TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be **young**

Inclusive mainstream practice

and

Experts at Hand (EAH)



NHS
Cheshire and Merseyside

Cheshire East Council

Inclusive mainstream practice and Experts at Hand (EAH)

1. Inclusion Support Offer (ISO)

Our Inclusion Support Offer (ISO) will be built from two key elements: our Inclusive Mainstream Practice model and our Experts At Hand services. We believe it is essential to bring these elements together to demonstrate how they align and complement one another, creating a comprehensive Cheshire East Inclusion Support Offer. We will operate as a single, integrated 0–25 SEND and inclusion system. The Best Start in Life model (0–5), Family Hubs and Early Help services form the foundation for early identification. This connects directly to the Inclusive Mainstream Practice and Experts at Hand model (5–25), which provides graduated support within schools and settings.

This forms a coherent and continuous pathway of support, ensuring that children, young people and families experience seamless transitions, consistent approaches, and aligned support from early years through to adulthood.

This integrated model ensures that support is provided at the earliest opportunity, reduces escalation to statutory processes, and delivers the right support, in the right place, at the right time across the full 0–25 age range.

This integrated approach will ensure that every school and setting has access to a dedicated inclusion team, comprising a wide range of professional expertise. This offer will support inclusive practice, early intervention, and specialist expertise, ensuring that all schools receive a universal package of support and have a clear route to accessing additional support when it is needed as part of the graduated approach and prior to an EHCP. This means that the model will provide a new offer so that children can get support without having to fight for an EHCP.

By combining these approaches, we aim to promote consistency of practice alongside fairness, and transparency in the allocation of resources. Ultimately, this model is designed to enable early support, reduce the escalation of need, and improve outcomes for all children and young people.

Our new way of working will also be organised through locality-based delivery, aligned with the Families First reforms and our Best Start in Life Plan. This approach will enable us to develop both a “team around the school” and a “team around the locality,”

strengthening relationships and collaboration at every level. Working in this way will support a deeper understanding of both the differences and shared priorities across Cheshire East, ensuring that targeted support is responsive to the specific needs of individual schools and settings, as well as the wider local context. It will also create opportunities for groups of schools and settings to work more closely together, sharing resources, expertise, and developing innovative, collaborative models of inclusion that reflect the needs of children and young people within their locality.

1.1. Proposed model structure for Inclusive Mainstream Practice and Experts At Hand

This delivery model has been co-produced with schools, multi-academy trust (MAT) leaders, early years providers, post-16 representatives, the Parent Carer Forum, and the Integrated Care Board. Engagement has taken place through workshops, SENCO networks, briefings and pilot activity linked to the Inclusion Framework.

Feedback from these partners has directly informed the design of the model. In addition, the model has been shaped by analysis of data and intelligence, including EHCP trends, exclusion data, AP demand, neurodiversity (ND) profiling tool (Knowing Me), and the JSNA.

Our delivery model will follow the Families First footprint which is across four locality areas and has been developed to align with the NHS Neighbourhood model where possible.

The delivery approach for this offer appropriately sits with Cheshire East Council, as it brings together education, health and care partners into a single, coherent Inclusion Support Offer aligned to statutory responsibilities for SEND and inclusion across Cheshire East. The model is explicitly LA-led, ensuring democratic accountability, strategic oversight and alignment with the area's Shared Journeys programme and national SEND reforms, while enabling consistent, equitable delivery across all schools and settings. At the same time, the approach is strengthened through formalised partnership arrangements with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and other providers, using Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to commission and oversee health functions such as Speech and Language Therapy

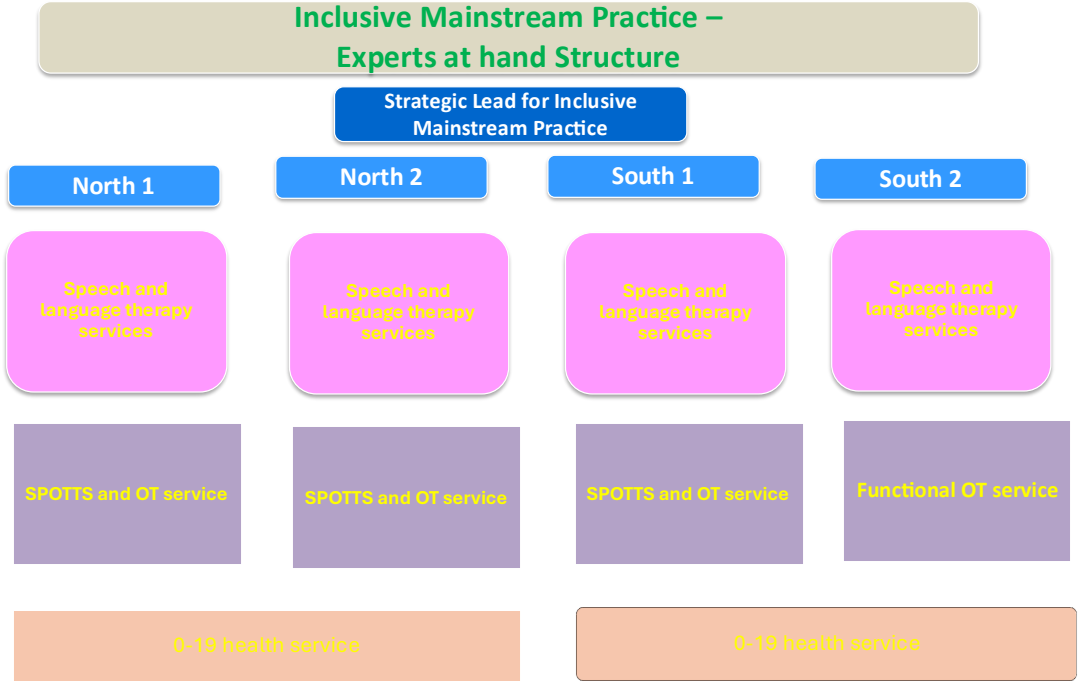
(SALT) and Occupational Therapy (OT), with clear expectations for clinical supervision and performance expectations. This will ensure that all partners are held to consistent standards for timeliness, quality and impact.

This blended model is optimal for the local area because it combines strong LA system leadership with the specialist expertise of health and external partners, delivered through locality-based teams aligned to the four Families First footprints. This supports services to be responsive to local need and delivered through a team around the school and team around the locality approaches that build capacity and relationships at community level.

Our reform plan is clear about strengthening data and it is our ambition to rapidly develop our insights so that we can use a range of data tools, and information and intelligence from the neurodiversity profiling tool (Knowing Me), to provide joint data to inform commissioning decisions. The aim through the EAH model and ND profiling tool will be to achieve ND assessment times initially being a maximum of 52 weeks but reducing to 40 weeks by 28/29. The inclusion of Best Start Family Hubs, particularly through the 0–19 service and parent engagement offers, provides community facing delivery points that strengthen early identification, prevention and family support.

Performance and quality assurance are embedded through a robust governance framework, including the SEND Operational Delivery Group and SEND Improvement and Assurance Board, alongside structured workstreams that oversee commissioning, delivery and continuous improvement. Collectively, this LA led, partnership-based model is optimal because it enables early intervention, reduces escalation to statutory processes, ensures efficient use of pooled expertise and resources, and delivers a consistent yet locally tailored offer for children and young people across Cheshire East. It is through this mechanism that all partners within the Inclusion Support Offer (including EAH education, health, care providers) will share collective accountability for improving inclusion outcomes, reducing escalation to statutory processes, and ensuring equitable access to support across localities. To achieve this, we will develop a shared outcomes framework across all partners and link this with the SLAs. As these develop, we will translate these to locality partnership-based accountability within its footprint which will be supported by data.


Inclusion Support Offer
Including Inclusive Mainstream Practice and Experts At Hand Structure
Business support and data role.
Strategic Lead for Inclusive Mainstream Practice
Business support and data role.
North 1
North 2
South 1
South 2
Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher 1 x FT
Inclusion Support Advisory Teacher 1 x FT
Specialist Teacher (CEAT)
Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychologist Trainee
Sensory Inclusion Service
Sensory Inclusion Service
Special School Outreach
Parent Carer
Just Drop In – MHST
Vision – MHST


Inclusive Mainstream Practice – Experts at hand Structure
Strategic Lead for Inclusive Mainstream Practice
North 1
North 2
South 1
South 2
Speech and language therapy services
SPOTTS and OT service
Functional OT service
0-19 health service
0-19 health service

2. How the EAH model will work in practice

The EAH model will work as a locality-based model which is designed to provide timely, needs led support and intervention without needing escalation to statutory processes. Access to EAH will follow a graduated and threshold-based model utilising referrals to the Inclusion Forums and therefore providing consistency across all settings:

- **Universal level (all settings):** Schools and settings will access advice, resources and training through the Inclusion Framework and Inclusion Support Offer (ISO) and their action plans, without the need for referral. All schools and settings will be able to expect to access borough wide support around workforce coaching and development through events such as SENCO meetings / Spotlight on Inclusion events / education leader briefings etc., plus Inclusion Framework tools and problem solving / action planning. Schools and settings are likely to be able to access EAH services through aspects such as consultations and workforce development. It does not include direct case-level involvement from Experts at Hand services. Access to Experts at Hand consultations from education, health or care professionals, is provided through a graduated, threshold-based pathway, beginning at the targeted level via locality referral routes.

- **Targeted level (early needs):** Schools and settings request support through a locality referral route, supported by SENCO-led evidence of utilising the graduated approach, use of the Inclusion Framework tools and initial triage by the multi-disciplinary locality Inclusion Team. Schools and settings within this tier may receive consultation and problem solving, targeted intervention planning and deeper workforce coaching and development. The impact is intended to be on the young people, and the support is also designed to build the capability of the school or setting so that future needs can be met without ongoing specialist involvement.

- **Specialist level (complex needs):** Multi-disciplinary EAH input (EP, autism, sensory services or outreach from our special schools and AP) is deployed where needs are persistent and complex and where targeted support has not resulted in sufficient progress. Schools and settings within this tier may receive consultation and problem solving, observation and modelling, targeted intervention planning and deeper

workforce coaching and development. Support is likely to be delivered in the school or setting, working alongside staff.

Accountability for EAH delivery will operate at three levels:

a) **Operational**: We will develop Locality Leads who will be responsible for delivery, referral management and performance within each area. Locality Leads will review referrals to identify gaps in access and take steps to engage underrepresented schools and settings.
b) **Strategic**: Strategic Lead for Inclusive Mainstream Practice accountable for consistency, thresholds and outcomes across the system via the Operational Delivery Group (ODG). ODG will ensure equitable access across all schools and settings by reviewing referrals, take up of support and outcomes so that support is not disproportionately accessed.
c) **System wide**: SEND Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB) overseeing performance, impact and alignment to financial recovery.

Performance will be monitored through:

- response times and access to support
- number of CYP supported at SEN Support
- reduction in EHC needs assessments
- placement stability and reduction in exclusions and change of placement requests

For CYP educated outside Cheshire East, the EAH model will be largely delivered through digital consultation and advice, with clear expectations for engagement as part of commissioning process.

The Inclusion Support Offer model is directly aligned to:

- National SEND and inclusion reforms.
- The expectation of strengthened universal and targeted provision.
- The Experts at Hand approach.
- The council's Shared Journeys programme.
- The development of a more inclusive, confident mainstream system.

As national expectations evolve, the ISS workforce provides a flexible and skilled resource that can be deployed to support schools and settings to respond to emerging priorities without creating over-reliance on statutory processes.

2.1. Role of the Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers

Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers (ISATs) will work as part of our Inclusion Support Offer to support schools and settings in delivering strong inclusive practice across the borough. The role of the **Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers** (ISATs) is rooted in working within a defined locality so they can develop a deep understanding of the context, strengths and challenges of the schools they support. By working closely with a consistent group of schools, the ISATs will develop and maintain strong, trusted relationships with senior leaders, staff and wider partners, enabling more meaningful and sustainable inclusion support. This locality-based approach ensures that advice and challenge are responsive to the specific needs of each school community rather than generic or reactive.

A key aspect of the ISAT role is the use of the Inclusion Framework (please see section below and separate appendix) to identify effective inclusive practice and areas for development. Through regular engagement, learning walks, discussion and data analysis, the allocated ISAT support schools and settings to reflect on their provision at a whole-school level, including leadership, teaching and learning, behaviour, SEND systems and wider culture. Where effective practice is identified, this is recognised and shared to strengthen consistency across the locality. Where gaps are evident, the allocated ISAT offers practical guidance, coaching and signposting to targeted support to build school capacity and confidence.

In addition, ISATs play a key role in supporting and shaping SENCO networks and SENCO Development Days. The themes, priorities and areas for development identified through the Inclusion Framework directly inform the focus of network meetings and professional learning opportunities. This ensures that training and collaboration are purposeful, relevant and aligned with current need across schools and settings.

ISATs also contribute to the planning and delivery of Spotlight on Inclusion events, using identified strengths and emerging themes from the framework to showcase effective

practice, promote peer learning and celebrate inclusive success with partners across the locality.

Overall, the ISATs act as both a critical friend and a catalyst for improvement, supporting schools to embed inclusive practice, reduce barriers to learning and ensure that all pupils, particularly those with SEND or additional needs, can thrive within mainstream settings.

2.2. Rational for the roles

ISATs bring knowledge of inclusive practice, curriculum adaptation, environmental design, behaviour support, emotional regulation strategies, graduated approach and whole school inclusion planning. Their work is preventative and capacity building in nature. They work alongside school leaders, SENCOs and classroom teachers to help build inclusive systems and reduce the need for EHCPs, prevent escalation of need and improve outcomes for children who require additional support but do not need statutory plans.

The Inclusion Support team is important for delivering the council's Shared Journeys strategy, ensuring that inclusive practice is implemented consistently across Cheshire East. They are also central to preparing the system for the government's SEND and inclusion reforms, especially in the development of new national standards, strengthened universal provision and the focus on keeping children in their local mainstream schools.

This proposal responds directly to the changing national and local SEND and inclusion agenda, including the government's direction of travel towards inclusive mainstream practice, the Experts at Hand model, and a system expectation that mainstream schools are supported to meet a greater proportion of predictable need without escalation to specialist pathways.

Their role is central to supporting schools to identify and respond early to need, reduce escalation, and improve outcomes for children and young people who require additional support but do not need statutory plans.

Our **Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers** will work with every school and post-16 setting on the Inclusion Framework to:

- Establish a comprehensive understanding of inclusion across all schools and post-16 settings by integrating data analysis with contextual, school-based insights.
- Support each individual school and post-16 setting in gaining a clear picture of inclusion within their setting through a combination of data interrogation and qualitative information.
- Develop a collaborative framework that enables partnership working to identify specific areas for development and actionable steps to enhance inclusion at the school or setting level.
- Provide robust evidence to inform the design and delivery of both universal and targeted training and support initiatives.

3. The Inclusion Framework



The Inclusion Framework will:

- **Facilitate collaborative engagement with individual schools and post-16 settings** to implement the inclusion framework effectively at the school or setting level.
- **Provide strategic guidance and support across whole-school and settings** to enhance inclusive practices, informed by the outcomes of the inclusion framework.
- **Deliver tailored targeted support and training** identified through the framework, addressing needs at the whole-school or setting level

This will be actioned through regular visits to primary, secondary and post 16 settings.

3.1. Pilot of the Inclusion framework

We began sharing the Inclusion Framework with a number of our schools and settings in January 2026. It has been co-produced with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Educational Psychology Service, our Autism Team, Parents and Carers, and our

Inclusion Quality Officers (now known as Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers). The framework is currently on version 16.

Throughout its development, the framework has also been shared with MAT CEOs and a selection of practising Ofsted inspectors. We are now in the pilot stage of rolling out the Inclusion Framework and have used it as a self-reflection tool with 16 schools and settings (as at 22 June 2026) across primary, secondary, and post-16 provision.

We have ensured a diverse representation of school contexts within the pilot, including small and rural schools, those serving areas of high deprivation, as well as both academy and maintained schools.

Feedback has been unanimously positive - for example:

"Both Dawn and Sarah were extremely supportive. It feels as though this is a team effort to help us move along the inclusion pathway, which is so vital now the white paper has been released. As someone who is new to the SENCO role, having that support and knowing where to go for help is really valuable."

"Completing the Inclusion Framework will be very useful in helping us to develop a clear and focused action plan for inclusion. It highlights the many strengths within our current practice while also identifying areas for further development. This process supports the clear identification of priorities and next steps, enabling us to focus on areas that will have the greatest impact. Ultimately, it will help ensure that we continue to develop our provision and provide the best possible support for all of our children."

MAT CEOs have also praised the process as an effective vehicle for driving trust-wide development in inclusion. Some have expressed interest in extending its use to schools beyond Cheshire East, recognising the value it offers.

Additionally, many schools have requested to join the pilot phase now rather than waiting until the Autumn term; however, current capacity limits our ability to accommodate further uptake at this stage.

We have been able to share the Inclusion Framework, along with our intentions for its collaborative use, across a wide range of educational settings through a Heads and Leaders briefing on 16 April 2026 (attended by over 114 settings), our first SENCO Development Day (attended by 138 settings) and a Governors webinar (attended by 54 delegates). On all of these occasions, the proposed work and approach were received with consistently positive support.

- **Inclusive Mainstream Practice Model (including experts at hand going forwards)**
- **Inclusion Framework** to be used as the delivery mechanism
- Target audience: All mainstream schools and Post 16 settings
- Delivered in all schools/Post 16 settings in Cheshire East by the Inclusive Mainstream Practice Team via locality working.
- Will include: action planning for inclusion, targeted training, signposting to support and resources and capacity development.
- **SENCo development networks**
- Target audience: School/setting SENCos
- **Spotlight on inclusion events**
- Target audience: All partners and settings, including parents, health and social care
- 'A spotlight on ...' different aspects of inclusion



- **Inclusion forum (targeted)**
- Case led mechanism for multi-agency support prior to a request for a needs assessment
- Target audience: All mainstream schools/settings.
- **Mechanism for schools to access additional funding**
- Links to send capital spend in mainstream schools (sufficiency).
- The group will also explore funding prior to EHCP funding or change of placement requests.

Inclusion forum (targeted +/specialist)

- Case led mechanism for multi-agency support prior to a request for a change of placement/risk of exclusion
- Target audience: All mainstream schools/settings.

In addition, the Inclusion Framework will help us to deliver tailored support and training identified through the framework, addressing needs at locality levels. This will be actioned through:

- the relaunching of SENCO development networks
- the continuation of Spotlight On Inclusion events

Working in partnership will achieve measurable inclusion outcomes, both at the school/setting level (e.g. reduction in suspensions, reduction in part time timetables, increase in SEN support etc.) and at the local authority level (e.g. reduction in requests for statutory needs assessments, reduction in numbers of children being EHE due to perceived lack of provision in school).

Both of these initiatives are already underway, with our first SENCO Development Day held on 23 April 2026 and attended by 138 settings. Engagement has exceeded our expectations to such an extent that we have needed to repeat our planned second SENCO Development Day, in June, to ensure that all those who wish to attend are able to do so.

4. Inclusion Forum

In addition, we will also be developing Inclusion Forums for each locality. They will be a:

- Case led mechanism for multi-agency support prior to a request for an EHC needs assessment
- Case led mechanism for multi-agency support prior to a request for a change of placement/risk of exclusion

The Forums will operate in localities and occur each half term. The Inclusion Forum panel will comprise of colleagues from the Inclusion Support Offer working within each locality: Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers, Educational psychology, Cheshire East Autism Team, our AP and special school outreach with lean in from the sensory inclusion service, SALT, Sensory OT/OT service and mental health support teams.

4.1. Access

The target audience is all mainstream schools/settings, including post-16. They will access this Forum through a designated online portal where additional support can be requested. Our Early Years settings already have an Early Years Forum in place.

The Inclusion Forums will also be the route for AP support, although emergency exceptions will be accommodated until the model becomes more embedded.

Access will be via training and digital methods for out of area mainstream FE providers where Cheshire East young people have an EHCP.

5. Cheshire East Three-Tier Model for Alternative Provision (AP)

Our ‘Meeting Needs, Delivery and Workforce Planning’ workstream has membership from the PCF, education providers, LA and the ICB. This is the core group which jointly considers AP needs. . The group will consider demand for Alternative Provision (AP) on an annual basis and determine whether any new AP needs commissioning and review the on the existing SLAs. The reporting route for this group is through to the ODG and SIAB and the work of this group will be reviewed by deep dives from SIAB.

Where AP capacity is constrained, the Cheshire East team will adopt a blended approach. This means that we will:

- Develop and use local provision by strengthening local AP and mainstream inclusion and build capacity in schools (Tier 1 support). This means that we will work with schools and settings so that staff have the skills and confidence to meet diverse needs and schools develop adaptive teaching and inclusion environments.
- Contracting provision when needed by using short-term placements to manage pressure.
- Use our outreach model where possible instead of placements.

The main intentions are to reduce reliance on external placements over time by building resilience in schools and settings, and to have sufficient high-quality provision within Cheshire East, linked to the graduated approach and the three tier AP model.

Where there are identified gaps in provision, the LA will take a strategic commissioning approach. This will include the commissioning of additional local provision, where demand is sustained and predictable, and time limited use of external providers. We will also explore opportunities for regional collaboration with neighbouring local areas. This may include jointly commissioned provision, shared outreach models, and access to AP and special school support across borders, so that that sufficiency challenges do not result in delays of support.

The preferred route is to grow and develop local capacity wherever possible, supported by sufficiency planning and capital investment, as this provides greater consistency for young people, stronger oversight, and improved outcomes for children and young people. However, the model has flexibility to draw on contracted provision where needed to ensure that no child experiences delay in accessing appropriate support.

In Cheshire East, a three-tier model for AP will be implemented to support children and young people who may be on part-time timetables, have experienced suspension, or are at risk of permanent exclusion.

Tier 1 – Targeted Support in Mainstream Schools

This tier focuses on early intervention to support pupils at risk of exclusion to remain in their mainstream setting.

- Specialist support will be accessed through the Inclusion Forum.
- This will involve staff from alternative provision settings and special schools working alongside mainstream schools to provide tailored, individualised support.
- The aim is to strengthen in-school capacity and prevent escalation of need.
- In addition, there is a commitment to developing in-house AP provision within schools, supported through capital investment and workforce development.

Tier 2 – Time-Limited Placements

This tier provides short-term placements in alternative provision settings to assess and address pupils' needs. The primary goal is to enable a successful reintegration back into mainstream education.

Cheshire East currently has AP settings able to offer these placements, however, there is a recognised gap in provision for Years 7 and 8, alongside wider capacity pressures. These pressures are partly due to pupils remaining in AP while awaiting special school placements. The Sufficiency Project Group will address both the gap in AP provision and current capacity challenges through a programme of workforce development.

Tier 3 – Transitional Placements

This tier supports pupils who require a longer-term transition before moving on to another setting.

Placements aim to prepare pupils for:

- A new mainstream school, or
- A post-16 destination

Cheshire East has AP settings offering transitional placements. Similar capacity pressures exist within this tier and there is a continued commitment to strengthening our whole provision offer through sufficiency planning and workforce development.

5.1. Summary

The three-tier model aims to:

- Intervene earlier (Tier 1)
- Provide targeted short-term support (Tier 2)
- Enable successful transitions (Tier 3)

This graduated approach is designed to ensure that more children and young people can remain in or return to mainstream education while also strengthening the overall AP system across Cheshire East.

5.2. Targeted funding

We will also pilot a mechanism for schools and settings to access additional funding. This directly aligns with the SEND capital spend in mainstream schools (overseen by our sufficiency workstream). The panel will also explore funding prior to EHCP funding or change of placement requests.

6. Roles

A number of specialist teams and services contribute to our Inclusion Support Offer. Whilst the exact detail of how these services will work within the Experts At Hand is still being coproduced, an outline of each service is covered below.

6.1. The role of the Cheshire East Autism Team and Educational Psychologist team

- Will implement the model through direct work with schools, early years settings and post-16 providers.
- facilitate group consultations focused on early identification, prevention and inclusion.
- support providers to build their own capacity to meet needs through psychologically informed practice.
- work with schools and settings within clusters, localities or MATs to support workforce development.

6.2. The role of the Sensory Inclusion service

- provide support to children and young people with sensory impairment, parents / carers, and schools / settings.
- work with children and young people with diagnosed hearing loss or visual impairment from diagnosis to school-leaving age working in homes, early years settings and school settings. Support for young people in FE colleges is also available.

6.3. The role of our special schools

By working with our special schools, we have co-produced an outreach model and offer where special schools will receive a portion of £300,000 from the EAH funding. Each special school will receive base funding of £10,000 to develop their infrastructure to deliver outreach, alongside additional financial support dependant on deployment. Referral routes will come through the Inclusion Forum and requests will be aligned to

their offer; requests for support will need to meet thresholds after demonstrating that the school has worked through the graduated support pathways. Governance for the model will be via the Inclusion Forum which in turn reports to the ODG.

Outreach staff will visit schools to observe individual children and young people within their learning environment. They will provide practical, evidence-informed strategies and recommendations to support inclusive practice and meet individual needs. This support will be offered at an early stage, helping schools to respond proactively before needs escalate. Outreach may also be provided at key points of escalation, including prior to a statutory EHC needs assessment request, when a change of placement is being considered, or where a pupil is at risk of permanent exclusion. The aim is to build capacity within mainstream settings, enabling staff to better support complex needs and sustain placements wherever possible. This collaborative approach supports early intervention, promotes inclusion, and helps reduce the likelihood of escalation to more specialist provision.

6.4. The role of our Parent Carers

- We recognise the essential role that parent carers play in contributing expertise to our inclusion model.
- Parent carers bring valuable insight into their local communities and understand the context in which schools and services operate.
- They can provide important feedback on areas of inclusion that are working well, as well as those that require further development and support.
- Their lived experience enables them to highlight barriers to inclusion and suggest practical, meaningful improvements.
- Parent carers can act as a vital bridge between schools, settings, and families, supporting positive relationships and shared understanding.
- They play a key role in shaping and strengthening inclusive practice, ensuring that the voices of children, young people, and families are reflected in service development.
- Their involvement supports a collaborative approach to inclusion, helping to build trust, transparency, and partnership across the system.

6.5. The role of mental health support

- Our commissioned Healthy Young Minds Alliance, alongside our Mental Health Support Teams, play a key role in supporting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.
- They provide a combination of school-based support, including consultations with staff, group interventions, and individual counselling for pupils.
- Their work helps schools to build confidence and capacity in responding to a range of mental health needs.
- Support is both preventative and responsive, enabling early identification and intervention where concerns arise.
- They work collaboratively with schools, families, and other professionals to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach to support.
- Over the next three years, we will move towards a position where 100% of schools are supported by a Mental Health Support Team.
- This expansion will ensure consistent access to mental health expertise across all schools and settings, strengthening early intervention and reducing the escalation of need.

We have drawn on the learning from the Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme to shape and strengthen the support offer from our therapy services. The joint work undertaken by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the local authority has enabled us to identify the elements of the programme that have been most effective and have had the greatest impact. This learning has informed a more targeted and responsive approach, ensuring that therapy support is practical, evidence-informed, and focused on meeting the needs of children and young people in mainstream settings.

6.6. The role of the SALT service

- Rapid access to specialist SALT expertise for schools through consultation and advice.
- Problem-solving and formulation to understand strengths, barriers and what is getting in the way.

- Coaching and modelling of strategies to support adults to embed communication-supporting practice in everyday routines.
- Targeted support guidance, including support with implementation of targeted programmes and specialist care plans, where appropriate.
- Built-in threshold and escalation advice, supporting appropriate progression to specialist pathways when needed.
- Workforce capability building, including a core training offer, the development of Communication Champions and an annual environmental audit with action planning and follow-up.

6.7. The role of the SPOTTS and OT service

- Whole-school and class-based focused observations (classroom, PE, dining hall, group interventions) to support reasonable adjustments.
- Demonstration-based training (e.g. sensory ladders, sensory circuits, eating/toileting pathways).
- Group training for staff, SENCOs, and TAs (includes more tailored training).
- Ongoing development and implementation of graduated approach including wider training offer.
- SENCO and staff consultation (problem-solving at a systemic level).
- Parent engagement (drop-ins, coffee mornings, hub-based support).
- Environmental audits.
- MDT working across services, with a sensory lens for neurodiversity and trauma.
- Universal training offer around support for functional skills needs.
- Link therapists with schools to support with embedding principles from training.
- SENCO/class consultation at pre-referral stage – support in demonstrating evidence needed for additional referrals if required.

As national expectations continue to evolve, the Inclusion Support Offer workforce will offer a flexible and highly skilled resource that can be strategically deployed to support schools and settings in responding to emerging priorities, while avoiding an over-reliance on statutory processes.

7. Dispute resolution

Within the Experts at Hand (EAH) model, disagreements are resolved as early as possible through a clear, staged and supportive escalation route that keeps the voices of children, young people and parents at the centre.

Initially, concerns should be discussed within the school or setting as part of the graduated approach. This creates an opportunity for the provider to listen carefully to the child or young person and their family, understand what is not working, and agree any practical changes.

If this does not fully resolve the issue, the case can be brought to the locality Inclusion Forum, where a multi-agency group reviews the situation, bring together professional advice, and works with the family to agree a shared way forward. This brings together collective problem solving and the lived experience from young people and their families.

If agreement is still not reached, the EAH pathway provides a clear escalation route within the local system. The issue can be reviewed by locality leads and, where needed, escalated to strategic oversight through to the DCO and Director of Education, Skills and Inclusion to determine the way forward and ensure that there is consistency, fairness and accountability across the area. At this stage, there is a renewed focus on listening to the child or young person and their family, and identifying whether additional support, assessment or changes to provision are needed. It may not be the Director of Education, Skills or Inclusion or Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) which meets with the provider or family, but they provide a line of sight on complex disagreements. If the disagreement relates to statutory decisions or cannot be resolved through this process, then families will be supported to access independent disagreement resolution services, which are free, voluntary and designed to help all parties reach agreement in a neutral setting.

Where issues remain unresolved after these steps, the pathway moves beyond EAH into the formal SEND system. This includes access to mediation in relation to EHCP decisions and, where necessary, the right to appeal to the SEND Tribunal. Mediation is a structured, legally recognised process which is linked to decisions about EHCNA and plans, and families must contact a mediation adviser before proceeding to tribunal.

Cheshire East Information and Advisory Service (CEIAS) is the local SENDIASS service and plays an important role in supporting families at every stage of disagreement

resolution, whether issues are being resolved informally or through formal processes. It provides independent and impartial information, advice and support to parents, carers and young people.

We will monitor how well disagreement resolution and mediation are working. This will be done through a clear set of measures that look at how quickly issues are resolved, how effective the outcomes are, and how families experience the process. We will track how long it takes to resolve concerns at school level, through Inclusion Forums, and through mediation. We will also look at how long it takes from a request for mediation to reaching a resolution.

We will measure how many disagreements are resolved early, before they reach statutory processes, and how many are successfully resolved through mediation. We will also monitor whether fewer cases go on to tribunal.

At a system level, we will look for a reduction in complaints, formal mediations and tribunal appeals. All of this information will be reviewed regularly by the Operational Delivery Group, which looks at performance, and SIAB, which provides strategic oversight. We will also share this information through partnership dashboards to ensure transparency and accountability. We will also look at any patterns in complaints, mediation cases and tribunal outcomes to understand what is not working well and where improvements are needed. The PCF will be closely involved in reviewing this information and help to make change.

Overall, this process should mean that most disagreements are resolved early through partnership working, while still providing a clear, fair and legally compliant route to independent resolution where needed. The key difference is that EAH focuses on continuous, local and relationship-based resolution to prevent escalation, whereas formal mediation and tribunal processes are used when a statutory decision is being challenged and earlier efforts have not led to agreement.

8. Funding for the model

Whilst this approach is informed by needs data, we are developing the streamlining of this data to ensure the approach is responsive and flexible to changing needs. This enables the system to identify emerging patterns of need, target resources more effectively at a locality or cohort level, and refine delivery and commissioning decisions. As a result, the model is not static but responsive, so that support is directed to where it will have the greatest impact in reducing escalation and improving outcomes. As our data sets strengthen, then we will be able to better identify trends and future needs.

Experts at Hand (EAH) funding enhances existing routes to specialist input by strengthening and scaling access to expertise that already exists across the system, instead of duplicating provision. It provides additional capacity within key services such as Educational Psychology, specialist outreach, SALT and OT, allowing for faster access to consultation, advice and targeted intervention at an earlier stage. Through approaches such as Inclusion Forums and locality teams, schools and settings will benefit from clearer, more consistent pathways to multi-agency support, improving timeliness and reducing reliance on statutory assessment routes.

Importantly, the delivery model is fully integrated with other services, including Mental Health Support Teams, the Healthy Young Minds Alliance, alternative provision, early years services and Family Hub provision. These services are aligned through locality working, shared governance and joint commissioning arrangements, ensuring a coherent team around the child, team around the family and team around the locality approaches. This integrated approach maximises the impact of all funding streams and resources and creates a seamless experience for children, young people and families, with EAH acting as the connecting framework that brings together universal, targeted and specialist support into a single, joined-up system.

Service area	Model	Additionality needed	How funded	Cost
Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers	2 x officers in each locality	6 x Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers	Equivalent of 2 x FT paid by LA 6 x funded by EAH funding	£556,752
CEAT – specialist teachers	1 x teacher in each locality (plus additional roles within the service working across the borough)	None	LA funded	NA
Sensory Inclusion Service – Hearing impaired Visually impaired	Teachers to be primarily in localities but very case dependent (plus additional roles within the service working across the borough)	None	LA funded	NA
Educational psychologists	1 x Educational Psychologist and 1 x Assistant Educational Psychologist (plus additional roles within the service)	2 x Educational Psychologists and 4 x Assistant Educational Psychologists	Equivalent of 2 x FT paid by LA 2 x Educational Psychologists and Assistant Educational Psychologists funded by EAH	£431,122

Healthy Young Mind Alliance and MHST	HYMA is already commissioned but works across the old 3 localities (this is until 2029) MHST – currently at 38% schools. Will be: - 77% 26/27 - 84% 27/28 -94% 28/29 - 100% Dec 29	None	Through separate funding for MHST	NA
Parents	1 x parent rep in each locality	1 x parent rep in each locality	NA	NA
Special school outreach	1 x locality link in each locality who will deliver and coordinate support	1 x locality link in each locality plus outreach support from special schools when needed	Commissioned from EAH funding	£370,000

0-19 SEND Specialist nurses	Currently 2 nurses: 1 x North locality & 1 x South locality. Would like to expand to one in each locality so 4 nurses	2 additional nurses, allowing cover for each of the 4 localities (N1, N2, S1, S2)	Exploration of commissioning opportunities within current commissioning envelop	NA

Proposed spend at this point - £1,357,874

Commissioned through the ICB

Service area	Model	Additionality needed	How funded	Cost
Speech and language therapy service	SALT AP role across Cheshires and Warrington. 1 x B7 overarching lead as outlined in specification. 6 x B6 therapists - 1 in each locality for primary, 1 for North & 1 for South for secondary each. Pull CE Chatters work into model for EYs.	1 x B7 overarching lead as outlined in specification. 6 x B6 therapists - 1 in each locality for primary, 1 for North & 1 for South for secondary each.	EAH funding	£475,212
SPOTTS/ OT service	Band 7 for primary and secondary in both North and	2 B7 OTS 4 B6 OTs	EAH funding	£434,063

	South (4 overall) but pulling in from existing service. B6 Therapist for N1, N2, S1, S2. Therapy assistant for North, Therapy assistant for South	1 B4 Therapy assistant		

Plus ICB spend – £909,275

Total = £2,267,149

9. Mobilisation

9.1. Year 1 Implementation (2026–2027)

Year 1 will focus on the mobilisation, establishment and full implementation of the Inclusion Support Offer (including EAH model) across Cheshire East, making sure that all schools and settings have access to consistent, high quality inclusion support and clear routes into our EAH model.

The period from April to September 2026 will be focused on planning, co-production and system design, including piloting the Inclusion Framework, working with partners, and alignment with national expectations. During this phase, feedback from the DfE in summer 2026 will be used to strengthen and finalise the model ahead of formal approval.

A final proposal will be presented to the SIAB by end of September 2026 for agreement. However, we also need to move at pace. This means that key activity will run alongside this process, to make sure that implementation can begin immediately following approval.

This parallel mobilisation approach will include:

- Early workforce planning and pipeline development.
- Initial engagement with health partners to shape SLAs and delivery models.
- Development of operational systems, including the digital access portal.
- Continued testing and refinement of the Inclusion Framework through pilot activity.

Following SIAB approval, the model will move into delivery through three implementation phases, i.e.:

Phase 1: Mobilisation and deployment (Autumn Term 2026)

The focus of this phase will be on establishing the basics for delivery across all four localities. Recruitment to additional roles, including Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers and specialist practitioners, will be finalised, and locality-based teams will start. KPIs and SLAs with partners will be agreed, and systems to access support

will go live, in addition to thresholds so that no one provider can dominate without using a graduated approach.

At the same time, the Inclusion Framework will move from pilot into early rollout, supported by targeted engagement with schools and the SENCO networks. Inclusion Forums will be started in each locality, providing a multi-agency approach for early intervention and support prior to escalation.

Phase 2: Early delivery and scaling (Spring Term 2027)

During this phase, the model moves to active delivery at scale. The majority of schools and settings will be engaged with the Inclusion Framework, and Inclusion Forums will be operating consistently across all localities.

This phase will also establish baseline performance measures, including access times, levels of demand, and early indicators of impact, making sure that the system can be actively monitored and refined.

Phase 3: Full Implementation and Impact (Summer Term 2027)

By the final phase of Year 1, the Inclusion Support Offer (including EAH) will be fully operational across all schools and settings. All schools will have engaged with the Inclusion Framework, and locality teams will be working as mature, integrated multi-agency partnerships.

See reform plan for milestones and KPIs.

10. Workforce development strategy

Cheshire East's workforce strategy is key to delivering our SEND reforms and achieving a sustainable, inclusive 0–25 system. The local area is moving from a reactive, specialist-led model to a proactive, capacity-building system, where expertise is based in localities and, with to help improve outcomes for young people, it strengthens the wider workforce across education, health and social care.

This strategy is jointly owned by Cheshire East Council and Integrated Care Board (ICB) and is delivered through the Inclusive Mainstream Practice model and Experts at Hand (EAH). It focuses on both:

- Workforce capacity (recruitment, sufficiency and deployment).
- Workforce capability (training, coaching and system leadership).

10.1. Strategy

The workforce model is designed around locality based, multi-disciplinary teams, which are also linked with the Families First and NHS neighbourhood footprint.

Each locality team will have:

- Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers (ISATs).
- Educational Psychologists (EPs) and EP trainees.
- Speech and Language Therapists (SALT).
- Occupational Therapists (OT).
- Autism and sensory specialists.
- Mental Health Support Teams.
- Special school outreach partners.
- Parent / carer representatives.

These teams operate both as a team around the provider and team around the locality, providing support across universal, targeted and specialist levels.

10.2. Recruitment growth

Within the education workforce, this includes the recruitment of Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers (ISATs) across all localities to lead system-wide inclusion development, and a focus on strengthening SENCO leadership capacity across all schools and settings. In Educational Psychology, the plan provides for the recruitment of additional capacity which will improve access to timely advice and support.

Across health services, the ICB commissioned workforce will be expanded to support delivery of the Experts at Hand model. This includes the appointment SALT and OT capacity. In addition, the mental health workforce will be scaled through the Mental Health Support Teams, so that all schools are supported by 2029. The strategy also includes investment in special school outreach capacity, which means that specialist expertise can be deployed more effectively to support mainstream inclusion at scale.

10.3. SENCO development and system leadership

A key part of the workforce strategy is the strengthening of SENCO leadership across all settings. This is delivered through the relaunch of SENCO networks, with a target of at least 95% engagement, and also with regular SENCO development days and a structured programme of ongoing professional learning. SENCOs are also supported through coaching and mentoring from Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers (ISATs), with all development activity linked to the Inclusion Framework to ensure consistency.

10.4. Delivery and phasing

The workforce strategy will be delivered through a phased approach over three years.

In Year 1 (2026–27), we will focus on mobilisation. This will include recruitment to key roles, including Inclusion Support Advisory Teachers (ISATs), Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists. Locality-based multi-disciplinary teams will be established, and refreshed SENCO networks and the wider workforce development programme will be launched. Spotlight on Inclusion events will be delivered to begin sharing best practice, and the Inclusion Framework will be rolled out across schools and settings, progressing towards full engagement.

In Year 2 (2027–28), the focus will move to scaling delivery. Experts at Hand locality teams will be fully operational, with consistent delivery across all areas. Workforce capability will be expanded across all schools and settings through training, coaching and system support. The specialist workforce will begin to stabilise as recruitment take effect, and communities of practice will be developed to embed peer learning and collaboration across the system.

In Year 3 (2028–29), the focus will be on sustainability. The workforce model will be fully embedded and reliance on specialist intervention and statutory processes will reduce. The overall workforce will be more stable and sustainable, with reduced dependency on agency staffing.

10.5. Impact and success

The workforce strategy will deliver measurable improvements across the SEND system, as shown in the SEND reform plan. This includes an increased proportion of children and young people supported at SEN Support, reflecting stronger early intervention and inclusion within mainstream settings. Growth in Education, Health and Care Plans will reduce as needs are met earlier and more effectively. Access to specialist services, including Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy, will improve, ensuring more timely support.

Inclusion outcomes will strengthen, including improvements in attendance, fewer exclusions, and better placement stability. Engagement across the system will also increase, with at least 95% of schools and settings participating in SENCO networks

and the Inclusion Framework. In addition, workforce confidence will improve, as shown through survey feedback, stakeholder engagement and qualitative measures of system experience.

10.6. Summary

This workforce strategy delivers major system wide transformation. Specialist expertise will be deployed through the Experts at Hand model, ensuring that it is builds capacity across the wider system instead of operating in isolation. Mainstream schools and settings will be able to meet a wider range of needs because of workforce development, coaching and collaboration.

Through stronger partnership working, education, health and social care will operate as a single, integrated system, around shared outcomes and delivery models. As a result, Cheshire East partnership will develop a skilled and confident workforce which provides the right support, in the right place, at the right time for all children and young people with SEND.