



# The Northumberland Strategic Inclusion Strategy

Promoting Inclusion and Preventing  
Exclusion Strategy

**2022-2026** (Updated August 2025)

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# The Vision

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Northumberland County Council's vision is for a thriving county where people choose to live, work, visit, and invest. The aim is to be a "Land of Great Opportunities" with a focus on growth across the diverse county to support thriving communities. This includes fostering a great place to live with opportunities for all residents and attracting investment to support economic growth.

Our Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2022 (currently being updated) translates the Corporate Plan into a vision that is focused on 'being a place where meeting the needs of children, young people and families is the focus, so that they get the best out of life', this means:

- Children and young people know that their voice will influence decisions that affect them.
- Children and young people have the 'Best Start in Life'.
- Ensuring all services work together towards tackling any form of disadvantage.
- Children and young people have access to the best quality education to prepare them for adult life.
- Children and young people feel safe and supported and are able to cope with life's ups and downs.
- Promoting and supporting children and young people to be healthy.
- As good corporate parents we prioritise the needs of our cared for children.

## Education Priorities

At the heart of the education priorities is ensuring every child meets their potential and makes a positive contribution to their local community this is set out on Page 4 in the six priorities that drive the work of the Education and Skills Central Services.



## Education, Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) and Skills Priorities

Northumberland Education has spent the academic year 2023-24 working productively towards the key priorities highlighted below:

- 01** Know the strengths and weaknesses of our schools and other educational providers and report their performance to the council and the community.

Challenge and support improvement in the performance of our schools and settings so that all children and young people, including disadvantaged and SEND learners, achieve the best educational outcomes:

We will support across the EY sector to ensure all children are school ready and that the schools are ready for every child. We will support all first, primary and middle schools to ensure their pupils have the skills and knowledge required to access the secondary curriculum.

We will support improved transition, progress and performance for Key Stage 3, 4 and 5 to promote access for all learners to their first choice destination.

**02**

Develop and implement new SEND pathways which support fairness, transparency, expectations and a consistency of approach:

- 03**
- Review SEND placement methodology and panels
  - Review the SEND Banding system
  - Review the statutory assessment process and introduce digital EHCPs

Develop the vocational education offer to provide clear pathways into apprenticeships, further education, higher education, and employment for all our young people and adults:

We will develop a curriculum and facilities which both supports the ambition of learner and links to the workforce requirements for Northumberland.

We will build on key relationships between education and industry.

We will produce clear guidance for schools and settings on what good careers advice looks like to ensure all young people are supported to achieve their aspirations.

**04**

Develop appropriate high quality educational provision that meets the needs of all children and young people as close to their home communities as possible:

We will strive to deliver the right number of places to meet all learner needs in the right place, at the right time.

**05**

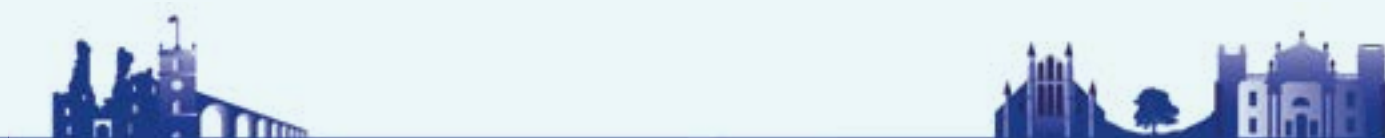
Ensure the Education, SEND and Skills Service fulfils its statutory duties within the legislative framework (including the School Admissions Code, Exclusion, Attendance, Virtual Schools, School Organisation Regulations, EY Sufficiency and those relating to SEND):

We will meet our own statutory duties.

We will further develop relationships with the Regional Director and Academy Trusts to ensure they adhere to their statutory duties whilst ensuring equality of access to education.

The LA will work closely with children, young people, and their families, schools, settings and all other partners to deliver on these priorities. They will be monitored and evaluated by the sector-led Education Strategy Partnership Board and the SEND Board

**06**



Research has shown that young people who are excluded from school are more likely to be NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), develop significant mental health problems, and become involved with the criminal justice system either in their teens or as an adult. Reducing exclusion from education and ensuring all Northumberland's early years' settings, schools and Post 16 providers are inclusive and able to meet the needs of their local communities is a key priority for Northumberland County Council to ensure improved experiences and outcomes for all children and young people.

Northumberland's Inclusion Strategy has been developed to help the Local Authority, early years' settings, schools, Post 16 providers and other services work in a more holistic way to reduce exclusions. The strategy provides an outline of approaches, interventions and services to support settings to ensure the needs of all young people are understood and addressed in order to prevent the use of exclusion wherever possible.

There is a huge amount of positive work going on in Northumberland to support the well-being and inclusion of children and young people. One of the main functions of this strategy is to map the available approaches, services and resources across the County to ensure a robust overview of the offer, as well as the identification of any gaps that need to be addressed.

The development of this strategy has been co-produced by the multi-agency working groups, discussions with Head Teachers, SENCOs, designated teachers, governors, alternative providers, discussions at the Education Strategy Board and the views of parents, carers, children & young people. The strategy draws heavily from examples of the strong leadership and good practice that already exists in many Northumberland early years' settings, schools and Post 16 provisions where there is robust evidence of strong inclusive practice and a reduction in the use of exclusion.

Progress on the implementation of the Inclusion Strategy will be reported to and monitored by the Education Strategy Board and will be kept under review and altered as necessary to incorporate newly published legislation and statutory guidance.

This strategy document:

- Describes the National context;
- Describes the Northumberland context;
- Describes the key strands of the strategy;
- Identifies the actions to be taken to promote inclusion and prevent exclusion;
- Describes the role of the Local Authority, schools, settings and partners in promoting inclusion and preventing exclusions.

Related strategies and plans that have a direct impact on reducing and preventing school exclusions include:

- Education and Skills priorities;
- Northumberland County Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2026;
- Northumberland Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2022 (currently being updated);
- Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership 2023-2026;
- Northumberland Multi Year Accessibility Plan 2022-2025;
- Northumberland SEND Strategy 2021-2024 (currently being updated);
- Northumberland SEND Capacity and Place Planning Strategy 2023-2027.

# National Context

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The National Review of Exclusions in 2017/18 found that 0.1% of children overall were permanently excluded from state funded schools in England, but the rates for some groups of children were much higher. The Ethnicity Facts and Figures website, which collates data on how different ethnic groups interact with public services, highlighted that pupils from some ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately more likely to be excluded from school. Black Caribbean pupils, for example, were permanently excluded at three times the rate of White British pupils. White Gypsy Roma group and the traveller of Irish Heritage group pupils had by far the highest rates of both fixed period and permanent exclusions.

All state funded schools in England operate under the same exclusions framework, as set out in legislation and statutory guidance. Despite this, there are differences in exclusion rates between schools, areas of the country, and pupils with different characteristics.

Following their review of alternative provision across the Country, the House of Commons Education Committee published a report on 18th July 2018

[“Forgotten Children: alternative provision and scandal of ever-increasing exclusions”](#).

This report sets out a number of key recommendations to drive improved inclusion practices in schools and reductions in exclusions:

- Schools should not rush to exclude pupils: schools should be inclusive.
- Parents and pupils have a right to know how often schools resort to exclusion: schools should publish their permanent and fixed term exclusion rates every term, including for pupils with SEND and looked-after children, as well as the number of pupils who leave the school.
- Parents deserve more information when their children are excluded: the exclusions process is currently weighted in favour of schools and leaves parents and pupils fighting a system that should be supporting them.

- Pupils and their parents should have someone in their corner: when a pupil is excluded from school for more than five non-consecutive days in a school year, the pupil and their parents or carers should be given access to an independent advocate. This should happen both where pupils are internally or externally excluded from school or where the LA is arranging education due to illness.
- Parents and pupils should be given accurate information about the range and type of alternative provision that is available locally: all organisations offering alternative provision should be required to inform the local authority in which they are based of their provision. The local authority should then make the list of alternative providers operating in their local authority available to schools and parents on their website.
- Independent Review Panels should be able to direct a school to reinstate pupils: legislation should be amended at the next opportunity so that this can happen.”

As a result of this report, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a call for evidence on school exclusion to support a national review of exclusions to be led by Edward Timpson.



[The final Timpson Review](#) of Exclusions was published on 7th May 2019.

The report contains 30 recommendations which have all been welcomed by the Secretary of State for Education. The government has committed to undertaking six key actions in response to these recommendations:

1. We will make schools accountable for the outcomes of permanently excluded children.
2. We will establish a practice programme that embeds effective partnership working between LAs, schools, alternative provision, and other partners.
3. We will work with sector experts, led by the Department's lead advisor on behaviour, Tom Bennet, to rewrite our guidance (including on exclusions and on behaviour and discipline in schools).
4. We now call on Directors of Children's Services, governing bodies, academy trusts and local forums of schools to review information on children who leave schools, by exclusion or otherwise, and to establish a shared understanding of how the data on the characteristics of such children feeds local trends.

5. We will work with Ofsted to define and tackle the practice of "off-rolling".
6. We will extend support for Alternative Provision (AP).

The full set of 30 recommendations will be considered and appropriately acted upon through the implementation of Northumberland's Inclusion Strategy.

In response to the Timpson Review, the Government launched a consultation to seek views on proposed changes to the behaviour in schools' guidance and the suspension and permanent exclusion guidance for England. This consultation closed on 31st March 2022.

This Strategy will take into account the recommendations coming from national government.

# Northumberland Local Context

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In Northumberland, 96.7% of the land mass is classed as rural, with 46% of the population living in this area. The other 54% of the population live mainly in the South East area of the county. In relation to the population itself, the county has an estimated population of 320,567 (Census 2021), a 1% fall on the 2020 mid-year population estimate. According to the Office for National Statistics, the county's population is forecast to increase by 4.4% to around 339,415 between 2022 and 2043. This has changed from the forecast decrease in population set out in the previous version of this plan, although it is less than the England average which is forecast to increase by 7.8% over the same period.

However, the increase in population does not appear to be in younger age groups; the number of children and young people aged 0 to 15 living in Northumberland has been slowly but steadily declining for a significant number of years, with circa 57,500 in 2001, 55,000 in 2006 and 51,721 in 2021 (Census 2021). The birth rate in Northumberland has also declined slightly by about 0.1% overall between 2009 and 2020, with the County's General fertility rate (GFR) at 48.9 (per 1000 female population age 15-44) compared to 55.1 for England. However, there is variation at the school partnership level.

Exclusions in Northumberland are above the national average for both suspensions and permanent exclusions. In Northumberland, children with identified special educational needs are more likely to be excluded than their peers. This aligns with the national picture. Boys and pupils eligible for free school meals are more likely to be excluded. Within the ethnic groups, pupils from a White British background compared to their peers are more likely to be excluded.

As at September 2024, there were 168 schools, academies and free schools (not including independent schools) in Northumberland who at January Census 2024 educated 42,635 children and young people in Reception Year 13); this is a fall of 1.5% from 42,873 recorded in January 2023 census, reported in the previous version of this document. Since the first version of this plan in 2021, there has been a 5.2% fall in the number of students on roll in Northumberland's schools and academies.

Northumberland County Council has a strong model of partnerships and collaboration with all schools and academies and is committed to improving outcomes for all Northumberland children. An increasing proportion of early years' settings, primary and secondary schools are judged by OFSTED to be good or better. There has been a year on year improvement in this measure since 2016 along with overall outcomes, which are improving. This demonstrates that overall, Northumberland's education settings are providing a firm foundation for our children to be successful.

Before the pandemic (March 2020) school attendance in Northumberland was good. For at least the 3 years previous to that it had been improving and better than national and regional averages in all measures. Data from the 2020-21 onwards shows that this position has changed. The challenges are around reducing persistent absence for certain pupil groups, particularly those of secondary school age, those attending Special Schools and those attending alternative provision settings.

County wide strategies have been introduced to support school attendance, including growth for the Education Welfare Service and an increase in high impact integrated working with Early Help. Our response to the new DfE guidance *Working together to improve school attendance (August 2024)* and the Virtual School's duty to promote the education of children with a social worker will continue to promote the key message that attendance is everyone's business and that we will get back on track with consistently good school attendance by developing our multi-agency approach.

The main reason for permanent exclusions in Northumberland continues to be persistent disruptive behaviour, followed by physical assault which also mirrors the national picture. In the 2024/5 academic year 77 out of 123 (59%) pupils were excluded for persistent disruptive behaviour and 22 out of 123 (18%) were excluded for physical assault.

The table below shows a year on year increase (with the exception of the years affected by the Covid-19 pandemic) in permanent exclusion and suspensions until 2024/25.

Data for 2024/25 shows a downward trend in PEX; there was a 12% reduction in PEX compared to the previous academic year. However, permanent exclusions of C&YP of Primary School age and those with EHCP's across all phases has risen mirroring the National picture.



# Exclusions in Northumberland

	Permanent Exclusions			Pupil population	Suspensions		
	Total	EHCP	SEN Support		Total	EHCP	SEN Support
<b>2018/19</b>	83	3	24	39,684	3490	180	769
<b>2019/20</b>	50	0	15	39,795	1696	112	391
<b>2020/21</b>	44	0	12	40,070	2144	172	642
<b>2021/22</b>	92	1	26	40,059	4027	372	1100
<b>2022/23</b>	105	0	38	40,036	6148	981	1687
<b>2023/24</b>	140*	9	62	41,899	6102	1170	1817
<b>2024/25</b>	123**	13	45	39,878	6228	1262	1908

\* includes 12 primary PEX of which 6 had EHCPs

\*\* includes 15 Primary PEX of which 7 had EHCPs

## Cared for Children (CfC), Children with a Social Worker and Children in Kinship Care

There have been no permanent exclusions (PEX) of Northumberland CfC since 2008. Early intervention by the Virtual School, through conversations with schools about young people in care who are at risk of exclusion, has supported this measure. Suspensions of this group, however, remain a concern both nationally and locally.

In light of the statutory guidance to schools (published September 2018) on their duties to CfC and previously CfC, schools and head teachers should also take steps to avoid the exclusion of Previously Looked after Children who have left care via adoption, Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Order.

In 2025 the Department for Education issued updated non statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of children with a social worker' setting out the expectations that schools will work with the Virtual School Head teacher to reduce exclusions for children with social workers including those that have had previous social care involvement.

One of The Virtual School's key objectives is to improve stability by reducing suspensions for Cared for Children, Previously Cared for Children, Children with a Social Worker and those living in Kinship Care. In order to support schools to reduce suspensions for those vulnerable groups The Virtual School provides training, networking and consultation to key staff in all Northumberland settings, a link worker model of practice for each Cared for Child, educational

psychology, SEND and Post 16 monitoring and intervention, and it is facilitating a trauma informed schools project across the county.

## Reducing Exclusion

The multi-agency consultations that informed the development of this strategy identified that:

- Promoting inclusion and preventing and reducing exclusion is everybody's responsibility and requires a robust multi-agency approach.
- Activity to promote inclusion and reduce exclusion should be embedded into all work with children, young people and families
- Schools and education settings want advice, resources and training to support best practice.

This strategy outlines the different strands of proactive work to prevent exclusion and secure best outcomes for all young people which is already underway and the further developments to be undertaken within:

- 1 Mainstream Offer
- 2 Fair Access and Inclusion
- 3 Ensuring Best Practice
- 4 Specialist Settings

Early years' settings, schools, Post 16 providers, and services should use this strategy to inform their policies, practice and multi-agency planning in their work to ensure good outcomes for our children and young people ensuring that promoting inclusion and preventing exclusion really is everybody's business in Northumberland.

# Mainstream Offer

The Mainstream offer consists of school-based interventions and support that demonstrates a consistently applied graduated response to all pupils needs. **Whole School Vision and Ethos for all Northumberland schools and education settings.**

Schools are the key universal children's service, which children and young people experience, and can positively influence their lives and emotional well-being. A positive ethos, the quality of the curriculum, the organisation, and engaging delivery of teaching and learning all contribute to school being a safe and secure environment, and a place where children want to be. Building strong relationships with parents and carers and engaging them in their child's education will also help secure good attendance and enable children to achieve good outcomes.

Providing children with the opportunity to develop positive social and emotional skills and resilience is crucial in addressing individual needs and achieving positive outcomes. Research increasingly demonstrates that positive emotional health and well-being are key factors in affecting social development, school attendance, and educational attainment. Regular attendance at school and then in Post 16 education and training makes a critical contribution to safeguarding children and securing good outcomes. We want our schools and education settings to promote a culture of positive relationships and good attendance and to work in close partnership with children and young people, their families, Children's Services, and other agencies to identify and respond to any additional needs which could, if left unaddressed lead to a risk of exclusion.



## School and Education settings Leadership

School Leadership Teams ensure that schools adopt and consistently implement inclusive, whole school policies and practices that support good attendance. The prevention of exclusion is the responsibility of the Head Teacher and the Governing Body, with the approach supported by the Leadership Team and the whole school body. The same principles apply to senior leaders in Early Years' and Post 16 settings.

Additional information and links to relevant policies can be found in our School Exclusion Handbook ([handbook](#)).

# Early Intervention, Identification and Prevention

## Preventative Education Services

### Northumberland Inclusive Education Services

#### Northumberland Inclusive Education Services

The core purpose of the Inclusive Education Support Service in Northumberland is to support and enable schools to identify special educational and disabilities and support identifying appropriate provision for the children and young people in their communities, and working alongside setting staff, can offer a wider range of training to support upskilling the workforce in a wide range of areas, thereby improving outcomes for learners as they move through school and prepare for adult life. Northumberland County Council provides Support Services for schools in the following areas:

- Autism
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Educational Psychology
- Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour (EWB)
- English as an Additional Language
- Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)
- Hearing, Vision and Multisensory Impairment
- Speech, Language and Communication SLCN)
- Preparing for Adulthood (PfA)/Careers

Since September 2020, services have delivered a core offer free at the point of delivery. This applies to all Northumberland schools (maintained and academies). Specialist staff provide advice for settings on meeting needs of children and young people within the context of the classroom and setting, working with setting staff and alongside wider stakeholders to develop and implement successful strategies for inclusion to support children and young people to achieve alongside their peers and reach their lifelong goals.

#### Inclusion Service

The main responsibility of the Inclusion Team is to fulfil the local authority's statutory duties regarding permanently excluded learners. Schools and Academies can access free support, advice and guidance to schools and academies in relation to young people 'at risk' of exclusion. Colleagues within the team have a wealth of experience working with young people whose barriers to learning include:

- Emerging social, emotional and mental health issues
- Transition
- Disruptive behaviour that may result in exclusion
- Challenging family circumstances

The work of the team varies and the intervention can range from signposting or implementing the graduated approach to brokering alternative provision places, if this is identified as a suitable pathway.

For information about how the Inclusion Team and the Inclusive Education Services fits into the continuum of school-based intervention, please refer to the ladder of support within the School Exclusion Handbook. ([ladder of support](#)).

#### Early Help

Northumberland County Council has a comprehensive Early Help and Prevention Strategy which focuses on a relational approach to family support, providing opportunities to build valued and trusted relationships, both with professionals and across the community. This approach is crucial in improving outcomes for children and young people as well as managing demand and cost pressures.

One of the priorities within the strategy is to reduce the gap in school readiness and improve engagement in education and good attendance, and pathways into education, training and employment.

Northumberland's Family Hubs underpin the strategy by having created a 'one stop shop' for families from pregnancy, through the early years and up to 19 years or 25 years for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Family Hubs provide a network for local services to come together to improve access to support, connections between families, professionals, services and providers, and puts relationships at the heart of family support. There are currently 11 Family Hubs, as well as outreach sites which offer a range of multi-agency services, with co-located partners.

As part of our multi agency First contact team and MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub), the Early Help First Contact team acts as a single point of access for all professionals who feel that a child or young person needs additional support through the Early Help Support Request process.

The Early Help First Contact team use the graduated approach for both SEND and emotional and mental health support. The Early Help Support request process aims to ensure that the right service is identified at the right time. Any member of staff working in an education setting can refer to the team with the families' consent. Northumberland's Early Help Assessment is a universal tool that can be used by any service or partner agency to help to understand more complex situations and to co-ordinate a support plan for children and young people.

# EARLY HELP PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PATHWAY

Refer to one group and the service will assess suitability.  
During assessment, the service will align age ranges and needs to gain the most from the group offer.

click here to complete a request form

**Best Start in Life**

**Supporting Families**

May be identified for Targeted Intervention through:

- EHA
- Intensive Professional/Agency Involvement
- Early Help Family Worker
- Statutory Social Work

click here

click here



## Prevention Groups (Conception - 2+ Years)

**Brilliant Babies**  
Conception - 6 months  
Bonding and attachment  
Communication  
Health and wellbeing  
Safety  
Physical and emotional development  
Play and learning

**Early Explorers**  
6-18 months  
Communication  
Health and wellbeing  
Safety  
Physical and emotional development  
Play and learning

**LTPP (AND)**  
(Additional Needs and Disabilities) 0-5 years  
Communication  
Health and wellbeing  
Safety  
Physical and emotional development  
Play and learning  
Information, advice and guidance

**Tiny Talkers**  
1-2+ Years  
Communication and language development  
Tips and techniques for developing communication through play

## Intervention Groups (Conception - 19 Years)

**HENRY**  
Families in the Making (Antenatal)  
Health Families: Right from the Start (0-5 Years)  
Healthy Families: Growing Up (4-12 Years)

**Incredible Years**  
Incredible Years Babies (0-1 Year)  
Incredible Years Toddler (1-3 Years)  
Incredible Years Pre-School (3-6 Years)

**Healthier Relationships**  
Hope 2 Recovery (Female 16+)  
Recovery Toolkit (Women 16+ & Children 8+)  
Me, You and Baby Too Antenatal and new parents  
Arguing Better  
Parents experiencing high levels of stress and couple conflict  
Getting it right for Children Separated or separating parents experiencing high levels of conflict

**5+ Groupwork**  
Groups for all age ranges are not always available: the Locality Teams will advise  
Groups to support concerns such as behaviour, confidence, self-esteem, risk-taking and exam stress  
Children and Young People (Over 5 Years)  
Parents and Carers (of 5-19 Years)

Universal Drop-In  
Learning Together Through Play (0-5 Years)



Within Early Help, the Early Help and Prevention Support Team work closely with partners and schools to support with the understanding of the early help offer, as well as supporting the initiation of Early Help Assessments, and the team around the family process. Support for schools and professionals includes offering advice and guidance, hosting clinics, and delivering training which includes a range of topics to support multi-agency staff working with children and families including working with children with emotional health needs, specific neurodevelopmental conditions and SEND. The training helps support staff to identify children early and to understand the early help and prevention framework available in Northumberland to support children and families.

There has also been the development of 'The Directory of Support for Schools' which collates all the support that school can access to support children and families. This includes support which is universal and free through to additional support that schools can acquire for a fee (Link to Directory).

There are currently four Family Help teams situated across the County in Family Hubs who support children and families with a range of complex needs that require intensive family support at an early help level. These teams work closely with schools, the child, and family as part of the Team Around the Family model.

There is a graduated response in place to support children and young people who are experiencing emotional wellbeing and mental health difficulties across health and children's social care services. Referrals can be made through the front door for this support. In addition, mental health services have rolled out the trailblazer programme where there are Education Mental Health practitioners linked to schools across Northumberland. There are also Children's Wellbeing practitioners based in family help teams who can provide 1:1 emotional wellbeing support, psycho-education intervention and parent led CBT that schools can refer into.

The Targeted Young Peoples Service consists of the Youth Justice Service (YJS), Sorted, Substance Misuse Service and Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) Teams.

Young people who are on the periphery of offending can be referred into the YJS Turnaround programme where an assessment will be completed and interventions offered to deter the young people from offending.

Young people who come into contact with the police can benefit from the YJS enhanced preventative model based around an out of court disposal panel and proportionate use of different outcomes by the police as an alternative to criminalisation. This provides an approach where holistic assessments are carried out to inform a plan of support, including supporting children's education outcomes.

The Sorted substance misuse service provides a range of support for young people. This includes group delivery and 1:1 support. Sorted can provide substance use educational sessions in classrooms and assemblies, please refer to schools. When schools have concerns about individual young people, then referrals can be made to the service for 1:1 support.

Sorted also have a professional training offer that schools can access to provide education to school staff in respect of harm reduction and supporting young people where there are substance misuse concerns. Sorted have recently appointed a stop smoking and vaping worker who can also deliver interventions to staff and pupils in schools.

Where there are safeguarding, exploitation and risk concerns outside the home (ROTH), referrals can be made using the MARF for support. There is also training available from the ROTH team for education about contextual safeguarding and how to safeguard children and young people at risk of harm outside of the home.

## **Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) Learners at risk of Permanent Exclusion**

The approach taken in Northumberland for learners with EHCPs is one of early intervention. Permanent exclusion of a learner with high levels of additional need is extremely detrimental to their wellbeing and progress towards their identified outcomes.

Schools making provision for learners with EHCPs are encouraged and supported to notify local authority teams (SEN Monitoring and Assessment Team and specialist support teams) as soon as possible if for any reason they are having difficulty ensuring that a child or young person is engaged in learning and making progress.

Tracking processes within the local authority enables regular monthly monitoring of all pupils with SEN who have received fixed term exclusions. Multi-agency approaches are taken, ensuring that where there are repeating patterns of fixed term exclusions, these are identified and appropriate support offered to schools. For pupils with EHCPs this involves contact being made with the school to discuss the consistency of provision available, the possibility of additional needs emerging, and exploration of other services that may be able to offer support and advice.

In line with the statutory processes, where it appears that a placement is at risk of breakdown, an early Annual Review will be called by the school so that amendments to the EHCP provision (Section F), levels of funding required or changes of placement can be discussed. With parental consent, other schools and settings are approached and placements agreed so that permanent exclusion can be avoided.



We will:

- Support all Northumberland schools and settings to ensure they are inclusive with the aim to meet the needs of all pupils in their communities;
- Provide targeted and whole school support through our multi agency offer;
- Support Head Teachers, governors and staff with learning and development opportunities specifically related to inclusion which will ensure a graduated response is consistently applied to meet all learners needs.

# Fair Access and Inclusion



## Fair Access Protocol

Every Local Authority must have a Fair Access Protocol, agreed with the majority of its schools and academies and which is legally binding. The purpose of the protocol is to ensure better education outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

From a school's perspective, the purpose of this protocol is to establish a fair and transparent system, which ensures that all the schools/academies share the responsibility to support children with challenging behaviour and educational needs when required.

From a pupil's perspective the purpose of the protocol is to ensure that access to mainstream education is secured quickly with the appropriate support.

The protocol will play a key role in helping to keep children safe and to achieve their potential. There is a particular focus on addressing the needs of vulnerable pupils and those with difficult and challenging behaviour who seek admission to a mainstream school/academy, either following a permanent exclusion or to pre-empt such an exclusion, or who are otherwise not on a school roll.

Our approach reflects a shared commitment to working in partnership to minimise the use of exclusion (suspensions and permanent). Schools/academies, the local authority and other services will focus their efforts on early intervention and support for children experiencing difficulties in order to avoid the need for exclusion and/or school transfer.

The current Protocol has been developed in consultation with colleagues via the multi-agency exclusion task and finish group; [Fair Access Protocol](#)

## Managed Moves

Managed moves have been advocated nationally as an alternative to permanent exclusion from school for many years. The current DfE guidance 'Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement August 2024' confirms that 'a pupil can transfer to another school as part of a managed move where this occurs with the consent of all parties involved, including the parents'.

Managed moves involve the young person moving on to a new placement in a planned manner. A change of school can be particularly valuable if it is perceived that a pupil's difficulties are the result of inappropriate peer relationships or if the relationship of trust between parent and school has broken down.

Although schools, parents and pupils have used the idea of a "fresh start" in a new school as an alternative to permanent exclusion for a number of years, experience suggests that when these moves are arranged between the schools themselves (usually at head teacher level) and when they are carefully managed, they have more chance of achieving a successful outcome for the pupil than when the parents attempt to identify an alternative school for their child and to make the transfer arrangements themselves.

In a managed move, the focus is on finding a way forward [in response to the pupil's current](#) difficulties – and so the process is a solution-orientated rather than punitive one. However, 'managed moves' should only be considered when a range of other strategies for managing the pupil in the original school have been tried without success.

For students with EHC Plans, any change of school needs to be through the related review processes and must involve the SEND Team.

N.B. A managed move should only be used when a young person is genuinely at risk of exclusion and not as part of general admission procedures.

[Managed Move Protocol](#)

## Off-site Direction

Off-site direction is when a governing board of a maintained school requires a pupil to attend another education setting to improve their behaviour. Whilst the legislation does not apply to academies, they can arrange off-site provision for such purposes under their general powers. Where interventions or targeted support have

not been successful in improving a pupil's behaviour, off-site direction should be used to arrange time-limited placements at an AP or another mainstream school. During the off-site direction to another school, pupils must be dual registered. Code B should be used for any off-site educational activity, if the provision is an approved educational activity that does not involve the pupil being registered at any other school.

When possible, in-school interventions or targeted support from AP schools should be used to meet a pupil's individual needs and circumstances – whether behavioural or special educational.

Depending on the individual needs and circumstances of the pupil, off-site direction into AP can be full-time or a combination of part-time support in AP and continued mainstream education. A proposed maximum period of time should be discussed and agreed upon as part of the planning phase for an off-site direction. As part of planning, alternative options should be considered once the time limit has been reached, including a managed move on a permanent basis (if a pupil is in a mainstream school) upon review of the time-limited placement.

The governing board must comply with the Education (Educational Provision for Improving Behaviour) Regulations 2010 and must show regard to the Alternative Provision: Statutory guidance for local authorities, head teachers and governing bodies. Whilst



the alternative provision guidance section does legally apply to maintained schools, academy trusts are also encouraged to follow this guidance.

The statutory guidance covers objectives and timeframes with appropriate monitoring of progress. For maintained schools, the governing board must ensure that parents (or the pupil if 18 or older) (and the local authority if the pupil has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan) are notified in writing and provided with information about the placement as soon as practicable after the direction has been made and no later than two school days before the relevant day.

Parents (or pupils aged 18 or over) and, where the pupil has an EHC plan, the local authority can request, in writing, that the governing board hold a review meeting. When this happens, governing boards must comply with the request as soon as reasonably practicable, unless there has already been a review meeting in the previous 10 weeks.

The length of time a pupil spends in another mainstream school or AP and the reintegration plan must be kept under review by the governing body, who must hold review meetings at such intervals as they, having regard to the needs of the pupil, consider appropriate, for as long as the requirement remains in effect. Not later than six days before the date of any review meeting, a governing body must give a written invitation to parents (or the pupil if 18 or older) (and the local authority if the pupil has an EHC plan) to attend the review meeting, or to submit in writing before the date of the meeting their views as to whether off-site direction should continue to have effect. The governing body must ensure, insofar as is practicable, that any review meeting is convened on a date, and at a time, that is suitable for the parent.

The governing body must keep the placement under review for as long as the requirement remains in effect and must decide following each review meeting as to whether the requirement should continue to have effect and, if so, for what period of time. The meeting should include arrangements for reviews, including how often the placement will be reviewed, when the first review will be and who should be involved in the reviews.

For example, review meetings should take place between the school, parents, the pupil, and other agencies e.g., a pupil's social worker, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and Youth Justice Teams, and the local authority (if a pupil has an EHC plan) to establish agreed monitoring points to discuss the pupil's ongoing behaviour. These reviews should be recorded in writing and be frequent enough to provide assurance that the off-site direction is achieving its objectives via monitoring points.

The governing body must give written notification of their decision as to whether the requirement to continue the placement should continue and if so, for what period of time including the reasons for it to the parent no later than six days after the date of the review meeting.

To support a pupil with reintegration into their referring school, the focus of intervention whilst off-site should remain on ensuring that a pupil continues to receive a broad and balanced curriculum whilst any inappropriate behaviours which require intervention are being addressed. If a pupil with a disability or SEN has been moved off-site, the duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014 continue to apply (for example, to make reasonable adjustments or to put support in place to meet SEN).

The length of time a pupil spends in another mainstream school or AP will depend on what best supports the pupil's needs and potential improvement in behaviour.

## Inclusion Panel

The local authority has a legal obligation to arrange suitable full-time education for children and young people who are permanently excluded. The local authority can meet these obligations through a variety of pathways including commissioning places at the PRU or alternative provision. In order to ensure the most appropriate educational provision suitable to meet the needs of those pupils at risk of permanent exclusion or those that have been excluded, a multi-agency Inclusion panel will come into operation in September 2022:

- to provide a clear and transparent admission process that is understood by service users (pupils), their parents/ carers, schools/academies and staff;
- to ensure that children and young people are placed in the most appropriate educational provision suitable to their needs.

The Inclusion Panel has been developed to decide on the most appropriate educational placements for those children and young people who:

- have been permanently excluded
- are at risk of permanent exclusion

The Inclusion Panel will also review pupils who are in receipt of education provided via alternative education or the PRU on a regular basis. In the first instance this will be done via the Inclusion Support Officers, who will act as the champion of the child and represent their views and feelings. All children and young people who are placed via the Inclusion Panel must have an exit route identified which might include:

- Post 16 progression plan
- Return to mainstream via the fair access process
- EHCP (with a view to moving out of the PRU/AP)

The panel membership will be made up of representatives from the Education Inclusion Team, SEND, Early Help, Mental Health, Health, Virtual School, Head Teacher of PRU and social care.

The local authority fully recognises that prevention and intervention deliver the best outcomes for those children at risk of permanent exclusion, so in order to support the work of the panel, funding will be set aside on an annual basis to provide additional support to schools to prevent permanent exclusion. [Inclusion Panel Protocol](#)

### We will:

- Ensure all children and young people have access to the most suitable education setting to meet their needs in order that they achieve their potential;
- Ensure that Northumberland's Fair Access Protocol (FAP) is maintained and applied to support vulnerable young people into an appropriate new school as soon as possible;
- Have overall focus on destinations as we strive to offer inclusive educational pathways that recognises the voice of learners in order for them to fulfil their potential.

# Ensuring Best Practice in Use of Exclusions

# 3



## The Use of Permanent Exclusions and Suspensions – Northumberland’s Ambition

Currently in Northumberland, the main reason for suspensions and permanent exclusions is persistent disruptive behaviour. There is a strong expectation that through the implementation of this strategy, the trend will change and the main reason for both suspensions and permanent exclusions of pupils from Northumberland Schools will be in relation to more serious incidents that have caused risk of harm to others and where allowing the pupils to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupils or others in the school.

This strategy aims to reduce the use of suspensions and permanent exclusions for incidents of persistent disruptive behaviour by ensuring that the root causes of such emerging behaviours are understood and appropriately addressed as early as possible through early intervention and innovative multi-agency planning.

Exclusion is especially discouraged for our Cared for Children and children with a social worker as it could be re-traumatising for them, resurfacing feelings of rejection and there are safeguarding concerns if they are sent home from school. The Virtual School is available with a wide range of support to help schools avoid exclusion for Cared for Children

*As stated in the DfE Statutory Guidance, “the decision to exclude a pupil must be lawful, reasonable and fair. Schools have a statutory duty not to discriminate against pupils on the basis of protected characteristics, such as disability or race. Schools should give particular consideration to the fair treatment of pupils from groups who are vulnerable to exclusion. Disruptive behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs. Where a school has concerns about a pupil’s behaviour, it should try to identify whether there are any causal factors and intervene early in order to reduce the need for a subsequent exclusion. In this situation, schools should consider whether a multi-agency assessment that goes beyond the pupil’s educational needs is required.”*

Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement Guidance for maintained schools, academies, and pupil referral units in England September 2024.

Exclusions – ensuring legal processes are followed. Where an exclusion is to be used, it is essential that the legally required processes are followed. Northumberland County Council has written a Handbook providing guidance providing Head Teachers, Principals, Heads of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Governors/trustees with a comprehensive guide in processing and recording a permanent exclusion.

## DfE Guidance

All decisions about fixed and permanent exclusions need to be made in reference to the statutory DfE guidance - Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement, Guidance for maintained schools, academies, and pupil referral units in England August 2024.

It is important to refer to the guidance when considering an exclusion and to ensure that all processes and procedures carried out are compliant with the guidance. The guidance provides an overview to the legislation on exclusions and how to ensure that practices/processes are compliant. Supporting young people who have been permanently excluded into a new school place:

For young people who need to return to mainstream schools following a permanent exclusion an appropriate school place is identified through Northumberland's agreed Fair Access Protocols (FAP). Once a new school place has been agreed, timescales are set for the young person to be admitted to the school along with an agreed plan for how any necessary support will be provided to the young person.



## Support for young people who have been permanently excluded

Every Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide full time, suitable education for permanently excluded learners.

In Northumberland, learners are assigned a Key Worker from the Inclusion Team, who will track and monitor their progress.

Alternative provision settings are expected to identify any gaps in learning or development by using our 'screening tool'. This will enable them to offer appropriate intervention and seek support from appropriate agencies if necessary.

The goal is to identify a pathway back into mainstream education via the FAP or into a specialist setting if required. For young people in Key Stage 4 there will also be support provided to identify a Post 16 pathway:

### Support into employment, training, and further education

The careers guidance team provides information advice and guidance (IAG) to young people in Year 11 who are considered to be at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) which aims to help them with next steps. Additionally, our team performs statutory functions to record monthly participation as well as supporting education providers, individual NEETS and other professionals to support those requiring access to careers support. Our main cohort is those that have EHCPs who are residing in our specialist schools and alternative provisions.

All Northumberland Schools and providers have their own statutory duty to coordinate the delivery of careers support within their setting. However, our Level 6 trained Careers Advisors work closely with those providers to offer support for those that are carefully identified at Risk of NEET. This comes in the form of a Careers Interview with an individually tailored Careers Action Plan (CAP) based on their interview. These are shared with the young person, careers lead and will often form part of the discussion during an EHCP review.

The Northumberland County Council Careers Service extended offer is to focus on enhancing careers provision in SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) schools with an emphasis on the evaluation and implementation of a Careers Health Check, with specific reference to the revised Gatsby Benchmarks. The enhanced offer aims to compliment the support offered by the North East Combined Authority (NECA) Careers HUB programme and the existing support individually offered to schools via the team of Careers Facilitators. This offer is a non-contractual offer in kind to schools.

Working with identified leads in Schools (such as Careers leads, SENCOs, Link Governors), we will act as a critical friend to explore the providers careers delivery plan for 2025/26 and how they intend to evaluate it against the new Gatsby Framework. The overarching aim of the offer is to raise standards in SEND Careers delivery and facilitate positive progression for SEND students living in Northumberland.

For Cared for Children, the Virtual School's careers advisers offer a bespoke package of guidance and support from year 9 up to age 21, including multiple guidance appointments as well as support with applications transport and bursaries.

#### We will:

- Work with Head teachers and Governors to ensure that statutory exclusions guidance is being followed and all exclusions are compliant with legislation;
- Offer all Governing Bodies access to exclusion training with regards to their role in reviewing exclusions;
- Monitor the use of permanent exclusion in each school and where there is high and/or increasing rate of exclusion we will invite schools in to discuss the reasons for exclusions and preventative measures being put in place;
- Work with Post 16 providers to identify and disseminate best practice in the prevention of exclusion. NB: Young people are excluded from Post 16 provisions. Post 16 policy and practice is determined by each individual Post 16 setting as there is no national Post 16 exclusions guidance or reporting on exclusion for this age group.

# Specialist settings



## Alternative Provision

Alternative Provision (AP) is for children of compulsory school age who do not attend mainstream or special schools and who would be at risk of not receiving suitable education, for any reason. Every child is entitled to an education that enables them to fulfil their potential, whatever their background, needs or location in the country. High quality Alternative Provision that is appropriate to the particular needs of a young person can play a critical role in making this happen. It can provide support to young people at challenging moments in their lives and each placement has the potential to transform a young person's life chances.

In light of the green paper (May 2022), Northumberland County Council reviewed its current provision of Alternative Providers and contracting arrangements to ensure the recommendations and new guidance is fully implemented across the county.

Local Authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for permanently excluded children and for other children who through illness or other reasons would not receive suitable education, without such arrangements being made. Where a child has been subject to a suspension of more than five school days, schools must arrange Alternative Provision.

Young people can require Alternative Provision for a wide range of reasons, including:

- as an intervention for children who, for a number of reasons are struggling to manage in mainstream schooling;
- behaviour which has resulted in the school implementing a permanent or suspension, or an off-site direction;
- health reasons – including physical or mental health needs; and
- where a child is awaiting placement in a specialist school.

The first objective of these places is to gain, over a relatively short period of time, a fuller understanding of the young person's needs and the type of support they need to make good progress and achieve well.

Where assessments show it is appropriate for the young person to return to their mainstream school, school staff should work closely with the Alternative Provision to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and understanding of how to provide the appropriate type of support ready for the young person's return. Alternatively, assessments may indicate that it is not appropriate for a young person to remain in a mainstream school as their needs will be most effectively met in a smaller specialist school. A special school place can only be secured where an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is in place.

## Provision mapping “Ensuring the right places are available at the right time in the right place”

(page 33): [Alternative Provision Market Analysis](#)

### Challenges

Serving the needs of Northumberland children and young people as close to their home communities as possible brings challenges due to the rural nature of the vast majority of the County. In order to meet this challenge, we need to ensure we have Alternative Provision available across the whole of Northumberland. The vast majority being located in the South East of the county which again is in line with where the vast majority of the population of Northumberland reside and where there is

the greatest demand for alternative provision placements both for preventive work and those that have been permanently excluded from school.

With the exception of the Pupil referral unit, all AP providers are private unregistered provision with young people attending 2 providers (2 days at 1st provider and 3 days at 2nd provider) no full-time provision is currently on offer.

### Alternative Provision commissioning arrangement and Quality Monitoring

Contract monitoring comprises annual Contract Management meetings, which are held with each provider (framework and non-framework) and the Head of School Organisation and Resources together with the Head of Commissioning. To provide a more structured basis for this conversation a Performance Dashboard using CPOMS is in development.

Annual Contract Monitoring Visits are held with each provider in which a Quality Monitoring report is completed with an Action Plan as appropriate. From a commissioning perspective, this covers safe recruitment, premises and insurance, risk assessments, policies and procedures etc. This process is supported by an assessment from a School Improvement Partner, which follows the format for support offered to Northumberland’s maintained schools.

This monitoring process was designed to provide the Council with a level of assurance regarding the overarching quality of the provision. However it is not intended to monitor the performance and wellbeing of the individual child in placement. In the case of permanently excluded children, this remains the responsibility of the specialist team within the Council who also regularly engage with providers via Provider Engagement Events to share good practice and drive up the quality of delivery.

Although Ofsted guidance makes it clear that schools cannot rely on the due diligence undertaken by the Council when commissioning placements, a catalogue is being produced detailing the service offer of each provider together with details of the outcomes achieved, this is updated on a termly basis. This is intended to support schools in identifying appropriate provision and understanding the market by sharing intelligence.

Whilst it is our aim to see a reduction in the number of children that are permanently excluded within Northumberland this is in part reliant upon schools proactively commissioning support for pupils via preventative programmes. It follows that the balance between the number of Council commissioned placements and school commissioned placements will alter over time. As both are reliant upon good quality, sustainable provision the work undertaken with providers supports that agenda with an increasing focus on reintegration, meaningful outcomes and support in preparing for post 16 education.

Further details on all Northumberland County Council alternative provision providers, including their outcomes data, is contained in the Alternative Provision /Catalogue at ([Alternative Provision Catalogue](#)).



## Monitoring attendance, progress and outcomes of young people in AP

The Education Welfare service monitors attendance of every child attending an Alternative Provider.

The service provided by Education Welfare involves:

- Oversight from a named Lead Education Welfare Officer;
- Weekly check of the compliance declaration to ensure that all providers are operating within the DfE guidance for the Registration of Independent Schools (August 2022);
- Fortnightly data meetings with each provider (on each separate site) to ensure that all children missing education and at risk of missing education are identified. This data is monitored by the multi-agency CME (children missing education) tracking pane;
- Monthly review of CME returns, triangulated with provider registers, to identify children whose attendance is causing concern.

For children who are permanently excluded from school, the Inclusion Team allocates the placement in alternative provision and supports the child for a period of induction. A timetable with notice of arrangement and certificate of service is prepared and sent to parents. At the same time the Lead Education Welfare Officer with oversight of attendance in alternative provision starts gathering and recording attendance data.

If and when the attendance of individual children deteriorates, providers start their attendance procedure by contacting parents, professionals and sending standard letters home. If attendance does not improve, then providers either make a referral to Education Welfare or, in exceptional circumstances, involve the Inclusion Team if the placement is not working.

Actions to improve attendance include home visits, referrals to other agencies if appropriate and meetings in school. Intensive one to one support from Education Welfare Support Officers is offered on an individual needs basis.

The Education Welfare service encourages alternative providers to take a firm position to enforce attendance. The service is monitoring 280 students, 2 of which are PA. There are 87 open referrals (including Independent settings and PRU). Of the 87 referrals, 6 formal warnings were issued, but 5 not progressed. One being prosecuted.



Average overall attendance is 67.66%. The latest national average from the DfE (Autumn Term 2024/25) cites attendance in state-funded alternative provision at 59.06%.

Academic progress and education outcomes for children placed in alternative provision are monitored by the Inclusion Team for permanently excluded pupils, and by schools that have commissioned places in alternative provision for children who remain on their school roll. An Alternative Provision Catalogue is published on an annual basis that sets out the providers used in the previous year and the educational outcomes together with destination data for each providers' cohort of pupils in order to support schools making an informed choice on which AP provider to meet the needs of their children and young people.

# Developing further SEMH Provision in Northumberland

Leaders from all education sectors have for some time been highlighting the challenges within many settings in ensuring appropriate provision for learners with SEMH. Although Northumberland County Council has much strength within this area, capacity is not always available where it is needed and the capacity which does exist is not always coordinated. Early years settings, all mainstream schools, special schools, alternative providers, health providers and central LA teams have key roles to play and responsibilities to meet in this area.

To meet the needs of SEMH learners as close to home as possible...

## **The Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) at Seghill will -**

In 2022/23 academic year the age range at the PRU changed, moving from KS2 and 3 to take KS3 and 4 learners. Permanently excluded pupils in KS3/4 are admitted automatically. Other learners are admitted via the Inclusion Panel. Where possible placements are short term, around 20 weeks. Planned exit routes are highlighted on entry including return to the current school, a managed move to another mainstream school, a placement at a special school in Northumberland or a placement at an AP Provision.

Significant amounts of work are required to ensure a smooth transition into and out of the PRU placement. Prior to admittance to the PRU schools need to prove appropriate approaches to the graduate approach, use of external SEND support services and other supportive practices. This should be highlighted to the admission panel by a 'champion of the child'.



## **We will:**

- Develop an alternative education model which offers routes for children which support their future career choice.
- Work with our existing high quality Alternative Providers, schools and academies to develop registered full time provision.
- Continue to build capacity in all partnerships to ensure the educational needs of children and young people are met as close to home as possible.
- Always have the child at the centre of every decision, and we will ensure that our most vulnerable learners have access to high quality education and ambitious pathways.

## **Contact Us**

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