

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

**An update on our work to improve the way schools and early years settings in South Gloucestershire deliver support to children with special educational needs**

I would like to share with you some details about the work we will be doing over the next few years that will improve the way we deliver inclusive education across all South Gloucestershire schools and Early Years settings. This is relevant to all parents and carers, and it will be of particular interest to you if you have a child with special educational needs. Giving all children in South Gloucestershire the opportunity to reach their fullest potential is our top priority as a council. Our schools and early years settings have a hugely positive impact on our children's learning and development, but the support that children with special educational needs require is a key area that we continually want to improve on.

To make sure that all children receive the best possible educational opportunities, we want all our schools and settings to embrace changes that will be implemented in the coming years and require some of them to work differently.

As a Council, we are working closely with all our schools in the district as well as with South Glos Parent Carers, our local parent carer forum who provide a strong and independent voice of families with children and young people with additional needs and disabilities, to develop improved approaches to meeting the needs of these children.

We call this approach [The South Glos Way](#): The way in which teachers, support staff and all professionals who work with children, from Early Years through to Further Education, support and equip them and their families on their journeys. This is about putting children at the centre and supporting them to thrive from pre-school and through all the changes and transitions in their lives. It supports the council's priority to give all our children and young people the best start in life. The Government has recently published an outline of proposed changes to the way children with special educational needs should be supported across all schools nationally so that increasingly, whatever their level of need, their local school will be equipped to offer a tailored and high-quality response to meeting their needs. The aim is to make the approach nationwide more consistent and more transparent. Much of what is proposed is consistent with our own plans and the approach we are taking across South Gloucestershire.

We have already begun, working closely with education, health and social care partners to improve outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) in South Gloucestershire, through our local [SEND Strategy](#) and developing our [SEND local offer](#).

A lot of positive work has been happening since the launch of the SEND strategy, in all our schools and settings. Through the investment and training we have already put in place, our mainstream schools and, more recently, early years settings too, have been working together to pool their skills and knowledge. This is so that they can support each other to improve early identification of need, ensure that the children can be assessed at the earliest age, and to provide the earliest intervention to meeting need.

This approach means that when appropriate more children can access the support required without necessarily needing an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). Although an EHCP may still be required, we want all schools and settings to be able to support children who may need

extra help more quickly. We know that sometimes, minor changes earlier on in a child's development can prevent the need for more significant interventions later.

When an EHC plan is required, we also want to ensure that the arrangements we have in place across local schools and settings work in the best interests of children, wherever the child lives in South Gloucestershire. This means adopting a single, consistent, and fair approach county-wide. As the population of children with special educational needs increases, we also want to ensure that financial resources are targeted effectively, based on the needs of the child, so that we can sustain a high-quality response across the County. A recent analysis of expenditure on special educational needs in South Gloucestershire highlights that we spend significantly more than the average local authority, yet the quality of all services and the educational outcomes of all children are not yet as good as we should expect. The reality is that we need to spend our money more effectively so that **all** children can get the best start in life, whatever their needs.

### **Changes to the way we fund and deliver support services for SEND in schools and early years settings**

We have been working closely with both mainstream and specialist schools and early years settings to develop proposals for a new comprehensive and transparent banding model, with new ways to allocate funding to schools to meet the needs of children who need support through an Education, Health, and Care Plan.

We have asked our schools to sign up to changes to the way we arrange, commission, and pay for support for young people with SEND. These changes are part of a larger plan to improve arrangements for SEND, summarised as follows:

- We will allocate the money we spend on supporting children and young people with SEND differently. Overall, funding for schools in mainstream is increasing, but a share of what is allocated specifically to support SEND services will be shifted from schools to deliver training and expertise in the early years sector, so that they can support children and their families earlier and better where early intervention will help children's development.
- We are introducing a transparent set of bands with funding levels attached to them so that whatever a child's needs are and wherever they go to nursery, school or college, there is fairness in allocating funding and the level of funding is proportionate to the needs of the child.
- We want all our mainstream schools to be more inclusive for pupils with a range of SEND so that more children can go to their local school with their friends and have an increasingly complex range of needs fully met. We also want to be able to offer more specialist care locally and reduce our reliance on the independent sector, where provision is generally delivered a long way from home, family, and the local community.
- We want schools and early years settings to build on the work of our existing school cluster model, which is about sharing best practice, school-to-school support; and working collaboratively when commissioning support services for children with specific needs so that it is done more cost effectively.

Making these changes will take time, but our objective is to ensure that children and young people from South Gloucestershire can achieve their potential from an early age and continue to be supported throughout their life in their local community. These changes will allow us to meet the increasing needs of our local population, spend our resources more effectively and most importantly continue to improve the support provided.

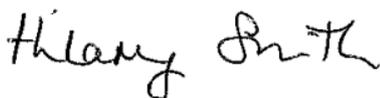
**What this means to schools:** The changes will begin to take effect from the start of the next school year, in September 2022, so mainstream schools are now planning for the new arrangements to begin in the next school year, with Special Schools following afterwards. Overall, the changes will be phased in over the next three years and we will continue to support all schools to prepare. A key element of these changes will be for schools to consider all the funding streams they have available to support their SEND pupils, which may include top-up funding, school budget share, pupil premium and to fully participate in the cluster arrangements to ensure the needs of all SEND pupils continue to be met. We will continue to collaborate with schools and parents to encourage this approach.

**What this means to children and families:** The changes will allow us to fund earlier intervention and support more effectively, as well as to share the best ways of working that can bring benefits to all children with special educational needs across South Gloucestershire. While these changes will alter the way we fund some activity in schools, any child with an EHCP will still have their needs met in full although the way in which the provision is organised by the school may need to change.

Because we are making changes to the way we deliver such important services, we are developing further support materials to explain how this will work, which schools will be asked to share with all parents and carers. These will also be available through South Glos Parent Carers. If you have a child with special educational needs and would like support from other families, as well as to discuss or feedback on this work, you can contact South Glos Parent Carers. Visit their website at: [www.sglospc.org.uk](http://www.sglospc.org.uk).

SEND And You (SAY), provides the Information, Advice and Support (IAS) Service for Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire. They give free, confidential, and impartial information, advice and support for parents, children and young people aged up to 25 about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, the law, local policy and practice, the Local Offer and Education, Health, and Care (EHC) Assessments and Plans. Visit [www.sendandyou.org.uk](http://www.sendandyou.org.uk). Schools, families, and the Local Authority have developed these changes together and this work will continue over the coming years. By working together, we can improve both the support we provide and the quality of that support to benefit children and young people with special educational needs.

Yours sincerely,



Hilary Smith  
Head of Education, Learning and Skills