

Greater Manchester Joint Health Scrutiny Committee

Date: 17 March 2026

Subject: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Report of: Jacob Botham, Children & Young People Lead, and Diane Norburn, SEND Project Manager, GMCA, Louise Rule, Associate Programme Director Transformation, and Emma Storer, Senior Project Manager, Nursing & Quality, NHS Greater Manchester

Purpose of Report

This report provides an overview of the Greater Manchester SEND position, including current governance and assurance arrangements, partnership networks, and the Schools White Paper and SEND reforms.

Recommendations:

The Greater Manchester Joint Health Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

1. Note the report.
2. To discuss how the Committee would like to receive updates in relation to SEND at future meetings, particularly in relation to the implementation of the Schools White Paper.

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1. Introduction/Background

1.1. This report provides an overview of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) delivery across Greater Manchester, including arrangements for governance and assurance, outcomes of area SEND inspections, the GM SEND programme and emerging position in relation to SEND reforms.

1.2. In England, SEND provision is primarily governed by the Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3), which mandates support for children (0-25). Key regulations include the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 and the statutory SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, along with the Equality Act 2010.

1.3. A child or young person has SEND if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. This is defined if the child or young person has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age or has a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream education settings.

1.4. Currently, support for SEND is delivered through the graduated approach, which aims to ensure that support is proportionate to need, moving from inclusive classroom practice to more targeted and specialist interventions as necessary:

Level 1: Ordinarily Available Provision - inclusive, high-quality teaching and everyday adjustments that all schools and settings are expected to provide for all pupils, including those with mild or emerging SEND.

Level 2: SEN support - for children and young people (CYP) who need additional help beyond ordinarily available provision. This includes more targeted interventions and individualised support, delivered and monitored via a SEN Support Plan.

Level 3: Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC plan) - a legal document issued by the local authority for children and young people (aged 0–25) with complex and long-term needs that cannot be met through SEN Support alone. The local authority coordinates the plan, with input from professionals, the school/setting, the family, and the child or young person. The purpose of the plan is to ensure coordinated, legally enforceable support across education, health, and care services.

2. SEND Governance and Assurance

- 2.1. Planning, commissioning and delivery of services for children and young people (0-25) with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in a local authority area is the responsibility of the local area SEND partnership. The partnership includes the local authority, Integrated Care Board, education providers, and other relevant services, working together to ensure positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- 2.2. Local area SEND partnerships are subject to joint inspections by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) and CQC (Care Quality Commission), evaluating the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, and how local area partners work together to plan, evaluate and develop the SEND system. Inspections principles and arrangements are detailed in the [Area SEND inspections framework and handbook](#).
- 2.3. In Greater Manchester, there is a SEND Strategic Partnership in place that brings together local authorities, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Parent Carer Forum representatives and other partners to work collaboratively to deliver on shared priorities and address common issues and challenges through strategic system discussions and planning. It is informed by the work of the ten locality SEND Partnership Boards and chaired by lead GM Director of Children's Services for SEND (Jill Colbert, Tameside) and ICB Executive Lead for SEND (Katherine Sheerin, Chief Commissioning Officer). The Partnership reports to the Integrated Care Partnership Board and GM Children's Board.

3. Current Position Area SEND inspection outcomes

- 3.1. Each local area partnership has the equivalent of a SEND board, which is responsible for the system oversight and delivery of the statutory duties for the local area in relation to the legal and inspection framework and for overseeing priority action plans and improvement plans following inspection.
- 3.2. Local area SEND partnerships inspected under the current framework receive one of three inspection outcomes:
- **Outcome 1** - typically positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

- **Outcome 2** - inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. No priority action plan required.
- **Outcome 3** - widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. Priority action plan required.

3.3. The table below shows area SEND inspection outcomes in Greater Manchester:

Table 1 - GM area SEND inspection outcomes

Local Area	Date of inspection	Area SEND inspection outcome
Bolton	Jun 2024	Outcome 1
Bury	Feb 2024	Outcome 3 (<i>monitoring inspection taking place 9th to 11th March</i>)
Oldham	Nov 2025	Effective action taken to address areas for priority action identified at the initial inspection in June 23 (Outcome 3)
Manchester	Nov 2021	Previous framework. No Written Statement of Action required.
Rochdale	Dec 2018	Previous framework. Sufficient progress made to improve each of the serious weaknesses identified in Sep 16 inspection
Salford	Dec 2019	Previous framework. No Written Statement of Action required.
Stockport	Sep 2022	Sufficient progress made in addressing 4 of the 5 significant weaknesses identified in Sep 18 inspection (previous framework)
Tameside	May 2025	Outcome 3
Trafford	Oct 2023	Outcome 2
Wigan	Jun 2018	Previous framework. No Written Statement of Action required.

3.4. The main areas for priority action and improvement identified in GM inspections are:

- Education, Health and Care Plan processes – quality of plans, timeliness and the annual review process.
- Waiting times for assessment – particularly autism and ADHD assessments, followed by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support and speech and language therapy. Support for CYP waiting for assessments is also highlighted.
- SEND strategy, oversight and governance - strategic oversight of SEND priorities and improvement plans.
- Preparation for adulthood (PfA) and transitions – particularly transitions between children’s and adult health services.

3.5. As part of the area SEND framework, Ofsted and CQC also complete a series of thematic visits each academic year. The visits investigate a particular aspect of the SEND system in depth in a small number of local areas. In GM, Wigan were selected for a thematic visit on preparation for adulthood in 2024 and Manchester on 'children not in school' in 2025. Observations from these visits are shared in a single national report.

GM SEND data

3.6. Table 2 below shows the number, percentage and rates of pupils (0-18 years old) recorded as SEN Support across GM local areas, with GM and England averages for comparison. For CYP receiving support at this level, the most prevalent primary need recorded is speech, language and communication needs at 31%, followed by social, emotional and mental health needs (25%) and moderate learning difficulties (16%).

Table 2 - GM SEN Support data 2024/25 academic year

	Pupil Headcount	Number of pupils with SEN Support	Percentage of pupils with SEN support	Rate of SEN support among Pupils (per 10,000)
England	9,032,426	1,284,284	14%	1422
GM	499,895	70,973	14%	1420
Bolton	57,557	7,143	12%	1241
Bury	30,988	4,014	13%	1295
Manchester	99,873	14,953	15%	1497
Oldham	47,772	5,874	12%	1230
Rochdale	38,719	5,573	14%	1439
Salford	44,930	7,822	17%	1741
Stockport	47,999	7,109	15%	1481
Tameside	37,606	5,950	16%	1582
Trafford	45,585	5,133	11%	1126
Wigan	48,866	7,402	15%	1515

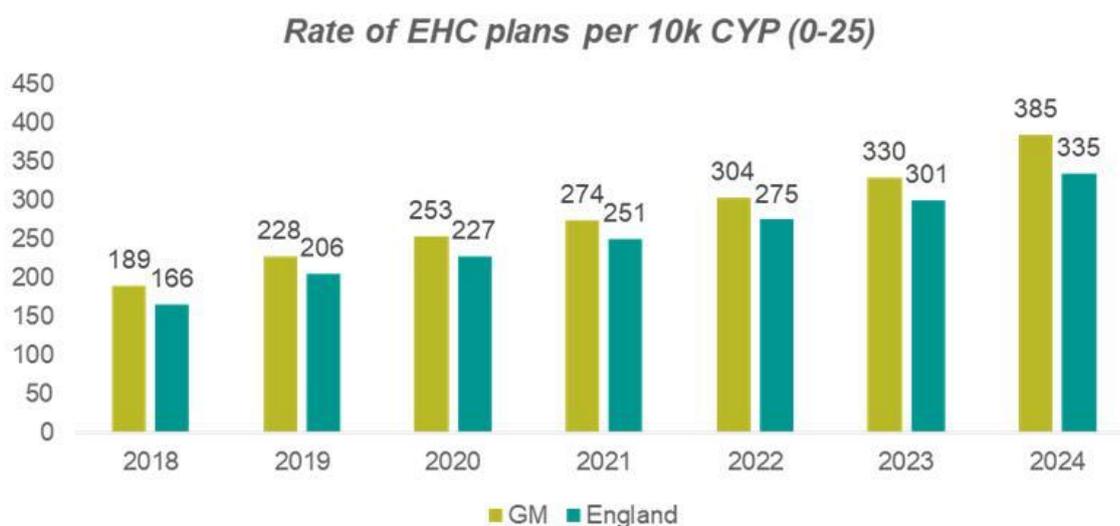
3.7. Table 3 shows the number, percentage and rates of pupils (0-18 years old) recorded as having an EHC plan across GM local areas, with GM and England averages for comparison. For CYP with an EHC plan, the most prevalent primary need recorded is Autistic Spectrum Disorder (31%), followed by speech, language and communication needs (23%) and social, emotional and mental health needs (19%).

Table 3 - GM EHC plan data 2024/25 academic year

	Total pupil headcount	Number of pupils with EHC plan	Percentage of pupils with EHC plan	Rate of EHP plan per 10,000 CYP
England	9,032,426	482,640	5.3%	534
GM	499,895	30,840	6.2%	617
Bolton	57,557	3,063	5.3%	532
Bury	30,988	1,975	6.4%	637
Manchester	99,873	7,027	7%	704
Oldham	47,772	3,323	7%	696
Rochdale	38,719	2,222	5.7%	574
Salford	44,930	2,624	5.8%	584
Stockport	47,999	2,925	6.1%	609
Tameside	37,606	2,473	6.6%	658
Trafford	45,585	2,411	5.3%	529
Wigan	48,866	2,797	5.7%	572

3.8. The number of Children and Young People (CYP) with an Education Health Care Plan (EHC plan) has been increasing year on year from 2018. The number of EHC plans for CYP aged 0-25 is higher across the GM city-region than England. In 2024, there were 385 EHC plans for every 10,000 CYP, higher than the national rate of 335 per 10,000, as shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 1



GM SEND programme

- 3.9. SEND is recognised as one of the six key themes within Greater Manchester's Joint Forward Delivery Plan for Children and Young People. This strategic plan establishes the main priorities and actions across the Integrated Care Partnership, with a strong focus on early intervention and prevention. The overarching aim is to ensure that every child and young person in GM receives the best possible start in life. To achieve this, the plan emphasises providing timely access to support for children, young people, and their families, whenever it is needed.
- 3.10. Priorities outlined in the Joint Forward Plan directly inform the development of commissioning intentions in Greater Manchester. This ensures that services are continually developed and enhanced in accordance with identified priorities, maintaining alignment with the GM ambition for CYP.
- 3.11. The GM SEND work programme is shaped by the priorities set out in the Joint Forward Plan. This programme seeks to identify opportunities for collaborative working across GM, with the aim of developing initiatives that strengthen support for children and young people with SEND. Central to this approach is a focus on system leadership and strategic oversight, ensuring that reforms and key transformation programmes, such as the redesigned Neurodevelopmental pathway and Balanced System approach to speech, language and communication, are effectively implemented.
- 3.12. In addition to the overarching GM programme, each local area partnership within GM is responsible for its own SEND improvement programme. These programmes are developed in line with their respective local strategies and priorities, and their delivery is overseen by the local area SEND partnership board to ensure accountability and consistent progress towards improved outcomes for children and young people.

Change Programme Partnership - SEND & Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan

- 3.13. As part of the SEND & Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (2023), the Government launched a Change Programme to work with selected local authority areas in 9 regions to test specific SEND reforms. For the North West, the Change Programme Partnership consists of Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale and Trafford; with Manchester identified as the Change Programme partner lead. Reforms tested include Local Area Inclusion Plans, AP specialist taskforces, standardised EHC Plan

templates and Local Inclusion Support Offers. Oldham has been testing the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme, establishing community-based professionals to identify speech, language and communication needs more effectively in early years and primary settings and improve access to and the quality of ordinarily available provision.

4. SEND Reforms – Schools White Paper

- 4.1. The Schools White Paper ‘Every Child Achieving and Thriving’ was published on 23rd February 2026 following a lengthy engagement process. The White Paper outlines a long-term reform programme for schools and the SEND system in England, centred on the principle that high standards and inclusion support and strengthen each other. The ambition is that every child, regardless of background or need, can achieve well, participate fully, and move successfully into adulthood. Schools are positioned as universal community anchors, supported by integrated local services.
- 4.2. The White Paper includes significant reforms to the SEND system, which are detailed in a separate consultation document - SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First – inviting feedback by 19th May 2026.
- 4.3. The proposed SEND reforms are underpinned by five principles, which are intended to shape both policy and delivery:
 1. **Early** – Children and families should receive the support they need as soon as possible to prevent needs from escalating and to maximise long-term impact.
 2. **Local** – CYP with SEND should be able to learn at an education setting close to home alongside their peers, with special schools continuing to support those with the most complex needs.
 3. **Fair** – Every school should be properly resourced to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time. Where specialist provision is needed (mainstream, special school or Alternative Provision), it will be available, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.
 4. **Effective** – Reforms should be grounded in evidence, promoting proven, effective practice that delivers strong long-term outcomes.
 5. **Shared** – There should be strong partnerships between education, health, care services, families, and experts to improve experiences and outcomes for all children. The voices of children should be at the heart of decision making.

4.4. The intended outcomes include:

- Fewer children becoming disengaged from education
- Earlier and more effective SEND support
- Reduced conflict between families and the system
- More children achieving positive destinations into adulthood
- Better value for public money through prevention rather than crisis response

4.5. Although national in scope, the White Paper:

- Encourages Place-based leadership
- Invites systems with strong partnerships to help shape and test reform
- Signals increased expectations on local consistency, inclusion and early intervention

4.6. Specifically, the White Paper proposes one education system with three layers of support:

Universal (mainstream for all children)

- High-quality adaptive teaching
- Inclusive classroom practice
- Calm, predictable environments
- Early identification of needs

Targeted (and Targeted Plus)

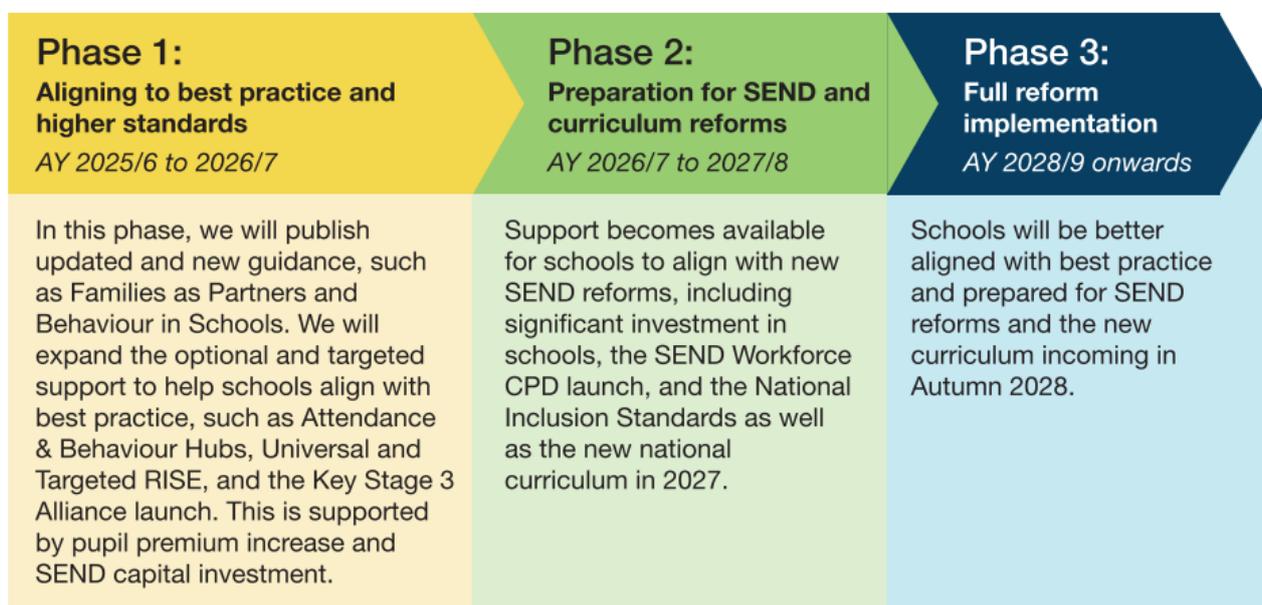
- Structured, evidence-based interventions delivered in mainstream
- Access to health and specialist professionals *without waiting for statutory assessment*
- Formalised through Individual Support Plans (ISPs), which become the core planning tool for SEND support, setting out barriers to learning, day-to-day provision, adjustments and outcomes. ISPs will be mandatory for *any* child with identified SEND and will be co-produced with parents. ISPs will be reviewed at least annually and quality of ISP use will be inspected by Ofsted.

Specialist

- For children with the most complex needs, EHCPs are retained, but will be explicitly linked to Specialist Provision Packages, focusing on entitlement and outcomes, not daily provision.
- Day-to-day delivery sits in the ISP.

- 4.7. Over time, the government expects more needs to be met earlier in mainstream. By 2028, all schools will be guided by National Inclusion Standards, covering identification tools, evidence-based interventions and provision across the universal, targeted and specialist layers outlined above. These standards will refine the inconsistent ‘four broad areas of need’ set out in the Code of Practice to better reflect key areas of child development – renaming them ‘areas of development’.
- 4.8. To deliver reform, the White Paper proposes significant investment in the SEND system, with and Inclusive Mainstream Fund of £1.6bn over 3 years, providing direct funding to schools and early years settings to allow schools to gain control over SEND resources and reduce reliance on statutory processes. Schools will have to publish an Inclusion Strategy, enabling greater scrutiny of how SEND funding is deployed, leading to long-term rebalancing away from High Needs block. At the current time, we do not know the exact funding details proposed in the White Paper.
- 4.9. There will also be additional funding to support the development and delivery of workforce transformation with over £200 million being invested in a CPD programme for all education staff and £1.8 billion over 3 years for LAs and ICBs to establish an ‘Experts at Hand’, delivering support directly into schools and early years settings This offer will include education psychologists, speech and language therapists and other allied health professionals and offer support through a combination of direct work with children, coaching and upskilling staff and system-level prevention. The emphasis will be on prevention, capacity-building, and reducing escalation to crisis and statutory routes.

4.10. Timescale phases for the implementation of reforms



5. Recommendations

- To note the report.
- To discuss how the Committee would like to receive updates in relation to SEND at future meetings, particularly in relation to the implementation of the Schools White Paper.