Lincolnshire SEND Reform Plan 2026 to 2029

Building an inclusive SEND system where children and young people get the right support, at the right time, in the right place



Introduction

Our shared ambition

To create a SEND system that identifies needs earlier, provides help sooner, strengthens inclusion, improves outcomes and enables more children and young people to thrive within their local communities.



This three-year partnership plan is for children and young people aged 0 to 25 and will talk about:

Earlier support Needs are recognised sooner and practical help is available before difficulties escalate.	**Inclusive communities** Children and young people feel that they belong and can participate fully in education and community life.
Local provision More children and young people receive suitable education and support closer to home.	**Better outcomes** Support improves learning, wellbeing, independence and preparation for adulthood.

Executive summary

Lincolnshire is committed to ensuring that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities receive the right support, at the right time, in the right place.

Many children and families already receive high-quality support across early years settings, schools, colleges, health services, care services and local communities. However, growing demand, increasing complexity of need and pressure on specialist services mean that support is not always early, consistent or easy to navigate.

This plan sets out how the Lincolnshire SEND partnership including the Local Authority, Health, Education Settings, Lincolnshire Parent Carer Forum, Lincolnshire Young Voices will work together over the next three years. The emphasis is on strengthening inclusive practice, providing earlier help, improving access to specialist expertise and developing suitable local provision.

The purpose of reform

This is not simply a programme to change structures or processes. It is a partnership commitment to improve children and young people's day-to-day experiences, opportunities and outcomes.

What the plan will do

- Bring education, health, care, parents, carers, children, young people and wider partners around a shared direction.
- Strengthen support before difficulties escalate, while protecting statutory rights.
- Develop a clearer continuum from universal and targeted support through to specialist and statutory provision.
- Increase suitable local capacity and reduce avoidable reliance on distant placements.
- Use evidence, quality assurance and lived experience to improve delivery over time.



Gradual Changes

Reform will be phased carefully over time.

Existing services will continue while new approaches are designed, tested, evaluated and improved.

What this plan means for you

For education settings: Early years settings, schools and colleges will be supported to identify needs sooner and strengthen inclusive teaching and reasonable adjustments. The plan aims to provide clearer access to specialist advice through Experts at Hand, practical coaching and training, and closer working with local partners and families.

For families: The aim is earlier help, clearer information about where to go for support, and better coordination between education, health and care services. Parent and carer views will help shape and review support and services. Statutory rights, including the right to request an Education, Health and Care needs assessment, remain unchanged.

For children and young people: The aim is to get help that matches your needs sooner, wherever possible closer to home, so you can learn, take part and feel that you belong. Your views will help shape support, with a focus on your wellbeing, progress, independence and preparation for adult life.

Our vision, principles and goals

Our vision

Every child and young person with SEND is valued and included, has needs identified early, receives effective support and is helped to achieve positive outcomes and prepare for adult life.

Our principles

Early intervention Support begins when needs emerge rather than waiting for difficulties to escalate.	**Inclusion** Children and young people are enabled to participate fully in education and community life.
Local support Wherever appropriate, support and suitable provision are available closer to home.	**Partnership** Education, health, care, families and communities share responsibility and work together.
Consistency High-quality support is available across the county, while recognising local circumstances.	**Outcomes** Success is judged by improved experiences and outcomes, not activity or process alone.

Our goals

- Identify needs earlier and respond more quickly.
- Improve attendance, participation, belonging and progress.
- Build confidence and capability across settings and services.
- Improve the quality and consistency of Education, Health and Care Plans and wider SEND support.
- Strengthen preparation for adulthood, including education, training, employment, independence, health and community participation.

OUR THREE-YEAR AMBITION

Where we want to be by 2029

By 2029, we want children, young people, families and practitioners to experience a system that is earlier, clearer, more inclusive and more joined up.

How we will judge progress

We will consider a balanced set of evidence, including attendance, exclusions, plan quality, educational outcomes, placement stability, sufficiency, preparation for adulthood and the experiences of children, young people, families and practitioners.



Earlier support

More emerging needs are recognised and supported promptly. Settings can reach useful advice without unnecessary delay and families experience fewer gaps between services.

Improved inclusion

More children and young people are successfully supported in local settings, with improved attendance, belonging and participation and fewer exclusions.

Better experiences

Routes to support are clearer, communication is more accessible and children, young people, parents and carers have a meaningful role in shaping services.

Stronger provision

Lincolnshire has the right mix of mainstream, hub, enhanced, alternative and specialist provision, planned around evidence of local need.

Better quality

Education, Health and Care Plans and non-statutory support are clear, outcome-focused and consistently reviewed for impact.

Preparation for adulthood

More young people progress into further education, training, employment, supported internships, independent living and community participation.

Our test for success

Children and young people should experience a real difference in the timeliness, quality and impact of support. Completing activity alone will not be enough.

Our strategy for reform

Support should increase in response to need. Children and young people should not have to wait for a formal diagnosis or an Education, Health and Care Plan before sensible adjustments and support begin.

Levels of support	What this means
Universal	High-quality inclusive teaching, reasonable adjustments and accessible environments for all.
Targeted	Additional, evidence-informed support for an individual or group, planned and reviewed by the setting.
Targeted Plus	A strengthened non-statutory level after Targeted support. Experts at Hand will help coordinate timely specialist involvement, providing coaching, modelling, advice and practical strategies, with clear access routes for mainstream schools to help prevent difficulties from escalating and needs from worsening.
Specialist	Direct or ongoing specialist assessment, intervention or oversight where needs require it.
Individualised and statutory	Highly personalised provision, including an Education, Health and Care Plan where statutory assessment shows this is necessary.

Experts at Hand

Experts at Hand will strengthen access to educational, health and specialist expertise across early years, schools and post-16 settings. It will help practitioners and families secure advice earlier through a team of speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, educational psychologists and specialist teachers, building capability in settings and coordinating support around identified needs. The Experts at Hand offer will supplement the wide range of existing support, agencies and professionals already in place and enhance the support available for children and young people with additional needs in Lincolnshire.

Statutory rights remain

Targeted Plus and Experts at Hand are intended to strengthen non-statutory support. They do not remove or restrict the right to request an Education, Health and Care needs assessment.

Our five reform priorities

1. Partnership and locality working	Develop practical local arrangements so partners understand needs, coordinate support and respond to pressures across a large rural county.
2. Experts at Hand	Create clearer and earlier access through settings to timely multidisciplinary advice, outreach, coaching and modelled practice from speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, educational psychologists and specialist teachers.
3. Inclusive practice and workforce	Build confidence and capability across early years, schools and post-16 through professional development, support and challenge.
4. Sufficiency and local provision	Lincolnshire has existing plans to develop the right mix of SEND hubs, alternative provision hubs, enhanced provision, accessible mainstream places and specialist capacity. These broadly align with the 'Inclusion Bases' referred to in the Government reforms.
5. Quality and consistency	Improve the quality and impact of Education, Health and Care Plans, annual reviews and wider SEND support through audit, moderation and feedback.

Across every priority

Preparation for adulthood, participation, wellbeing, accessibility, co-production, quality and evidence will be considered throughout the programme.



First-year activities

Workstreams will focus on

1

Partnership and locality development

Confirm responsibilities and local arrangements; improve engagement and communication; use local information to coordinate support.

2

Experts at Hand and Targeted Plus

Map current expertise and support; design, establish and test the offer; model pathways providing equitable access for educational settings; clarify how coordinated non-statutory support, via additional speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, educational psychology and specialist teaching, will operate alongside existing support agencies and provision; agree how additional impact will be monitored and reviewed.

3

Inclusion and workforce

Develop professional learning, coaching and modelled practice; share effective approaches; target support where confidence and capacity need strengthening. Link with the Experts at Hand offer and model to further strengthen effective and efficient support for mainstream educational settings.

4

Sufficiency and provision

Progress SEND and alternative provision hubs (Inclusion Bases); identify gaps; plan mainstream, enhanced and specialist capacity using evidence of need.

5

Quality assurance

Strengthen Education, Health and Care Plan audits, moderation and annual review learning; use complaints, feedback and performance information to improve practice.

Year one outputs

Clearer pathways Public and practitioner information explains how support is accessed.	**Tested approaches** Targeted Plus and Experts at Hand are tested and refined before wider use.
Workforce support Settings receive practical support linked to identified needs.	**Provision plans** Local capacity and gaps are understood and prioritised.
Quality evidence Audits and feedback show where practice is improving and where action is required.	**Regular reporting** Partners can see milestones, progress, risks and impact.

Our three-year roadmap



2026/27 BUILD AND DESIGN	2027/28 EMBED AND EXPAND	2028/29 SUSTAIN AND IMPROVE
Main focus Confirm governance and detailed delivery plans; map services and pathways; develop and test Experts at Hand and Targeted Plus; strengthen locality working, workforce support, quality assurance and provision planning.	**Main focus** Extend earlier multidisciplinary support; expand inclusive local provision; embed workforce development; refine local arrangements and reduce unwarranted variation.	**Main focus** Evaluate impact; refine models; strengthen preparation for adulthood; embed successful approaches and develop longer-term sustainability.
What people should begin to see Clearer information, initial testing, stronger oversight and a shared understanding of the future model.	**What people should begin to see** More consistent access to advice, stronger practice and increased use of suitable local provision.	**What people should begin to see** Measurable improvements in timeliness, inclusion, quality, transitions, experience and outcomes.

How we will deliver

- Working with Lincolnshire Parent Carer Forum and Lincolnshire Young Voices alongside settings and partners. Building on their existing involvement, they will continue to inform how changes are designed, delivered and reviewed.
- Test new approaches before wider implementation.
- Maintain statutory duties and service continuity during change.
- Review evidence, risks and unintended consequences regularly.
- Adapt the programme where experience or data shows a different approach is needed.

What we have already achieved

The reform programme builds on existing improvement work across Lincolnshire. The following foundations are already in place or under development:

Strategic Leadership

A shared reform direction has been established and partnership oversight strengthened. School cluster models have been developed and mapped for reconsideration and testing alongside Experts at Hand. Governance structures have been revised with the ICB to align with the new ICB cluster model.

Experts at Hand

A working group has been established with key partners, including Lincolnshire Parent Carer Forum and Lincolnshire Young Voices. Data analysis has taken place to establish equitable access across mainstream schools. The core concept has been developed, services and pathways are being mapped, and opportunities for earlier access to expertise have been identified.

Inclusive Provision

SEND and alternative provision hub arrangements and other local support models have continued to develop. 18 SEND hubs and 2 alternative provision hubs have been established. A further 15 hubs have been approved and are in development for phased opening in Spring 2027.

Quality Assurance

Multi-agency quality assurance, moderation and a stronger focus on Education, Health and Care Plan quality are informing improvement.

Data and Intelligence

Performance, sufficiency and quality information are being used more systematically to identify pressure and variation.

Co-production

Lincolnshire Parent Carer Forum and Lincolnshire Young Voices are helping to shape SEND reforms alongside settings and partners. Building on their existing involvement, they will continue to inform how changes are designed, delivered and reviewed.

A phased approach

Some elements are already operating, while others remain in design or testing. We will be clear about what is confirmed, what is being developed and when further detail is available.

What this gives us

- A clear platform from which to design and test the next phase of change.
- A stronger understanding of local pressures, variation and gaps in provision.
- Existing practice and services that can be connected and strengthened, rather than replaced unnecessarily.
- A basis for tracking whether reform is improving experiences and outcomes.



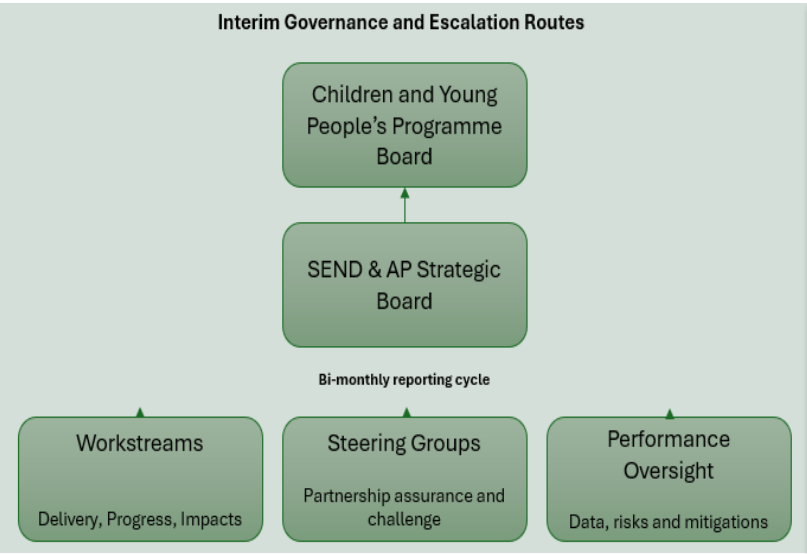
Dependencies, governance and accountability

Key dependencies

Partnership commitment Sustained leadership and participation from education, health, care and wider partners.	**Workforce capacity** Recruitment, retention and time for practitioners to learn and adopt new approaches.
Funding and commissioning Resources aligned to priorities, transparent commissioning and careful management of financial pressure.	**Co-production** Meaningful involvement of Lincolnshire Parent Carer Forum and Lincolnshire Young Voices alongside settings and partners in design and review.
Data and digital systems Reliable information, appropriate information sharing and accessible routes to advice.	**National direction** Ability to respond to national SEND and education policy while maintaining local momentum.

Governance and accountability

The programme will be overseen through partnership governance that brings together the local authority, education, health, care, parent representation, children and young people and wider stakeholders. Delivery workstreams will report progress, risks, dependencies and decisions through the agreed programme structure.





How progress will be reviewed

Regular review of milestones, performance, quality, sufficiency, workforce and finance.

Feedback from children, young people, families, settings and practitioners.

Clear escalation where delivery is off track or risks cannot be managed within a workstream.

Public communication about progress, challenges and the next stage of implementation.

Our commitment

We will work openly and collaboratively, protect statutory rights and keep the focus on the difference reform makes to children and young people. The plan will evolve as evidence and experience develop.

Glossary: what the words mean

This glossary explains the terms and acronyms used in this plan. The terms are listed in alphabetical order.

Term or acronym	Meaning in this plan
Enhanced provision	Education provision with additional support or expertise beyond the usual mainstream offer to meet identified needs.
Hubs — SEND and Alternative Provision	Local provision or center's intended to bring additional education support and expertise closer to children, young people and settings. The plan includes developing both SEND and alternative provision hubs and these broadly align with the 'Inclusion Bases' referred to in the Government reforms.
Reasonable adjustments	Changes to remove barriers faced by disabled people, such as providing information in a different format or changing classroom arrangements.
Targeted support	Additional help for a child, young person or group with identified needs, using approaches informed by evidence. Their early years setting, school or college plans the support and reviews how well it is working.
Targeted Plus	Planned extra support beyond Targeted, coordinating specialist advice without an EHC plan. Statutory assessment rights remain unchanged.
Universal support	High-quality inclusive teaching, reasonable adjustments and accessible learning environments available to all children and young people.