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SEND Newsletter : March 2025

1 message

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March 2025

Introduction from Amanda Perraton, Executive Director for Children and Families



Welcome to the latest edition of Cheshire West & Chester Council's SEND Newsletter.

As we step further into 2025, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible work being done across our SEND services. Significant progress is being made to strengthen our support for children, young people, and their families.

We know there is still work to do, but I am encouraged by the dedication and commitment of everyone working within SEND services to drive meaningful change. This newsletter provides updates on our SEND Development Programme, new staff recruitment, and our key priorities moving forward.

Thank you for everything you do to support children and families in Cheshire West and Chester.

SEND Development Programme – Expanding Our Services

To improve SEND services, we are developing a SEND Inclusion Support Service (SENDISS) to ensure children, young people, and families receive the right support at the right time.

New Roles Being Created:

- Senior Manager for SENDISS – Overseeing and coordinating SEND support.
- SENCO Support and SEND Training Lead – Providing training and guidance to SENCOs and school staff.
- Lead Practitioner (Resourced Provisions) – Developing and expanding specialist resourced provisions.
- Phase Transfer Practice Lead – Supporting smooth transitions between education stages.
- Three new ASD Specialist Teachers – Strengthening autism support in schools.
- Four new Cognition and Learning Specialist Teachers – Improving specialist learning interventions.
- Business Support Team – Ensuring quicker responses and more efficient case management.

These additions build upon new posts approved in August 2024, including:

- Communications Officers
- Finance Officer
- EHCP Writers
- Education Access Officers
- IASS Adviser
- SEN Assessment Officers (SENAO)
- Case Workers
- Mediation Coordinator
- Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO)

What Difference Will the New Roles Make?

The additional staff and expertise will help us overcome key challenges in SEND support:

- Faster EHCP processing – More caseworkers and EHCP writers will reduce delays.
- Stronger support for schools – SENCO training and specialist teachers will help mainstream schools provide better SEND support.
- Better transition support – Children moving to new education settings will get more targeted help.
- Enhanced autism and learning interventions – More specialist teachers will improve in-school strategies.
- Improved communication – A stronger business support team will mean quicker responses for families.

These improvements will help ensure families feel supported, schools are better equipped, and children receive the right support at the right time.

Did You Know?

- EHCP backlog reduction: In August 2024, we had 300 overdue EHCPs. Now we have 41 remaining!
- 100% of primary transition EHCPs were completed on time this year.
- Our new SEND Partnership Board will be chaired by a nationally recognised expert in SEND improvement.
- New specialist teachers will help children with ASD and cognition and learning difficulties get better in-school support.

- The Parent Carer Forum (PCF) is working closely with us to ensure parents' voices are heard—get involved here.

PCF Update

The Parent Carer Forum (PCF) continues to play a crucial role in shaping SEND services. Recent discussions have focused on:

- EHCP timeliness – The need to ensure plans meet statutory deadlines.
- Mental health & autism support – Expanding access to training and services.
- Improved transition planning – Especially for secondary school placements.

The PCF is working closely with the council and SEND services to ensure that parent perspectives drive positive change. If you would like to get involved, visit PCF Cheshire West.

Q&A with Amanda Perraton – Driving Change in SEND

Q: Who are you, and what is your role?

A: I am the Executive Director of Children's Services, responsible for ensuring all children and young people have access to high-quality education, health, and social care services.

Q: What is your understanding of the SEND situation?

A: There is still work to do, but we are focused on meaningful change, including more dedicated staff and better service coordination.

Q: What changes do you hope to see in 2025?

A: I expect to see:

- Stronger governance and accountability.
- Faster EHCP completion.
- Improved local SEND provision.
- Fewer complaints as families see positive change.

Q: What does meaningful change look like?

A: A strong, joined-up system where education, health, and social care work together to meet children's needs early.

Q: What advice do you have for families?

A: Stay in touch with your case worker, use the PCF for support, and know that we are listening and working hard to improve services.

New SEND Partnership Board – Independent Leadership

We are pleased to announce the formation of a new SEND Partnership Board, which will be independently chaired by Edwina Grant, a nationally recognised SEND leader.

The Board will focus on:

- Ensuring accountability across education, health, and social care.
- Monitoring EHCP improvements and service developments.
- Strengthening co-production with families and schools.

Social Care Update

Following consultation and focus groups, the Council has now produced an updated all age Direct Payment Policy. The aim has been to simplify the policy and clarify who can receive a direct payment and what this can be used for. The policy is available on Livewell Cheshire West.

Coproduction and engagement on short breaks has now ended. Work is taking place to

analyse the themes and trends from the sessions. Feedback will then be used to develop the short breaks commissioning strategy.

Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)

The Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) is a national project running from July 2024 to March 2025, aimed at improving outcomes for neurodiverse children by strengthening schools' capacity to support their needs.

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE) through NHS England (NHSE), the project focuses on whole-school inclusion and is led by Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB), alongside Designated Clinical Officers (DCOs) in each local authority area.

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity refers to a range of learning differences and developmental needs, including (but not limited to):

- ADHD
- Autism
- Anxiety
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyscalculia
- Developmental Language Disorder
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Project Goals

The DfE and NHSE have identified key areas where schools can make a difference:

- ✓ Improving school attendance
- ✓ Reducing exclusions
- ✓ Enhancing attainment for neurodiverse pupils
- ✓ Boosting children's wellbeing
- ✓ Increasing parental confidence

What's Happening in Cheshire West and Chester?

Four primary schools in Cheshire West and Chester are part of the PINS project. Schools first completed a self-evaluation, covering:

- Leadership, culture, and values
- Mental health (for pupils and staff)
- Readiness to learn (learning styles, behaviour, etc.)
- Teaching and learning
- Environment
- Communication

Parents were also invited to share their views through a questionnaire.

Training & Support for Schools

Autumn 2024

An online training programme was delivered across Cheshire and Merseyside to support schools. Key topics included:

- Understanding neurodiverse needs
- Differentiating between trauma and neurodiversity

- Teacher language and communication
- Helping children with self-regulation

Spring 2025

The next phase includes:

- Further online training
- Face-to-face support for participating schools
- A sensory environment audit, conducted by Specialist Occupational Therapists (SPOTs), working with school leaders
- Visits from an Advanced Solutions practitioner, providing expert guidance on emotional health and wellbeing for neurodiverse pupils

Evaluating Impact

By March 2025, schools will repeat the self-evaluation, and parents will be invited to complete the survey again. Insights from the project will be shared:

- Locally in the next term
- Nationally through an evaluation by the DfE, to explore the potential for wider implementation

Want to Learn More?

For further information, please contact Gill Tyler at: gill.tyler@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk

Final Thoughts

Thank you to every staff member contributing to these improvements. Your work is making a real difference for families across Cheshire West and Chester.

If you have feedback or ideas, please contact us or join our next Parent Engagement Forum – together, we can keep making a difference.

Amanda Perraton, Executive Director for Children and Families



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