

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Date: Monday 27th October, 2025 Time: 4.30 pm Venue: Mandela Room, Town Hall

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Fire Evacuation Procedure

In the event the fire alarm sounds, attendees will be advised to evacuate the building via the nearest fire exit and assemble at the Bottle of Notes opposite MIMA.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

4. Minutes of the Previous Children's Scrutiny Panel held on 15 September 2025 3 - 6

5. Further Evidence - Out of Area Specialist Provision 7 - 20

The Panel is asked to consider:-

1. Further evidence in the context of its current scrutiny topic - Workforce Development Strategy (SEND & Inclusion) and how this has assisted in maintaining children in Middlesbrough education provision.

2. Next steps/lines of enquiry for its review.

6. Possible Terms of Reference - Discussion Item

The Panel is asked to consider possible Terms of Reference for its current scrutiny investigation "Out of Area Specialist Provision".

7. Overview and Scrutiny Board Update

The Chair will provide a verbal update on business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 17 September and 22 October 2025.

8. Any other urgent items which in the opinion of the Chair, may be considered.
9. Date and Time of Next Meeting - 8 December 2025

Charlotte Benjamin
Director of Legal and Governance Services

Town Hall
Middlesbrough
Friday 17 October 2025

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors E Clynch (Chair), D Jackson (Vice-Chair), J McTigue, M Nugent, S Platt, A Romaine, S Tranter and Z Uddin (+ 1 vacancy).

Assistance in accessing information

Should you have any queries on accessing the Agenda and associated information please contact Joanne Dixon / Tabitha Frankland, 01642 729713 / 01642 726241, joanne_dixon@middlesbrough.gov.uk / tabitha_frankland@middlesbrough.gov.uk

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 15 September 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors E Clynch (Chair), D Jackson, S Platt, S Tranter, Z Uddin and G Wilson

OFFICERS: P Allen, C Cannon, E Cowley, T Frankland and C Lunn

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor

25/1 WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

In the event the fire alarm sounds attendees will be advised to evacuate the building via the nearest fire exit and assemble at the Bottle of Notes opposite MIMA.

25/2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Business
Cllr E Clynch	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.
Cllr D Jackson	Non-Pecuniary	School Governor.
Cllr S Tranter	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.

25/3 MINUTES - CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL - 15 JULY 2025

It was raised that Cllr Uddin was incorrectly listed as Vice-Chair of the Children's Scrutiny Panel in the minutes. Cllr Jackson had been appointed as Vice-Chair of the Children's Scrutiny Panel at the Full Council meeting that took place on 9 July 2025. It was agreed that this would be amended and the minutes of the Children's Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 15 July 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

25/4 INTRODUCTION TO NEW SCRUTINY TOPIC - OUT OF AREA SPECIALIST PROVISION

The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review provided a presentation on Out of Area Specialist Placements.

Out of Area Specialist Placement by definition was a residential or education placement that was located outside of a child's home local authority boundary and provided education provision for children that required a more tailored service, for example young people with complex or special educational needs and disabilities.

There were two types of out of area specialist provision that Middlesbrough children could access. The first was Other Local Authority Special schools which were schools maintained by the local authority where they were based or were part of the state school system. The second type was Independent Provision which were organisations run privately and not maintained by the local authority or part of the state school system. It was confirmed that some independent specialist provision offered day placements and others also provided residential options.

There were several reasons why a child would be placed in an out of area specialist provision, these included:

- Gaps in local provision
- Individual needs of a child
- Provider specialism
- The child was in the care of the local authority, lived outside of the Middlesbrough area and was in education placement close to where they live.
- The child had moved into Middlesbrough from a neighbouring local authority and for consistency it was appropriate to continue to commission the placement.

- Parental preference (for children with an EHCP, the local authority must consider parent's first choice even if out of area)

The majority of children in out of area specialist provision had an Education, Health and Care Plan and it was highlighted to Members that local placements for children were always considered first before a placement out of area was agreed.

The type of special educational needs of children in out of area specialist provision varied, with Autism Spectrum Condition and Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs being the most common.

The majority of children in out of area specialist provision were secondary school age (71%), with 22% primary age and 6% aged over 16. In terms of geographical location of placements, 55% were within the Tees Valley; 21% were in the North East, 8% were in North Yorkshire and 15% were National.

The average cost of an out of area local authority specialist provision placement was broadly comparable to the cost of a placement in a Middlesbrough special school at around £16,000 and was funded through the High Needs Budget of the Dedicated Schools Grant. There were currently 53 children who received their education in another local authority special school outside of the Middlesbrough boundary and the total budget outturn for the 24/25 financial year for other local authority specialist provision was £1.176m. Many of these children were eligible for transport assistance and transport costs were often inflated; Middlesbrough Council worked with neighbouring local authorities to ensure good value and economies of scale and avoid creating an unreasonable cost to the transport team. The average per pupil cost of transport to other local authority schools was £4,000 per annum.

Independent provision was more costly than maintained or academy school provision and this was funded through the High Needs Budget of the Dedicated Schools Grant. There were currently 60 children in these types of placements and an average placement cost, based on current spend for Middlesbrough, was £65,000 - significantly more expensive than the cost of a placement in a special school at £16,000.

Work had been done to reduce the numbers of children accessing independent provision but uplifted fees and costs from independent providers meant that the financial impact of reducing reliance was not always fully realised. A total of £4.786m was spent on independent specialist provision in the 24/25 financial year and as with children in out of area local authority placements, many children in independent provision were also eligible for transport assistance and the average per pupil costs of transport to independent provision was around £30,000 per annum. There were 15 children who were transported to and from independent day placements by the local authority each day and the Council would never be able to eradicate the use of this type of placement completely as they as they provided a specialist service for children in Middlesbrough with the most complex needs.

Middlesbrough had 84 out of 500 looked after children living in private residential children's homes outside the local authority that provided a holistic package combining specialist care and education as one service. Many of these children would be in foster care or children's homes in Middlesbrough if there was availability. These children were receiving education either on the premises or at schools local to their children's home; these could be high-cost specialist placements for some of the children with most complex needs, many of whom also have an EHCP.

In these circumstances, staff from across children's services (including looked after children's social workers, the virtual school and the special educational needs team) worked together, supported by finance and commissioning, to secure placements and make placement decisions collectively. On occasion, residential education provision could be commissioned for children who were not looked after but this was rare in Middlesbrough.

In 2022, Middlesbrough Council took part in the Department for Education's 'Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme' and the use of independent specialist provision was identified as an area for improvement and potential cost reduction with the deployment of a different strategy. Since 2023, the Council had been successful in reducing the use of independent specialist provision in Middlesbrough had reduced. There were 60 children who accessed their education provision in independent schools and Middlesbrough had the lowest use of

Independent Special Schools in the Tees Valley at 2.97% and performed well against regional and benchmarks and continued to drive numbers down.

In addition, there was reducing reliance on the use of these placements for children with a new EHCP. In Middlesbrough 1.7% of new EHCPs were placed in independent specialist provision which was below National (2.4%) and Regional (1.8%) averages. This was due to developments in local specialist provision to increase capacity in the town, along with strong partnerships with specialist and other education providers who were committed to developing specialist expertise within Middlesbrough to meet the majority of children's needs locally.

There were a number of quality assurance checks and processes in place for using out of area schools, and in particular independent specialist providers. The Secretary of State for Education published a S41 approved list of independent special schools and specialist post 16 institutions. This list was published with assurances that providers on the list must meet certain standards.

There were also processes in place for commissioning independent specialist provisions with contracts in place and individual placement agreements for each child and schools were subject to regulatory oversight from Ofsted and the CQC. Staff from the local authority visited children in their settings regularly but there was also quality assurance processes in place for key members of LA staff to carry out quality visits at the provisions. In 2023 during the SEND Local Area Inspection, the process of out of area placements and assurance was found to be effective.

A Member acknowledged that Middlesbrough relied less on Out of Area Specialist Provision compared to its national and regional counterparts but queried how Middlesbrough compared in terms of the quality of SEND provision available in area. They also queried what the 'perfect' service would look like.

It was confirmed that Middlesbrough Council and other local authorities met with the Department for Education to share best practice and most local authorities who had increased SEND capacity had taken the same approach as Middlesbrough. The 'perfect' service would provide assurance that the needs of every child were met effectively and for the majority of children to be educated within Middlesbrough, keeping out of area provision to a minimum but most importantly a positive experience for the child and their family.

There was an opportunity to continue reducing reliance on out of area placements. This would not only have a positive financial impact, including on the high needs budget and transport budgets, but it would also mean that the majority of children will remain in their local community. It would never be possible to reduce reliance completely, but the intention would be to reach a minimal level and build local capacity and specialism to avoid reliance on out of area placements. The work required to ensure this continues, will also be included in the new SEND & Inclusion Strategy which is due to be published in January 2026.

A Member queried why out of area provision was the more attractive choice to some parents and expressed concern about the cost of independent provision.

It was advised that although a Workforce Development Strategy had been put in place to upskill staff and increase capacity in the Borough, there was sometimes still a shortage of staff that were specially qualified to cater to a variety of specific complex needs. The independent sector could provide tailored environments and often more resources and support per child which was why continuous improvement to local authority SEND provision was so important.

The Interim Director of Education and Partnerships highlighted that in 2023 Middlesbrough received positive ratings in the Ofsted conducted Area SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) inspection but that the service area continued to work with other providers to provide the best possible service.

A Member queried what the service looked like before 2023 and what needs had been addressed locally.

The service area had worked in collaboration with specialist partners to build special school capacity within Middlesbrough, particularly for those with learning disabilities and children with complex needs, which had reduced reliance on out of area provision gradually over time.

SEND provision in mainstream schools had also been improved through higher levels of adaptations to meet the needs of pupils.

A Member queried whether academies had the same responsibilities to support SEND pupils as local authority-run schools.

It was confirmed that academies had the same responsibilities as local authority-maintained schools but local authorities still provided essential SEND assistance to academies, to ensure staff felt supported to meet the needs of all pupils and manage funding to ensure it was used to meet the needs of children with SEND. The framework behind this was part of Middlesbrough Council's SEND workforce strategy.

Members thanked colleagues in the service area for their hard work and the improvements that had been made so far.

It was suggested that the Panel would agree the Terms of Reference at the next meeting which would focus on several topics discussed in the meeting:

- What had worked well in the past – good practice
- Upcoming government SEND reforms and the impacts of these
- Middlesbrough's SEND Workforce Strategy and the impact of this

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

25/5 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided an update on items discussed at the recent Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 30 July and 17 September 2025 which included:

- Executive Member Update – The Mayor
- Delivery against the Continuous Improvement Plan - Progress update
- Overview and Scrutiny Board - Work Programme 2025/26
- Scrutiny - Work Planning 2025/26
- Pre-Decision Scrutiny Protocol
- Executive Member Update - Education and Culture
- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Forward Plan Actions Progress
- Draft Terms of Reference - Poverty, its impact, and efforts to tackle it.
- Scrutiny Chairs Update

25/6 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - MONDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2025 AT 4:30 PM**

The next meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Panel had been scheduled for Monday, 27 October 2025 at 4:30 pm in the Mandela Room, Town Hall.

25/7 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

None.

SEND & Inclusion Workforce Development

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Children's Scrutiny Panel – 27th October 2025

Agenda Item 5

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Workforce Development – Background and context

Workforce development has been a long-term focus of the improvement work for SEND & Inclusion and formed the basis of the original Middlesbrough SEND & Disability Strategy when it was first introduced in 2018. Workforce development activities cover all aspects of SEND & Inclusion across education, health and care services along with schools and settings.

The workforce development strategic group worked to identify priorities for local area workforce development, and this was supported by engagement work with schools

A workforce development offer was introduced shortly after which includes induction learning, core learning and developmental learning for the following groups:

- Internal Council Staff
- External staff in schools and settings
- Parents and carers

There is also a strong quality assurance process for SEND & Inclusion in Middlesbrough which has driven the learning cycle in terms of workforce development. This includes all aspects of quality assurance learning from peer reviews, reviews of education health and care plans and quality assurance activity that takes place around case audits and learning visits to providers.



Workforce Development – Delivering Better Value

- In 2023, to acknowledge the growing pressures outlined above, Middlesbrough Council received a £1.045m grant from the Department for Education for the roll out of the Delivering Better Value [DBV] programme.
- Workforce development was highlighted as an opportunity area as part of this work, meaning that a focus on training and development to improve workforce skills and knowledge would have a positive impact on outcomes for children and the sustainability of finances in the longer term
- Identified actions as part of the delivery of this were:
 - Developing a local area graduated response
 - Training, mentoring and networking opportunities for school SENCoS
 - Conferences and learning activities/ events across the local area
 - Employing a Family Liaison Officer to support parent partnerships
 - Development of SENCo handbook
 - Transitions



Workforce Development – Achievements

Training, mentoring and networking opportunities for school SENCos

A five-day SENDCo development programme was delivered between March and July 2024. National and local experts were invited to Middlesbrough to focus on upskilling staff on:

- The SEND graduated response
- SEND leadership
- Multi-agency working
- Transitions
- SEMH

Each of the five sessions were consistently attended by over 60 members of staff



Workforce Development – Achievements

Training, mentoring and networking opportunities for school SENCos

Membership and a supported development programme for schools to participate in the Whole Education SEND School Improvement Programme for 24 schools in total.

Our delivery partner Tees Valley Education facilitate the local SEND Network along with mentoring, training and development opportunities for SENCos and other key staff across Middlesbrough.

Peer reviews and networks undertaken to share skills and knowledge across networks of schools (including post 16 providers).



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EDUCATION
www.teesvalleyeducation.co.uk

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Workforce Development – Achievements

Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision In Middlesbrough

Inclusive resources to be made available for children and young people in mainstream educational settings in Middlesbrough

Information for parents/carers and practitioners



Developing a Local Area Graduated Response

Middlesbrough's Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision document is based upon Quality First Teaching and was recently published. It provides clarity about, support, resources and strategies available within the local area for children and young people at SEND Support.

Led by seconded SENDCos in collaboration with service providers from Education, Health and Social Care the Middlesbrough SEND Ranges document is due to launch on 21st October 2025.

The Ranges aims to provide a clarity in relation to identifying the level of need and support CYP requires and will ensure greater consistency of approach across all settings in Middlesbrough. This will be achieved through continued practice sharing, networking and training across schools.

[Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision | Middlesbrough](#)



Workforce Development –Achievements

Development of a SEND Learning Hub

The development of an online portal for practitioners and families to access bitesize learning at their own pace.

[Learning hub | SEND Hub](#)

SEND & Inclusion conferences

The delivery of annual local area conferences highlighting SEND topics of local importance and inviting specialists and lived experience speakers to share their skills and knowledge.

Staff from the LA and supporting schools have delivered at local, regional and national conferences.



Workforce Development – Local Area Priorities

Alongside the Delivering Better Value programme there are a series of other key priority areas where significant activity has been undertaken:

Early Years

During 2024-25 a scoping activity with EY providers and multiagency colleagues was completed to determine EY training needs and identify training already available.

Restructure of the original Cleveland Unit nursery to introduce an assessment approach with opportunities for outreach and training with the specialist team. Specialist staff delivered 87 hours of outreach in September.

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Introduction of a refreshed portage offer for families of children with complex needs – a parent led approach.

Supported via the DfE to work with Dingley's Promise to offer up to 100 free funded training places for early years staff, and participate in a series of action learning sets

Linked Early Years offer with family hubs and the Education Alliance Board to ensure opportunities for family learning and support are integrated into the offer



Outreach and Inclusion

Following feedback from schools in 2021 an Outreach and Inclusion service was developed within the local authority to support with early assessment, identification and preventative approaches to support children with SEND and those at risk of exclusion. Training, outreach services and advice and guidance are all offered as part of this offer.

This model works closely with the Designated Clinical Officer and Designated Social Care Offer who provide training, support and guidance on their health and care specialisms. Training is also offered from specialist services and therapy services (e.g. Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Epilepsy)

School based learning

Schools invest in supporting their own staff to complete relevant training for SEND. Some examples of this include:

- Team Teach
- Relationship based and restorative approaches
- Attention Autism Training

Many schools are also engaged in sharing their skills and knowledge across the partnership through outreach, training sessions and workshops (examples include Green Lane and Beverley Park).



PROCLAIM Partnership

This is focussed on providing training and support to schools to support them to become trauma informed and attachment aware in their approach. There are 23 PROCLAIM schools in Middlesbrough.

The local authority Inclusion and Specialist Support Service is also part of this programme with a trauma informed and attachment aware workforce.

Preparation for Adulthood

Delivered targeted PfA-focused outcomes and person-centred planning training across the local area.

Collaborated with Supported Internship providers to implement the Supported Internship Quality Assurance Framework, encouraging self-assessment and reflection to support continuous improvement.

Facilitated supported internship and further education providers to participate in specialist training around job coaching and systematic instruction to support employment outcomes.





Development Opportunities for LA SEND & Inclusion staff:

Staff from the LA have been supported to complete:

- Legal training with IPSEA
- SEN Case Officer Qualifications
- Attend National Development Team for Inclusion Leadership Development Programmes
- Apprenticeship opportunities
- Webinars, conferences and learning activities to bring knowledge back into the local area (as participants and speakers)

The Future Workforce

There has been partnership work completed with Teesside University and Middlesbrough College to consider how specialisms from the Local Area can be integrated into teacher training or training for the children's workforce. This has involved developing programme content and guest speaking on learning programmes.

Workforce Development – IMPACT on practice and staff development

“The impact has been positive. Really good professional development.”

“It has made clear what we know and what we don't and has informed the priorities.”

“There is a real benefit of time to talk and share good practice in a safe space.”

“The training has brought SEN more to the forefront within school and improved target setting.”

“It has been useful learning as part of a team, drawing from expertise, raising profile of SEND in school and children's outcomes.”

“Allows you time as professional to really consider what matters, what needs changing, having that strategic view.”

Workforce Development IMPACT

Children have their needs assessed in a timely way – 98% completion for 20-week process vs 45.9% national

The number of children in mainstream and specialist provision is now more in line with national levels

The local area graduated response is stronger - there has been a 16.6% decrease in the rate of referrals in Middlesbrough in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Primary school and special school suspensions are below national and regional averages

Less days lost to suspensions locally

Focus on relationships, resolution and legal compliance - Tribunal rates remain below national averages

Growing numbers of young people are gaining skills for employment – consistent numbers of young people participating in supported internships

Number of children in 'Out of Area' Placements is lower than national levels – supported by developing specialisms locally and an improved graduated response

The number of children permanently excluded reduced this year for the third year in a row

Workforce Development – Next Steps

Announcements are anticipated in Autumn 2025 with regard to national SEND Reforms. These will influence our approach to workforce development.

There is a new SEND & Inclusion Strategy due to be published in January 2026, which will incorporate the new reforms. The strategy will run from 2026-2030 and workforce development continues to be a priority.

Key areas for development 2026-30

- Build networks for good practice sharing, learning and collaboration across all stakeholders
- Bring together specialist and mainstream providers to share knowledge and build resilience
- Focus on educating the whole local area partnership 0-25; including working with local settings, parents and young people to identify priorities for training activities in line with the local area needs
- Invite national experts and sector specialists to Middlesbrough to inspire change, support inclusive capacity and share knowledge
- Coproduce a programme of training and learning for families with families
- Continue to develop Early Years and Post 16 workforce development

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