

# Brent Self-Evaluation for SEND

## January 2025

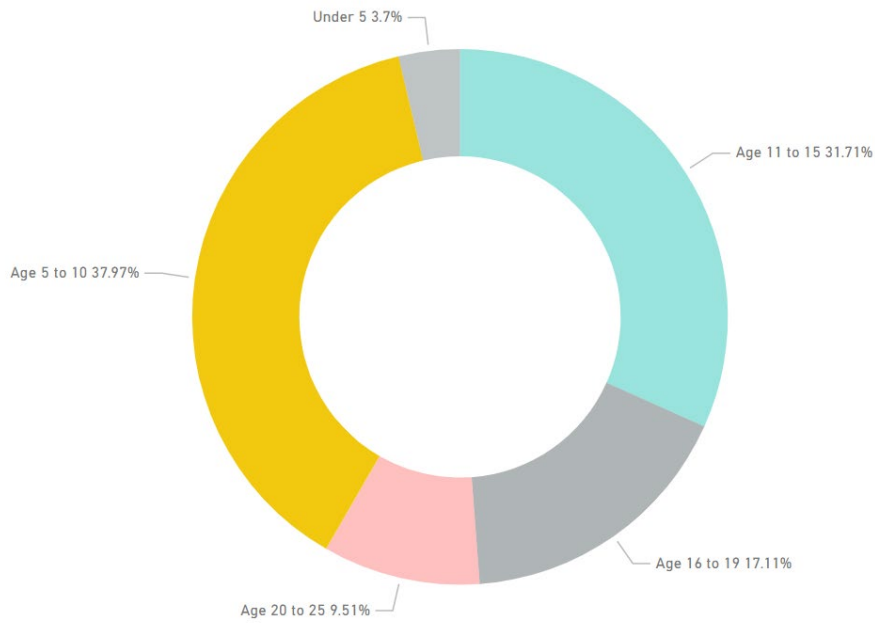


## 1.0 Introduction

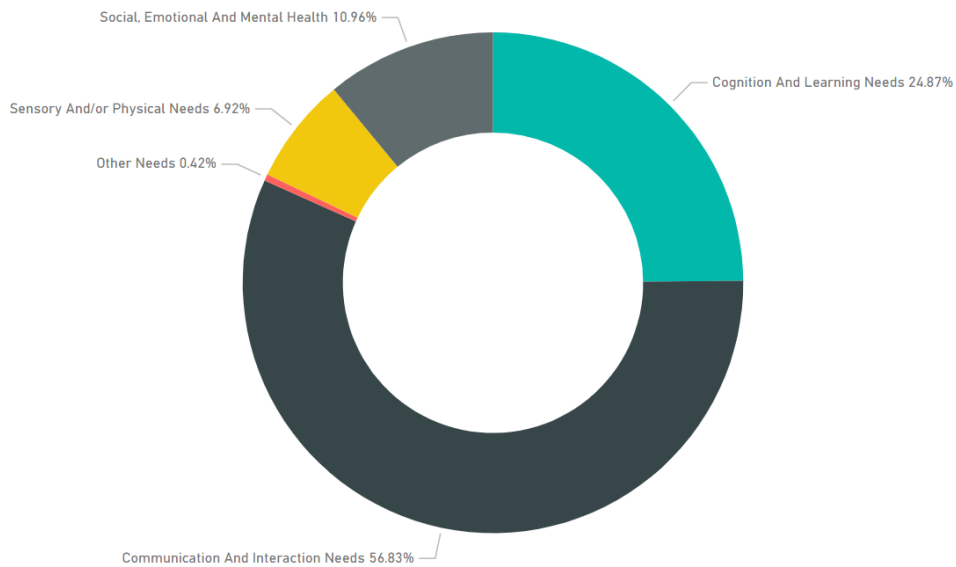
- 1.1 Brent is one of the most diverse boroughs in England, with significant communities of Black and Asian heritage. In the context of high levels of deprivation, increasing demand for services that support children with SEND has highlighted inequalities and vulnerabilities across the borough. The local area partnership is very aware of what needs to be done to ensure that all children with SEND get access to the support that they need through a number of identified priority programmes.
- 1.2 Building on the outcome of the previous inspections of local authority SEND services in 2017 and 2019, this SEF has been developed with input from a range of partners, including parents and carers through the Inclusion Strategic Board.

## 2.0 Children and young people's needs are identified accurately and most are assessed in a timely and effective way

- 2.1 Brent is continuing to see a year-on-year increase in the number of children with EHCPs. In January 2024, there were 3500 children and young people with an EHCP compared to 3251 in January 2023. In 2023 there were 601 initial requests for EHC assessment (468 in 2022), of which 179 were refused (29.8%). In 2023 there were 456 new plans issued (312 in 2022) of which 36.8% were for under 5s and 49.8% were for children aged 5-10. Increases in recent years in the number of under 5s issued with an EHCP aligns with the rapid increase in under-5 diagnoses of ASC (the need identified in 28.3% of new EHCPs in 2023). While the quality of decisions to assess for an EHCP are appropriate in most cases, work is underway to consider how the needs of children and young people, especially Brent's under 5s, may be even better met through further early intervention approaches (see paragraph 4.7). Brent's EHCP demographic in terms of age (Figure 1) and area of need (Figure 2) are depicted below.



**Figure 1 The age distribution of Brent children with an EHCP**



**Figure 2 The primary need distribution of Brent children with an EHCP**

2.2 There are several routes for early identification in Brent, which includes the multi-disciplinary Early Years Panel that administers the Early Years Intervention Fund from the High Needs Block. All children with high level SEND from their 3rd birthday can apply for 15 hours of additional funding support per week for 38 weeks of the year at one of the specialist nurseries to provide an increased adult:child ratio. 329 children were supported through the Early Years Panel in the 2023/24 academic year; 57 requests were declined, demonstrating rigour in the funding allocation process. Health professionals, including occupational therapy, physiotherapy, community nursing and speech and language

therapy, provide regular support to children attending the specialist nurseries and enhanced provision.

- 2.3 There are currently four Brent specialist early years provisions, located at the Curzon and Fawood Federation, Granville Plus Nursery School and at the Willow childcare enhanced provision. The specialist provisions provide high quality pre-booked spaces for children with a range of SEND. Willow nursery is co-located with a Family Wellbeing Centre, ensuring joined up support across education, health and early help can be provided to families. The nursery offers 27 full time equivalent (FTE) places for children with SEND. In the academic year 23/24, 26 children and families were supported through the EHCP process, which ensured that these children had appropriate support in place before starting school. Specialist early years provision is highly regarded by families:

*"I've seen a big difference with my child since entering Willow Family Well-being centre. She is more aware, engaged and no longer fears being around large groups of people. Staff are amazing and caring and give my child the help and support she needs. Thank you."*

*"My son recently started coming to Willow nursery, we can make out the difference in him. He started mingling with people and started constructing sentences."*

*"Thank you from the bottom of my heart for teaching and taking care of my child I appreciate you all for being understanding patient and kind throughout my child's SEN journey, we will miss you all dearly."*

- 2.4 The LA is currently undertaking a review of its EY offer for children with SEND, in light of both the rising level of identified need in the 0-5 age group in Brent and also the expanded free childcare offer. The review will focus on ensuring that all childcare providers in Brent will be able to access a comprehensive level of support (both financial via an enhanced Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) offer and in terms of advice) that will enable them to meet the needs of all children in their care. This initiative seeks to ensure that parents will have greater choice of EY providers. In addition to this, Brent is reviewing the provision of specialist EY support for children with complex medical needs, with the aim of ensuring there is sufficiency of places for this highly vulnerable cohort.
- 2.5 A multidisciplinary Section 23 panel was established in September 2022 and, in supporting earlier notification of children with SEND, is allowing for earlier strategic planning and commissioning of services. This is proving effective at identifying children with additional needs – there were 189 health notifications in the 2023/24 academic year compared to 260 in 2022/23.<sup>1</sup> The main identified needs were Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), global developmental delay and speech, language, and communication needs. To respond to the changing needs of Brent's early years cohort, especially the increasing prevalence of young children presenting with speech language and

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<sup>1</sup> The reduction in the number of Section 23 notifications between 2022/23 and 2023/24 is attributed to staffing challenges within the community paediatrics team, rather than a decrease in the number of children presenting with needs that would trigger a Section 23 notification. The recovery plan for community paediatrics is detailed in section 10.8, below.

communication needs (SLCN) (a cohort that comprises 76% of the early years inclusion team's caseload), Brent is working with the charity 'Speech and Language UK' to conduct a multi-agency review of SLCN support pathways to ensure that Brent's universal, targeted and specialist offer meets local needs. Current outputs from this project include the proposed introduction of the 'WellComm' speech and language toolkit, to be rolled out free of charge across all of Brent's Early Years providers from September 2025. To further support SLCN development, Brent's Early Years Inclusion Team delivers a highly impactful 'Early Talk Boost' programme, free of charge to early years providers. Feedback from recent sessions delivered at a nursery indicates the value of this programme:

*"We are so delighted to see the effects of Early Talk Boost after only 2 weeks of introducing it. The children in the group are becoming more confident in speaking and sharing their voice with the other children. Parents can also see the difference in their children's progress and have said the following:*

*'Hello M, just to let you know that A is loving these books. She has already started making up stories on her own and was telling us a long long story last night' [Mum of child A].*

*As a team we have seen a marked difference in the children who would normally not want to speak out but are now showing a newfound confidence, which they are unaware of, as it is happening automatically."*

- 2.6 There has been significant improvement in Brent's ECHP 20-week timeliness data over the last 12 months. Significant improvement in this key metric, that had been an earlier area of concern, is clear evidence of impact of the Borough's investment into the 0-25 SEND team, assessment services and a renewed focus on timeliness. Brent's 20-week timeliness currently sits at 82.4% as at the end of October 2024, far above both the national average figure of 50.3% and Brent's previous (2023) 20-week figure of 37.6%. Furthermore, the increase in demand for EHCNAs has not impacted on the timeliness of decisions to move to an assessment for an EHCP (100% at 6 weeks and 98% at 2 weeks). The Early Years Inclusion team is supporting the early years sector on the ECHP process and how to identify needs and the Early Years Panel is promoting early identification and fast-tracking of pre-school children with complex needs who are likely to require an ECHP assessment. To improve the timeliness of annual reviews that help to ensure that children and young people's needs are identified accurately and effectively, two new SEND QA officers started in post in October 2024, with a focus on improving scrutiny, impact and timeliness of annual review work.
- 2.7 Additional support is given to vulnerable children including looked after children (LAC) and those with a social worker via an allocated Educational Psychologist (EP) to the Virtual School. In the 2023/24 academic year 20 children were supported, spread across KS1-KS4 (with the highest numbers in KS3 and 4, at 8 and 7 children respectively). All children supported had needs in the area of social, emotional and mental health. The next highest areas of need identified at referral were cognition and learning and physical and sensory needs in relation to over and hyperactivity. 11 LAC were supported at SEN support and 9 for EHC assessment. Emergent themes have been emotionally based

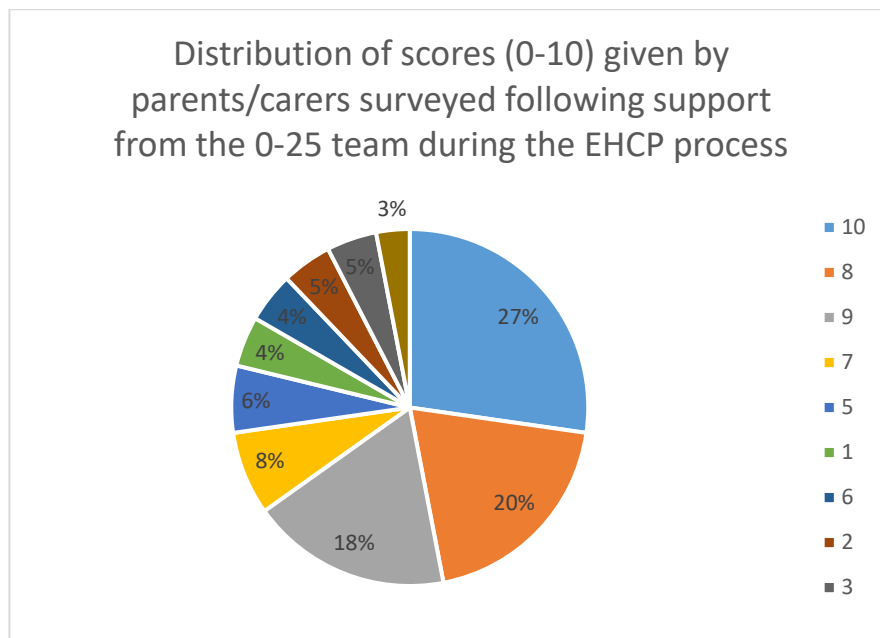
school avoidance, with some children struggling to attend school. Consequently, there has been direct work with designated teachers and foster carers to ensure that children's needs are met appropriately. The support from the EP service that is attached to the Virtual School means that looked after children are seen swiftly where there is a need for EP involvement. This has supported school placements, (thus avoiding potential placement breakdowns) and supported children on the edge of care. Additionally, the EP service has worked with the virtual school to impact on a wider scale through contributing to whole staff school training. This year the training offered also included whole service training at the Children and Young People practice day on Dan Hughes' 'PACE' intervention (a specialist intervention aimed at supporting children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences and may struggle with attachment as a result).

- 2.8 Support from the Educational Psychology (EP) service is aimed at helping schools to identify and support children's needs. This includes Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training across all settings and schools and the delivery of an Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) programme. To date, over 95 ELSAs have been trained in Brent across early years, primary, secondary and special provision, with ongoing support provided by the EP service. The impact of this programme has been universally positive, with 100% of respondents to a survey stating that ELSA added value to what they do in school and was worth the investment of training and supervision time. Feedback on support from ELSAs from parents is positive, noting improvements in their children's emotional regulation.
- 2.9 The 0-25 Disabled Children and Young people service has 837 open cases of children and young people who either have an active EHCP or their EHCP has recently ceased. Number of children open to this service has grown since the pandemic, reflecting an increase in need and also a focus on assessing and providing services for families at an earlier stage. Out of this cohort there are 38 children who are subject to Child Protection Plans, 17 looked after children. The rest of the children and young people either have a short break plan because they are receiving specialist services or they are preparing for adulthood and receiving care and support which is identified in their care and support plans.
- 2.10 The 0-25 Disabled Children and Young People Service was involved in the Adults Social Care (ASC) CQC inspection in May 2024. The feedback noted that allocated social workers knew the young people with whom they were working and the care and support plans and service provision were proportionate and person-centred. An area requiring further improvement was transition planning, including the development of a borough-wide transition pathway so that young people that are known to other parts of children and young people such as looked after children, vulnerable young people known to the Localities or Early Help Services and those who have an EHCP and may require services from ASC in the future can be captured. The transition pathway is in the process of being finalised.

### 3.0 In Brent, children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support

3.0 The voice of parents and children/young people is a key element in the quality assurance of EHCP assessments, plans and reviews. Brent SEND caseworkers actively support children and their families to shape or amend their child’s plans and support in both EHCP development and annual reviews. During phase transfer the local authority works with families and children and young people to explore the options of school transfer and 84% of children passed through the year 6/7 phase transfer process in February 2024 with an agreed destination.<sup>2</sup> To ensure the most appropriate fit of school placement, the SEND 0-25 team provide advice to parents/carers about provision and how well it might meet the needs of a child/young person. In some cases, parental confidence in and knowledge of schools and how the system operates can present challenges to finalising plans and securing provision that will support a child to thrive in a timely way.

3.1 To ensure that the 0-25 Team make service decisions that are informed by families’ experiences of using our services, Brent regularly surveys parents/carers following engagement with our service. In 2024, 66 parents/carers have been surveyed regarding their experiences of the EHCP process. Parents/carers were asked to rate their response to the question “How would you describe the communication (during the EHCP process) from your allocated SEND Case Officer?” on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 10 (very good). The results of this survey question are shown in Figure 3, below:



**Figure 3: Parental satisfaction with the communication from their case officer during the EHCP process**

<sup>2</sup> The 16% of children for whom a destination was not identified prior to the February deadline comprise children for whom completed paperwork was not received in time for the LA to achieve the February phase transfer deadline and children for whom there was disagreement between the LA and parents regarding which school would be named in Section I.

3.2 As can be seen from Figure 3, 73% of parents and carers surveyed rated the quality of communication as at least 7/10. This is promising, but the 0-25 Team is still looking at why 17% of respondents rated the communication as between 1 and 4/10. The most common answer given for a lower score (where this information was provided) was owing to slow response times, and a change of case officer. The 0-25 Team is looking at improving ways of working (e.g. trialling software to assist with administrative tasks) to ensure a more consistent level of support is provided to families, within the staffing structure available learning from feedback comments such as:

*"Concerned recommend interventions haven't been implemented. Not proper consideration when finalised plan was received. Not satisfied with the coproduction with the school regarding expertise, neurodiversity and behavioural management. Not informed of a clinical approach."*

*"Feels the EHCP has been implemented to meet government regulations and not targeted towards the Child's needs."*

The 0-25 team has also received feedback that demonstrates its potential to be transformative to the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families:

*"I am reaching out to you because your guidance and support have been invaluable to us as a family. Your advice, strategic planning, you have made a significant impact on our lives. I am grateful for all the help you have provided."*

*I will always keep you in my prayers and hope that you continue to inspire and assist other children and families in Brent like you did. 1000 Thank you for everything. Have a good summer."*

3.4 Following on from the success of the 2023 event, in October 2024, the Brent Supported Employment Forum again hosted a system wide careers and post-14 information event called 'Branching Out' to ensure that young people and parents/carers can make effective decisions about their child's post-16 education pathway as part of the post-14 annual review. 92 young people attended the event to speak to over 30 local organisations. Many of the successful elements of the 2023 event were repeated, but new features were included in response to requests from young people with SEND and their parents/carers. For example, some young people reported to us that some of the workshops became too busy last year and that this restricted their ability to fully participate. To prevent this from happening this year, we introduced a booking system for workshops to ensure that no one event became too crowded. Feedback provided from the Brent Parent Carer Forum on the event included the following:

*"Hi all we just wanted to pass on feedback from parents. All we spoke to praised the event, the workshops and information made available tonight. Many said the feedback from the last event had been heard. We spoke to 8 parents for whom tonight was their first contact with any provider /service and us. We so often pass on feedback that is not so good. We wanted to take the opportunity to say we feel parents are very much part of and an equal partner of Brent's local SEND partnership. We all know there are lots*

*to still do but together we can make the lives of our families better and hopefully proud to live in Brent”.*

- 3.5 To ensure that the LA includes and respects parental experience in decision-making, parental feedback is gathered on an annual basis by Brent Parent Carers Forum (BPCF). The results of this feedback informs changes in process. For example, in 2024 a new EHCP template was developed in response to feedback from children and young people and their parents/carers. The updated template is designed to be easier to navigate (and is thus more accessible), to emphasise preparation for adulthood (PfA) goals more clearly from post-14/Year 9 and to ensure that the voice of the child or young person remains front and centre throughout. The new plans came into use on all new EHCPs from October 2024.
- 3.6 BPCF surveyed parents and carers of children and young people with an EHCP in the 23/24 academic year, the results of which are due to be published imminently. Early emerging themes include concerns relating to housing for families of children and young people with SEND, effective support for children and young people during periods of transition and the short breaks offer. Co-production of the short breaks offer is planned during this academic year.
- 3.7 A weekly panel, chaired by the Statutory SEND Service Manager, is attended by representatives from across health, schools and settings and social care, including the DCO who provides clinical oversight for assessments and plans. Where assessments or plans are not progressed, a ‘way-forward’ meeting is held with the referring agency, school and parents/carers to discuss the findings of the panel and the reasons why at that time an assessment or plan is not progressing. In 2023/24 there were 40 way-forward meetings. Themes arising from these meetings include a rise in: children and young people who are academically able, but who are experiencing significant challenges with their mental health needs and/or experiencing Emotionally-Based School Avoidance (EBSA); parents concerned about their child’s transition to secondary school (the majority of meetings are for children in Year 3 and above); undiagnosed autism and resultant unmet needs due to long waiting lists with CAMHS; paperwork received from schools including unsupportive language which overly focuses on the child’s behaviour rather than how their additional needs present in the environment and out-borough schools who are not able to benefit from Brent services and the Local Offer due to local commissioning arrangements and eligibility criteria.
- 3.8 Feedback from way-forward meetings has informed the support offered by the Local Authority to schools, parents and carers and other key stakeholders (including health). For example, a recent session (December 2024) offered free of charge to SENCOs and Headteachers focussed on the law with regards to the admission of children with SEND, and the law regarding exclusions and SEND. A further example of support offered following ‘way forward’ meetings is the decision to offer free ‘SCERTS’ training to all Brent schools, that focuses on social communication, emotional regulation and transactional support and was developed to upskill people supporting children and young people with ASC, to enable them to provide targeted support. To date, eight Brent schools have

accessed the SCERTS training and officers will be working with schools to assess impact in due course.

- 3.9 The low number of complaints and tribunals in Brent provides some evidence that parents feel involved in decision-making. The SEND 0-25 Team received 29 complaints from residents during the 2023/24 academic year: 8 were not upheld, 8 were upheld and 13 were partly upheld. Themes arising from complaints include communication with parents, Annual Review delays, delays in securing special school placements or access to therapy provision.
- 3.10 In the period September 2023 to August 2024, there were 44 appeals regarding decisions on EHCPs, with 26 closed during the academic year. As of 20 August 2024, there were 18 live appeals at first stage tribunal of which 4 related to a refusal to assess, 1 related to not issuing an EHCP and the remainder related to placements and/or provisions. Mediation, commissioned from an independent provider is in place and available for parents/carers to access. In the 23/24 academic year, Brent received 26 requests for mediation.
- 3.11 SENDIASS service feedback continues to evidence high levels of satisfaction in the impartial advice received, through the training offer, helpline and individual case support. Data shows Brent SENDIASS is seen as impartial by the vast majority of those accessing the service and 95% of users would recommend the service to others. The number of calls received increased in the academic year 2023/24 to 2027 from 1326 in 2022/23. SENDIASS supported 20 families in the process of appeals during 2023. In the main these appeals were lodged against the LA decision of not to assess. Many of the appeals were concluded prior to hearing with SENDIASS supporting communication between the LA and the families. The positive impact of SENDIASS can be seen below, with comments in the annual user survey including:

*"The SENDIASS service has been incredibly supportive and instrumental in guiding me through the complexities of supporting my children with special educational needs (SEN). Their advice and services have provided a robust support system, offering clear and practical guidance. They have educated me on the available resources, ensuring I have the necessary tools and information to advocate effectively for my children's educational needs. This comprehensive support has been invaluable in navigating the SEN landscape, enabling me to better support my children's development and well-being. We are in desperate need for our community support and I appreciate all the help I have received and will continue to receive. Thank you so much for your time and effort in supporting our community." (parent)*

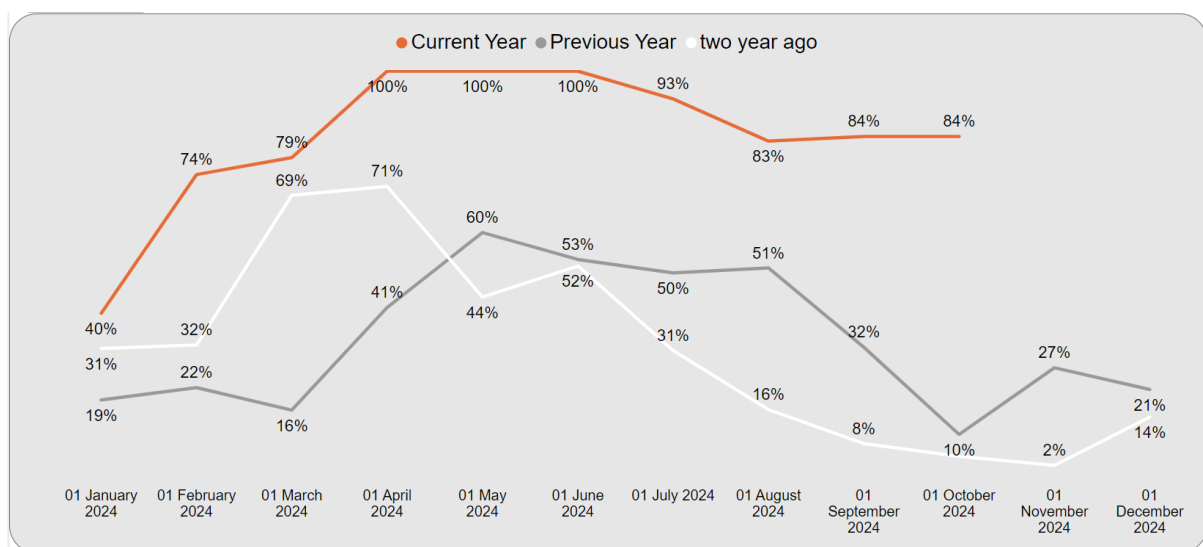
*"(I) did not know a service of such was available and so easily such fast and efficient service." (young person 17-25 years)*

*"Today's meeting was very much needed in our community. The parents of children with special education needs got the information they needed to help their children. Each mother had an issue they needed to tackle and with your firm advice they were able to overcome their worries." (local community group)*

3.12 Children, young people and their parents and carers have identified the need for more social activities for children and young people with SEND. This is being co-created with children and young people with SEND and their families building on the recent ‘What matters to you’ event, co-hosted by Brent Parent Carer Forum and the Inclusion Service in November 2024. The event was well attended, with over 30 children and young people with SEND engaging in a range of activities. The feedback from the event is currently being collated, but key headlines are that children and young people with SEND would like Brent to support the creation of a social club within the community. A dedicated project officer is currently working with children and young people with SEND and their families to draw up a specification. The social club is due to launch in 2025, and will tie into Brent’s commitment (made in the SEND strategy 2021-2025) to both host a celebration event for children and young people with SEND (agreed to be bi-annual), and to support all children and young people with SEND accessing 25 cultural events before they reach 25.

#### 4.0 Children and young people in Brent receive the right help and support at the right time

4.1 Overall children and young people in Brent receive the right support at the right time. The starting point is effective assessment for EHCPs and SEN support to ensure that children’s needs are understood. As can be seen in Figure 4, below, Brent’s 20-week timeliness figures have improved considerably over the last two years to a point where it now sits at 84%. This improvement came about as a result of focused work by the Inclusion service to improve this metric, and as a result of parents feeding back to the service that addressing 20-week timeliness was a significant priority for them.



**Figure 4: The percentage of Brent EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (including exceptions)**

4.2 In terms of annual review timeliness, this has been identified as a priority area in need of increased focus. To address the challenges in annual review timeliness (standing at only 5.5% of annual reviews processed within statutory timescales, as of January 2025 – a

slight decrease compared with the 2023 calendar year in which 6% of annual review processes were completed on time), Brent has hired two additional members of the 0-25 SEND team to focus entirely on annual review work. Furthermore, a trial is due to commence in January 2025 of a software package designed to reduce the administrative burden faced by case officers, with the intention that the use of this tool would free up case officers to attend and process more annual review paperwork in a timely fashion.

- 4.3 As the number of EHCPs has increased, the number of children with an EHCP placed in mainstream schools has increased from 46% in 2020 to 65% in 2024. 78% of children and young people issued a new EHCP in 2024 are in mainstream school compared to 69% in 2021 (national 74%; statistical neighbours 77%) and 13% aged 0-25 are placed in special schools (national 11%; statistical neighbours 11%) (Source: SEN2 January 2024). Overall, 65% of children and young people with an EHCP in Brent aged 0-25 attend a mainstream provision – this is in line with the expectation in the Children and Family Act 2014 that all children should be educated in mainstream where possible.
- 4.4 Through the School Effectiveness Partnership Board and regular meetings with headteachers, the Children and Young People’s Directorate leads an effective partnership with local schools to deliver an inclusive agenda. Significant work has been undertaken to develop the capacity of mainstream schools in Brent to identify the SEN needs of pupils early so that they can be supported in the most appropriate way. The rising level of need in Brent is also being proactively and positively responded to by both schools and the LA. There are 11 additionally resourced provisions sited in Brent mainstream schools, and the LA is working with schools to create a further 4 by 2027, with the potential to add at least 100 additional specialist places.<sup>3</sup> Two Brent local special school MATs, the Rise Partnership and the Compass Learning Trust, work with local Brent mainstream schools to provide additional support and training to mainstream colleagues in supporting children with SEND. For example, the Rise partnership is commissioned by the LA to deliver additional training sessions for Brent schools with an ARP. Additionally, the Compass Learning Trust holds an ‘Autism Education Trust’ (AET) licence, and delivers AET training to Brent schools. Lower than anticipated uptake of this training in the 2023/24 academic year has been attributed to the relatively high cost of the offer. In response to this, the LA is working with Compass Learning to support a broader roll-out of the highly regarded training at a reduced cost to schools by subsidising the offer for the 2025/26 academic year onwards.
- 4.5 Despite this increased support offer, some schools remain concerned about how to support children with increasing complexity of need who are being placed in mainstream schools. Relatedly, some parents also communicate to BPCF a lack of confidence in the ability of mainstream schools to meet the needs of their children. To further respond to this challenge, Brent has taken action to both increase the amount of support available to schools through increasing the amount of top-up funding available to children with SEND, and to increase the amount of funding schools receive for children who are placed in mainstream whilst they await a place in special school, to ensure that no child or setting is disadvantaged simply because of the type of school they attend. A comprehensive review of Brent’s resource allocation system in SEND began in 2023, culminating in 2024

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<sup>3</sup> Final number of ARP places is to be confirmed following the outcome of significant change applications.

with a fully co-produced (with both schools and parents/carers) updated banding tool that will ensure that Brent makes resource allocation decisions with improved consistency and transparency. The roll out of the new approach commenced with new plans in December 2024.

- 4.6 Whilst there are clear strengths and areas of challenge in Brent's approach to supporting children on the assessment pathway for an EHCP, and those with an EHCP, significant work is also underway to ensure that where appropriate, children's needs are being met in Brent without the need for an EHCP. Brent has a comprehensive SEND Support service offer available to all Brent residents attending Brent schools. The offer, and the impact of these services is outlined below.
- 4.7 The Intervention First Team (IFT) is a pilot project running within the Harlesden cluster of schools, offering intensive early support to children aged 4-7 who are presenting with social, emotional and mental health needs (part of Brent's Delivering Better Value programme). The pilot has been impactful, with positive feedback received from all stakeholders and a clear reduction in the need for an EHCP for children referred to the programme: at the start of the programme, schools were considering an EHCNA for 56.3% of children referred to IFT. Following participation in the programme, only 2% of participants were referred for an EHCNA (a decision supported by all parties). Of the programme, one SENCo commented:

*"As a school we have greatly valued and much appreciated the support from your service this year. The individualised intervention support sessions that your team were able to offer to our children made a significant difference to their emotional well-being by enabling them to continue developing emotional literacy and strategies for self-regulation. The children looked forward to the sessions and would often ask when their next session would be."*

- 4.8 Further examples of SEND support services available for children and young people include Brent's Autism outreach service (BOAT), the support service for families awaiting assessment for ASC (STAR), the local authority commissioned wellbeing and emotional support team (WEST), the mental health support teams in schools (MHSTs), the specialist hearing impairment (HI) and visual impairment (VI) support teams, the early years inclusion support team (EYIST) (which also encompasses Brent's portage service), the inclusion support team (IST) and the SEND support team. All of these services (except the MHSTs) are funded by the Local Authority to ensure that children and young people with SEND, schools and families receive the right support at the right time. Full impact reports of each of these services are produced. Some key data from these support services is as follows:

BOAT: For the 23/24 academic year, 1036 students were known to BOAT, ranging in age from 2-19yrs. 37% (383 students) of these students were actively supported through advice, support and training for their settings. Feedback for the service is consistently positive, with some examples below:

*"I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt thanks for the exceptional support and collaboration during our partnership. Your expertise and dedication were crucial to our success, and it was an absolute pleasure working with you." (SENCO)*

*"BOAT are a diamond in Brent. I really appreciate you taking the time out of your very busy schedule to share some extremely valuable advice." (Family support worker).*

STAR: As of January 2025, there are 295 families receiving support from STAR. Of these, 227 CYP are awaiting an ASC assessment and 68 are awaiting an ASC & ADHD assessment. In autumn 2024, 17 out of 33 parents / carers attended the 'Understanding Neurodiversity' course (compared to 9 out of 15 in summer 2024). STAR also offers termly drop-in sessions at all 8 Family Wellbeing Centres; these sessions are open to all Brent residents even if families are not known to STAR. 24% of children known to STAR have an EHCP and 4% of children known to STAR are also known to social care. 98% of people surveyed responded 'good' or 'very good' that STAR is available by phone/email and responds in a timely manner to requests for advice. As with BOAT, feedback for the service provided by STAR is consistently positive:

*"Listening to you was most helpful and a nice emotional boost. We are not alone in all this. Also, I wanted to thank you, your sessions are so very helpful and informative. It shows so clearly how driven you are and how much you want that families and their children are properly supported, even and most importantly on an emotional level. What a great service."*

WEST: 545 children and young people received an intervention during 2023-2024, with 88 additional parent/carer or professional consultations conducted (annual target was 350 children and young people. 93% of children and young people who completed an intervention with WEST saw an improvement in their goals (this figure was 100% for children in care). In addition to conducting direct work with children and young people, WEST are commissioned to provide an extensive support and training offer to schools, families and professionals working within the LA. Feedback from schools in terms of the impact of the training included the following:

*"A good training offer which is readily accessible. Frequency and duration is good. Useful strategies in supporting their self-esteem, anxiety, confidence in their abilities etc."*

*"The information in the training contains the exact level of detail we need as educators but not too much detail that would require hours and hours to go through - perfected pitch."*

*"Great session as always, thank you! Knowing what signs to look out for with children and young people and understanding their behaviours and feelings was particularly good."*

- 4.9 As can be seen above, a key function of Brent's various SEND support services is to deliver training to schools and providers to ensure that Brent has a comprehensive graduated approach framework (GAF, also known as 'ordinarily available provision'). In order to respond to an increase in Brent children and young people presenting with Social,

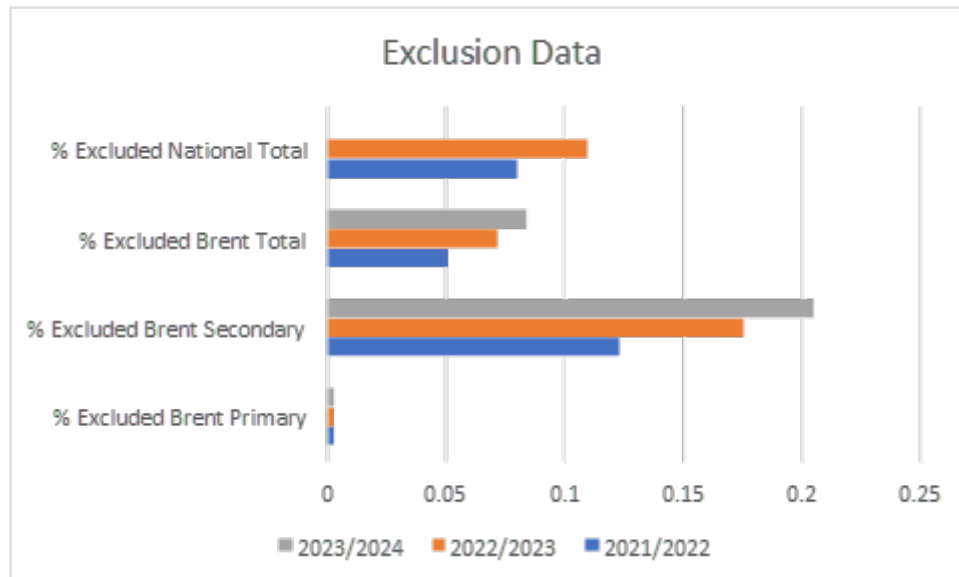
Emotional and Mental Health needs, Brent funded the rollout of 'Thrive' training offer across the borough, a Department for Education approved offer for schools wishing to support the emotional and mental health needs of their cohort in a trauma informed way. To date, 2 secondary, 2 special and 7 primary schools have participated in the Thrive training offer. Initial feedback from schools has been positive with two schools feeding back to the SEND Support team as follows:

*"Training and taking part in Thrive has been very beneficial to my school. My school is in a very deprived area of London. Families join my school with a range of circumstances, e.g. temporary accommodation due to domestic violence, domestic abuse, crowded homes, affected by trauma, and low-income families. The children at (X school) need much loving care from the staff. We work hard to make them feel safe and secure so they can learn. Thrive has supported us in doing that. I have learnt to use the Thrive Online tool to profile and complete action plans for children. "*

*"The Thrive approach is a dynamic, science based and is a trauma-sensitive approach to meeting the emotional and social needs of children and young people. It has supported wellbeing, behaviour and attendance. Children I have used the THRIVE approach with are happier and enjoying school as well as participating in their learning. It has the potential to support other children with SEN to develop emotionally and socially."*

- 4.10 To further support schools and early years providers to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, since 2023, Brent has made available £750,000 of funding to schools and early years providers to apply for under the 'inclusive environments grant' bid process to create spaces that better meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. To date, £450,000 has been allocated to 29 providers. Money has been used to create sensory spaces, to improve lighting and furniture in rooms, and to purchase equipment such as 'Cubbies'. The positive impact of this scheme has been clear, with SENCos reporting that, for example, some children with ASC, attendance has significantly improved since the introduction of an appropriate sensory space.
- 4.11 The Virtual School and the SEND 0-25 team ensure looked after children's needs are met on time through effective co-working. This includes undertaking a combined assessment when relevant, and a combined annual review and PEP process for the 42 looked after children with an EHCP. This joint working and single line of sight at practitioner and manager level ensures children are placed in good and appropriate provision. Reliance on other local authorities for children placed out of borough or who have placement moves, however, can make it difficult to ensure that Brent children are supported quickly and effectively. To mitigate this a nominated SEND 0-25 case officer for LAC ensures oversight of response times and escalates to the Head of Inclusion and the Head of the Virtual School for intervention when required, including taking back the responsibility for the EHCP. This occurred on 2 occasions in the 2022/23 academic year and on one occasion in 2023/24.
- 4.12 For all children and young people with an EHCP, any changes to their educational offer outside of the annual review process, including exclusion, parental decision to home educate, a reduced timetable or managed move, triggers an emergency annual review.

This allows the local authority to maintain oversight of the needs of the child and ensure children are receiving the right support at the right time. Joint assessment by the SEND 0-25 team and the elective home education officer has resulted in low numbers of children with an EHCP being electively home educated (19 as at end of December 2024). Owing to strong joined up working between Brent’s education services and excellent work by some Brent schools, Brent’s rate of exclusion remains lower than the national picture, see figure 5, below.



**Figure 5: Brent’s exclusion data as an overall percentage (compared to national) and for primary and a secondary for 2021/22 – 2023/24**

- 4.13 An area of particular focus in Brent is in expanding the capacity within our special schools and additionally resourced provisions (ARPs) to ensure that there are sufficient spaces available to meet the rising demand. As noted in 10.12(below), Brent has committed to a significant capital programme of over £44m to add a further 400 special school places (including post-16 provision), with all projects due for delivery by 2027. It is recognised that for some children, this increase in specialist placements will not come soon enough and to mitigate this situation, Brent plans on expanding SEND Support services from 2025 onwards, to ensure that school staff are provided with the appropriate support, advice and training to support our most vulnerable learners whilst they await a placement in specialist settings (where appropriate and in line with parental and child preference). All children with an EHCP who have no identified school place are provided with bespoke, 1:1 tuition packages whilst an appropriate school place is sought. To ensure safe practice in terms of the safeguarding of children without a school place, from 2025, all 0-25 and SEND Outreach services team managers will become ‘designated safeguarding leads’ (DSLs).
- 4.14 The EHCPs of children and young people whose parents choose to electively home educate or for whom ‘Educated Other than At School’ (EOTAS) is named in Section I, and where there is also social care involvement, are subject to joint audit processes by social care and Inclusion Service staff. The audit process was agreed in November 2024, with the first audit currently in process (as of December 2024). This demonstrates effective

joint working across social care and educational services to promote safeguarding. As per updated Government guidance (November 2024), all parents of children on a child protection (CP) plan now need to seek permission from the LA to electively home educate.

- 4.15 The Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre provides respite services within Brent to eligible CYP with SEND and their families. The service is overseen by the CWD team. The centre carries out an annual stakeholder survey, and the following comments are from the 2024 survey and focus on respondents' suggestions regarding staff performance:

*"The team at the Ade are very professional, warm, and welcoming. They have so much care for the children and have been observed to advocate well for them even through meetings and other communications. The team to continue as they are! From my experience, they remain very child centred!"*

*"The staff are highly trained, always friendly and make me feel at complete ease at leaving my child in their care. I feel like they truly care about my child's happiness, safety, and wellbeing. No suggestions at all in this area. I am very happy. "*

*"We are happy with the service provided by Ade Adepitan Centre. My son mostly enjoys his stay there. Staff is very friendly and happy. "*

*"I am happy with the service that Short Break Centre provides. However, I would love to be informed as soon as possible about changes to my son's attendance. I would like to have more weekends as it is more suitable for me if possible."*

As can be seen from this sample of comments, the service is well-regarded and highly valued by parents and carers. However, some parents have identified a wish for additional respite sessions (such requests are reviewed on a case by case basis by the CWD team). The most recent Ofsted inspection in November 2024 rated this setting as Good overall.

- 4.16 Providing the right support at the right time to children and young people with SEND is also a focus for health services within Brent. A total of 2293 young people with LD aged 14+ are registered with a Brent GP (as of December 2023). 87% of young people with LD (aged 14 and over) had received an annual health check by November 2024. North West London (NWL) (and Brent) are on track to exceed the national target (75%) and to meet the NWL stretch target (80%).
- 4.17 The 'Thrive' model is a clear example of where leaders in Health and the LA are working with service users to co-produce a new service delivery model for emotional wellbeing services in Brent, to ensure that children and young people with SEND receive the right support, in the right place and at the right time. Engagement work to develop the Brent Thrive approach to date has involved mental health leads in schools, Brent Parent Carer Forum, children and young people (via Brent Youth Parliament), parents and staff at Family Wellbeing Centres, as well as system partners including the voluntary sector. Outputs from recent workshops with stakeholders across the sector is being used to drive forward the development of mental health and wellbeing services. The Local

Authority's Director for Education, Partnerships and Strategy chairs the multi-agency group that will oversee this work.

4.18 Processes and systems are set up to support practitioners to work together and share appropriate information in a timely manner, including strong systems for identifying and responding to risks to children and young people with SEND, as can be seen by the following examples:

- Currently 21 children and young people (of which 7 have a diagnosis of Learning Disability and 14 have a diagnosis of Autism) are being monitored through the Dynamic Support Register with a further referral to be added. The roll out of a key worker programme as a direct product of the work of the Dynamic Support Register (DSR) panel for young people with ASC/LD at the point of crisis admission has had a positive impact.
- A Positive Behaviour Support pilot is building local capacity and providing training and advice to families and support providers on a behaviour-led suicide prevention model to support autistic children and young people at risk of serious self-harm and suicide.
- The CYP Directorate is embedded in the Local Area Emergency Protocol Meetings (LAEP) and Care Education and Treatment Reviews (CETR). This has contributed to preventing children's admissions to hospital as well as planning safe discharges to the community following in-patient treatment. 7 young people have been supported by LAEP this academic year, ensuring that support is provided to families to prevent breakdown.

4.19 Service improvements are informed by evidence-based practice to drive forward good outcomes. A neighbourhood model of service delivery is established in Brent through Family Wellbeing Centres (FWC) that deliver services in the community and this is being built on by the development of paediatric and health focused hubs. FWCs offer a range of co-located multiagency and multi-disciplinary services for children and young people with SEND. In 2023/24 578 children and young people with identified SEND were registered with the FWCs (in addition there are families with children with SEND where this was not identified on registration). Of the 578, 181 were under 5s, 192 were 6–11-year-olds, 167 were 12-18 year olds and 38 were 19-25 year olds. At FWCs, ante-natal and post-natal clinics are provided along with healthy living provision and Cygnet and Stepping Stones specialist parenting programmes. In 2022/23 67 parents out of 106 completed the Cygnet programme (63% completion rate) and 8 parents out of 14 completed the Stepping Stones programme (57% completion rate). The Council outreach teams for autism, early years intervention, deaf and visual impairment services all deliver out of the FWCs as well as in schools and settings. In August 2023, the ICP Health Inequalities Executive approved the funding of a localities approach to addressing key health inequalities including asthma, immunisations and vaccinations and the mental health of young people. The focus is on the most deprived wards in Brent (Harlesden, Stonebridge and Dollis Hill). These wards are the highest presenting wards for SEN and exclusions and are the focus for the work on the DBV, integrating with the health inequalities programme.

4.20 The local area partnership has worked hard to ensure that parents and carers know how to access services. Since 2022 there has been annual training for frontline staff in each FWC as SEND navigators, to support all parents/carers in Brent to access the right support at the right time. The FWC termly and holiday timetables signpost families to the SEND local offer. The FWC host the CAMHs under 5's service which is accessible across the hub network. Peer-support groups for parents of SEND children have been set-up on Saturday mornings at the FWC, this was following requests from families. There is also a family sign class at Willow FWC. Through the Start for Life programme funding Perinatal Mental Health (PNMH) services, for low to moderate needs will complement the PNMH service for severe needs already in place. The aim is for the new service to launch in spring term 2025. The FWCs have a Parent Carer Voice forum, including parents of SEND children, to shape the FWC delivery model and co-produce services to meet the needs of SEND families. Examples of parent voices shaping the offer include:

- *Information requested by parents relating to new-born babies on the council start for life website*
- *Improvements to delivery of the Cygnet and Stepping Stones parenting programmes for SEND families*
- *Improvements to the FWC e-registration and e-booking system.*

Examples of CYP voices shaping the offer include:

- *giving ideas for activities at the FWC which then improved take-up*
- *requesting activities that are regular and sustained and not just during school holidays*
- *Young women requesting a safe place to come together without males present.*

4.21 The FWCs also facilitate opportunities through BPCF for parents/carers of children and young people with SEND to meet, including a monthly group for Children of Deaf Adults (CODA). This was established following a meeting with the Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools and the Corporate Director of CYP and CODA parents who shared the challenges they were facing in supporting their children to succeed in education and in accessing services in Brent. The outcome was the CODA homework club, delivered by Brent Start, Brent Deaf and Hearing Impairment Service and BPCF and funded by the LA, which received a 'highly recommended' at the GLA Inclusion Awards in 2022. Subsequently a CODA youth club has been commissioned and CODA parents also have access to BSL supported sessions with all local services delivered via the Brent Hubs. The homework support club is a clear example of Brent working with Brent Parent Carer Forum to deliver services that precisely meet the needs of Brent's unique population.

## 5.0 Children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and achieve strong outcomes

5.1 The area partnership SEND Strategy 2021-25 was co-created between parents, carers and those who work with them across the partnership, with a focus on ensuring that 'all

children and their families have the fullest possible range of support and opportunities available to them in order to improve their life chances and realise their aspirations.’ Over 500 parents/carers and young people co-produced the strategy that focuses primarily on ensuring effective education, employment and training opportunities are available, that outcomes at GLD and Key Stages 2, 4 and 5 are equal to or above national and there are training and meaningful employment opportunities post-16.

5.2 Table 1 provides the data from Brent’s Annual School Standards and Achievement Paper 2023/4, presented to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in March 2024. It demonstrates the level of achievement for SEND children in Brent compared to all Brent children and national levels. By these measures, Brent schools EHCP cohorts’ rates for ‘achieving the expected standard’ were lower than national rates at EYFS and KS1, but higher for KS2 and Progress 8. Brent schools SEN Support cohorts’ rates for ‘achieving the expected standard’, were higher than national rates. These results indicate some very strong support for children with SEND across Brent, and also some areas where targeted work is needed. Work to improve the quality of the curriculum through investment in staff and training with Brent schools and settings will begin to translate into the improvement in outcomes for Brent children and young people in the coming years to close the gap. The Setting and School Effectiveness Partnership Board provide direction and oversight over this work which also includes bespoke training such as an Anti-Racist Programme free to all Brent schools in 2024/25.

**Table 1: Headline achievement data 2023/4 children and young people in Brent Schools**

	% attaining GLD = good level of development	% attaining Working At expected level in Phonics	% achieving the expected standard for KS2	Attainment 8 %
<b>Cohort</b>	<b>EYFS</b>	<b>Phonics Year 1</b>	<b>KS2 Reading Writing Maths</b>	<b>KS4 (Attainment 8)</b>
All pupils	67.0 (67.7 national)	<b>78.8</b> <b>(80.2 national)</b>	61.3 (61.0 national)	50.4 (46.2 national)
SEN Support	29.2 (25.0 national)	<b>62.5</b> <b>(51.6 national)</b>	37.1 (25.7 national)	37.7 (33.2 national)
EHCP	2.3 (3.9 national)	<b>19.6</b> <b>(20.2 national)</b>	14.3 (8.8 national)	16.6 (14.0 nationally)

5.3 There is a drive to ensure that EHC plans are outcomes focused and that reviews reflect children's ambitions. As evidence of Brent closing the feedback loop, Brent’s 2024 redesign of its EHCP and annual review paperwork to better capture the voice of children and young people and preparation for adulthood (PfA) goals was a response to multiagency audits undertaken during the 2022/23 academic year, which found that aspirations post-16 had not been captured well. The annual review paperwork for children aged 14+ now has a clear focus on PfA goals. This increased focus on better preparing children and young people for adulthood can also be evidenced by the fact that Brent has this year commissioned a dedicated ‘independent travel training’ (ITT) offer. The design and commissioning of this offer was undertaken in conjunction with Brent Parent Carer Forum and PfA is at the heart of the new service specification. This

service will launch in 2025, with the ambitious target of successfully travel training 58 young people with SEND in the first year of delivery.

- 5.4 Young people access impartial information, advice and support that enable them to make informed choices about their future through a variety of mechanisms including the Careers and Enterprise Hub delivered via schools. Additionally, the local authority commissions a third sector provider, Prospects, to support career development options for young people who are not engaged in education, employment, and training or who are looking for the next step on their career pathway. The provider works as part of the wider employment and skills partnership led by Brent Works offering impartial advice and guidance and access to a range of employment and training pathways via the Brent Hubs, and a specific provision is available at the Willow Family Wellbeing Centre for young people with SEND. This joint work means that Brent has a high rate of participation for 16-18 year-olds. The December 2022 participation rates return to the DfE identified that 94.8% of the SEND 16-18 cohort (330 young people) were participating in EET including 0.3% in supported internships, compared to nationally (86.6% and 0.1% respectively). The December 2023 participation rate for the SEND 16-18 cohort (464 young people) is 84.1%. with 3.2% NEET. The commissioned provider is following up on the destinations of those currently not known (10.8%). The NEET rate for the Brent general population is 3% compared to 7% nationally, with the unknown rate at 0.6% for Brent compared to 3.5% nationally. This compares to 96.6% of the non-SEND population in Brent participating in EET, 1.6% NEET and 1% with an unknown destination.
- 5.5 The Council is looking to support employers across Brent to be autism aware and to expand the number of employers who are achieving the disability confident standards. A Supported Employment Forum, led by Brent Works and the Inclusion Service, brings together providers with parents/carers and young people to ensure a system wide approach to continued development of the post-16 offer that enables more young people with SEND to secure meaningful employment and improved life chances. The Forum includes the Imperial Hospital Trust, West London Alliance, Compass Learning Trust, Wembley supported internship programme led by Brent Works, College of Northwest London, Shaw Trust, Mencap, Careers and Enterprise Hub and Brent Council adult learning service Brent Starts. Providers in the forum have successfully supported an annual average of 30 young people on internship programmes and led over the last three years to 40 young people's permanent employment. In 2022/23 Brent had 30 supported interns across 11 settings in programmes ranging from hospital settings, Brent Council, hospitality, Transport for London and retail. Employers included Wembley Park, Goldman Sachs and Mencap. A further 30 supported interns were recruited for 2023/24 with 12 starting on the Civic Centre/Wembley Park programme. This is led by Brent Works and supported through the Disability Confident Employer group and supported by all Brent Council departments. To support the continued growth in the number of supported interns, the Council has rolled out autism awareness training. There is a disability staff equality network to provide a safe place supporting staff with disabilities to discuss how to improve the lives of residents, service users and employees in line with Brent's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2024-2028).

- 5.6 There are some cohorts where further work is needed to achieve strong outcomes. Post-18 engagement in education and training is an area of focus for the Supported Employment Forum and developing the Post-16 Skills Resource Centre. The building for the centre is on schedule to open in January 2027. The design of the offer has been scoped with Brent Parent Carer Forum and a local special school Trust and the offer will be co-produced with children and young people with SEND. The Centre will support young people to develop skills across the other three PfA outcomes with a focus on independent living including healthy lifestyles, activities and addressing social isolation. This is being developed alongside an enhanced pathway provision for young people with more complex needs, in partnership with the Compass Learning Trust (a local special school multi-academy trust). In terms of the impact of the increased focus in Brent on supporting children and young people with SEND into employment and supporting their PfA goals, feedback from children and young people and their families has been collated. One student wrote of getting a permanent role at Brent Civic Centre via the supported internship programme said:

*"I am really delighted I have been offered a job. When I told my mum she was speechless with happiness! She was really worried about me travelling because I was not an independent traveller, but I am now. I am happy because I will be more independent and will have a job I love."*

## 6.0 Children and young people with SEND are valued, visible and included in their communities.

- 6.1 The core theme and objective of the SEND Strategy 2021-2025 is that children and young people with SEND are valued and visible members of their communities. The action plan of the Strategy sets out how this is being achieved. A short breaks statement, that was co-produced with young person advisors and the BPCF in November 2023, clearly outlines the offer in Brent. The Local Offer and PFA websites list a breadth of activities available and, through BPCF, the local authority is aware of the activities that are popular with families. However, feedback through the BPCF parent/carers survey indicates that not all parents/carers are aware of what is on offer locally and, working with the BPCF, the local authority is exploring how the Local Offer can be better publicised.
- 6.2 Examples of activities to support children and young people to be active in the community are discounted physical sports provision through the take-up 'B Active Cards' and 'Registered Disabled Yellow Cards' for young people aged 17-25 with an EHCP. The Ade Adepitan Centre (see section 2.12, above) continues to provide high quality services to children and young people with a disability and respite provision. The centre was successful in a funding bid to secure a new minibus from the Variety Club of Great Britain. There are a range of third sector organisations providing opportunities for children to engage in activities. Members of a Disability Sports Coach club in Brent had the

opportunity to meet five-time Paralympic swimming champion Ellie Simmonds on in November 2024 when she attended a session at Willesden Sports Centre.



6.3 The organisation Dare, a third sector provider, is commissioned to deliver day respite activities for children with disabilities including at weekends. Dare is also commissioned through the Brent Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme that delivers free enriching and physical activities to children in Reception – Year 11 on benefit-related free school meals during the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. The activities commissioned in 2023/24 year include a range of sports, horse riding, boat trips, arts and crafts, drama workshops and cooking classes and there is a range of places for children and young people with SEND. In 2024, Brent worked with 39 providers, including 2 SEND specialist provisions, to deliver activities to 43 venues across the borough. It is a requirement that provisions are accessible and inclusive to all. Brent utilises 15% of its funding for children who are not on free school meals, but are identified by the Council as benefiting from the programme, as permitted in the grant agreement, including children with SEND. Opportunities are also taken to prioritise an increase in SEND places for example when funding is rolled over from previous holiday periods. As can be seen in Table 2, below, uptake of the HAF programme by children with SEND is increasing year on year.

**Table 2: Uptake of the HAF programme in Brent by children and young people with SEND, 2022-2024**

	<b>Easter 2022</b>	<b>Easter 2023</b>	<b>Easter 2024</b>
<b>Number of SEND Children</b>	108	184	255
<b>% of HAF Attendees</b>	6.3%	12.1%	15.8%

	<b>Summer 2022</b>	<b>Summer 2023</b>	<b>Summer 2024</b>
<b>Number of SEND Children</b>	240	248	287
<b>% of HAF Attendees</b>	12%	13.9%	15.3%

The HAF programme enables young people to access new activities they may not have tried before, build their confidence and enhance their social skills, as parents have commented:

*"Thank you for what you have done for my daughter. She doesn't particularly like school because she finds the lessons challenging due to her disability. This programme made her like the school and staff more because she was able to just play and be with her friends in the same environment without any academic pressure"*

*"The club is amazing for my children. My children enjoying coming to the club and made a lot of friends who understand them and love them. I have one special needs child and he has learnt a lot of skills from the other children. He started to understand making friend since he started to come to the club. The club uses different tactic to build the children confidence. I feel comfortable and safe to send my children there. The staff are amazing with children. I really adored how they approach working with children and they create very happy and enjoyable environment for them".*

- 6.4 There is recognition of the contribution that young people with SEND make to their local communities. The winner of the Pride of Brent Youth Awards 2022 Young Disability Champion was a 12 year old boy who has been an amputee since a very young age. He won the award for his positive attitude despite his disability and the support he provides as a young carer for his mother who has a range of health conditions and his younger sibling who has ADHD and diabetes.
- 6.5 The local area partnership support children and young people to develop their confidence to participate in local activities. Schools, especially the special schools, are active in ensuring all children and young people with SEND can participate in borough wide activities. During Brent's year as London Borough of Culture (2020) Brent Music Service worked with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and children and young people to compose and perform a Brent Anthem. This choir was and continues to be comprised of children from across all schools including specialist provision. Children have an opportunity to perform in concerts and events through Brent Music Service - in 2023 Manor School's choir won 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Brent School Choir of the Year event. The partnership is proud that all schools' councils in Brent are inclusive school councils.
- 6.6 In June 2023, the Brent partnership hosted a SEND celebration event at Brent Civic Centre. During the week of 26-30 June 2023, the local area partnership celebrated children and young people with SEND through an exhibition of over 200 pieces of artwork and poetry, which were collated into a virtual book. Over 300 children/young people and their families attended a reception where children and young people nominated by their school were presented with certificates by the Deputy Mayor of Brent, the Corporate Director for Children and Young People and the Integrated Care Partnership Borough Director. The 2025 event is currently being organised, with the design and focus of the event being co-produced with children and young people with SEND. Feedback on the 2023 celebration event included:

*"It was so amazing to see all the children's achievements today including my daughter. Thank you for this event!" (Parent)*

*"A wonderful celebration of our SEND children. It was so nice to see a mixed profile of SEND children/youth. Please continue this as an annual event." (School)*

*"I got a certificate. I went on stage and felt like I was going to have a heart attack. It's been kind of fun. I would give it a 10. It's like having much fun with new friends." (Student nominee)*



7.0 Leaders in Brent are ambitious for children and young people with SEND.

7.0 Creating an inclusive Brent is a key priority for the local area partnership. This is expressed through the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027, Borough Plan 2023-2027, and the SEND Strategy 2021-2025 that defines the outcomes leaders in Brent are working collectively to achieve for all children and young people with SEND. An annual action plan for the implementation of the SEND Strategy, which is regularly reviewed by both the Inclusion Strategic Board (ISB), reporting to the Brent Children's Trust, sets an aspirational culture of high expectations and quality across services and provision and identifies areas for development to improve the experience of children, young people and their families with SEND.

7.1 There is strong oversight of SEND through the Corporate Director for Children and Young People, who holds the statutory responsibility for SEND alongside the Chief

Medical Officer, NHS NWL (who is the SEND lead), the NWL Executive Board, the Programme Director Maternity and Children Young People NWL ICS and the Borough Director for the ICP. Clear governance structures and reporting mechanisms are in place that cover all aspects of SEND and Alternative Provision through the Brent Children's Trust (BCT), the Inclusion Board that reports to the BCT and the ICP Executive. Processes for making decisions are structured, so that partnership leaders can swiftly agree to changes that are required to improve services or address funding issues. The partnership's proactive and effective response to the challenge of the High Needs Block overspend through engagement in the Department for Education's Delivering Better Value (DBV) Programme is an example of how leadership across the partnership works together to tackle key issues.

7.2 Through the Inclusion Strategic Board, parents (represented by Brent Parent Carer Forum) and practitioners collectively review practice impact. Recent thematic reviews considered by the Inclusion Strategic Board include the Quality and Impact of EHCPs, Preparing for Adulthood, Voice of Children and Young People, Health Transition into the Integrated Care Service and Sufficiency of Places. Quarterly reviews of performance give the partnership the opportunity to provide high support and high challenge to service providers, using a refreshed SEND dashboard. As described in 5.3, above, this oversight has driven improvement in the quality of EHCPs and annual reviews and informed the redesign of the EHCP and AR documentation. As stated in 7.1, the ISB is integral to reviewing progress made against the commitments of the SEND Strategy 2021-2025. At a recent (November 2024) ISB, the SEND Strategy 2021-2025 progress report for 2024 was shared, and the following priorities for action co-produced with external stakeholders from BPCF, health and education:

- For health, education and social care to work with parent carers to assess the level of support for children with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) available in Brent, and agree where improvements are required.
- For parent carers to be more included in the development of the post-16 offer as it progresses with the Head of Service for Inclusion and Director of Education, Partnerships and Strategy to work with BPCF to agree next steps. The hiring of Post-16 manager agreed for early 2025.
- To focus on improved joint working between health, education and early help to mitigate for vacancy rates in the health visitor service. An agenda item focusing on early years data from health was added to the agenda for the January 2025 ISB meeting to ensure shared focus on this area.
- For all stakeholders to be kept sighted on the re-commissioning of ASC, ADHD and LD diagnostic services.
- To enable improved data sharing from CAMHS, including impact data. An update has been requested for January 2025's ISB.
- While there is good co-production, it is important that all documents are genuinely co-produced with children and young people and their parent / carers and that they reflect the independence children and young people want and pathways to independent living.

7.3 An Executive Board oversees the local ICP arrangements for Children and Young People. For children with SEND, priority areas of focus are:

- To support children and young people to achieve good mental health and resilience through addressing CAMHS waiting times and implementing the 'Thrive' model.
- To build whole system pathways to support children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs through early intervention, and to manage rising demand at statutory levels.
- To ensure that neurodiverse children and young people and their families and carers can live well and receive appropriate and timely support when required.
- To address health inequalities.

7.4 Leaders in Brent continually evaluate services against parent/carer feedback and use performance indicators to understand the areas for service improvement and development in commissioning. The SEF is jointly owned across partners and clearly expresses area of success and areas for development. Accountability sits across the partnership and monitoring enables leaders to jointly evaluate whether services and provision are improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND, not only whether children and young people have received the services.

## 8.0 Leaders actively engage and work with children and young people and families

8.1 In preparing the SEND Strategy 2021-2025, the most significant leaders in the conversation were young people and a new young person advisors' network was established. Young advisors from Brent Special Schools Councils have more recently been engaged in shaping the neurodiversity pathway and in developing the PfA website.

8.2 Young people with additional needs have also been on senior staff recruitment panels including the appointment of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People in April 2022. Children and young people with SEND have participated in the development of the Youth Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. While children and young people are actively engaged in developing the Brent approach to SEND, it is recognised that there remains a need for consistent and regular engagement with children and young people (further details of which are given in 3.12 above). The proposals for the new social club for children and young people with SEND were themselves co-produced with children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers at an event that designed to facilitate successful and enjoyable engagement with young people with a wide range of SEND, including those who are non-speaking and those with significant learning needs.

8.3 Brent is committed to meaningful co-production with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, exemplified in the agreement to support BPCF financially for the next 3-5 years (at least) to ensure that they are able to fulfil their vital function within

the local area. As testament to Brent’s clear commitment to meaningful co-production, feedback from Brent’s parent carer forum about the local partnership is positive:

*“Brent Parent Carer Forum CIC is the commissioned participation forum whose role is to reach out to parent carers and feedback on services, offer constructive challenge to current services along with working together to co-production future services. To do this effectively and meaningfully there is a need for regular two-way communication between ourselves and the local authority and health, which we have. We feel we are on the same journey together all wanting the very best outcomes for our children and young people. There are no closed doors in Brent and we are listened to with openness and responded to with a solution focused ethos. We are treated as equal partners with a place on Brent’s Inclusion board with a regular agenda item allowing us to feedback what parents are telling us. Brents SEF is owned by us all and acts as a live work plan where together we work what next, how and by when. We feel involved welcomed, valued and respected.”*

8.4 The 2019 Ofsted/CQC joint local area SEND revisit evidenced that there was a culture of partnership with parents that was established and embedded, with parents an integral part of service development and decision-making. Work with parents and carers as a strategic partner has not only been sustained but has been strengthened. The Brent Parent Carer Forum (BPCF) is an integral member of the ISB. The commitment to inclusion of the parental voice is also evidenced in parent/carer participation in the recruitment of senior local authority staff responsible for SEND services, most recently in the appointment of the new Head of Service for Inclusion in July 2024. The BPCF now has 534 members and a team of 12 parent champions who promote parental participation for parents/carers of children with an education, health and care plan and those being supported at SEN support. The first SEND celebration event in June 2023 hosted by the Brent partnership was an ambition expressed by parents/carers as part of the SEND Strategy 2021-2025 (see paragraph 6.6).

8.5 Table 3 below provides a snapshot of BPCF workshops available for parents and carers of children with SEND from August 2022 to date with those in bold available from January to July 2024.

**Table 3: BPCF Workshops for Parents and Carers**

Existing and repeating sessions	New sessions requested by parents (as of January 2025)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How to challenge effectively to create better outcome for your children</b></li> <li>• <b>The role of SENDIASS</b></li> <li>• <b>Understanding behaviours in your child that may challenge</b></li> <li>• The importance of good dental care</li> <li>• Understanding and managing behaviours that may challenge</li> <li>• Understanding the importance of section A on an EHCP</li> <li>• Moving to secondary school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of social care</li> <li>• Understanding and supporting puberty</li> <li>• The role of the inclusion service</li> <li>• The ‘Thrive’ model</li> <li>• New inspection framework</li> <li>• Sensory communication</li> <li>• The role of health therapists</li> <li>• The role of community school nursing</li> <li>• SLT tips – communication</li> <li>• Money matters</li> <li>• The role of family wellbeing centres</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wetting the bed – toilet training and enuresis – incontinence service</li> <li>• Health and wellbeing for parent</li> <li>• Sleep hygiene</li> <li>• Bullying what are the signs to look at for and how to support</li> <li>• <b>Applying for an EHCP</b></li> <li>• <b>Understanding SEND support /Graduated approach</b></li> <li>• BOAT supporting Year 5 parents</li> <li>• Person Centred planning</li> <li>• <b>Money matters</b></li> <li>• <b>Annual reviews</b></li> <li>• Personal budgets and direct payments</li> <li>• SEND review session</li> <li>• <b>Young person’s transition review</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the Resource Allocation System (RAS) in social care</li> <li>• New beginnings – supporting the move to big school for parents (Early Years)</li> <li>• The role of the SENCO</li> <li>• Understanding how language develops</li> <li>• What is neurodiversity</li> <li>• Early Help – what support is available</li> <li>• Direct payments and personal budgets</li> <li>• Introductions to Brent Family Wellbeing Centres</li> <li>• Understanding behaviour as communication</li> <li>• Navigating the Local Offer</li> <li>• How to ask the right questions</li> </ul>
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8.6 As central members of the Inclusion Strategic Board, BPCF have a standing item on every agenda to give and receive feedback and ensure they shape decision-making. A recently updated travel assistance policy, approved by Cabinet in June 2024, was co-produced with BPCF. The new travel assistance policy has an increased focus on supporting children and young people with SEND to develop the skills they need to travel independently using public transport. BPCF colleagues co-produced the service specification for the newly launched ‘independent travel training’ (ITT) service with members from the Inclusion and Transport teams, and were subsequently involved in feeding back on the bids during the tender process.

8.7 There is an ‘open door’ between BPCF and the local authority, which ensures that feedback is continuous and BPCF can help to shape creative responses to emerging need. The Head of Service for Inclusion meets with BPCF at least monthly, and there is regular LA attendance at BPCF forum meetings. An annual survey is undertaken by the BPCF that helps partners to understand areas of satisfaction and concerns to ensure that improvement plans are co-produced. Initial findings from the 2023 survey include requests for support for the whole family including siblings and more transparency in relation to referrals, eligibility and thresholds. Concerns raised include waiting times, communication between professionals for young people who are eligible for adult services, support for parents whose children are anxious about school and having to go out-of-borough to access leisure activities. Headline strengths are STAR (Waiting Well programme for supporting autism referrals) and BOAT (Brent Outreach Autism Team) that some mainstream schools support children well, that Brent hubs/FWCs provide support for young people with additional needs who are seeking employment, provide families with access to specialist parenting programmes and specialist health practitioners; and specialist groups such as the CODA group. In response to parents’ concerns regarding provision for children struggling with school-based anxiety, Brent educational psychology service is currently reviewing options for providing a package of educational and therapeutic support for this cohort (in lieu of specific support being

available from CAMHS). A business case for developing an 'EBSA' offer is due March 2025. The results of the 2024 parent survey are pending (as of December 2024).

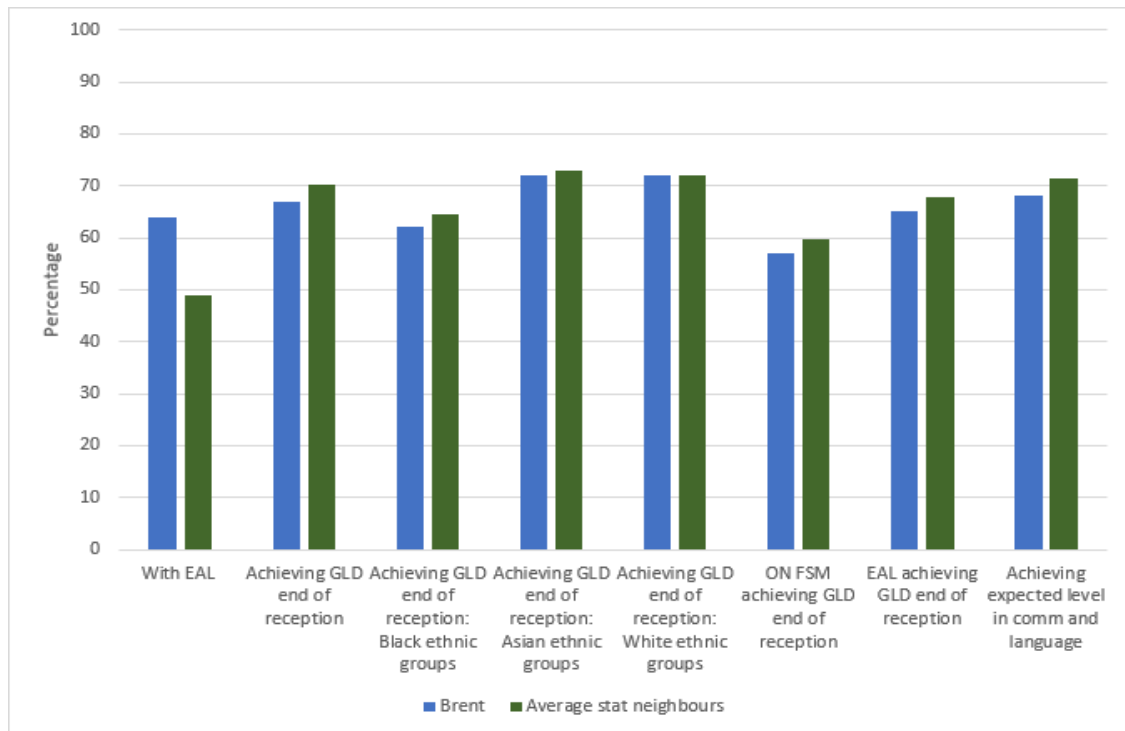
- 8.8 A steering group of parents/carers and young people has been established to maintain oversight of the Local Offer to ensure continued improvement to communications. The steering group are driving forward, and own, the Preparing for Adulthood website through the young peoples' advisor network. Three workstreams (Health and Wellbeing, Navigation and Flow, and News and Events) are ensuring that stakeholders are provided with detailed information on what to expect and where to access support for parents/carers and young people. Positive comments have been received from parents about how easy it is to access the Local Offer, and how useful the information is to them when making decisions about their children. The 'Preparing for Adulthood' [PfA] website launched in October 2021 and continues to be developed to ensure it remains a valuable resource to young people looking at their next career step. Together with Brent Youth Zone, this resource has had over 5,000 unique page hits from January 2023 to January 2024. Young people from Woodfield School designed the video that explains what the Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) website is all about. Further work on the website with parents/carers and young people has led to a new neurodiversity portal.
- 8.9 A post-16 sub-group of the Inclusion Board has been set up with BPCF to drive forward the Post-16 Skills Resource Centre. Parents and Carers have been canvassed to identify what they would want the centre to deliver and how. A clear steer has come for activities not just in the new building but across the borough. The next phase is developing an implementation plan which will involve parents and children and young people.
- 8.10 A workshop in November 2024 provided an opportunity for members of the BPCF to ask questions of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People (DCS) and area leaders from across health, care and education. BPCF are also part of the Brent Disability Forum which meets quarterly. The Corporate Director and Director of Education, Partnerships and Strategy regularly attends BPCF sessions with parents. A continuous theme that has arisen during BPCF 'Big Conversations' and workshops, and also in surveys, has been a need for improved communication between parents/carers, Health and the LA so that parents/carers and young people are able to better navigate the system. Co-production of the refreshed education, health and care plan paperwork and policies, such as the personal budget and direct payment policies, has taken place in response to these requests.
- 8.11 Of equal importance is how parents/carers of young people at SEN support or where children do not have an EHCP but might have a health diagnosis, are meaningfully informed and able to navigate the system. A new 'Supporting children with health needs in school' policy has been coproduced to ensure there are clear expectations of school, health providers and the local authority particularly in relation to EBSA.
- 8.12 Feedback from BPCF illustrates how members feel the forum is positively impactful for children and young people with SEND and their families in Brent, and that this positive impact is assisted by strong relationships between BPCF, health partners and the LA:

*'Working with the LA and health is a partnership, as we truly act as the critical friend. The success is seen as our success so we are able to assist them to deliver services for the family.'* (BPCF Director)

*'Families are now feeling they are heard, but there is still work to do. The LA are willing to work in a reflective manner to continue to improve and I am happy to be a part of this journey to develop a better Brent for all.'* (BPCF Director)

## 9.0 Leaders in Brent have an accurate, shared understanding of the needs of children and young people

- 9.1 Leaders use data effectively to help the wider partnership identify and respond to issues. Brent has a SEND specific Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) (created by Public Health) available [here](#). Additionally, leaders in Brent draw on SEN 2 data, health data, school census data analysis, EHC referral and assessment data and referral data for diagnoses and therapies to shape the strategic direction of both service delivery and commissioned services. Data is shared annually and quarterly through the Inclusion Strategic Board (ISB) that reports to the Brent Children's Trust. This is triangulated with the ongoing and annual cycles of feedback and engagement sessions with parents/carers and young people who help leaders to understand the needs of children and young people.
- 9.2 To further refine the understanding that leaders have within Brent regarding the needs of children and young people, additional focus groups are set up to drill down further into data sets to enable evidence led, targeted support programmes. A clear example of this way of working is the current 'school readiness' working group – a collaboration between Public Health, Inclusion, Early Help, Health and Data colleagues to work collaboratively to share data and thinking around the question of why Brent's percentage of children achieving a good level of development (GLD) at the end of Reception is lower than that of Brent's statistical neighbours. Figure 6, below, shows how further analysis of the GLD data is being used to inform which groups to target for support. Initial findings indicate that boys of black heritage who are on free school meals (FSM) should be prioritised for targeted, early intervention to ensure that they can fulfil their potential.



**Figure 6: A comparison of Brent’s GLD data broken down by demographic, as compared with Brent’s statistical neighbours**

10.0 Leaders in Brent commission services and provision to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people including alternative provision and evaluate the impact of these services

10.1 Services and systems are designed around the needs of children and young people to achieve the principles in the SEND Strategy and are informed by evidence of what works in achieving good outcomes. Whilst joint commissioning arrangements have become more complex due to the establishment of the Integrated Care Board/System that operates across 8 boroughs, close working at a local level within the ICP and engagement in the ICB programme enables partners to make best use of all the resources available to improve outcomes for children and young people in the most effective, way. Focused work under the Delivering Better Value programme (see below) is looking to improve how these resources become more sustainable and efficient in supporting the area partnership to meet needs and improve outcomes.

10.2 Leaders understand that children and young people with SEND may be more vulnerable to abuse and ensure that this is carefully considered when commissioning and evaluating services. Effective safeguarding arrangements are considered in the multiagency response to tripartite funded packages of provision, the DSR, LEAP and CETR panels and in the commissioning of residential settings or commissioning alternative provision. Corporate Parenting Committee oversees the duties of the council and its partners' in respect of looked after children and care leavers to ensure these are being fulfilled. It also seeks to improve the life chances of looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

A clear example of this commitment is Full Council having unanimously voted to make being in care a protected characteristic in Brent in November 2024.

- 10.3 Over the last five years an increase in the identification of needs has led to an increase in demand pressures that is impacting on commissioned services. Partners are very aware of pressures in the system and are working together to develop a sustainable offer. In the health provider workforce, for example some areas are running at a 50% vacancy rate. A particular pressure area is the commissioning of therapists for pupils in out-of-borough school placements or for those who are registered with an out-of-borough GP. The ICP Executive has established working groups to address the workforce related issues and joint commissioning of services to meet need. For example, in relation to neurodiversity (ND) and mental health and wellbeing, leaders are jointly evaluating the service provision in Brent with a direct focus on improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Focused work on improving mental health and wellbeing has begun to gain traction. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Sub-group is tracking the number of children and young people waiting for assessment, with a focus on reducing assessment and treatment waiting times. The highest numbers of children and young people on the CAMHS treatment waiting list are age 11-16 years, living in NW10, NW2 and HA9, accounting for a 50% increase in presentations. NWL ICB and CNWL are developing prototypes to test pathways for early intervention and prevention in mental health (CAMHS, CMHT and Crisis) in the NW2, NW10 and HA9 neighbourhoods. The aim is to bring NHS Talking Therapies closer to communities utilising VCSE partner sites / premises.
- 10.4 There is significant variation in waiting times for ASD/ADHD assessment and certain treatments by CAMHS. However, the waiting list is triaged and support for conditions such as sleep difficulties, anxiety, depression and OCG are offered whilst waiting for a diagnosis. The Children's Trust has lobbied the NWL ICB for levelling up funding for Brent, with the Chair having written to the Mental Health Lead in the ICB, seeking addition to the proposed investment plan and recovery plan for mental health services to ensure parity with other NWL ICB authorities. There is currently a workstream being undertaken to analyse demand and capacity within the service and to consider what additional services the ICP could bid for at NWL level to offer greater preventative capacity and support young people through waiting well provision. Dialogue continues between the local ICP Executive and the senior leadership of the ICB on how resourcing can be improved.
- 10.5 Over the past year the health visiting service has been implementing a targeted recovery plan to improve delivery and uptake of the 5 mandated checks for health visiting across the borough. Despite ongoing workforce challenges in Brent, which is a reflection of the wider national workforce picture in health visiting, significant progress has been made towards improving access across the borough. Antenatal checks for vulnerable women is 71.4%. New birth visits, are completed within 14 days 97.2% of the time and within 30 days 99.7% of the time. Targets are met for 6-8 weeks newborn checks with a completion rate of 85.7%. These checks have improved considerably and are just below the national target level. An antenatal recovery plan is being implemented to improve services for pregnant women in Brent. The 12 months child developmental reviews are

completed 88.6% of the time and 2-2.5 year reviews have started reaching delivery at national targets at 88.2% and are above London average. The HV team will continue to focus on improving access to 6-8 week checks and face to face antenatal sessions for vulnerable women and access to virtual antenatal sessions for families on the universal pathway.

- 10.6 Since its inception, the Integrated Care Partnership in Brent has recognised that children need to be given a greater priority in terms of service development and population healthcare. The ICP has built closer links between health, social and education teams and in addition to the Children's Trust has set up a dedicated Children's workstream for the ICP. This means that each of the four ICP sub-groups has a set of children's priorities, cutting across physical and mental health, including neurodiversity. The priorities include, neurodiversity, the development of paediatric hubs, asthma, CAMHS, the promotion of better mental health and childhood vaccinations through the 'Brent Health Matters' model, developing the THRIVE model and addressing capacity gaps in the Special School Nursing service as a result of increased special school places. As of October 2024, 12 Brent schools have achieved full Asthma friendly status and a further 8 are undergoing the audit/assessment process. An additional 28 schools have signed up for the initial training to start on the pathway.
- 10.7 The Local Authority has taken a lead on supporting the development of early intervention and preventative mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people through a commissioned contract that provides clinical support for children and young people in targeted vulnerable groups delivered by the Anna Freud Centre (the WEST service, referred to in 4.5, above). The service also supports parents, carers, and professionals working with children and young people with mental wellbeing issues (further details of the impact of WEST can be found in section 4.8, above). Brent is the lead local authority for a project funded by the ICS CAMHS Provider Collaborative on behalf of the 8 boroughs in the ICS that provides early intervention support for children and young people who are admitted to A&E due to mental health issues. A specialist complex behaviour support service has been procured to provide support to this cohort and a pilot project called the Looked After Children's Resilience Service is successful as a preventative strategy against placement breakdowns for looked after children.
- 10.8 The Brent Child Development Service (CDS) has experienced significant consultant vacancies over the last 24 months alongside insufficient capacity to meet demand which is resulting in long waiting times for an initial assessment within Community Paediatrics. As of November 2024, there are 504 children and young people waiting for an initial assessment with an average wait of 23 weeks and a longest wait of 50 weeks for an appointment with a paediatrician. The service has a recovery plan in place to manage available capacity as efficiently as possible, and CLCH is allocating additional resources from Q4 (2024/25 financial year) to support this recovery plan by commissioning an outsourced company to undertake assessments.
- 10.9 There are currently 200 children under 5 on the waiting list for a social communication assessment (SOCA), with an average waiting time in the last 12 months of 57 weeks. This represents a significant improvement over the last 18 months when the average waiting

time was in excess of 85+ weeks. The improvement to under 5s SOCA waiting times has been driven by CLCH commissioning an outsourced company to support wait reductions that has been operating from Family Wellbeing Centres and local health clinics to undertake assessments, during weekdays and also on weekends when families are often better able to attend. A contract renewal to continue this support through Q4 is being put in place. The outsourced service is linking with the Child Development Service and local speech and language and occupational therapy services where appropriate. To support the 'waiting well' agenda the NWL ICP and Brent Council have jointly funded 'Supporting The Autism Route' (STAR), a pre-diagnostic neurodiversity programme, for those children who have not received a diagnosis. STAR delivers a 6-8 week intervention programme combining evidence-based practice, including parenting and child development initiatives (fine and gross motor skill development, speech language and communication development) and social competency. There is also ongoing support via the STAR network. The impact of STAR has been positive (for further details, see section 4.8, above). Given this positive response and impact, Brent has worked closely with the ICP to successfully petition for further funding for an additional STAR post. This additional post will be live from January 2025.

- 10.10 Key performance indicators for therapy services have been altered twice in the last 12 months, reflecting the work NWL ICB is undertaking to standardise the offer for children and young people across North West London. This has resulted in some variation in data reported across different quarters. In terms of timely access to health services, the now 12-week assessment timeliness is being met for 99% of children requiring Occupational Therapy and 100% of children whose referral is accepted are seen for Speech and Language Therapy. 97% of children and young people referred for Physiotherapy are seen within their 6 week target for assessment. However, the number of special school nurses is not yet at the level required to meet the expanding cohort of children with an EHCP. A business case to support the extension of the special school nursing service was presented to the NWL ICS for approval in July 2023. It was recognised that this was an issue across all 8 boroughs and approval has been paused whilst awaiting assessment of need across the ICS and for work to establish a common service specification for all 8 boroughs to be completed. This work is ongoing. In the meantime, the ICP Executive has approved non-recurrent funding to be made available to CLCH to recruit staff to address the issue on an interim basis and staff are now in place.

A challenge remains for children and young people who do not have an EHCP in accessing NHS therapist support where children are either educated out-of-borough (OOB), are educated through EOTAS or have a GP in another borough due to contractual arrangements. For children and young people with an EHCP new LA contracts in 2025 for SLT and OT will support children and young people in OOB schools. This contract will address the issues highlighted, and also significantly increase the current and future capacity of the contract, to ensure that all eligible children and young people receive timely access to their therapeutic interventions. For children and young people without an EHCP, there is still ongoing work on the NWL core offer service specifications.

- 10.11 Effective decision-making by a Joint Funding Panel ensures that, where appropriate, joint funding across agencies is applied for children with complex needs, including looked

after children needing residential and/or residential school placements, and children requiring Continuing Health Care. Development of the NWL ICB has resulted in a centralised Continuing Health Care Team covering all 8 boroughs, resulting in a review of complex care and continuing health care case funding.

- 10.12 The Brent School Place Planning Strategy (2024-2028) outlines the approach to meeting SEND sufficiency. Responding to the need for demand for local places, the Council is investing £44m in new ARPs and an expansion of the special school estate, including a new secondary special school. The new school will cater for secondary aged children with ASC and will be delivered by a local academy trust. The capital programme will add over 400 special provision places into local schools, with delivery from 2024. Work is ongoing to develop a second phase of capital investment to further expand local specialist places, including SEMH places at primary and secondary. This is a signal of the local area's forward planning and commitment to children with SEND.
- 10.13 Recognising the growing need for post-16 provision the Council has agreed investment in the creation of a Post-16 Skills Resource Centre based at Welsh Harp reservoir with investment of £3m approved by Cabinet for 16-25-year-olds. It will focus on pathways into supported employment and will include a horticultural centre. The Welsh Harp centre is on course for delivery in 2027. The new travel assistance policy and new 'independent travel training' (ITT) service are also aimed at supporting preparation for adulthood (see para 5.3).
- 10.14 In response to increased demand for EHCPs, in February 2022, the Council agreed additional investment of £1.2m in SEND caseworkers. This supported a doubling of the SEND caseworker team, which has halved caseloads, and appointment of a dedicated mediation officer, a short breaks officer and a designated social worker (DSCO) post to improve the quality and timeliness of social work reports in EHCPs. The team was not fully established until March 2023, and it took time to embed new staff as most were previously employed by schools and early years settings. A focus of the team is assuring quality, communications and workforce development. The team is currently at full capacity, and being supported by further agency workers who are focusing on annual reviews (in line with feedback from schools and parents and carers). Brent's improved EHCP timeliness, as described in Section 4, above, is evidence of the positive impact that this investment has had over time.
- 10.15 Due to demand pressures, SEN support services have been recommissioned, moving from a child to a setting-based model. Over the last four years the Brent Outreach Autism Team (BOAT) caseload increased by 400% due to the increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism. To manage demand pressures more effectively a number of service changes have been necessary, including moving some support online and the team focusing on work with schools and settings to support children to thrive in education. The national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs) has meant prioritising assessments for EHCPs over other work. The authority is currently reliant on locum EPs and to address this, consideration is being given to a new recruitment and retention programme for SEND professionals supported by the London Improvement

and Innovation Alliance (IIA) that seeks to mirror the incentivising approach adopted for the social care workforce.

10.16 The Inclusion Service works closely with schools to avoid exclusions, where possible, and where this cannot be avoided commissions appropriate provision to meet their needs. In the 2023/24 academic year there were 48 permanent exclusions from Brent schools and of those, 18 were withdrawn or rescinded in Brent schools through partnership working between the local authority and schools and the use of managed moves. Schools also arrange managed moves directly and, whilst a lens has been placed on the use of part-time timetables for children, further work needs to be undertaken to better understand how schools use dual registration and managed moves to offset exclusions. This activity is keeping permanent exclusions low. Of the 30 pupils permanently excluded from Brent schools in 2023/24, 1 was of primary age and 29 were of secondary age, of whom 26 were Brent residents. Additionally, 13 Brent resident pupils of secondary age were permanently excluded from schools located in neighbouring authorities. There were no permanent exclusions for looked after children. An EHC Plan emergency annual review is held where there are concerns about placement stability for looked after children and young people with an EHCP and resources, training and integrated working around the pupils are established to address any emerging needs. Of 3242 fixed term exclusions in total in 2023/24, 288 were for pupils with an EHCP. There were 12 fixed term exclusions given to 6 pupils with an EHCP from out-of-borough schools in 2023/24, and no permanent exclusions. Between September and October 2024 there have been 181 fixed term exclusions from Brent schools, 33 of primary aged children and 148 of secondary aged children. To date this academic year there has been one permanent exclusion of a pupil with an EHCP, from a Brent primary school. There have been no permanent exclusions of children with an EHCP from a Brent secondary school in the 2024/25 year to date.

10.17 Commissioned provision includes two local authority pupil referral units, a free school alternative provision and out of borough alternative provision. For those children who are excluded, Brent River College, one of the LA's Pupil Referral Units, provides effective support. In 2019 Brent established an alternative provision school to meet SEMH needs through the free school presumption route. The Roundwood School has been operating since January 2021 and works closely with schools in Brent to offer respite provision. Where a child with EHCP or SEN needs are referred for respite, the school works closely with the LA to ensure the placement is appropriate. For children across KS1-KS3 with more complex behavioural needs Brent Council continues to commission six places a year at The Pears Family School for respite. The respite is dual registered and combines curriculum provision with therapeutic intervention with the child and family. This provision has successfully been used to prevent primary and KS3 exclusions for pupils with complex needs who have subsequently transitioned back into their home school or been supported to transition to a new school. Pupils placed in dual registered provision by Brent Council have clear SMART intervention plans in place.

10.18 The Inclusion Support Team provides effective oversight of the placement of young people attending alternative provisions. A panel oversees the referral and placement process for the 6-day statutory exclusions timeline and for health needs provision. To

improve decision-making for children with health needs, a separate panel called the Health Needs Panel has been established from September 2023 that combines education, health and care specialists to oversee medical needs and emotionally based school avoidance. This will support the roll out of a new policy regarding the health needs of pupils in schools, as well as a coproduced toolkit and training programme. Most young people with a health need are supported through dual registration with Ashley College, the LA's medical PRU. A monthly meeting with both PRU headteachers maintains oversight of young people who are placed in the provision and their transitions. An AP coordinator and an Inclusion Support Team Manager are responsible for commissioning in and out-of-borough provision arranged by the local authority for those unable to attend local PRUs and undertake robust quality assurance prior to commissioning and through the academic year. The Fair Access Process is effective and all secondary schools work in partnership with the local authority to ensure a successful return to mainstream settings for those pupils who are ready.

10.19 Addressing disproportionality remains a focus for the CYP Directorate and schools. Through the monitoring of fixed term and permanent exclusions, the LA and schools in Brent are working together to understand disproportionate levels of exclusions for Black young people and developing relevant responses to support full inclusion within Brent. In 2023/24, for secondary pupils, 8.7% of all permanent exclusions were for boys of Black Caribbean heritage. This figure marks a reduction from the 25% figure of the previous academic year, marking the continuation of a downward trend of permanent exclusions for this group. The Local Authority funded successful anti-racist training for school leaders – 'Leading from the Top' in 2023/24. Building on this the local authority is funding an Anti-Racist Programme for all schools that includes the Leeds Beckett Anti-Racist School Award in 2024/25, aimed at addressing educational disproportionality.

10.20 There were 3424 fixed term exclusions to 1757 pupils in 2023/24. Of those 1757 pupils, 69 children and young people were subject to a child protection plan in the same period, 35 were known to the Youth Justice Service and 152 were known to Early Help in the same period. In 2023/24, 2 pupils who were excluded went on to be registered as Elective Home Education (EHE) due to parents not wanting their child to go to a PRU. All relevant safeguarding and provision maps are checked on a termly basis. There are currently 19 children and young people registered as EHE with an EHCP and 39 supported by education other than at school (EOTAS) commissioned by the local authority. This includes a number of alternative arrangements to full time education to ensure that children are accessing appropriate education in line with their EHCP. 21 young people of statutory school age are currently being supported by tuition provision whilst they are waiting for a school place (all provided with at least 15 hours of learning). As referenced in section 10.12, above, Brent is working hard to increase capacity within its special schools and ARPs, and by increasing support to mainstream schools to more confidently meet the needs of children with SEND, to ensure that no children are unplaced whilst awaiting a place within specialist provision. In terms of benchmarking this data, as the Department for Education does not collect data of the number of children with an EHCP who are e.g. EHE or on EOTAS or who are unplaced, it is difficult to see how Brent compares nationally.

10.21 Ensuring vulnerable children and young people are more effectively supported across the partnership in school attendance and improving oversight and transparency of pupil movements in relation to alternative provision is a priority. A particular focus for the 24/25 academic year will be on ensuring that Brent enhances its database of all students registered as Elective Home Education (EHE) and Educated Other Than At School (EOTAS) so that the borough can ensure effective safeguarding of these cohorts.

## 11.0 Leaders in Brent create an environment for effective practice and multi-agency working to flourish.

11.1 Leaders across the education sector play a key role in partnership working to support effective practice. The local authority maintains a strong and effective local partnership with special and mainstream schools working collaboratively to support children and young people through the Setting and School Effectiveness Partnership Board and through regular school planning meetings with the Corporate Director and Director of Education. Sessions with schools that focus on SEND are held throughout the year, including via SENCo forums (three face to face and three virtually every academic year), visits with schools and a SEND Support focus group (the first session of which is scheduled for January 2025). These groups, visits and forums focus on the development of services and school concerns, including resourcing for SEND pupils and training of staff. The Head of Inclusion and the Director of Education meet every half term with the heads of the local special schools also to discuss issues including capacity, forward planning and current challenges.

11.2 Close collaboration with colleagues in the NWL ICB is well-supported by strong links with Brent's designated clinical officer (DCO). To further strengthen multi-agency working, the ICB recently made the decision to make the DCO covering Brent a full-time role. This decision has already yielded benefits, with the DCO more available to attend meetings with stakeholders from across multiple sectors. A recent example of this was a meeting between a health provider, the DCO, representatives from two Brent special schools and members of the LA Inclusion service. The focus of the meeting was the provision of specialist equipment to children in special schools and the need to have a shared and joined up approach to complex issues such as maintenance, fitting and storage.

11.3 Within the LA, multi-agency working is strong with clear plans for further improvement in this area. For example, School Effectiveness colleagues work closely with SEND Support team members to undertake joint quality assurance of ARP provision to ensure that there is a consistent shared sense of what 'good' SEND provision looks like in Brent. In February 2025, colleagues from the 0-25 SEND team and the SEND Outreach services team will come together to complete their 'designated safeguarding lead' (DSL) training. This is to ensure that all colleagues with a responsibility for children are suitably trained and skilled to ensure appropriate safeguarding. Again, this training represents a collaboration between the Inclusion and School Effectiveness services. Since November 2024, the Inclusion service has been collaborating with colleagues in Adult Social Care, BPCF and health to draft Brent's 'All-ages autism strategy'. This key document is due to

be published by September 2025. Since October 2024, colleagues from across Social Care, Inclusion and Safeguarding collaborate to conduct in-depth audits of children who have EHCPs and are also on child protection plans and who do not attend school (because, for example, they are EHE or on EOTAS packages). The results of these audits are fed back during Brent’s monthly performance and QA meetings with findings informing next steps in terms of how children are supported. Brent’s approach to supporting this cohort will of course evolve with the proposed legal changes around children who are EHE and on child protection plans.

- 11.4 Brent has a strong focus on the multi-agency quality assurance (QA) of EHCPs (including colleagues from Health, local authority (Children’s Social Care and Inclusion) and representatives of Brent Parent Carer Forum), conducted both across the Brent local area partnership and between Brent and a neighbouring LA to ensure a high level of scrutiny. There have been 16 themed EHCPs audited within the multiagency quality assurance process over the academic year 2023/2024 with themed audits across all stages. Auditors have been drawn from the LA’s Early Years’ Inclusion Service, Educational Psychology Team, 0-25 SEND and SEN Advisory Service and children’s social care, North West London Integrated Care System, (Brent) Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust and Central North West London Healthcare NHS Trust. Additional auditors attended from the statutory SEND service of a neighbouring LA.

**Table 4: Multi-Agency EHCP Audit Results**

EHCP Audit Overall Judgements	November 2023	March 2024	May 2024	July 2024	Results
Outstanding	0	0	0	0	0
Good	1	2	2	3	8
Requires Improvement	3	2	2	1	8
Inadequate	0	0	0	0	0
Result	4	4	4	4	16

- 11.5 Learning from the multi-agency EHCP QA process is provided to all key agencies responsible for contributing to EHCPs in Brent (health, children’s social care and education). Table 4, above, details the results of multi-agency EHCP QA audits conducted in 2023 and 2024. Audits for the 2024/25 calendar year will reference identified areas of improvement to ensure the feedback loop is closed. For example, following the July 2024 audit round, it was recommended that social care outline a synopsis of life events that have brought the child to the service’s attention and service being accessed for both EHCP development and at annual review. In twelve of the sixteen audits, concerns were raised about CAMHS’ contribution to the EHCNA process and a number of recommendations were made including the need for a clear process for updates for children with an EHCP known to CAMHS, and the need to clarify both past and present interventions. Areas of improvement for the 0-25 SEND Advisory Service following the most recent audit (November 2024) included ensuring health information is accurate and placed in the correct section of the EHCP and that language used in the EHCP is

neurodiversity-affirming which respects student differences and each student's unique abilities and fosters an inclusive educational experience.

- 11.6 Examples of the range of opportunities to share best practice and learning across the partnership include: discussions at the Inclusion Strategic Board; discussions at service away days to learn from fellow practitioners; bespoke conferences such as a recent conference on neurodiversity for early years settings delivered by the Early Years Inclusion Support Team; the Safeguarding Partnership, including the DSL network, that ensures there is effective partnership grip on safeguarding and the Brent CYP annual conference that shares development work across the directorate, with the 2024 conference focused on developing anti-racist practice. In 2024 Brent co-produced with staff a ways of working document that sets out the Directorate's values and commitments - *This is Brent CYP, this is how we grow*. This provides the framework for how staff work together, with partners and families to ensure that children and young people in Brent achieve positive outcomes.

## Evidence Sources:

SEND Strategy 2021-25 SEND Strategy  
Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027  
Brent Borough Plan 2023-2027  
Brent Children's Trust Terms of Reference and papers  
Brent Children's Trust Governance Overview  
ICB and ICP Governance structure  
ICP Executive Board minutes  
Brent Children's Trust Papers  
Health and Wellbeing Board papers  
EHCP Multiagency Quality Assurance Report 2023/24  
Inclusion Strategic Board papers  
Inclusion Strategic Board Dashboards  
SEND 0-25 Management Dashboard  
Brent Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2023/24  
Monthly Performance Report and dashboard  
Development Options for the Special Educational Needs Assessment Service February 2022  
Report on Education Psychology Service Recruitment and Retention December 2024  
Action Plan, Project Plan and minutes for Supported Employment Forum  
EHCP Multiagency Quality Assurance Report 2023/24  
Overview of Brent EHC Need Assessment and revised EHCP template  
Brent SENDIASS Annual Report 2023/24  
Delivering Better Value (DBV) proposal and relevant papers (DBV Implementation Plan and DBV Board minutes);  
Dynamic Support Register  
Minutes from LAEP and CETR meetings  
Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Report on School Attainment (2022/23) March 2024  
Cabinet report on Post-16 Skills Resource Centre May 2023  
Cabinet Report on SEND Capital Programme January 2022.  
Supported Employment Forum papers/minutes  
Annual Report on Exclusions 2023/24; Annual Report on Alternative Provision 2023/24;  
Prospects Contract Monitoring reports  
;Statement of Purpose – Ade Adepitan Short Break Centre; Short Breaks Criteria 2018;  
SEND Celebration Event Photo Gallery  
London Borough of Culture 2020 YouTube video  
Holiday Activities and Food Programme annual reports 2021 – 2024  
Local Offer and PFA websites  
CLCH report on services  
Memorandum of Understanding with BPCF  
BPCF Workplan;  
Thrive mapping and Thrive Project Plan;  
Terms of Reference and Minutes of All-age Autism Board;  
Supporting Children with Health Needs in School Policy  
SEN 2 2024 Analysis Report  
Brent JSNA 2019  
School Census data  
SEND reports to Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 2023 and 2024  
Brent ICP Overview and Priorities ICB  
Report on Placements Commissioning, National Safeguarding Review Report of Children with Additional School  
Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 November 2024 Refresh  
Special School Nursing Business Case  
Joint Funding Panel Terms of Reference 2018;;  
Development Options for the Special Educational Needs Assessment Service February 2022; Refreshed Graduated  
Approach Framework 2023; SCERTS Plan 2023;  
CYP Commissioning and Procurement Board papers regarding SLT, OT  
Health service logic models – Asthma, ND, SLT