

REPORT TO CABINET

SEPTEMBER 2026

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Portfolio Title – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Clare Besford

Local Area Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Alternative Provision OFSTED Inspection (ASEND)

Summary

This report provides Cabinet with an overview of the findings from the recent joint Area SEND Inspection undertaken by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in May 2026. The inspection reviewed the effectiveness of arrangements across Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, the Northeast and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and wider partners in identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Reasons for Recommendations

The inspection findings are of strategic significance for the Council and its partners. Cabinet is asked to note the contents of the inspection report and endorse the proposed improvement plan to support continued improvement in outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND.

Recommendations

1. Note the findings of the joint Area SEND Inspection undertaken in May 2026.
2. Note the requirement to submit the final improvement plan to the Department for Education by 30 September 2026.
3. Note that progress against the improvement plan will be monitored through regular Department for Education and NHS England review meetings and reported through existing governance arrangements.

Detail

1. The joint Area SEND Inspection took place between the 4th and 22 May 2026. Inspectors considered the effectiveness of local arrangements across education, health and care and the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND

The inspection concluded that the local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and identified four areas for improvement. However, inspectors also recognised a significant number of strengths across the partnership and progress made since the last inspection.

2. A multi-agency improvement plan has been developed in response to the inspection findings and will be submitted to the Department for Education by 30 September 2026. Progress will be monitored through regular engagement and review meetings with the Department for Education and NHS England.
3. The report highlights a clear understanding of both strengths and areas requiring further development, alongside a shared vision and coordinated approach to improvement across education, health and care partners. Inspectors acknowledged the effective use of local data and intelligence to shape services and provision, strong co-production arrangements through the Parent Carer Forum and SEND Youth Forum, and the positive impact of SENDIASS in supporting families.
4. Inspectors identified four areas for improvement:
 - Ensuring children and young people with SEND are better supported during key transitions between educational settings, services and adulthood.
 - Improving the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans so that they consistently identify needs, provision and aspirations, supported by up-to-date advice from all agencies.
 - Continuing to work with schools to embed the local inclusion vision, improve consistency of SEND support and reduce disengagement, suspensions and exclusions for children and young people with SEND.
 - Reducing waiting times for neurodevelopmental assessment and community paediatric services and improving understanding of the impact of waiting times on families
5. A multi-agency improvement plan has been developed jointly by the Council, Integrated Care Board and education partners. The plan aligns directly to the four areas identified within the inspection report and builds upon existing priorities within the SEND and AP Strategy and Local Area Reform Plan. The plan includes clear actions, milestones, success measures and governance arrangements to monitor delivery and impact and will be published on the Council's Local Offer Website.

Consultation and engagement

6. The improvement plan has been developed through existing SEND partnership arrangements and informed by engagement with educational settings, health partners, social care services, the Parent Carer Forum, SEND Youth Forum and wider stakeholders.

Next Steps

7. The final improvement plan will be submitted to the Department for Education by 30 September 2026.
8. Following submission, the Council and its partners will participate in a programme of regular review meetings with the Department for Education and NHS England to monitor progress against the four areas for improvement. These meetings will provide support, challenge and assurance regarding delivery of the action plan.
9. Progress updates will be reported through existing governance arrangements, including the SEND Strategic Improvement and Reform Board, and periodic updates will be provided to Cabinet.

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