

April's Devon Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) newsletter

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Devon County Council sent this bulletin at 29-04-2024 03:43 PM BST

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April 2024

One of the recent highlights of my month has been the opportunity to meet with our 'Champions for Change'. The group is run by participation officers and captures the voice of children and young people in special schools in Devon.

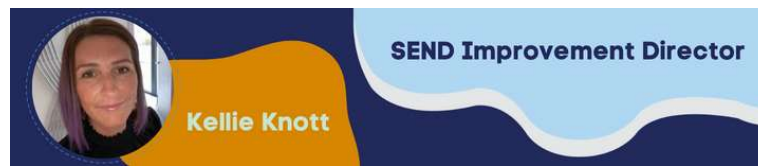
During the meeting they shared with me some of the issues that their schools want to raise. This included concerns about food, staffing and transport as well as the lack of funding for swimming lessons at secondary school, waiting lists for diagnosis and mental health support.

I've now contacted several of our service leaders here at Devon County Council to think about how we can take action based on what the young people at the meeting said, and I'm looking forward to this being an ongoing conversation with them to ensure we respond to things that our most important to our children and young people.

Our Youth Participation Team work hard with young people to encourage their voices to be heard, and I'm determined to ensure that our conversations lead to change! If you or anyone you know is interested in joining a group run for young people with SEND by young people with SEND, please get in touch. [Visit the SEND Local Offer webpage for more information.](#)

Best wishes,

Kellie



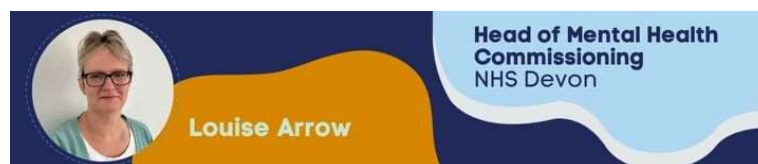
Head of Mental Health Commissioning for NHS Devon talks to us about support in schools

A key part of our SEND improvement plan is the work that we do in partnership with NHS Devon in schools to support children and young people with mild to moderate mental health and wellbeing concerns. We caught up with Louise Arrow, Head of Mental Health Commissioning for NHS Devon, to hear more about the early intervention support her Mental Health Support Team provide.

"We currently have seven NHS Mental Health Support Teams working in 57 primary, secondary and special schools, providing early intervention support to children and young people. That support is delivered in a variety of ways, including face to face Cognitive Behavioural Therapy sessions, workshops, as well as online support, all adapted to meet the needs of individual children and young people. The teams also work closely with school staff, helping to develop schools' own approach to providing mental health and wellbeing support to their pupils.

"In the last academic year, we've helped 1,841 young people through one-to-one sessions and held over 300 workshops, attended by more than 6,000 young people. We also held nearly 40 workshops attended by more than 200 parents and carers; and around 560 staff workshop or training sessions, attended by more than 5,000 education staff. That level of mental health support to young people and schools is set to increase this year thanks to additional funding from NHS England for two more Mental Health Support Teams, with more to follow in September 2025.

"Schools have told us that the support they receive from us is helping them deliver better care for their pupils. This was reflected in a recent national survey, where Devon Mental Health Support Teams, and the support we provided, was rated amongst the highest in the country. Children and their families have also been positive about the difference our teams make."



Read the full story on the news page of our website

Special update
Read in your inbox
or catch up online

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Government cash support for Devon's special needs education

Last month we signed an agreement with the Government which will see an extra £95 million of national funds set aside to reduce our deficit on special needs education.

We sent a special version of this newsletter to answer some questions about why we need the money, what the agreement involves and what it means for Special Educational Needs in Devon. If you missed it in your inbox, you can catch up online by clicking on the button below.

[Read the special update](#)



Stephen McShane joins the team!

We are really pleased to welcome Stephen McShane to Devon! He's joined us to work closely with Kellie Knott (SEND Improvement Director) on several specific areas linked to our SEND Transformation Programme.

Stephen was the Lead Ofsted Inspector for our SEND Inspection in December 2018 and the following Ofsted revisit in May 2022. We are very fortunate to have him join us at Devon County Council and bring his skills, experience and knowledge to support us on our improvement journey.



Consistent approach and successful outcomes

Changing how we work with providers

Our refreshed SEND Transformation Programme is well underway now, and we are working hard to make the necessary changes to improve the lived experience of children and young people, whilst ensuring that we also reach a financially sustainable position.

Our focus is transformational change not just service improvement, and a large part of this is altering how we support children and young people so that they are able to stay within their mainstream setting, as well as increasing the number of places available at specialist providers within the public sector.

However, we recognise that for some children, placements with providers in the

independent sector will still be the most appropriate based on their needs. Where this is the case, we need to ensure that a high quality of education is provided and that we also achieve best value for the placement. For this to happen, we need to make some changes to things like our commissioning and procurement arrangements for independent special school places, alternative provision and short stay support to ensure a consistent approach and successful outcomes for children and young people.

We've contacted providers to discuss the way we currently work and some of the changes we are planning to make and have invited them to share their thoughts with us and their experience of working in other ways, for example with other local authorities. This work is in the early stages at the moment, but more details will follow in due course and we will keep you up to date via this newsletter.



Calls to the SEND Statutory Team transferring to our Customer Service Centre

We're making changes across our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Statutory Team that we hope will improve the timeliness of the Education Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) and plans.

Our Customer Service Centre is using a new system that brings all communication together in one place and is integrated with the SEND Statutory teams so they can help respond to calls, assist with information and pass messages quickly to the right people. This means that the team can focus more of their time on completing assessments, drafting EHCNA's and progressing plans once they are issued, rather than answering calls.

There will be no change to phone line numbers, and the service to families and professionals will continue uninterrupted, but with the extra flexibility of extended opening hours which will now be from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. We will be monitoring how this new approach is working, to make sure it's having a positive impact.



New Interim Head of SEND Statutory Team

As part of the improvements that we want to make to our statutory processes and our communication with parent carers, we have also appointed a new interim Head of the service. From the beginning of May, Samantha Chapman, (Sam), will take over as manager of the team. The role was previously held by Julia Foster who left the organisation at the end of March.

Sam is a highly valued senior manager within our SEND transformation programme. With her in this post, and the changes that we are making to improve the efficiency of the team, we are confident that our SEND Statutory Team can drive forward the improvements that we and families across Devon need.

We ask that families to continue to contact the service in the same way, by telephoning [01392 380434](tel:01392380434). Further information about the team is [available on our website](#).



Special edition
newsletter



Family Hubs are being developed across Devon

Families will be aware that we are developing a network of Family Hubs and associated outreach services across Devon, and that Action for Children are helping us prepare for the changes. You can see the range of services that we envisage being part of our Family Hubs network [on our website](#). They build on the services that have been provided through Children's Centres for many years. But there are big differences:

- Family Hubs will provide help and support to families of children aged from zero to 19 years old, or up to 25 years old for young people with special educational needs or disabilities, and young people with care experience
- the support available from Family Hubs will be accessible to all families with children in that age range. There will be no assessment or eligibility criteria, and no need to be referred by a professional
- Family Hubs will work more closely with existing care and support providers in local communities, so there will be a wider range of help and advice available to families

From this month, families will begin to see a gradual change as Family Hubs and the services they deliver will start to become more present in local communities. The next step will be to decide where the support can be accessed, but for now we are asking families to ring ahead or email Action for Children to speak to a member of staff for advice and support. We've published a special edition newsletter about Family Hubs, and how families can access them. If you missed it, you can read it online using the button below.

[Read the special newsletter about Family Hubs](#)

Visual impairment New custom-made armband and lanyard



Our new aids have helped to improve the lives of children with a visual impairment

Children with a visual impairment in Devon have helped us to design a new custom-made armband and lanyard to help others more easily recognise that they have a disability. They've been a big hit with young people who have told us that these aids have had an immediate impact and made a big difference to their day-to-day lives.

More than 600 children and young people in Devon live with a visual impairment which affects their learning, development, independence, inclusion, and their confidence. But, because it's a disability that isn't visible to others, this can inadvertently lead to children and young people not being treated with the care and consideration that they deserve and are entitled to.

Usually those who are visually impaired use an awareness aid, such as the internationally recognised white short 'symbol cane' or white 'long cane'. But these aids are designed with adults in mind, and children told us that they needed something to suit their age group. So

our Rehabilitation Officer for Visually Impaired Children (ROVIC) service set out, with help from young people, to design two new visual awareness aids that they felt 'comfortable and confident' using. [Read the full story on the news page of our website.](#)



Autism and Us programme

Summer dates!
Book now!

Autism and Us programme returns for the summer term

Our popular Autism and Us programme gets underway for the summer term soon, offering support for families of children and young people who have an autism diagnosis, or who are waiting for one.

The free programme is made up of four weekly 'live online' sessions (each approximately two hours long) providing an overview of autism, communications needs, understanding and supporting behaviour and sensory needs. There's also more in-depth one-off workshops on specific topics such as vulnerability and online safety, managing stress and anxiety and verbal communication support strategies.

[Please visit our website](#) for full details of the programme and workshops, including how to book.



Youth Voice Awards 2024

Earlier this month we staged our annual Youth Voice Awards, where we celebrated the young people who have helped make change in Devon over the last year.

Over 70 young people and adults gathered at the Positive Lights Project in Exeter to show their pride and support for all our award winners from Youth Council, Youth Parliament, SEND Network for Change, SUSU, and Young Devon.

We had over 60 winners overall, all chosen for their contributions to youth voice and playing their part in the huge number of achievements that we've had in the last year. These include: recognising care experience as a protected characteristic; council tax exemption for care experienced young people; Total Respect training; improving mental health provisions through Youth Voice Saturdays; and working with local organisations to explore how to improve accessibility to venues. Read the full story [on the news page of our website.](#)

Well done to all our award winners!



Help us improve our SEND Local Offer website

Parents, carers and young people have told us that they find it hard to find information on our Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Local Offer website. To help us improve the site we are trying to find out more about what information is a priority to you.

You can help us by completing this first in a series of short surveys we will be running. It should only take a couple of minutes to complete, and your feedback is really important. Use the button below to take part.

Take part in the survey



Young people working to improve accessibility in local facilities

Our Echoes group (a voice and influence group for primary school aged young people) recently visited Picturehouse in Exeter to find out more about what they are doing to help make their facilities accessible to as many people as possible.

The young people got a tour of the cinema before putting their questions to Picturehouse General Manager, Paul Breen. Paul explained a number of adaptations the cinema makes for guests with additional needs and disabilities, including accessible seating, adaptations for wheelchair users including lower café tables, and monthly screenings catering for specific audience needs, such as relaxed performances.

The visit was part of a wider project in which Echoes are working with local organisations to help improve accessibility for people with additional needs or disabilities. Echoes aim to establish what good looks like across a range of venues and will then campaign to see more places make these adjustments.

For more information about Echoes, please visit [our Youth Participation Team webpage](#), or email childsc.specialeducationalneedsparticipation-mailbox@devon.gov.uk.



Take part in our art project!

Our SEND Participation Team is collaborating with Esteem Team CIC and researchers from the University of Exeter on the University's Engaged Public Research funded art project. Neurodivergent young people worked with the project team to devise the prompt: "What being neurodivergent means to me" as a theme for the exhibition.

Artworks created through our participation sessions and from individual submissions will be developed into an art exhibition that illustrates facets of young neurodivergent identities. The exhibition will challenge negative beliefs about neurodivergence, and tackle stigmatising stereotypes of some young people in our local community. The physical exhibition of these artworks will be launched at Positive Light Projects at an event in June. The exhibition will take place between Friday 21 and Sunday 23 June 2024.

If you are neurodivergent or know of a neurodivergent young person who would be interested in taking part in the exhibition, please contact amy.bickford@devon.gov.uk. The deadline for submissions is Friday 24 May, and all art forms are welcomed.



Funding available to support autistic students' mental health and wellbeing

The Sheila Coates Foundation has launched a fund to support the mental health and wellbeing of autistic young people in mainstream secondary schools and colleges in England.

They are offering one-off awards of £5,000 to help with practical, short-term solutions which can be put in place immediately, such as sensory spaces and equipment, training and development, additional staff time or specialist interventions.

[Visit the Sheila Coates Foundation website](#) to find out more, including how to apply, before Tuesday 7 May 2024.



If you have a question or a story to send us, please email:
childsc.sendimprovementprogramme-mailbox@devon.gov.uk

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