

# Practice guide

## SEND & Alternative Provision

### Identification – Family Hub SEND Centre of Excellence, Cheshire East

#### Background, purpose, and rationale

Cheshire East was identified as an outlier for the number and rate of growth of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and involved with the Delivering Better Value for SEND (DBV) programme at the time of bidding for Family Hubs funding. The Family Hub partnership group committed to developing a Family Hubs as a SEND Centre of Excellence to trial and develop inclusive practice across all Cheshire East Family Hubs. We collaborated with partners and families to discuss what the centre could look like; this included young people who supported us to design the space. Our Parent Carer Forum (PCF) were key partners on our steering group and regularly informed us about challenges they faced, gaps in service provision, and changes needed to provide effective support.

#### What we did to improve children and families' experiences

The SEND Family Hub workstream included health visiting, school nursing, speech and language, occupational therapy, paediatrics service representatives, alongside input from voluntary, community and faith sector providers and Designated Clinical and Social Care Officers. We used research from the DBV programme, local data and intelligence, and parent/carer voices to identify what was working well and what gaps existed to help trial new initiatives and do things differently together.

Monks Coppenhall Family Hub and Centre of Excellence for SEND opened in October 2023, following significant capital refurbishment as part of our transformation fund delivery plan. The Family Hub has space to deliver the Start for life offer, clinical spaces including for midwifery, two dedicated SEND service delivery space, a changing places toilet facility and multi-agency office space. The new multi-agency office encourages partners across agencies to come together and work alongside each other. removing barriers and sharing skills and resources. An example of this was supporting a child with complex health needs to access their free early education entitlement. The Portage team were able to support the setting with transition; health teams arrange specialist training; OT assessed equipment needs, funded by SEN Inclusion Fund; and continuing care funding to support the family and setting in managing medical needs. Ordinarily this would have required a series of emails and meetings, resulting in delay.

In addition to our usual family hub activities at Monks Coppenhall, we developed a weekly SEND offer with a variety of workshops, drop ins, short break activities and clinics in the community. Many of these have demonstrated good impact and have since been rolled out across our borough.

## What was the impact?

Our family hubs are well-known and trusted place to meet other families and access support from trusted professionals. Children and families find appointments – including for physiotherapy, paediatric feeding, and speech and language - easier to access within the hub. These appointments take place in a bright, open, non-clinical environment with access to outdoor space. Following appointments moving to the hub, clinicians have seen a 50% decrease in non-attendance. Families tell us children are more relaxed coming into a family hub than a surgery or hospital, improving the experience for the whole family. We are working closely with paediatric health teams to explore the possibility of taking other clinics into family hubs and affiliated provider venues across Cheshire East.

Our SEND Local Offer marketplace runs eight times a year with partners from health, PCF, specialist services, and the voluntary community and faith sector, to offer advice and support to families. Over 260 families attended in the past year. Following the success of the SEND local offer marketplace, we have enhanced the offer with 1-to-1s for families to speak to a specific service, over 30 parents have accessed these sessions in the last 2 months. Feedback from families has stated: *'Brilliant event,' 'Really supportive,' 'Great event, came away with some tips to help me,' 'Great to know there is support out there.'*

The Early Years Forum considers up to sixty children a month as a multi-agency panel to ensure good quality SEND support plans, interventions and access to specialist advice for settings and families. As a result of this early support, many children have narrowed attainment gap and successfully transitioned to school on SEND support plans, reducing inappropriate needs assessment requests to our Statutory SEND Panel. We follow the principle of 'making every contact count' to ensure we are purposeful in getting families the right support at the right time, in the right place.

Health practitioners developed a pre-school development course to support families with early SEND concerns, with 126 families accessing the offer to date. Feedback has been positive: *'The course has been very helpful,' 'The format was easy to follow and understand,' 'Lots of helpful information and resources,' 'Access to an evening online course was fantastic when I have a family of five,' 'Thank you so much for the opportunity to do this course. It has been very useful and covered lots of the things that I wanted to find out about. I would be eager to do any other courses or standalone sessions in the future.'*

Having Monks Coppenhall as a SEND Centre of Excellence, enables us to trial new and innovative services and practice to reduce barriers for children and families with SEND before rolling out across our other hubs and community spaces where we identify positive impact.

## Resources

[Cheshire East Family Hub Digital Offer](#)

## Find out more

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