

SEND Ambassador Champions

A group of young people from both special schools and enhanced resource provisions in mainstream settings are making a difference through the Derby's SEND Ambassadors programme.

Meeting once a month at the Museum of Making, the ambassadors share their experiences, discuss key issues, and work on projects that promote inclusion and accessibility across Derby. Their voice is central to decision making in the city, ensuring that young people have a genuine say in the things that affect them.

Recent meetings have focused on mental health priorities, supported by an NHS nurse who provided insight into wellbeing and signposting to local services. The discussion helped the group explore how support and information can be made clearer and more accessible for young people with additional needs.

The Ambassadors are also helping to make city-wide events more inclusive and engaging, offering valuable feedback. Their input has already helped shape the way events are planned and delivered across the city, with suggestions ranging from adding quiet zones and clearer signposting and interactive elements, to making events more comfortable and accessible for everyone. As part of their involvement in the redevelopment of the Derby Assembly Rooms, they shared ideas for creating a vibrant and welcoming environment, with plenty of open spaces and sensory elements to ensure it feels inclusive and enjoyable for everyone.

If your school would like to be involved with the SEND Ambassadors Champions, please contact **Local.Offer@derby.gov.uk**

Derby & Derbyshire Music Partnership

The Derby & Derbyshire Music partnership has a huge amount on offer throughout the year for schools and different settings. There are also opportunities for children and young people to engage and participate in weekly, termly and one-off activities.



- Adaptations are made to lessons, and this is evident in the Derby and Derbyshire Halle where songs were performed with Makaton and visual resources provided around Derby Arena.
- There are now lead Derby schools for the Music Hub, including Allestree Woodlands School and St Andrews Academy.
- Music Education Hubs East Midlands (MEHEM) was rolled out this academic year and will continue during the 2025/6 academic year: <https://www.mehem.org/uprising/uprising.aspx>

HAF successes and funding news



THE HAF TEAM AND MP BAGGY SHANKER ATTEND THE OPENING OF ID DERBY'S NEW CENTRE.



CELEBRATING THE WORK OF OUR PROVIDERS AT OCTOBER'S NETWORKING EVENT.

Funded by the Department for Education and delivered locally by Derby City Council in partnership with Community Action Derby. HAF forms part of the government's Best Start in Life mission, ensuring that a child's background does not determine their future success. Through HAF, children who receive benefits-related free school meals benefit from a range of fun, engaging activities during the school holidays, and a nutritious lunch at every session.

It's been a brilliantly busy few months for the HAF team, following the fantastic announcement that the Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed over £600 million for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme for the next three financial years (from 2026/27). This equates to just over £200 million each year, and while we are awaiting further guidance on this, we do know that it means that much-needed provision is secure for Derby's children well past the end of spring.



LEFT AND CENTRE: 'ROLL WITH US', A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CLUB PROVED POPULAR. RIGHT: COMMUNITY ONE PROVIDED COLOURFUL, FUN SPACES FOR CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES.

Working in partnership with Community Action Derby, we've delighted to have achieved the following between April and September 2025:

- 42 providers delivered 60 HAF clubs across Derby during the summer.
- Over 18,000 places were attended over this period.
- During the 2024-25 year we've supported almost 6,000 children.
- 901 of these children had SEND.
- Over 25,000 nutritious meals have been served during this year.

We also hosted a networking/collaboration event for HAF providers in October, celebrating their successes, sharing thoughts and experiences, and using these to shape the future of HAF delivery in Derby. There was a great sense of community at the event, with providers keen to support each other and work together for the children of Derby.

The team are currently preparing for the winter HAF delivery during the December / January school holidays, where we have 29 providers offering over 5,000 places and exciting new opportunities including ice skating sessions and family panto tickets.

Applications for HAF providers to deliver from Easter 2026 onwards will open in the new year.

Parent and carer voices: Derby SEND Voice

Derby SEND Voice was created by parent carers, for parent carers, as their official voice within the city. We are a collective of volunteers who all share one thing in common: navigating the world of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) alongside our children and young people. We understand first-hand how complex, overwhelming, and isolating the SEND journey can be, and we're here to make sure that Derby city's families feel supported and heard.

We organise parent carer events such as information workshops and social events, and signpost people to relevant services, making sure the parent carer voice is shared with the right people.

Our forum is pan-disability, meaning we support families of children and young people aged 0–25 with any additional need or disability, whether diagnosed or not. Our mission is simple but vital: to ensure that the lived experiences of Derby's SEND families are heard, valued, and acted upon in the planning and delivery of services across education, health, and social care.

We are recognised as official stakeholders in the local SEND system. Our role is to represent the voice of families in strategic discussions, ensuring that services are not just designed for families, but with them in co-production. We believe that when families are involved from the start, services become more effective, inclusive, and responsive to real needs.

In our first year, Derby SEND Voice has already made a meaningful impact. We hosted a SEND Marketplace attended by over 300 families and local services, creating a space for connection, information, and support. We've delivered free workshops on topics such as Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), financial planning, sleep, and transitions — all designed to empower families with knowledge and confidence. We've also organised social events to help families build peer support networks, including a silent gig that brought joy and community to many.

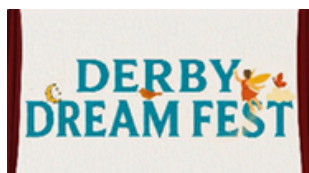
We have just moved into a new home at Friar Gate Studios and have lots of exciting things in the diary coming up. Our growing membership means we can be involved in many more projects, attend coffee mornings to reach out to different communities, and most of all shape positive change in Derby City for SEND families.

For more information about Derby SEND Voice, please follow our Facebook page and visit **derbysendvoice.co.uk**



Stay up-to-date with our latest news and information by following our Facebook page: **facebook.com/DCCLocalOffer**

You'll also find photos and video round-ups of our latest projects and events, including Dream Fest, the Festival of Sport, and the Local Area Inclusion Plan.



Dream Fest

<https://tinyurl.com/328s3z9p>



Festival of Sport

<https://tinyurl.com/yc6e3fs3>



Local Area Inclusion Plan

<https://tinyurl.com/59nbcmcz>

