



# High Needs Strategy for Lincolnshire 2021 – 2023

Provision without boundaries  
where children feel they belong, are  
respected, hopeful and optimistic  
about their future



Co-produced in partnership with  
Lincolnshire Parent Carer Forum

Lincolnshire  
COUNTY COUNCIL  
*Working for a better future*

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# Introduction

## What does the strategy aim to do?

The purpose of this High Needs Strategy (HNS) is to set out our aims and strategic direction over the next three years to ensure that children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Lincolnshire are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes in school and in life. Partners in education, social care and health are committed to working together to establish an integrated school system where children and young people get the right health, care and education, in the right place, at the right time and are able to transition to adulthood and independence when they are ready to do so.

## Our Inclusive Ambition

The strategy has been developed following a review of our high needs provision in Lincolnshire in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including young people, parents, early years' providers, schools and post-16 providers, as well as local authority staff working in collaboration with Impower consultancy. Together, we have defined our inclusive ambition:

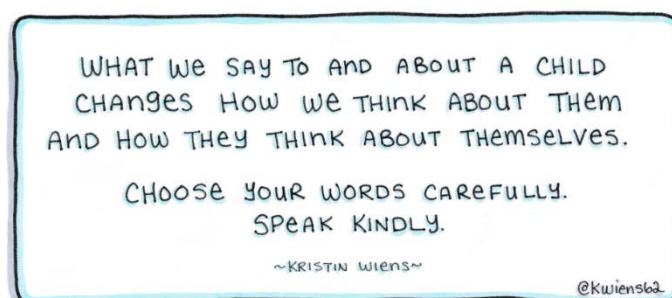
1. Children and young people, parent/carers and professionals will have a strong understanding of the graduated approach and support available in Lincolnshire. Children and families will feel supported by their community and have confidence with the SEND system, because the right support is provided at the right time.
2. Mainstream settings have strong knowledge and understanding of supporting children with additional needs and are able to use sophisticated ways to teach social and emotional skills. Settings are able to work together with families to ensure that the home environment reflects the support taking place within the school practice, in order to best meet a child or young person's needs.
3. We will move away from exclusions to recognise that behaviour is a communication of need. In response to this need professionals are able to wrap services around a child, helping to meet their need in an inclusive way.
4. We will have high aspirations for our children and young people with additional needs, using plans to help meet needs and achieve outcomes, meaning higher academic achievement, increased personal resilience, increased socialisation and more resilient adults after education.

## National and Local Context

A key aim of the government's SEND reforms (2014) was to promote high quality SEN support in schools, enabling more children to have their needs met within mainstream education. However, over the last few years there has been a rise nationally in the number of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) who are educated in special rather than mainstream schools. This increase has put a significant pressure on the availability of local provision for children with SEND as well as our High Needs Block (HNB).

In Lincolnshire, our ambitious Building Communities of Specialist Provision: Together in Lincolnshire Strategy is well underway now. Due to be completed at the end of 2024, Lincolnshire's Special Schools are moving away from their previous specific designations and moving towards "All needs" provision (excluding the SEMH Specialist Schools). Additional Special School places are being created as part of the programme and this will provide much needed capacity but these extra spaces will quickly be absorbed if the broader aims of both the Building Communities of Specialist Provision Strategy and the High Needs Strategy are not achieved.

There has been a corresponding increase in the numbers of children and young people identified as needing additional support through an ECHP plan. Though now beginning to reduce, Lincolnshire's rise was sharper than both the regional and national averages and this created unsustainable pressure within the system which the HNS must ensure, through systemic change, is not repeated.



## SEND and High Needs Review

To first understand and then mitigate the rising demand, Lincolnshire County Council commissioned IMPOWER to work in partnership with the LA to review SEND and high needs support and evaluate how well Lincolnshire is delivering support and provision for children and young people with high needs across all partners providing children's services. This review found that there were significant opportunities to intervene earlier; in up to 69% of cases, children's needs could have been prevented, reduced or delayed, in many cases avoiding the need for an EHCP.

This and other findings are summarized as follows:

1. The local offer is not easy to navigate and is not being used effectively to reduce demand
2. Opportunities for effective early intervention are not commonly realised, and demand in early years is increasing
3. Demand for EHC plans are rising, this could be partly due to inconsistent use of the graduated approach
4. Children with SEND are disproportionately excluded, despite professionals feeling they are inclusive
5. There is increasing demand for specialist support, which is where the system and spend is focused
6. Decision making behaviours in the system are not always effectively managing demand
7. Current approaches to understanding needs, provision and finances are not connected
8. There is a lack of clarity about the outcomes being achieved for local pupils
9. There are challenges with performance oversight and a lack of shared understanding of challenges
10. Relationships and a joined up approach across all parts of the SEND system are not as strong as they could be

## Mitigating the impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 struck soon after the SEND review was concluded and must also inform any evidence-based strategic response. There is a real risk that the number of pupils referred for EHCP assessment or into specialist Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) or all-needs provision will only increase sharply without an overtly trauma-informed plan. Advances in neuro-science which show that trauma and adversity impact on all aspects of functioning, both cognitive and emotional<sup>1</sup>, must inform our strategy.

We know that the pandemic has increased hardship in a wide range of ways and that more children and young people will be growing up in stress-filled environments because of this, impacting on their capacity to meet age-related expectations, behavioural and academic<sup>2</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bmj.com/content/371/bmj.m3048>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/blogs/emerging-evidence-on-covid-19s-impact-on-mental-health-and-health>

HNS strategy must ensure that all adults interacting with vulnerable children and young people understand how they can and must act as buffers against adversity, building resilience so that disadvantage need not become destiny.

We are not starting from ground zero in this. Our HNS will build on the awareness-raising work that has been undertaken already through the Inclusive Lincolnshire training offer and throughout lockdown, when engagement from the school sector in professional learning and reflection was unprecedented; we will build on this momentum and embed the practice within SEND policy and practice such that distressed children and young people are nurtured and healed within their mainstream schools, their resilience and ultimately their life chances subsequently enhanced.

## How we will meet this challenge

### Underpinning philosophy

Key to this strategy is the embedding of a strengths-based approach in our work with children, young people and families. Strengths-based practice is not a new concept and there are a range of methods, models and policies that underpin it. At its heart, however, this approach is about ensuring that we recognise and seek to build on the strengths and resources of the child or young person and their family, including their interests, skills and support systems, when planning how best to support them.

It is also important to make reference to the 'social model' and the 'medical model' of SEND as ways of understanding, identifying and responding to special needs. The medical model focuses on the child's condition, seeing the problem *within* the child and seeking to treat the child so that he or she can fit in with the environment. The 'impairment' is focused on, rather than the needs of the individual. This model draws on the idea that it is society that disables people, through designing policy and practice to meet the needs of the majority of people who are not disabled or who do not have special needs.

In contrast, the social model of special needs sees the problem within the environment and addresses changes that need to be made for the full participation of a diversity of people to be possible. Reasonable adjustments are made to ensure that individuals are not excluded or disadvantaged by virtue of their difference. As Alexander Den Heijer puts it, "When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower."

The Warnock Report (1978)<sup>3</sup> promoted the social model of disability, with the 1981 Education Act changing the word 'handicap' to 'SEN' in the hope that this would shift the focus from disability to individual needs, the imperative being to meet those needs. However, Warnock's vision for inclusion has faltered in England. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties who are educated within their mainstream schools has fallen by 24% between 2012 and 2019<sup>4</sup> and England is an outlier in comparison with the rest of the UK.

In Lincolnshire we have seen that this trend toward increased segregation is stronger than

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/warnock/warnock1978.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://inews.co.uk/news/education/government-segregation-special-needs-children-mainstream-schools-328706>

nationally. The aim of the HNS is to reverse that by promoting within Lincolnshire the **social model** of inclusion and to build on the learning from Scotland, where the government's drive for greater inclusion has seen a sharp increase in the number of children with SEND being educated alongside their peers.

Finally, through a responsive and flexible continuum of SEND provision without walls, the HNS will ensure that the great hope which is neural plasticity translates into enhanced outcomes for children and young people. We know that children's progress can be astonishing when the right stimulus is provided, the developing brain being a sponge for learning. (The converse is also true). A special school place should not be viewed necessarily as a school-career, therefore, and neither should an EHCP plan. Our strategy ensures that increased independence is encouraged, recognised and celebrated at every opportunity.

The strategy is not merely a pragmatic response to financial pressure, then. It is underpinned by a moral and ethical commitment to strengths-based practice, the social model of SEND, a trauma-informed and non-pathologizing vision and ultimately equity for all of Lincolnshire's children and young people.

**GROWTH MINDSET & INCLUSION**

**INSTEAD OF THINKING... (FIXED MINDSET)**

- HE IS NOT READY FOR SCHOOL.
- WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH RESOURCES.
- SHE NEEDS TO BE PULLED OUT TO A SEPARATE SETTING.
- I NEED MORE EDUCATION ASSISTANT TIME.
- WE HAVE TRIED THIS STRATEGY BEFORE.
- I WASN'T TRAINED FOR THIS.

**TRY THINKING... (GROWTH MINDSET)**

- HOW CAN WE GET SCHOOL READY FOR HIM?
- WHAT CAN I DO WITH THE RESOURCES I HAVE?
- HOW CAN I MAKE SURE SHE HAS A SENSE OF BELONGING?
- WHAT CAN HE DO INDEPENDENTLY?
- DID ANY PART OF IT WORK?
- WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

**WHEN A FLOWER DOESN'T BLOOM YOU FIX THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH IT GROWS, NOT THE FLOWER.**  
Alex Den Heijer

FREE DOWNLOAD: northstarpaths.com

## Implementation

The eight elements of the plan are designed to translate this trauma-informed, Warnock inspired, strengths-based vision for special needs provision into practice. Its elements are not organised chronologically but according to three broad areas of work. These will be introduced throughout the course of 2020-2023.

The goal of course will be to ensure that a responsive implementation strategy reflects the still unknown impact of the pandemic and it needs to be emphasised that a sound strategy is

capable of refinement, because it sits within a social, economic and policy context which changes. We must ensure that any new learning is harnessed so that Lincolnshire really does build-back better for children and young people with SEND. The LA will ensure that project managers keep this complex and ambitious plan on track with stakeholders engaged at every stage, not least our strategic partner, the Lincolnshire Parent and Carer Forum (LPCF).

To summarise the eight elements, items 1-3 relate to the graduated approach and how it will be strengthened to bolster early intervention and prevent the escalation of need; the middle components relate to statutory SEND and the introduction of robust practice standards; items 6 and 7 focus on the creation of a more nuanced and flexible offer for families, away from the binary choice between special and mainstream school provision, whilst the eighth element is about ensuring that information-systems allow system pressures to be mitigated and stakeholders robustly held to account.

## The Eight Elements of Transformation

### One: Strengthen our local offer and graduated approach

It will be important to ensure that the Local Offer promotes trauma-awareness and more broadly the social model of special needs, as outlined above. Updated content will provide families and settings with practical, evidence-informed advice about how to support children and young people experiencing difficulties, rather than how to seek diagnoses or simply refer into specialist services. We will also ensure that website design and language is informed by insights from behavioural science such that inclusive practice is foregrounded, as opposed to the statutory pathway.

We will publish revised graduated approach guidance, rebranding it as Lincolnshire's 'Inclusion Toolkit' to make its core purpose clear: to provide SENCOs and other professionals with high quality practical support which will guide and enhance their day to day practice. There will be co-produced Toolkits for Early Years, schools and post 16 settings, published digitally via the Local Offer.

Underpinned by the social model, the Toolkit will also emphasise the fact that the needs of most children and young people can be met through inclusive High Quality Teaching (HQT) and reasonable adjustments. It will highlight a range of support and intervention that schools can provide, without the need for additional support from an EHCP.

### Two: Introduce a SEND advice line for SENDCOs

We will launch a SEND Advice Line ('Ask SALL') in order to support professionals in finding solutions easily and quickly, without first having to refer pupils into specialist services or for statutory assessment.

Our advice-line team will familiarise practitioners with the Inclusion Toolkit, ensuring this becomes the 'go-to' document for professionals working with SEND, as well as guidance on



services available via the Local Offer. The core SALL team will also facilitate timely call-backs from educational psychologists when issues, such as emotionally based school avoidance, are complex and positive outcomes in peril.

SALL will contribute over time to workforce development and a 'levelling-up' of the knowledge, skills and understanding that exists within the mainstream sector. It will ensure that professionals feel empowered and supported to 'hold on' rather than 'refer on' and will feature prominently on the home page of the Local Offer.

### Three: Introduce VSEND to support decision making & benchmarking

We will embed a new assessment tool in Lincolnshire called Valuing SEND. Valuing SEND is an approach which looks to identify, articulate and track the needs and outcomes of children to create a more objective and holistic picture of needs and the support required to meet them. This approach was developed by IMPOWER Consulting and has been shown to support more productive and meaningful conversations about children and young people's needs, and better tracking of progress and evaluation of support.

The use of Valuing SEND will be central to our strategy to deliver more timely and comprehensive interventions, improving children's long-term outcomes and inclusion. Guidance on its use will be built into the Inclusion Toolkit and supported by Ask SALL as well as supporting our work on statutory assessment and annual review.

### Four: Define & promote practice standards within the statutory assessment pathway

The use of VSEND within revised Local Authority EHCP referral documentation will support the development of transparent practice standards and greater consistency across settings. In particular, the grading of 'setting readiness' through the VSEND tool will drive the development of a consistently high quality SEND offer county-wide. Where additional resource is required through an EHCP, this will be because needs are beyond those which should routinely be met within Lincolnshire's inclusive community of schools.

The reintroduction of a six week allocation panel will ensure that these practice standards are embedded. Over time, all referrals for EHCP will be appropriate because practice standards will have been clearly articulated through consistent support and challenge, both at key points along the statutory pathway and through greater clarity in relation to the graduated approach, or in other words our Inclusion Toolkit.

### Five: Develop a strengths-based approach to annual reviews

We will ensure that the progress that children and young people make when their needs are expertly met is recognised and celebrated through the annual review process. Repeated VSEND radar diagrams will allow progress across the areas of need to be tracked such that plans are closed when appropriate, especially but not exclusively at key transition points.

We will ensure that the voice of the child is heard. We will also ensure that families are encouraged to view placement in special school as an intervention, whenever the profile of

needs suggests this is appropriate, with transition to mainstream an ambition routinely explored at annual review. Through this and other elements of the HNS, we will transform culture and practice around SEND such that the shared goal is independence, not a statutory plan.

#### **Six: Support step-down with focus on transition from special to mainstream school**

The HNS will promote the identification of special school pupils who are ready to consider mainstream as the next step in their progress. Linked with the annual review process, caseworkers from the LA's Pupil Reintegration Team will ensure that transition is supported at every stage. Pupils and their families will be at the centre of decision-making and planning with the approach taken relationship-based, flexible and responsive. A period of dual registration will provide a safety-net, in response to parents' feedback on this, and there will also be flexibility in relation to the choice of mainstream school, which will not in all cases be the nearest.

We will also facilitate the transition back to mainstream of pupils who occupy places in Pilgrim Hospital School, due to severe and often school-based anxiety. For all KS1-3 pupils, a 6 week assessment place upon referral will facilitate the accurate identification of need and the wrap-around support required for successful reintegration. Mainstream settings will be supported in creating the conditions for this highly vulnerable cohort to be successful upon transition back.

Leaders at Springwell Alternative Academy will also ensure that a revolving door continues to release capacity such that some capacity can be released for pupils whose plans name SEMH Special, as well as those excluded or referred via the Ladder for intervention. All permanently excluded pupils in KS1-3 will now be reintegrated back to mainstream within sixteen weeks of placement. This strategic shift also enables us to build on the huge contribution that Lincolnshire's mainstream school leaders have made to our HNS by lowering the rate of permanent exclusion. This has allowed the LA to make more creative and targeted use of existing capacity.

#### **Seven: Introduce safe base provision within mainstream**

Usually referred to as 'specialist resource bases' (SRB), many other LAs have invested in enhanced provision within mainstream, enabling a greater proportion of children and young people with complex needs to access their community schools.

In the spirit of Building Communities, and as we endeavour to move away from labels, the HNS strategy will introduce 'Safe base' provision based on learner need rather than the diagnostic label, such as autism, which is typically associated with resourced provision. Through a pilot project, we will fund the establishment of safe bases in a small number of secondary schools as a progressive alternative for those pupils who would otherwise have been allocated special school places at SEND hub.

This will enable us to harness the growth in inclusive practice within mainstream settings that has been driven by Lincolnshire's 'Behaviour Ladder'. It will contribute to the development of a continuum of specialist SEND provision within Lincolnshire, providing families with an option that they report through the LPCF would meet needs in a significant proportion of cases.

#### **Eight: Hold to account and mitigate system pressures through primed performance**

Strengthening the visibility and accountability of data across the SEND spectrum, a two tier performance framework will enable us to monitor, evaluate and if necessary flex our HNS. The top level will be for all stakeholders to be able to map the current and future journeys of children and young people with SEND. The second tier will provide more detailed operational data for managers, to inform day to day decision making relating to the provision of SEND services for children and young people. This will also be combined with finance data so that spend in the High Needs area can be projected and understood, along with need type, so that we can ensure our estate of available provision is fit for the needs of Lincolnshire's children and young people with SEND.

### **How we will know the strategy is working**

#### **How we measure success**

We will work closely with the LPCF to ensure that children, young people and their families co-produce developments and support us in evaluating progress towards milestones:

- the local offer is appropriate to meeting the current and future needs
- higher achievement among pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities
- fewer pupils in segregated provision and greater inclusion in the local community
- reduction in exclusions, children out of school and NEET population
- better use of specialist provision that meets local needs
- increased confidence in mainstream schools and the LA SEND system
- reduction in SEND appeals and tribunals
- reduction in SEND-related complaints
- a more highly trained workforce
- feedback from parents, pupils and school staff have better access to information and support and that shows they feel more supported by education, health and social care
- better transitions and improved progression pathways that supports preparation for adulthood

#### **We will monitor our offer to ensure that it continues:**


- to meet changing needs
- to be attractive to children, young people and their parents
- to be affordable within future funding allocations

# MY INCLUSION ABC'S

@kwfens62

**A** ALL MEANS ALL  


**B** BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION  


**C** CHOICE  


BE A BEHAVIOUR DETECTIVE  
**D**  



**E** EVERYONE STARTS TOGETHER  



**F** FAIR MEANS EVERYONE GETTING THEIR NEEDS MET  


**G** GROWTH MINDSET  
**H** CHILD HONOURING  



**I** INDEPENDENCE  


**J** JOYFUL LEARNING  


**K** KIDS DO WELL IF THEY CAN  


**L** LEAD WITH STRENGTHS  


**O** OPEN MINDEDNESS  




**M** MOVEMENT BREAKS  


**N** NEEDS BASED  


**P** PLAN & PURPOSE  


**Q** QUESTION UNEXPECTED BEHAVIOUR WHY? WHY NOW?  


**R** RELATIONSHIP  



**S** SELF REGULATION  
  
**T** ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY  


**U** UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD  


**U** UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING  


**V** VISUALS  


**W** WORDS MAKE WORLDS  


**X**-TRA PROCESSING TIME  


THE POWER OF **YET!**  
  
**Z** ONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT