

Practice guide

SEND & Alternative Provision

Health pathways - Speech, Language and Communication, Oldham

Background, purpose and rationale

There are a higher-than-average number of children and young people in Oldham who have an education, health, and care plan (EHCP) compared to national rates (Oldham: 6.0% and national: 4.8%). The most common type of need for children and young people with an EHCP is autism, although speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) remain a significant area of need, which is shown in the most common primary need for children and young people at the SEN Support level being SLCN. Furthermore, most children at primary transition who move to special schools have primary needs in SLCN and autism.

Due to the challenges of rising demand and many referrals for speech and language therapy (SALT) leading to long waiting times, it was important to look at reducing this.

What we did to improve children's outcomes and experiences

A lot of work has been done since the last Area SEND inspection to get into a much better position. Along with that work, the whole system was looked at, covering universal, targeted and specialist provision. This identified what was missing at the universal level, which could also be driving the need for referrals. This also aligned with investment through Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC), which enabled the creation of a joint education and health specialist team to test ways of working with parent carers and schools for early identification and support at the universal and targeted levels.

Through what we have learned through ELSEC, and in analysis of our data, we have explored the creation of a speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) service. This is integrated in the SEND & Inclusion Service aligned with the Communication & Interaction Team. This allows for greater join up of specialist teachers and specialist Speech & Language Therapy (SALT) support for children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). The new model will be school facing and would deliver support directly in schools/settings.

What was the impact?

The work of Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC), whilst still in the early stages, is indicating that the school-based model works. Ultimately, what ELSEC delivers will be a core part of the SLCN transformation and future delivery of services.

We are anticipating that the intended impact will include a reduction in specialist speech and language therapy waiting times by ensuring that only children and young people who require specialist intervention are referred to this service. Through a more skilled, school-based workforce, we will be better equipped to address the needs of children with speech, language, and communication difficulties at the SEN support level. As a result, EHCPs with a primary need of SLCN will be issued only for those requiring specialist intervention.

Through enhanced collaboration with the Oldham Parent/Carer Forum (OPCF) we will achieve better-informed and more supported parents/carers regarding speech, language, and communication needs.

The implementation of targeted speech and language interventions within school settings that can be seamlessly integrated into the classroom and broader school environment, reducing the need to remove children from their classrooms. This will help secure a sustainable system that prevents a return to the previous model of high, and sometimes inappropriate, speech and language therapy referrals, which contributed to longer wait times.

Find out more

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