

A draft strategy for the future of

Education in Kent

2025-2030

Draft document for consultation



**raising
ambition**



**enabling
curiosity**



building resilience

Welcome to the draft ***Raising ambition. Enabling curiosity. Building resilience. A Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent 2025-2030.***

We've developed the draft strategy by listening to families, carers, children and young people, schools and providers (by providers we mean all early years settings as well as colleges and training providers), education professionals, and partners. We would now like to hear your feedback on the proposed 'Strategy for the Future of Education in Kent 2025-2030'.

The strategy aims to respond to the needs of children and young people, their parents and carers, and those in the education profession, while delivering our statutory duties. The strategy is built on partnership working to deliver an excellent education for our children and young people, strong effective schools and providers, and system-wide cohesion.

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Raising ambition. Enabling curiosity. Building resilience. A strategy for the future of education in Kent, 2025–2030

Foreword

Kent County Council (KCC) is committed to playing an important role in supporting the best educational opportunities for our children and young people. This strategy is focused on the three things we think are the most important for a good education: ambition, curiosity and resilience. These apply primarily to the children, young people and their families who use the education system, but also to our education providers and professionals, and to the wider system that supports it.

Peter Drucker, a consultant and writer, famously said, 'Culture eats strategy for breakfast'. So why are we working on a strategy, particularly at a time of change? This strategy does more than set out a well-designed list of priorities and actions. It sets out an evidence-based way to work collaboratively and inclusively, promoting a culture of child-centred and evidence-informed working through a strong self-improving system. These are our golden threads which will support us through the future.

These threads have also informed the development of the strategy as well as co-production sessions with children and young people, their families, and the professionals in the system who have shared their priorities, raised their concerns, and explained their aspirations. The sessions have led to the focus and areas of work currently in the strategy. This has shaped the principles to which we are committing, our shared priorities, and the overarching strategy approach.

The strategy aims to provide a high-level statement of intent to guide us, and our partners, in delivering education through the next five years. Leaders and practitioners within the sector are key to the success of this strategy, as are the many partner organisations with whom we work.

Everyone who works in education does so with a strong desire to improve the progress, outcomes and life chances of children and young people. They are guided by an unwavering moral purpose that puts the best interests of the learner at the heart of their work. In this strategy, we are outlining how the whole sector can come together to include and support every child and young person, no matter what their circumstances, where they come from, or the challenges they face.

We know that education plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of Kent and I am delighted to embark on this transformative journey with you.

Rory Love OBE, BA (Hons), Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Introduction and context

Google the question 'What is the purpose of education?' and you will see the enormous and sometimes conflicting expectations there are of schools and providers. A quick glance at the media shows the lack of agreement there is about how best to deliver 'a good education'.

The 2002 Education Act is still a helpful point of reference. The Act requires schools to provide 'a balanced and broadly based curriculum which: promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils/students at school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'.

How these requirements are met can vary and, as this document is being developed the new Government has launched an independent, expert-led 'Curriculum and Assessment Review', which will provide an opportunity for leaders to broker an agreement about how schools and providers can better equip our children and young people for adult life.

At the point of publishing, Kent is actively considering the implications of Devolution planning, the possible impact of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and the sector awaits the outcome of the Curriculum Review. We are also responding to the work implications of changes such as Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. During this time of uncertainty and change, the education strategy aims to set out a shared ambition for our children and young people, and describe how we intend to fulfil our responsibilities and duties to provide them with an environment that will help them flourish. Our aim is to develop a useful, accessible document addressing the big strategic areas we need to focus on to improve. This does not and cannot address every aspect of education or our business-as-usual work. It does, however, identify the areas where we believe we can have the most impact on the education of our children and young people. This strategy provides an updated, cohesive and strategic narrative to support alignment of all activity in the best interests of our children and young people.

The strategy works on three levels. Firstly, it sets out what KCC can do to improve the system, the work of schools and providers and the lives of our children and young people, within the framework of our statutory duties and areas of responsibility and influence. Secondly, it reflects the input from professionals, parents, carers, children and young people, and aims to address their priorities. Thirdly, it aims to establish a strong and cohesive system, and outlines the approaches we want to take to position Kent at the forefront of best educational practice.

The education sector has the tough role of preparing pupils for, in many cases, an unknown future; a role which it fulfils well for many young people. Successfully managing change and financial challenge is part of school life, as is addressing recruitment and retention of effective staff. We all balance our accountability for Government and taxpayer funding with the need for all work to have maximum impact. The nature of school and provider accountability is also evolving with a recent withdrawal of one word inspection outcomes. In addition, there are a range of Kent specific issues, such as our need to improve provision for those with special educational needs, the need to build strong inclusive practices and to respond to outcome gaps for some groups of children and young people, particularly our most vulnerable.

This strategy builds the response to these issues around the understanding that the expertise sits in the sector. KCC has a significant role, amongst its other statutory duties, in facilitating, convening and (at times) challenging. During this period of change, it also becomes more important to consider and support a locality model that collaboratively brings together the sector to resolve gaps or issues for children and young people.

The national direction of travel over the past few years has been to embed sector leadership through school-to-school support structures. This has been via Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) but also through the establishment of teaching schools and curriculum hubs. Though, recently the DfE announced the establishment of Regional School Improvement Teams, which is a new development. However, the principle remains that deep expertise sits within the sector and this needs to be utilised effectively if we are to address our issues.

The education system in Kent is huge and diverse. This creates wonderful opportunities, but the risk of a fragmented system where the most vulnerable children and young people can fall through the cracks is amplified and needs to be guarded against. Research has shown that leadership focused on a local area can be significantly more effective. [A 2016 study](#) into school leadership styles showed that an 'architectural' style of leadership redesigns, transforms and builds for the future by transforming the community¹. This type of leadership is future focused, embraces a place-based approach and delivers continuous improvement. We are embracing this approach and want to establish and encourage collaborative working in response to local needs within a framework of a shared commitment to all children and young people. We know there are many collaborations between schools and providers in Kent and want to build on this effective practice. Developments in SEND infrastructure to devolve decision-making to a more local level through the establishment of Communities of Schools, co-terminus with the geographical boundaries of the Primary Care Networks, is also informed by this research.

A collaborative approach underpins this strategy. A range of education leaders, partners, families, carers, children and young people have engaged in our co-construction conversations. A big thank you to all who met with us and gave their insights. They have informed our approach and influenced the areas of focus.

We face a time of change and a range of challenges. Responding to these is dependent on effective, collaborative partnership working, building on the great practice that is already in place - so this strategy is for everyone in education.

Thank you to all who work in the sector, those who lead, those who teach and those who support, for your continued hard work to provide a great education for all our children and young people.

Christine McInnes, Director of Education and SEND

¹ [One Type of Leader Who Can Turn Around a Failing School](#). Hill, Mellon, Laker and Goddard. 2016.

Our Kent education mission is to:

- Collaboratively develop and support an effective, evidence-informed system of strong leaders and staff grounded in clear moral purpose to respond to the local needs and aspirations of Kent children and parents.
- Place children and young people at the centre of all education, by ensuring they are heard, included and supported to be ambitious, curious and resilient individuals who are well prepared for their future and empowered to achieve.

Our work sits within the wider strategic framework for children and young people in KCC, Medway Council and the NHS. The shared vision of this work is: *‘Supporting children and young people to achieve; through living healthy, safe lives in which they feel seen and included.’*

The Kent education principles

For all children and young people in Kent, we will be:

1. **Ambitious:** Striving for the best learning and educational progress and outcomes for all children and young people.
2. **Child-centred and inclusive:** Promoting safe, relational approaches to ensuring an understanding of individual needs, joined up services, smooth transitions and equity.
3. **Compassionate and principled:** Seeking to balance best interests whilst providing appropriate challenge and making difficult decisions.
4. **Collaborative and place-based:** Facilitating collaborative, place-based (meeting local needs) approaches to education and childcare through building strong support networks and partnerships.
5. **Consistent and open:** Communicating effectively and consistently to build trust and stronger relationships.
6. **Evidence-informed:** Learning and development focused, recognising evidence and seeking best practice to inform continuous improvement.
7. **Sector-focused:** Enhancing sector-based leadership, expertise and skills for effective, continuous improvement.
8. **Sustainable:** Building for a financially stable and appropriately resourced future.

Why we need an education strategy

The Local Authority (LA) is in a unique position of having an overview of the whole education system, an accountability for aspects of the system and a responsibility to act as an advocate for individual children and families. Whilst the specific statutory responsibilities for school improvement have reduced, the responsibility for supporting a healthy and equitable education system remains, for example, through duties related to commission of places, admissions and fair access. KCC officers and members are committed to supporting an education system that provides good opportunities for all, and so work started on co-constructing this wider education strategy with the sector to provide a context for focused work on sector improvement, however that is delivered. The purpose of the strategy is to create cohesion across many stakeholders, and to proactively respond to our context and specific challenges. It is built around our statutory duties and aligns our work with the national direction of travel. It also responds to the voices of our children, young

people, parents, carers and educational professionals. This strategy aims to set out the case for a strong, collaborative and cohesive system that works in the best interests of all children.

A key local concern is improving the system approach to SEND inclusion, following two inspections (2019 and 2022) which identified significant areas of weakness within the SEND area (Health, Education and Care Services) and that there needed to be a more consistent approach to SEND inclusion across all education providers. This strategy supports greater clarity on the agreed expectations of all schools and providers, (by providers we mean all early years providers as well as colleges and training providers), with regard to universal provision, targeted support and specialist education provision. Further guidance on this SEND Continuum of Need and Provision is currently under development.

National direction of travel

Over the past few years, the Government has accelerated the development of the self-improving, school-led system resulting in a reduction in the responsibilities of local authorities and a consequent change in funding. These changes are both a challenge and an opportunity. There are still key roles for local authorities, however. Some of these are statutory responsibilities, others are as an enabler, collaborator or partner, and as a champion of vulnerable groups.

Kent is relatively unique in that the majority of its Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are small (fewer than 10 schools or 7,500 pupils) and 'homegrown' rather than part of big national trusts. We also have a significant number of Single-Academy Trusts (SATs). The DfE has outlined its preferred model in the 2022 white paper '[Opportunity for all – Strong schools with great teachers for your child](#)'. Despite political change, the need to support this diverse system remains a key priority.

As the system develops, there is a growing understanding of the need for sector-wide collaboration to ensure that no child is left behind. Sir David Carter, previously the National Schools Commissioner, said there is 'a new level of accountability which is how does your impact in your trust contribute to raising standards beyond your trust?'²

In addition to the focus on statutory school age provision, other education provision has a significant impact on education outcomes for children and young people. There is considerable evidence of the positive longer-term impacts of early childhood education and care provision for young people and adults in relation to exam performance, the labour market and other outcomes. Recognising this, KCC has led a review of early years provision; the recommendations of which are currently being implemented. Post-16 education is an essential pathway to educational achievement, whether as the next stage in learning or as a support for those learners who have not attained the required standards (for example, in maths and English). To support strengthening of this part of the education sector, KCC commissioned an evidence-based review which led to the establishment of Pathways for All, a post-16 reform programme. All of this broader provision has a significant impact on educational outcomes and needs to be considered to ensure strategic coherence.

² [What works in delivering school improvement through school-to-school support \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).

With regard to SEND inclusion, early indications from the new Government suggests a greater focus on inclusivity of the mainstream as the kind of first step on the road to SEND reform - which is already the Kent approach.

Statutory duties

KCC has a wide range of statutory duties it needs to meet in education. These are a priority, and we need to consider and plan for how these are fulfilled.

These can be summarised as a responsibility to:

- Ensure a sufficient supply of good education places, including early education and childcare, and sufficient local provision for pupils with special educational needs
- Co-ordinate admissions and fair access
- Commission home to school transport appropriately and efficiently (according to the law and KCC policies) to promote independence for young people
- Meet the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act (2014).

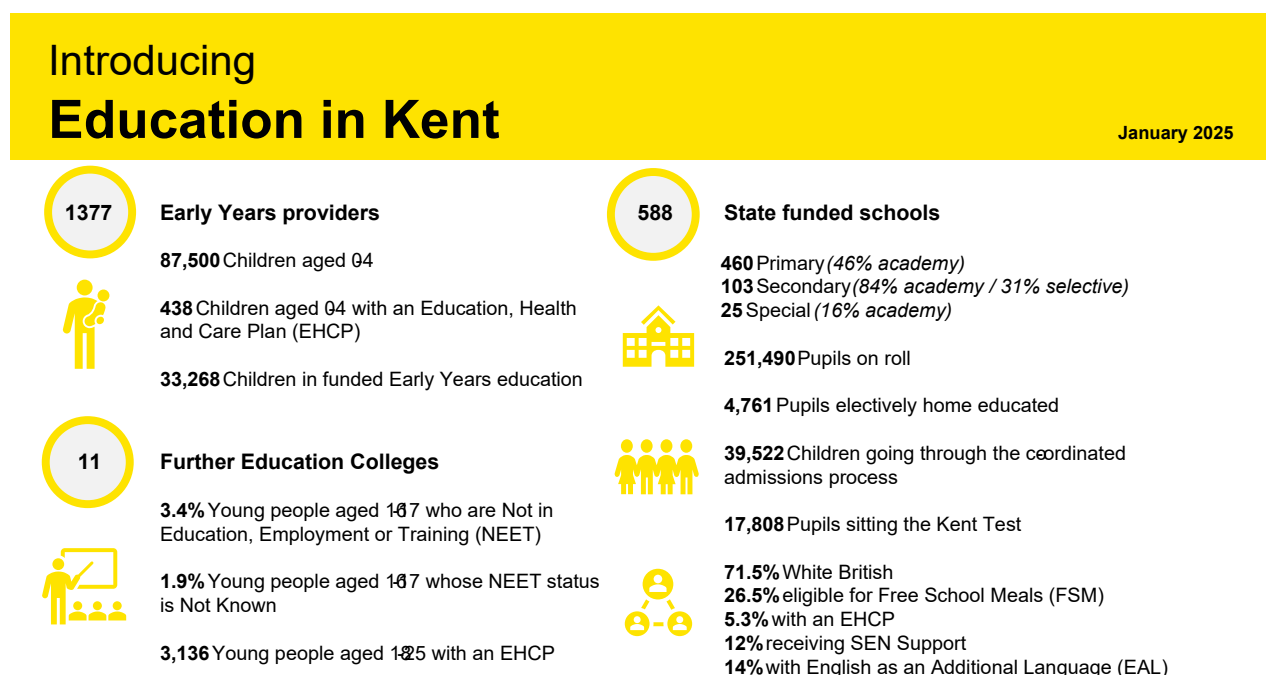
We have a broader responsibility to:

- Champion the needs of vulnerable children and young people, their families and carers, so there is an inclusive learning system which gives them the opportunity to succeed.

Local authorities also have a responsibility to:

- Ensure a strategic coherence that enables schools, settings and providers to develop purposeful partnerships that improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes for children and young people
- Collaborate with partners to build the capacity for sector-led improvement.

Our Kent state-funded education context



Our listening

Listening to the children and young people, parents and carers, leaders and professionals in the sector and a wide range of partners, has been central to constructing this strategy. It is built on the input from six sessions involving 118 children and young people, six focus groups with parents, six co-construction sessions with sector leaders and professionals, and conversations with 16 representative organisations and partners. Their input has shaped the areas of focus and content of the strategy, and their voice is shared throughout.

Our implementation and accountability

The detail that sits within the three areas of focus outlined in this strategy will be delivered via an action plan. Fundamental to success will be the engagement of key stakeholders, delivery partners, and the education sector as the detail of the action plan is developed and delivered. This will build on the existing positive relationships and high levels of engagement that have already significantly contributed to this work. Ongoing sector-wide collaboration and effective communication will be a central component of the work. The oversight of implementation will sit with the strategic education partnership group, specifically established to provide representation and support sector-led working, thus facilitating and empowering the sector to develop its capacity for peer to peer challenge and support. KCC, as a key partner, will work with this group and determine the priorities, the phasing of the implementation, and support with the detail of how the overarching areas of focus within the strategy are translated into workable, detailed, and accountable actions.

The strategy identifies our three key areas of focus and provides a high-level summary of actions we intend to deliver to ensure the success of our children and young people over the life of the strategy. The delivery action plan will be monitored, and we will hold ourselves and others accountable in the following three ways.

1. Progress against planned actions (activity and volume metrics) such as:
 - Activity in the action plan is delivered
 - Outputs delivered and the levels of engagement
2. Sector and children and young people's feedback (qualitative data) such as:
 - Children and young people's voice
 - Feedback from focus groups and collaborations
 - SEND outcomes framework
 - Annual education survey outcomes
3. Established education data sets (quantitative) such as:
 - Good Level of Development at Early Years and Foundation Stage
 - Free for 2 take up in early years and the new entitlement
 - Expected standard at Key Stage 2 (KS2)
 - Attainment and progress 8 at Key Stage 4 (KS4)
 - Free School Meals gaps at KS2 and KS4, and for Looked After Children
 - Not in Education, Employment of Training (NEETs) and Not Knowns at Post-16
 - Ofsted outcomes
 - Percentages of persistent and severe absence

These different types of accountability data will be reported with differing levels of frequency as they respond to and are articulated within the strategy action plan.

Commitment to partnership working

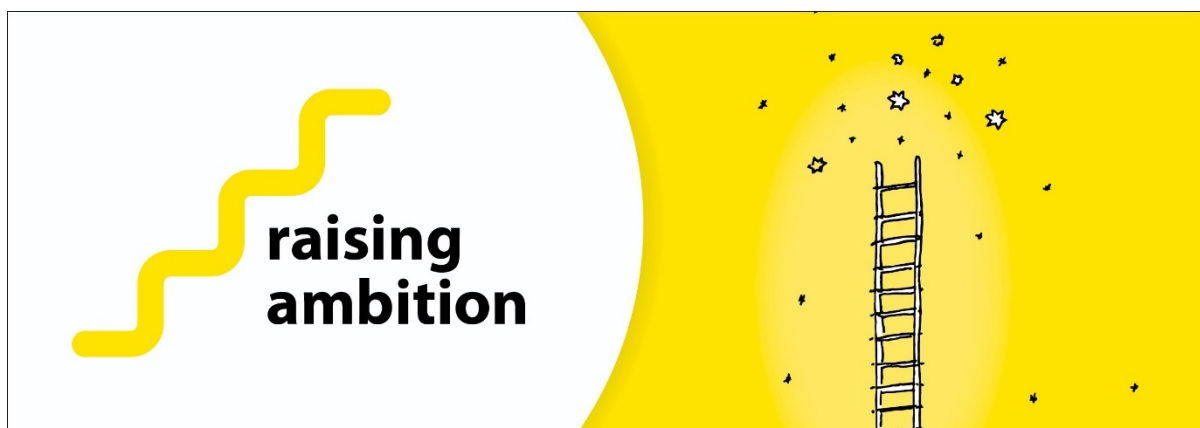
KCC is committed to developing strong strategic relationships with key partners and understands that this is fundamental to achieving the ambitions and aims set out in this strategy. It recognises the contributions made by professional organisations, key delivery partners, DfE funded teaching schools and curriculum hubs, wider stakeholders (such as faith groups, charities, professional and commercial providers), as well as provider associations who are representative of parts of the sector. Partnership working brings immense value and KCC is committed to fostering strong, collaborative relationships based on mutual respect, trust and aligned objectives. The continued commitment of key stakeholders is therefore vital to ensure effective partnership working. In recognition of this, we will reach out to, and work collaboratively with, key stakeholders to develop a better partnership working agreement.

Three areas of focus

We will focus on the following three areas for our children and young people, our schools and providers and for the whole sector:

1. **Raising ambition** - we will be ambitious for all children and young people by creating firm floors that provide secure starts and long ladders to enable everyone to reach beyond expectations.
2. **Enabling curiosity** - we will enable children and young people to be ready to learn and we will support and encourage them to explore their interests and wider horizons.
3. **Building resilience** - we will build resilience for the education system by addressing barriers and encouraging effective, collaborative working .





Learners said:

'I want to achieve my ambitions and live a successful life.'

'From my education, I want the ability to be independent, intellectual and be open to any opportunities which may come to me in the future.'

Parent and carers said:

Paul: 'I want my children to feel safe, valued, have opportunities to be challenged and have fun, and to feel like they can make the next steps.'

Charlotte: 'I want my child to be able to do the best that they can, and for the school to recognise this and support them to get there.'

Professionals said: Raising ambition means

'A fully inclusive education that enables every child to achieve their potential.'

'Providing the support that every child needs.'

Why 'ambition'?

The DfE's Teachers' Standards begin with 'Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils'. Being ambitious is important because it inspires excellence and can push pupils beyond their own expectations and perceived limits. In Kent, we are ambitious for all our children and young people, for our professionals, for all our education providers and for the sector as a whole. Raising ambition can be achieved in various ways. For example, by setting goals, identifying pathways, moving towards independence or pursuing higher education. For the sector, it may involve improving inclusion, raising progress outcomes or doing well when inspected by Ofsted. All efforts to raise ambition recognise the importance of progress and the range of different starting points, but clearly emphasise the desire to provide an education that enables everyone to do their best. We are ambitious for every child to achieve their personal best, to make strong progress and to have good pathways.

Our work on raising ambition will focus on the following priorities:

Ambition 1: High standards and strong progression for all children

Ambition 2: Strong starting points and therefore better life chances from the very beginning

Ambition 3: Good pathways for all young people at post-16

Ambition 4: Great schools with strong Ofsted outcomes

Ambition 5: Meeting specific needs through inclusion and appropriate SEND provision

Ambition 6: Equality of opportunity

Ambition 1: High standards and strong progression

At a county level, Kent schools and providers, as well as children and young people do well against many of the key outcome measures. This is a testament to strong leadership and a workforce dedicated to ensuring that all children and young people are enabled to do their best. Ofsted inspections of our colleges, schools and early years settings find that a high percentage are taking effective action to raise standards. Our outcomes for statutory education are in line with national ones, but there is still improvement to make because every learner needs a great education.

Underneath the headlines, the data reveals that there are significant gaps for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with additional educational needs. Some children make significant progress, while others do not. There are also local gaps showing that children in certain parts of Kent have lower chances of performing well. Although our data changes year-on-year, this is a significant area of focus. In 2024, our key stage 2 reading and writing were strong, but our year 1 phonics data and key stage 2 maths outcomes need to improve.

The work on high expectations, standards and good progression starts with identifying issues, exploring the evidence, good decision making and drawing on relevant expertise. Data is vital for identifying priorities for improvement and helping to understand what is working well. The sector has access to a range of data to support this analysis, including our District Dashboard, which brings together all the inclusion related data. However, headline data is not the only way to identify successes or areas for improvement. Schools and other providers will use a range of data to ensure all learners are making progress and reaching their full potential. Progression, engagement and good pathways are equally important indicators.

We will achieve strong outcomes and good progress for all children and young people, and respond to trends, locality gaps, attainment gaps and cohort needs, particularly for those who are disadvantaged and have SEND by:

- Advocating for detailed data analysis to identify, develop and promote programmes and interventions that respond to the Kent-specific issues, trends, progress and attainment gaps, and the needs of different cohorts. Most MATs have school improvement functions or staff that will be doing this work. KCC's school improvement service, The Education People, supports this for maintained schools by using data effectively to develop and promote a broad training and consultancy offer that responds to specific national, local, key stage and school level priorities.
- Developing and promoting appropriate data dashboards so schools and providers have access to a range of data to support the analysis of inclusion for those with special needs. The data sets can be interrogated by individual institutions so they can develop an understanding of how they compare to groups of similar schools. It is also the key tool to support robust decision-making by Communities of Schools (once the system is fully rolled out) to ensure

High Needs Funding and other resources are effectively improving outcomes for those with special needs.

- Providing support to early years sector providers to ensure very high quality, inclusive provision that supports all children to reach their full potential, as measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and any indicators agreed as part of the Early Years Review.
- Utilising the expertise of the full range of delivery partners, including the Government-funded Teaching Schools and Curriculum Hubs, the local and national leaders of education and the newly established DfE School Improvement teams, alongside our local providers such as The Education People (TEP) and Kent Association of Leaders in Education (KALE). These partners support schools and providers to identify and address attainment gaps linked to cohort needs, specifically the attainment gaps for groups such as disadvantaged pupils, and subject gaps such as maths, through targeted, evidence-informed interventions and support.
- Working with maintained schools to identify patterns of underachievement, targeting schools with the greatest need for school improvement support and guidance, signposting the most appropriate evidence-based approaches, including a range of traded interventions and school-to-school support.
- Working through Governor Services to ensure governors have access to training that responds to identified knowledge gaps, particularly around the curriculum, so that schools have strong, well-informed governors who understand how to hold school leaders to account for the outcomes, standards and needs of their school.

Ambition 2: Strong starting points

A child's first 1,000 days, or the period from conception to age two, are the most crucial for the development of their body, brain, metabolism, and immune system. Positive early experiences shape the brain, support children to be school ready and help bridge disadvantage gaps. Our ambition for early years education and childcare in Kent is an exciting, vibrant, diverse, sufficient and sustainable sector that is of outstanding quality, achieves excellent outcomes and progress for all young children and is available, affordable and inclusive for all families. Early education and childcare within Kent is available through a large, diverse and constantly-shifting market of maintained (schools), private, voluntary and independent providers (including childminders). Although our Ofsted outcomes in the early years sector are overwhelmingly positive and above national, providing the quantity of places needed to meet the Government's new free entitlements agenda may be challenging, as is the early identification of needs and supporting parents. Beyond the sector, we want babies, very young children and their parents to have opportunities to engage in creative play.

We will achieve strong starting points and therefore better life chances from the very beginning of education by:

- Working with partners, particularly Public Health, health visitors and other health professionals, to exchange data to ensure there is a cross sector understating of the cohort and their families to inform strategic planning of services.
- Ensuring our youngest children are able to fully access their early years entitlement/s by aiming to ensure a sufficient, sustained early years and childcare market and the provision of information and advice to parents in relation to the nature of their entitlement/s and where and how these might be accessed.
- Encouraging and enabling parents and families to be involved in their children's learning at the earliest age via support offered by Family Hubs and other early years and childcare provision.
- The early identification of the needs of young children vulnerable to under achievement and responding to need quickly. The aim is to achieve this through the implementation of the Early Years Review recommendations.
- Supporting the sector to improve staff recruitment and retention in early years. We will respond to the sector's feedback by promoting the use of The Education People's Recruitment Hub and encouraging use of its Recruitment Toolkit.
- Offering the early years sector advice, support and training (via commissioned and traded services) to continue to support inclusive, high-quality provision, as measured by Ofsted inspections and assessment of Early Learning Goals.
- Continuing to involve and engage Early Years and Childcare providers in the ongoing development in the market in Kent through strong, collaborative engagement activities such as the Early Years and Childcare Provider Association, early years collaborations, and the termly briefing and networking sessions.
- Continue to drive up quality and inclusivity in the Early Years and Childcare sector through the provision of commissioned and traded advice, support and training that targets and responds to sector need. This will also continue to be supported through the early years collaboration networks, which are well established to provide effective peer to peer support.
- Implementing the findings of the 2024 Early Years Review to improve our universal offer in early years education and provide a simpler, streamlined approach to the way targeted and specialist services are accessed and used to support children aged 0–5, particularly those with additional needs. We will ensure children have their needs identified accurately and assessed in a timely and effective way, so they receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time. This will be delivered through a robust offer of support at universal, targeted and specialist levels from September 2025, with a focus on professionals working alongside early years practitioners and using a coaching/mentoring approach to build confidence and capacity. It will include Dingley's Promise, which offers flexible training for early years children with

SEND. This revised approach will be underpinned and embedded through developing and delivering a core training offer by September 2025.

- Responding to feedback from the 2024 Early Years Review which identified the need to streamline bureaucratic processes and instead rely on the strong skills, knowledge and professionalism within the sector. This new approach will be underpinned and embedded by developing and delivering a core training offer by September 2025.
- Continuing to support and grow the work of Playground, a unique and innovative programme empowering the creativity of babies, young children and their families. Playground aims to promote and evidence the positive impact of creativity, which is vital for both healthy development and building the mental resilience of young children. Playground is a National Portfolio Organisation³ funded by Arts Council England. The next stage for this work is to secure investment for research and evaluation to evidence the powerful and transformational impact the programme has on families with babies and young children with additional needs. Playground's ambition is to work with families, teachers, artists and strategic partners to create a scalable model of practice to ignite significant positive change in the quality of creative learning and engagement opportunities for all young children with additional needs.

Ambition 3: Good pathways for all young people at post-16

Kent has a large and diverse post-16 sector with range of selective and non-selective sixth forms, three large and successful college-groups, and an array of training providers. A [review of the sector](#), published in 2022, and our own data, shows that students working at or below Level Two have fewer options, and are not always able to progress to good next steps. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24 there was a decline in the number of courses available at Level 2 and below. This will be one of the key areas to be addressed by Pathways for All. There has also been a lack of flexible provision for young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) delivered outside of school or college, which will be addressed by working alongside the DfE. There are not enough apprenticeships to meet demand, nor is there the appropriate scope of offer. We also know that specific support for SEND young people is needed to help them move into employment opportunities through supported internships, apprenticeships and paid employment. This is reliant on consistent access to high quality careers information, advice and guidance about the labour market and an increase in qualifications at Level 3 and above.

We will ensure better pathways for all young people at post-16 by:

- Working with our delivery partners, The Education People, providers, and the DfE. This will involve using the DfE's gap filling process to attract training providers to Kent and create additional places over the next few academic years. In turn, this will start rebuilding NEET and vulnerable learner provision in the county. Data trends indicate that more will be needed as reduced provision has led to a gradual increase in NEET numbers. The post-16 cohort

³ [National Portfolio 2023-26 | Arts Council England](#)

is growing considerably for the next few years, which will also place pressure on this provision. We will continue to work with the DfE to fill the identified gaps over coming years. This will also be addressed through the Pathways for All work. Over time, this should lead to a stabilisation of NEET numbers and an increase in the options for post-16 young people.

- Ensuring we have the data to understand the challenges faced by young people and the sector. We will continue to produce valued reports, such as the NEET Deep Dive and the Provision Gap analysis to support the sector to develop. As well as using sources such as the KentChoices system and existing services to support the sector-led Local Collaborative Partnership Areas (LCPAs) and providers to develop provision for all young people.
- Working with other partners (TEP, Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge, Careers and Enterprise Company, Medway Council, Kent Association of Training Organisations and Apprenticeship Ambassadors) to develop an apprenticeship strategy across Kent and Medway which will ensure the number and range of apprenticeships can increase and meet the various needs of our young people. The planned government drive to facilitate more apprenticeships from entry to higher level will provide more sustainable careers pathways.
- Working with providers and the TEP Supported Employment Service to embed the Supported Employment Education Framework. This will ensure that those with special needs have good pathways to employment and, where possible, can be independent. This will lead to an increase in the number of young people with SEND progressing into paid employment, in line with our planned Safety Valve outcomes.
- Supporting the sector to increase the use of a standardised approach to careers across the county, providing good information and raising aspirations. This will be achieved by working with a Pathways for All special interest group who are piloting a new framework, as well as our partners at The Education People, who will further develop the careers section on KentChoices. This will ensure that the county's young people have access to information to help them make good decisions about their future. Alongside this, the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) currently support schools to embed good practice as they work towards the Gatsby Benchmark and raise the aspirations of the young people they work with. This will streamline and support transition into post-16, and lead to good decision making and educational progression.

Ambition 4: Great schools with strong Ofsted outcomes

Kent currently exceeds the national average for the percentage of schools with a positive Ofsted outcome, but we are not complacent and know that maintaining strong, effective schools requires continuous focus. All children and young people should be able to access a great education and be enabled to make the best of their one chance at school. We will support schools to deliver an excellent education and achieve strong inspection outcomes by ensuring they understand what is required of them, they are evidence-informed, and by supporting them to recruit the right staff with access to the right training.

We will continue to support schools to be effective by:

- Ensuring schools have access to the most up to date information about inspection frameworks through sharing expertise, experiences, identified patterns and areas of focus. Using this intelligence and embedding Ofsted expertise into the work of school improvement will support schools to understand what is expected of them and support them to deliver a great education.
- Providing support for the accountability of maintained schools, ensuring they are effective and provide a great education for all children and young people. This includes integrating the use of the core standards and the graduated approach for children and young people who, for whatever reason, are struggling. Access to a range of commissioned and traded services and interventions will support schools to meet their accountability frameworks, their responsibility to their local community, and support KCC to fulfil its own duties as outlined in the statutory [Support and Intervention in Schools guidance](#), Nov 2024 (previously the Schools Causing Concern Guidance)
- Offering support for recruitment and retention to ensure the best staff are working in Kent schools. Where possible, we and our partners will network and share recruitment information to ensure schools and strong candidates are appropriately linked up. We will continue to support staff retention via signposting and providing a range of training and support opportunities to grow our own high-quality staff for all the roles within the sector. This includes providing support and induction for new headteachers, and working alongside our partners, teaching schools and curriculum hubs as they deliver national professional qualifications, SEND inclusion and curriculum-focused training as part of evidence-informed professional development.
- Working alongside our sector partner, KALE, to continue to embed the legacy of the EEFective Kent Project, a partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation, which focused on building strong evidence-informed practice across the sector to enable all pupils to do their best in school. The [KEEHUB](#) (Kent Education Evidence Hub) is the sector-led group, hosted and organised by KALE who are working with EEF research schools and KCC to facilitate access to, and champion, high quality evidence-informed practice at all levels within the sector.

Ambition 5: Meeting specific needs through inclusion and appropriate SEND provision

A small number of children are born with significant and complex needs, some of whom will require support for life. Many children and young people have additional needs at some point in their education journey, where comprehensive universal education provision or some additional help will get them back on track. Some children and young people fall somewhere on that continuum between high and low, temporary need.

Since 2020, KCC has been working with the education sector to better develop universal education provision and targeted support, alongside developing staff knowledge and skills to meet a range of needs we know are in the pupil population.

The approach is described in A Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education ([CATIE](#)) and has been supported by a range of well-attended training and development programmes. The work on strengthening SEND inclusion education provision is multi-faceted and includes clarifying expectations of individual schools' offers as well as how the system - which comprises mainstream schools, mainstream plus (Specialist Resource Provision and Alternative Provision) and special schools - functions.

We will meet need through inclusion and appropriate SEND provision by:

- Continuing to deliver [A Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education](#) (CATIE) which sets out the strategic direction for inclusive education across Kent for 2024–2028. CATIE sets out four priorities:
 1. Supporting a school-led system to deliver the highest quality core inclusive education
 2. Providing additional intervention and support with engagement and integration
 3. Inclusive education is part of a broader, holistic and joined-up offer of support
 4. Ensuring smooth transition between education phases

This strategic work was co-produced and seeks to support all education providers to provide the best education for the full range of the needs of our children and young people.

- Setting up communities of schools to ensure appropriate resourcing and support for all children and young people with special needs in mainstream schools. The work is establishing groups of schools who are able to collectively agree the type of additional support they need, informed by the data drawn from the District Dashboard, amongst other sources and consider the appropriate resourcing needed. This work will establish strong partnership working based around local needs, focused on evidence-informed practices to ensure all children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools are appropriately supported to achieve to their full potential in education and beyond.
- Developing a sustainable SEND education system that provides for the full continuum of SEND need. Work has been underway for several years to reform the education system in Kent with a particular focus on the capacity of mainstream schools and providers, strengthening the provision of SEND support and embedding the graduated approach. Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) provides more intensive support in mainstream setting, and in order to ensure a consistent offer for pupils across the county, a review was undertaken. This has resulted in a consistent service level agreement being put in place and proposals to expand, assisting in identifying the added value of attending an SRP. The final strand of this work is focusing on Kent's special schools and working to support the sector to evolve and meet the needs of the pupils with the most complex needs identified through our SEND Sufficiency Plan. The Localities Model of School Inclusion, Specialist Resource Provision and the Special Schools Review work all focus on developing a rich, full and appropriate continuum of provision for need. These

areas of work come together to form a cohesive continuum of education provision and ensure all parts of the sector are enabled to appropriately support and deliver education for all our children and young people with SEND.

- Developing and delivering a new strategic pathway to support neurodiverse (ND) young people and their families, to ensure the best possible outcomes. With the aim of providing earlier support for this growing need type, health, education and social care colleagues have been working together to explore alternatives. Informed by the evaluation of the very successful This is Me (a programme of early identification and school-based intervention), work has been underway to develop a new ND pathway. Following a successful bid for DfE funding, we will deliver one of the national pilots of [Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools](#) (known as PINS). This strategically planned project further strengthens the working relationships between health and education services. The strategy is based on whole school educational approaches and develops environments where neurodiverse pupils can flourish and succeed. A menu of support, bespoke to individual schools, will be delivered using professional resource networks. Links between peer schools are also established to ensure a consistency of understanding and improve the quality of delivery. The approach will be evaluated and rolled out across the county over time.
- , we plan to develop a three tier AP system, PRUs, Independent placement and other none education setting such as tuition. This will need to align with the current government policy. When there is clarity from the government, we Develop a strategic approach to all CYP who are not in mainstream education. In line with the government Alternative Provision (AP) roadmap
- Delivering, with our partners, the Kent SEND Strategy, 2025-2028 which aligns with the vision of the Integrated Care Framework to 'support children and young people to achieve through living healthy, safe lives in which they feel seen and included'. This means all children and young people should feel valued and supported, that our work should be centred on inclusivity and care and that all our actions should align with helping children reach their full potential. The strategy sets out five key ambitions:
 1. Improve the lived experience of children and young people and their families
 2. Provide access to the right support at the right time in the right place
 3. Achieve the best outcomes through inclusion and participation
 4. Work together with children and young people with SEND and their families
 5. Prepare for a successful future at the earliest opportunity.

The SEND Strategy will deliver against the Kent Children's and Young People's Outcomes Framework (Appendix 2), and is a joint commitment to the goal of providing every child with the support they need to succeed.

Ambition 6: Equality of opportunity

Kent values and supports all its young people and is eager to ensure that barriers to education are addressed. As a public body, we have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality of opportunity, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, and support diversity. In education, we have a duty to champion the needs of vulnerable children and young people so they have every opportunity to succeed. This is done by ensuring that every child and young person has an equal opportunity to make the most of their education and to succeed. We therefore work to remove barriers, make necessary adjustments and support every child and young person to be successful. This ranges from ensuring all have access to good school places, promoting and supporting school attendance, working with the most vulnerable children and young people through Virtual School Kent (VSK), the local adoption partnership and supporting our schools to be accessible.

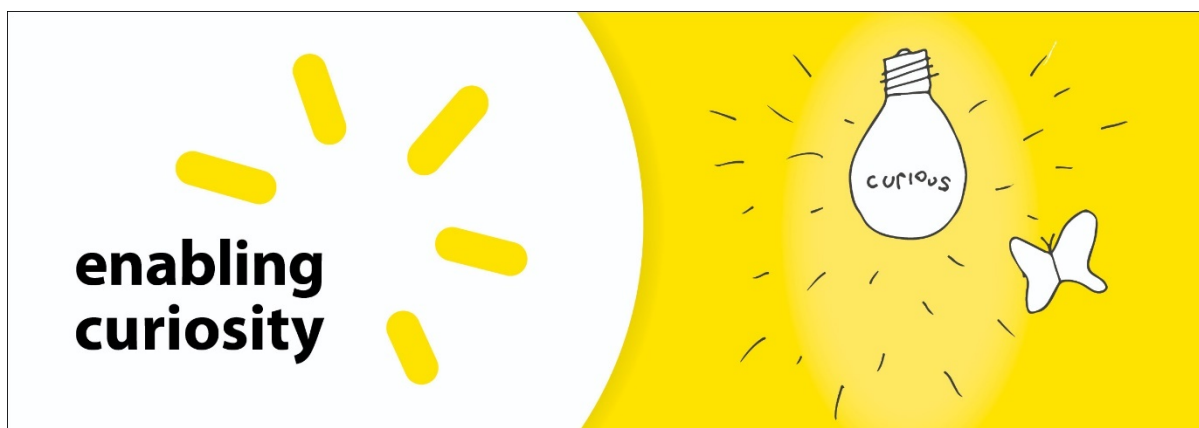
We will improve equality of opportunity for children and young people in Kent by:

- Commissioning the right places for [education provision](#) in Kent. The plan sets out the council's approach to school place commissioning. Good commissioning supports delivery of the council's duty to ensure every child can access a nursery/school place, promotes and champions parental preference, and raises standards of education in the county. It is shaped by, and responds to, the ambitions of this education strategy and its policy directions.
- Providing fair access to nursery and school places by supporting those who are most vulnerable. Kent's annual admissions scheme sets out how we fulfil our statutory duty to offer new school places and support those families that move within the school year. We work with all Kent schools to set reasonable entry criteria to increase opportunities for vulnerable groups, including priority to all Kent Grammar schools for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These same access principles are applied to Kent's centralised grammar testing arrangements, ensuring adjustments are made to give all pupils the opportunity to take part to the best of their ability.
- Reducing absence and improving attendance by supporting all providers with advice, guidance and training in line with statutory guidance. This includes investigating cases of children missing out on education, supporting with enforcement activities, working to ensure children in entertainment and employment are safeguarded, and acting in support of children and young people placed in pupil referral units (PRUs) to ensure they are all able to access a good education.
- Supporting the education workforce to be aware of inequalities, understand policy and build stronger practices. Through traded specialist consultancy, support, training, advice, coaching, and mentoring, the TEP Equalities Adviser can support schools and providers in promoting equality and diversity in their organisation, and equal opportunities for all pupils. This work aims to uphold equality, promote inclusion, ensure equality of opportunity through a needs-led approach, eliminate discrimination and harassment, and to promote recognition and respect for diversity.

- Improving the educational experiences and achievements of adopted children by directly and indirectly ensuring teachers and those working within education settings are trauma informed, understand the challenges of adoption, and are provided with appropriate tools and strategies to support adopted children and their parents. Greater awareness and better support will be achieved through better communication, workshops, training, education planning meetings and utilising the offer of mediation in some situations.
- Advocating and being ambitious for those children and young people open to or within Youth Justice and Adolescent Early Help. We aim to provide a suitable educational offer, including progression to full-time timetables, by promoting attendance. This includes implementing education risk management and/or recovery plans through sector collaboration. Plans and assessments will be shared between the Youth Justice team and schools or settings to jointly manage the risks. It will also involve celebrating their successes and taking every opportunity to accredit children's Youth Justice activities through the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance framework. In our wider partnerships, we will support schools to understand and participate in multi-agency contextual safeguarding approaches. This work will support vulnerable children to remain in suitable education, thus providing secure starting points.
- Improving access to education for disabled pupils and discharging the council's duty under the Equality Act 2010. KCC will implement an education accessibility strategy setting out how it and its maintained schools are improving access for disabled pupils to the curriculum, the physical environment of schools and the information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.
- Exploring ways of building stronger partnership working arrangements across KCC directorates, and other relevant organisations, to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and young people's access to equality in education. GRT Resident Service and various parts of the Education Directorate have different roles and types of information but no clear channel or process for sharing this. Finding better ways to facilitate joined up working could improve support and lead to better engagement in education and better services for the GRT community. Establishing a task and finish group to explore and establish a systematic approach would support the delivery of equal opportunities for this group of children and young people.
- Promoting equality of opportunity for service children. Through the role of the Civilian-Military Liaison Adviser, the service children cohort are fully included and effectively integrated into school life by celebrating diversity, supporting effective liaison, and through advocacy. This is in line with the Armed Forces Act 2021, which stipulations that service children should not be disadvantaged due to their parents' service.
- Advocating for the educational outcomes and progress of children and young people who are in care, those who have been in care or who have been supported by social services and those who are living in kinship care. This ongoing work is delivered by the Virtual School Kent (VSK) and includes advocating for trauma informed practices to support children and young people

who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, championing the support needed for the children and young people to do well in school and ensuring relevant agencies have a joined-up approach with the school to ensure that these children make good progress, achieve good educational outcomes and improved life chances comparable to their peers.

- Ensuring the Education Programme has capacity to meet the demand for delivering a suitable, high quality education, on behalf of KCC under Section 19 of the 1996 Education Act, for those who would otherwise be missing education either due to permanent exclusion from primary school or to secondary aged pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and pupils awaiting a permanent placement who have an EHCP. This bespoke service is tailored to each pupil's individual needs and prepares them for reintegration back into school. By ensuring that the offer is engaging, enjoyable, effective, individualised and safe for all, children and young people who might otherwise have been disenfranchised are supported to stay in education.
- Identifying and supporting children missing education and undertaking education other than at school. Under the Education Act 1996, KCC has the duty to identify children who are not receiving a suitable education. To deliver this, we will collaborate closely with schools, alternative provisions and relevant stakeholders to gather comprehensive data on registered pupils, maintain an accurate and up-to-date database of all children in Kent, and actively engage with families to emphasise the importance of education and the suitable options available. Where parents are home educating their children, we will ensure that they understand their responsibilities and provide necessary support and signposting.



Learners said:

'I value the extra-curricular activities available at my school.'

'[I like] to learn about the wider world – our past, present and future and to be able to enjoy it'

Parents and carers said:

Laura: *'[Education is] encouraging and supporting enquiring minds, understanding how and why, where to look for answers.'*

Liz: *'[Education is] giving children exciting opportunities to listen to, to see and to get involved in new experiences.'*

Professionals said:

'I want to feel that everyone working with my school wants my school to flourish, and as a result my children flourish.'

Why 'enabling curiosity'?

Curiosity is a powerful driver in the learning process for children and young people. It ignites interests and passions, develops creativity and uncovers hidden talents. Curiosity encourages learners to delve deeper into areas of interest and fosters a love for discovery and knowledge. Enabling curiosity involves creating an environment where children and young people feel secure about learning and enabled to think creatively and to explore. Although good Key Stage 2 and GCSE outcomes open up a range of opportunities, there are other skills and experiences that broaden horizons and set children and young people up for a good future.

By enabling curiosity, we support young learners to become enthusiastic, lifelong learners who are eager to pursue their interests and talents. We work with parents, schools and a wide range of other providers, including the NHS and charities, to provide a breadth of opportunities and to ensure children and young people are able to actively participate in learning.

In schools, a focus on the wider curriculum ensures a breadth of subjects and learning experiences are available to learners. All children and young people need access to a diverse and balanced curriculum, both within and beyond school, to support their overall development.

Our work on enabling curiosity will focus on the following priorities:

- Curiosity 1: Effective pastoral care that supports positive attitudes to education
- Curiosity 2: Great teaching and learning that fosters curiosity
- Curiosity 3: Good health that enables good participation in education
- Curiosity 4: Good physical fitness that enables participation in education
- Curiosity 5: Rich opportunities to develop passions and talents within and beyond the classroom for creativity, the arts, culture and music

Curiosity 1: Effective pastoral care that supports positive attitudes to education

Good pastoral care supports the wider wellbeing of children and young people by creating a nurturing, supportive environment where learners can thrive both academically and personally. It supports children and young people to feel safe, supported and happy in education. This ranges from promoting a strong pastoral culture in schools, providers and across the county. It places the child at the centre of the policy and practice of the organisation, often through maintaining strong positive relationships. By focusing on these relational approaches, professionals and the sector can better understand and meet needs.

We will develop strong pastoral support for children and young people and their families by:

- Championing the role of pastoral care and encouraging schools and providers to be brave in their personal development strategy. We are championing a 'whole school approach' to nurture, developing data sets to support school self-evaluation and allowing schools, through the community of schools' model, to discuss whole school and cohort level strategies so that all children are included. This will support our ambition to strengthen independence and for all children to live fulfilled lives.
- Developing stronger approaches to transition at the key points in a children and young people's educational experience. We will explore ways of improving the experience for both the education providers and for the children and young people and their families. We will explore building this into the Communities of Schools work. In practice, this will involve better sharing of experiences and skills to jointly improve the experience of children and young people, leading to a more uniform approach to transition across the different phases and between different types of schools.
- Embedding and supporting the delivery of the Nurturing Kent Programme, which involves the National Nurturing Schools Programme being rolled out to 300 Kent schools over three years. The programme is bespoke to each setting and involves support for quality first teaching and learning, to embed a nurturing culture. It celebrates what schools already do well, whilst championing areas to improve with regular guidance and support. It promotes

healthy outcomes for children and young people by focusing on developing social and emotional wellbeing alongside academic learning.

- Supporting parents and schools with a range of learning opportunities through the [Community Learning and Skills](#) to develop an understanding of issues such as autism and ADHD through to managing children's behaviour or understanding teenagers. These aim to deepen understanding and support positive relationships with education providers as all parties come together to support the pastoral needs of the children and young people.

Curiosity 2: Great teaching and learning that fosters curiosity

The delivery of learning and the decisions around the wider curriculum all provide opportunities for schools and providers to generate and embed curiosity. Developing curiosity and responding to interests are powerful driving forces in the classroom which can support pupils to learn more effectively. It can significantly improve academic performance as children and young people's brains are more receptive to learning and retaining information. Importantly, it makes learning more effective and enjoyable.

Through traded and commissioned services for Kent schools and providers, we will cultivate curiosity by:

- Promoting, as part of school improvement work, a range of approaches that support schools and providers, and their staff to develop and deliver a curriculum built around curiosity. This will be through:
 - Professional development: Providing teachers with training on innovative teaching methods that encourage inquiry-based learning.
 - Resource allocation: Ensuring schools have access to diverse and engaging educational materials that spark students' interest.
 - Collaborative learning: Promoting collaborative projects and group activities that stimulate curiosity and peer learning.
 - Supportive environments: Creating a supportive atmosphere where students feel safe to ask questions and explore new ideas.
 - Customised programmes: Offering tailored programmes that cater to the unique interests and needs of each student, encouraging them to pursue their passions.
- Supporting schools and providers to make good decisions about the wider curriculum as part of school improvement and in response to the Ofsted focus on personal development. This includes supporting schools to effectively deliver curriculum subjects such as citizenship, RE and other areas such as personal, social, health and economic education, and age-appropriate relationships and sex education that contribute to pupils' personal development. This will ensure that all have access to a diverse and balanced curriculum that supports good engagement.

Curiosity 3: Good health that enables good participation in education

Good health

Physical health and wellbeing directly impact education. A child's ability to learn and thrive in education is dependent on being able to attend consistently and engage with learning. This focus aligns with the [System Integrated Care Strategy](#) which has a shared objective around Best Start in Life and a focus on helping pre-school and school-age children and young people achieve their full potential. Kent and Medway's integrated care system involves a wide range of partners including [NHS Kent and Medway](#) and KCC, to plan and deliver joined up health and care service to improve residents' lives. By supporting the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of all children and young people in Kent we will help to ensure better overall outcomes and support engagement in education.

In partnership with Public Health and the NHS, we will improve the health of children and young people in Kent by:

- Promoting the understanding and value of a [trauma-informed approach](#) in schools via eLearning, briefings, Family Hubs and the work of safeguarding leads to increase the understanding of the benefits of this approach in schools. This will increase the number of trauma informed schools across the county with better outcomes for the school, its staff and learners. It will improve the emotional health, wellbeing, behaviours and attendance of learners, and therefore improve the outcomes for schools.
- Supporting schools and providers to embrace the opportunities that the curriculum provides to develop children's understanding of how to keep their minds and bodies healthy via effective communication and sharing approaches. In addition, we will utilise all available tools to support families.
- Embedding the Asthma Friendly Schools programme by encouraging schools to take up the [online offer](#) of training. This will support the implementation of asthma focused policies and procedures to improve asthma awareness and management in schools. This will be via a guide, the use of templates and checklists, and free online training which will help schools become asthma friendly and improve outcomes for pupils with asthma in primary, secondary and special needs schools in Kent. The programme will ensure schools:
 - Develop a management plan for each child
 - Identify a named individual responsible for asthma in each school
 - Develop a policy for inhaler techniques and care of children with asthma
 - Develop a policy for emergency treatment
 - Provide asthma training and education for staff
 - Develop a system for identifying children who are missing school because of their asthma or who are not taking part in sports or other activities due to the condition.

Curiosity 4: Good physical fitness that enables participation in education

The Chief Medical Officer recommends⁴ that children and young people do at least 60 minutes a day of moderate intensity physical activity, or 20 minutes a day for disabled children and young people, to improve their health and wellbeing. In addition to the physical benefits, evidence shows that being active also builds confidence and social skills, improves concentration and learning, creates a sense of achievement, reduces stress and helps maintain a healthy weight. Schools who embed physical activity into the school day have seen improved attendance, attainment, behaviour, concentration and engagement of pupils, plus improved links with family and the local community. In Kent, only 45.5% of children aged 5-16 years are [active enough](#)⁶, (the national average is 47%). Girls with a disability, from the least affluent families and from culturally diverse communities, are the least likely to be active. There are a wide range of opportunities for children and young people to be active. However, they are not accessible to all, which is why schools play a vital role. Active Kent and Medway work with trusted partners to support schools to provide positive experiences for all students to increase levels of participation and improved health and wellbeing.

Through the work of Active Kent and Medway, schools will be able to encourage more children and young people to develop a lifelong habit of physical activity by:

- Taking a data and insight-led approach to prioritising our support to schools to reduce the inequalities gap in access to physical activity. Supporting schools to complete the Sport England Active Lives Survey and receive a bespoke report to help to identify strengths and opportunities which will lead to school improvement. Sharing information and good practice will provide practical examples of how schools can increase levels of physical activity, particularly of their less-active students.
- Taking a whole school approach to school improvement through physical activity via our Everyday Active Schools programme for primary schools. This includes up-skilling all staff and providing resources to deliver active lessons, breaks, and clubs. We will upscale the programme through trusted partners such as School Games Organisers and develop the programme for SEND and secondary schools. We will also collaborate with Schools Health to identify opportunities to create links with weight management interventions.
- Working with partners, including School Games Organisers, to deliver the School Games programme for less-active students. This will deliver inspirational events and festivals which encourage students to be curious and willing to engage in new opportunities to be active. We will monitor and evaluate the impact to inform future planning and share the learning to help schools provide new activities and increase engagement in sport and PE.
- Providing advice and guidance to secondary schools to engage with less-active students through consultation, using youth voices to co-design different types of activity. We will support targeted projects, including activity programmes for

⁴ [Physical activity guidelines: UK Chief Medical Officers' report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Youth Sport Trust Key Facts Sheet](#)

⁶ [Children's activity levels hold firm but significant challenges remain](#), Sport England

students with mental health challenges to build their confidence and resilience. It will be vital to create links between schools and trusted providers of sport and physical activity who are skilled in breaking down the barriers and providing a positive experience. We will provide advice around the development of schools' sports facilities and opening them to the local clubs and groups. This will improve links with the local community and generate income to cover the costs.

- Collaborating with trusted partners to develop a workforce who are highly skilled in improving the physical literacy of all students. We will do this by identifying the gaps in knowledge and skills and providing training for school staff and local providers. In addition, we will develop the future workforce by coordinating training for young leaders to enable them to volunteer in schools and in the community, developing their confidence and creating a sense of achievement. It will be essential to support the training of students in Key Stage 4 and post-16 to achieve coaching qualifications which can lead to employment.

Curiosity 5: Rich opportunities to develop passions and talents within and beyond the classroom for creativity, culture, art and music.

Kent's children and young people benefit from a high number of established arts organisations with excellent learning programmes, as well as a community of practitioners with strong reputations for their excellent work with children and young people both in and out of formal education. Cultural education plays a key role in bringing school communities together and strengthening parental engagement which, in turn, has a large and positive impact on children's learning. Evidence⁷ shows that creative and cultural activity can enhance pupils' aspirations, ambitions, discipline and confidence, leading to a positive impact on future employability, life skills, health and wellbeing.

Evidence published by the Cultural Learning Alliance in 2017⁸, demonstrates that engagement in arts and cultural activity will improve a range of educational outcomes, develop skills and behaviours, and support good health. These include a 17% increase in cognitive ability, better achievements in core subjects such as maths and English, and higher long-term employability achievements.

We know there is scope to enhance creative learning opportunities for more children and young people, to provide more opportunities for work experience, and be clearer in signposting pathways to careers in the creative and cultural industries. The challenges to be addressed include those faced in previous cultural learning programmes where creative cultural organisations found it difficult to establish links and develop ongoing relationships with schools.

Family learning also plays a crucial role in children's education. Research⁹ shows that effective parental engagement can positively impact on academic success and lead to learning gains. Parents and carers are the first teachers for young children and can foster curiosity and joy in learning through everyday experiences.

⁷ [Key Research Findings: the value of cultural learning](#), Culture Learning Alliance

⁸ [Key Research Findings: the value of cultural learning](#), Culture Learning Alliance

⁹ [Working with Parents to support children's learning](#), The Education Endowment Foundation

We will create opportunities to develop passions and talents within and beyond the classroom through creativity, culture, arts and music by:

- Delivering the '[Kent Cultural Strategy](#), Inspirational creativity: Transforming Lives Every Day,' which aims to:
 - Ensure that all children and young people in Kent have access to high quality culture from an early age and on their own terms
 - Promote cultural learning with improved careers guidance and vocational learning opportunities to develop employability, social and creative skills
 - Enable children and young people to become respected as commissioners, curators and producers of culture as much as they are audiences and participants.
- Promoting and broadening access for all children and young people in Kent to a variety of high-quality creative activities within education and beyond. Working with creative partners, we will develop a plan to promote and provide delivery in schools, including work on breaking down barriers to engagement, and by testing the outcomes of cultural engagement across a range of art forms. We will establish a strategic methodology for delivering structured creative learning outcomes as part of everyday education in our schools to broaden children's horizons, empowering them to reach their full potential.
- Continuing to deliver programmes such as Culture Camps, which offer young people an opportunity to get creative, work directly with professional artists/performers, have high-quality cultural experiences and develop new and transferable skills for the workplace.
- Ensuring [The power of music to change lives: A National Plan for Music Education](#) is available, promoted, supported and delivered throughout schools in Kent. The National Plan for Music Education sets out the Government's expectations for music in schools to ensure that music is delivered as a statutory curriculum subject in key stages 1, 2 and 3 and that schools provide opportunities for children and young people to learn to play musical instruments, to sing and to play in groups. The Music Hub for Kent & Medway, led by Kent Music, has been established to promote and support great music teaching in schools through support, guidance and advice. It aims to increase the quality of the offer and the breadth of take up.
- Working to promote and integrate excellent music teaching to support educational progress and outcomes. Evidence shows that where music is integrated into the life of a school, the whole school benefits. Having excellent music provision in education will enhance attainment overall and lead to improved educational progress and outcomes.
- Developing and offering a wide range of creative family learning opportunities. [Community Learning and Skills](#) provide a wide range of fun, family learning courses that develop creativity and an excitement about learning for children to share with parents and carers. These include a wide range of interests from art to science, technology, engineering and maths. Through shared interactive learning experiences, children are supported to understand that curiosity is valuable and that learning is fun.



Learners said:

'[I want school] to support, reassure and understand me.'

'[I want] teachers that like teaching and want to be there.'

Parents and carers said:

Jacqui: 'It's okay to get things wrong, it's all learning.'

Natasha: '[I want] my child to be happy to go to school, to be able to access learning, to be able to make friendships, be resilient.'

Professionals said:

'[I want] alignment and transparency to allow schools to work together in a landscape where all children belong to all of us.'

'[We need] facilitation and support of true cross phase / cross service collaboration'

Why 'building resilience'?

Resilience is vital for our children and young people, our schools and education providers, and for the wider system.

Increasing mental health needs, the Covid legacy and the ever-changing shape of the future, mean resilience is vital for our children and young people. It is also vital for our schools and providers in the face of political change, financial challenges and the changing frameworks under which they provide education.

Resilience is similarly vital for KCC, as we face similar financial and regulatory challenges to schools and providers. The statutory responsibility for maintained schools, as set out in the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#) and in guidance, needs to be balanced with a wider responsibility for pupil place planning, championing the needs of those who are vulnerable, and the need to come together and create cohesion across a diverse range of sector.

Our work on building resilience for children and young people, providers and the system will focus on the following priorities:

Resilience 1: Strong, well-integrated safeguarding

Resilience 2: Effective support for mental health

Resilience 3: Enhance system-wide cohesion through convening

Resilience 4: Strengthen and support the self-improving system

Resilience5: Future-proof the system

Resilience 1: Strong, well-integrated safeguarding to ensure children and young people are safe

Safeguarding is at the core of all work in education. It keeps children and young people safe and supports resilience. Kent was rated 'outstanding' for its safeguarding practice in 2022, a position confirmed during the recent Ofsted-focused visit in January 2024. Building on our success, a key priority is ensuring our outstanding safeguarding practice is evident across the multi-agency safeguarding partnership. The updated Working Together Statutory Guidance (2023) and the Children's Social Care National Framework affirm that successful outcomes for children rely on education (schools, colleges, early years, and childcare settings) working together across the whole system of help, support, and protection for children and their families, taking a systemic, relational and collaborative approach to service delivery.

We will ensure the strong and successful delivery of well-integrated, multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to keep children and young people safe in education, and develop the life-skills to keep them safe in a challenging world by:

- Delivering a multi-agency Kent Practice Framework for working with children and their families. By focusing on the priorities laid out in the national framework, including the role of advocacy, we will ensure that the voices of children and families are at the centre of everything we do via an increased focus on social connections, inclusion, family solutions, and resources, all from a strengths-based perspective. There will be an e-learning practice framework curriculum supporting knowledge and skills required for the lead practitioner role.
- Delivering and promoting DfE practice direction. This empowers education providers through direct representation, information sharing, reflection and learning within both the operational and managerial side of safeguarding work.
- Integrating the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and Education Safeguarding Service to increase capacity, share data and intelligence. This will provide more direct outreach support for education settings, particularly to those in need of safeguarding support. We will increase Designate Safeguarding Lead (DSL) catch ups, subsidised training and safeguarding reviews with a purposeful focus on early years settings.
- Establishing Family Hubs across Kent as a delivery system for local authorities and their partners to provide family help. These hubs will offer multi-agency professional and community resources and networks to enhance and support children's resilience and their ability to achieve positive educational progress and outcomes.

Resilience 2: Good mental wellbeing that supports children and young people to be resilient and do well in education and in life.

Good mental wellbeing is crucial for engagement in learning, academic success and building resilience. Some children and young people are more likely to experience poor mental wellbeing than others, particularly those with adverse childhood experiences. Schools and providers play an important role in identifying mental health needs at an early stage and by referring children and young people to appropriate support. It is vital that children and young people and their families get the most appropriate response to meet their needs. To do this, Kent will base the children and young people mental wellbeing system on the national [THRIVE Framework](#). Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) are a nationally funded programme to provide some schools with additional expertise and support. There is an aspiration in Kent to develop an offer of support for those schools not supported by a MHST.

We will support children and young people's mental wellbeing to develop resilience and ensure they are ready to engage in education by:

- Supporting schools to embed a whole school approach to emotional wellbeing and mental health. We will promote the take up of Senior Mental Health Lead training, implementing a robust personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, and provide mental health pastoral support to help schools to have a significant impact on the wellbeing of pupils. By March 2026, Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) will operate in a large number of Kent schools and other Kent schools will be provided with additional capacity when resources are available.
- Promoting the use of the full range of [NHS and DfE guidance](#) to support education settings as they work to sustain good mental health and resilience of children and young people and work with their families. This will be supported by regular communications directly to mental health leads and senior leaders. The guidance, '*Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges*'^[1] includes:
 - Principles of a whole school or college approach
 - Senior Mental Health Lead (SMHL) training
 - Resources for planning and implementing a whole school or college approach
 - Mental health and wellbeing resources for pupils, parents and teachers
 - Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs).
- Embedding i-THRIVE as the model to support the collaboration of system partners and services. i-THRIVE is an integrated, person-centered framework of support and services which enables young people, their families and professionals to jointly identify and agree needs and an appropriate response. This will be rolled out to all education settings. The ambition is for young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs to be met in a timely and appropriate way.

- Promoting and supporting school and provider workforce confidence with mental wellbeing. This will be delivered by facilitating regular workshops and events to share the most up-to-date information, to increase engagement and build confidence levels in the education workforce.
- Strengthening the resilience of children and young people by developing and implementing an approach to Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) in partnership with school leaders, pupil referral units (PRU) leaders and other specialist services. We are working to include this in our provision for the full continuum of need which will inform every part of the strategy, and by creating professional resource groups so that children and young people and their schools and providers can access support to meet their needs. Including SEMH in our sufficiency planning strategy with outreach and early intervention at the core will support integrated and effective delivery.

Resilience 3: Enhance system-wide cohesion

The role of the local authority (LA) in education has changed significantly over the past few years. Creating cohesion and convening across a complex system is an important part of KCC's work. This is in the context of an increasingly academised system, growing school autonomy, the pivot towards a self-improving system built on school-to-school support and the removal of government funding to LAs for school improvement.

In this context, strategic coherence that enables schools and settings to develop purposeful partnerships that improve the quality of teaching and learning, as well as outcomes and progress for learners, is vital. Local Government Association research¹⁰ highlights the pivotal role of the LA, particularly in developing strong relationships that respond to local needs and align to a clear vision.

Against this backdrop, KCC has the responsibility to ensure strategic coherence and enable system-wide collaborations and strong partnership working. It is also necessary to maintain our statutory responsibilities around accountability¹¹. KCC is uniquely placed to support the wider system through convening and facilitating across the full diversity of the sector to ensure it works effectively for all.

We will enhance system-wide cohesion, by:

- Establishing an oversight group or board of senior education leaders and partners to lead strategic partnership working so as to drive improvement. This will bring together representation from key education stakeholders to develop a fully rounded understanding of the issues and possible responses. It will work collectively and transparently to produce solutions to the complex challenges impacting on the quality of education. Bringing high-level cohesion into the system will improve system-wide relationships and awareness, enabling all to play their part in responding to evolving education challenges, and ensure all children and young people can thrive.

¹⁰ [Enabling School Improvement](#), Local Government Association

¹¹ [Support and intervention in schools](#), Guidance on intervention, DfE

- Jointly planning, establishing and embedding a school-to-school support model. Over time this localised, school-improvement partnership model should be the main mechanism for the delivery of school improvement support. These groups will utilise the expertise and partnership working structures from the communities of schools. The Education People will be a valuable partner in this work, helping to ensure that schools, particularly maintained schools, have the support and resources they need, or are entitled to. As the system becomes more established, leaders may choose to strategically share or pool their school improvement resources and expertise between schools for agreed local priorities, and to access a potentially wider range of funded, traded and school-to-school support. This aims to create and support a self-improving system¹² that fully utilises the rich expertise within the sector to ensure that all schools continue to thrive and improve progress and outcomes for children and young people.
- Embedding and enhancing the sector-led post-16 collaboration, [Pathways for All](#), to respond to post-16 issues as identified in the 2022 report. The eight recommendations remain a focus, and have been supplemented by a sector-written strategy called 'No Child Left Behind'. The initial focus is mapping cold spots to enable the development of provision to meet the needs of all young people. Eight Local Collaborative Partnership Areas (LCPAs) have been established, based on travel to learn patterns, to respond to the recommendations and other local issues for young people at post-16. The strategic board will focus on enhancing leadership and collaboration in support of sector cohesion.

Resilience 4: Support the self-improving system

Empowering school-to-school improvement with the right tools and appropriate support is fundamental to its success. Harnessing the breadth of expertise that sits in the system requires strong leadership, a commitment to continuous improvement, strong professional development and evidence-based working. Parts of the sector are already using the model effectively, but others have less experience of this way of working. Harnessing the wealth of expertise that sits in the sector is vital for the success of all and should be supported according to need.

We will support the self-improving system by:

- Supporting the development of the skills needed to identify, develop and deliver high-quality school improvement within the school-to-school support model. We will support procedures for identifying, accessing and developing expertise from both within the families of schools, and from outside these groups, so that schools can learn from the most effective practices, as demonstrated by the evidence of success. This responds to our duty to support collaboration, promote an inclusive system that meets the needs of the most vulnerable, and deliver a good education for the children and young people of Kent. This will be delivered through both commissioned and traded work by our school improvement partners, and will focus on:

¹² [A self-improving system: towards maturity](#), D H Hargreaves, National College for School Leadership

- Facilitating collaboration and knowledge sharing through building networks, organising collaborative projects and supporting knowledge transfer
 - Providing expert support and guidance through school improvement consultancy, leadership development, and data analysis and interpretation
 - Identifying, developing and delivering high-quality continuous professional development through tailored professional development and collaborative working
 - Promoting a culture of improvement through leadership development, staff engagement and celebrating success.
- Encouraging and supporting the analysis of the data to understand the needs of specific local cohorts of children and young people. KCC is committed to support, where it can, the data needs of the Pathways for All Local Collaborative Partnership Areas (LCPAs) with provision mapping and the work of the Countywide Approach To Inclusive Education (CATIE). As the school-to-school model is developed, we will explore appropriate ways to support the families of schools to have the data they need to enable them, and key partners, to identify clear improvement priorities, action plan, evaluate, and fulfil their primary responsibility to provide high-quality education.
 - Improving communication to support joined-up, effective working across the sector. Stakeholders confirm that Kelsi, KCC's main medium for communicating with the sector, is not currently delivering the information needed. In collaboration with the sector and internal partners, we will gather feedback and explore the needs of the sector. This will help us to plan and deliver a new website that supports with the right information. We will also establish a communications protocol in partnership with sector leaders to ensure clear and consistent channels for communication, accessible to all schools and providers, to ensure leaders feel neither bombarded or isolated.
 - Strengthening engagement with the sector via an annual education survey. This aims to ensure KCC has a regular, direct opportunities to listen to the wider sector. It will support our ability to evaluate the impact of our work, deepen our understanding of the issues and challenges being faced, inform decision making and ensure stronger communication.
 - Celebrating and promoting the best evidence-informed practice. We will explore working with external partners to raise the profile of evidence-informed educational practice across the profession. We aim to do this through establishing a 'festival of education', to ensure Kent educationalists are at the forefront of best practice and are inspired by sector experts.

Resilience 5: Future-proof the system

The future of education is poised to undergo significant change. The impact of new technologies, the response to climate change, the growing financial pressures that all parts of the sector face, and the impact of political and legislative change all need to be considered as we proactively plan for the future. Fundamentally, the future belongs to children and young people. We are responsible for providing them with

the skills and experiences they need to adapt to the future. The challenges are significant but so are the opportunities.

We will future-proof the system by:

- Working with the sector to jointly explore the threats and opportunities posed by artificial intelligence in the context of education. This will be achieved by establishing a working group that will draw on existing expertise to develop an understanding of the issues and look to establish guiding principles to support educators as they navigate the key issues.
- Supporting the green agenda and the drive towards net zero. Under the previous government, the DfE set out its [Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy](#), which included the key ambition of 'excellence in education and skills for a changing world: preparing all young people for a world impacted by climate change through learning and practical experience'. KCC will support this aim by providing advice and guidance to school leaders along with signposting schools and providers to various initiatives and resources which can be embedded within the curriculum. Whilst raising awareness in children and young people of the effects of climate change and the need to maintain a clean and safe environment, this work will also bring direct benefits to Kent with schools and providers actively engaging in initiatives that can reduce the county's carbon footprint and improve air quality.
- Supporting schools' resilience and emergency planning. Schools can only operate effectively if they are safe and secure, and agile enough to respond appropriately to any event or incident that could have an adverse impact on their ability to continue to provide education to their students. The DfE expects all education, childcare, and children's social care settings to have emergency plans in place. Additionally, under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, specific responsibilities are placed on the local authority to respond to major emergencies and incidents. On occasion, schools will be required to support in the council's response. For this reason, KCC Education, in conjunction with KCC Emergency Planners and the Kent Resilience Forum, ensure that schools have access to appropriate resources and advice to enable them to produce their emergency and business continuity plans. This work is led by the Assistant Directors Education, who should be a first point of contact for schools when incidents or situations arise.
- Supporting schools, particularly those heading towards financial difficulty, to manage both increasing staff and resource costs in the current tighter financial framework. By increasing awareness of the issues, and by offering training specifically focused on avoiding financial deficits, and through early interventions, we aim to ensure school budgets are well planned and schools can continue to securely deliver a good education.
- Securing financial sustainability via a review of the services to schools. This is assessing the funding and delivery of the services KCC provides to schools, particularly our maintained schools. In light of the Government's withdrawal of the School Improvement Grant and as the national context changes, it is important the council systematically reviews its support to schools. The

process seeks to provide clarity and equity across the different parts of the sector and ensure compliance with funding and grant sources. This is also to ensure the services continue to be relevant, effective and efficient, fair and importantly, enable schools to move forward with the autonomy and decision making expected by the current and future regulatory frameworks.

- Interpreting and influencing the national agenda. As the Government enacts policy and statutory change, KCC has a role to play in supporting the sector to understand the full implications and ramifications of any change - ensuring there is information, expertise and support, via a range of means such as newsletters, briefings or training. As the largest local authority by population in England - with over 600 schools, three large colleges and more than 900 early years providers - our collective voice is based on a deep, contextual understanding of the sector and the impact policy may have. By responding to consultations and proactively communicating, we seek to have a voice that both represents and advocates for the sector.

Stakeholder and partner engagement

This strategy was co-constructed by working with our key stakeholders, both those in the sector and KCC colleagues, all of whom are deeply committed to providing the best education for all children and young people of Kent. This took place in one-to-one discussions, small focus groups and wider stakeholder sessions. Our early years providers, schools and colleges shared their challenges and areas of focus.

We listened carefully to our children and young people during six engagement sessions with a total of 118 children and young people who want an education that engages them, helps them progress and gives them good opportunities. We ran six focus groups with parents and carers who wanted their child/ren to be happy, safe and have good next steps.

Many of our partners are referenced in the strategy; others have worked closely with KCC throughout the co-construction process. This includes but is not limited to:

- The Education People (TEP)
- Kent's teaching schools and curriculum hubs
- Provider associations, specifically Kent Association of Leaders in Education (KALE), Early Years Provider Association (EYPA) and Kent Education Evidence Hub (KEEHUB). Representatives from Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KsENT), Kent & Medway Grammar Schools Association (KMGSa), Kent Further Education (KFE) were involved.
- Canterbury, Rochester and Southwark Diocese
- A range professionals providers including Leadership Learning Securing Excellence (LLSE), Association of Education Advisers (AoEA) and Kent and Medway Progression Federation (KMPF)
- Adoption Partnership South East, National Health Service (NHS) and Active Kent and Medway (AKM) and Public Health.

There are a range of other services that support education including Human Resources, Finance, Public Health and Early Help. All have provided valuable insights and feedback that has shaped this strategy.

Thank you to all who have engaged and for your ongoing work to ensure all children and young people in Kent have a brilliant education.

The wider strategic framework

The following strategic work sits alongside and informs the work of this strategy.

- [A Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education \(CATIE\)](#)
- [Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing Support](#)
- [Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2024–2028](#)
- [Education Accessibility Strategy and Schools Access Initiative Policy](#)
- [Framing Kent's Future – Our Council Strategy 2022–2026](#)
- [Funding Services to Schools 2025–26](#)
- [Inspirational Creativity: Transforming Lives Everyday - our cultural ambition for Kent](#)
- [Integrated Care Strategy](#)
- [KCC Net Zero Action Plan](#)
- [Kent SEND Strategy 2025–2028](#)
- [Pathways for All – Kent 16 to19 Review](#)
- Relational Approaches to support School Belonging and Attendance: A guide and Toolkit
- [SEND Sufficiency Plan 2023](#)
- [Special Schools Review: proposed changes to designations and admissions guidance](#)

Glossary

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

AP – Alternative Provision

CATIE – A Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education

CEC – Careers and Enterprise Company

CME – Children Missing Education

DfE – Department for Education

DSL – Designate Safeguarding Lead

Education professionals – refers to everyone who works in education, including teachers, teaching assistants, all levels of leadership and governors.

EEF – Education Endowment Foundation

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

GRT – Gypsy, Roma and Traveller

KALE – Kent Association of Leaders in Education

KCC – Kent County Council

KS - Key Stages - [The national curriculum](#) is organised into blocks of years called 'key stages'

KEEHub – Kent Education Evidence Hub

LA – Local Authority

LAC – Looked After Children

LADO – Local Authority Designated Officer

LCPA – Local Collaborative Partnership Area

MATs – Multi-Academy Trusts

MHST – Mental Health Support Team

NHS – National Health Service

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

PE – Physical Education

PINS – Partnership of Inclusion of Neurodiverse Children in Schools

PRUs – Pupil Referral Units

Providers – refers to all the parts of the sector who provide education, from early years settings and childminders to post-16 colleges and training providers

Safety Valve Programme – a Department of Education programme to support local authorities

SATs – Single-Academy Trusts

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SENIF – Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund

SEMH – Social, Emotional and Mental Health

SMHL – Senior Mental Health Lead

TEP – The Education People

VSK – Virtual School Kent

Appendix One: Kent Children and Young People's Outcomes Framework

The framework is an essential part of our approach to supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and has been developed with input from young people themselves.

