

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LOCAL AREA

Bournemouth,
Christchurch and
Poole

SUMMARY: LOCAL SYSTEM "CHANGE STORY"

OUR CONTEXT

What are the most distinctive features of our local area that shape how we respond to the needs of children and young people?

What unique challenges or opportunities do we have here that will affect our journey toward a more inclusive and sustainable education system?

The Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) area is characterised by a combination of coastal geography, demographic diversity, and significant socioeconomic contrasts, all of which shape how services respond to the needs of children and young people. Formed in April 2019, BCP is home to around 404,500 residents (predicted to grow to 405,050 by 2028), population having increased by 4.9% over the past decade, driven largely by net migration. In the BCP area people are generally healthier and live for longer than the England average. However, not everyone has the same experience and BCP has areas of contrast, including some of the most affluent and most deprived areas in the country. 45,500 people live in an area that is amongst the 20% most deprived in England, including 10,900 0-19yr olds. There are 118,557 children and young people aged 0-25 in the area and 8,882 children are from absolute low-income families (less than 60% of median income). The prevalence of SEND in the most deprived decile of LSOAs in BCP is 26% and in the least deprived it is 14%. As children and young people in more disadvantaged communities may experience higher levels of need linked to poverty, housing instability, and reduced access to services. there is a continuing need for targeted early intervention and inclusive practice to address gaps in attainment and wellbeing.

BCP is also becoming more ethnically diverse. Around 18% (70,600) of residents are from an ethnic minority background, and diversity is even greater among younger people; 28% (14698) of pupils in BCP schools (2025/26) identify as non-White British. SEND prevalence is highest amongst pupils from Gypsy Roma, White and Black Caribbean, Black British, White Irish and White British ethnic groups.

A defining feature of the locality is its coastal and urban composition, with three distinct towns that retain their own identities. This creates both opportunity and complexity in service delivery. On one hand, the area benefits from strong community assets, areas of natural beauty, cultural amenities, and access to natural environments that support wellbeing and enrichment. On the other, the geographical spread and variation between communities require flexible, locally responsive approaches to ensure equitable access to education, health, and support services across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

A further distinctive feature is the high and increasing level of need relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). BCP has experienced sustained rising demand for specialist provision, Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which creates pressure on resources but also provides an opportunity to strengthen inclusive practice across all schools and settings, ensuring children can remain within their local communities wherever possible. SEND prevalence varies considerably across BCP with

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

What are the defining strengths and challenges of our current situation? Consider available data e.g.

No. of children awaiting EHCP assessment

Provision mix – No. and % of children by need by setting type (ISS, maintained special, mainstream)

Spend on Independent Special School provision [per place, overall]

Supply of Education Psychologists working with CYP

Supply of SALTs working with CYP

In what ways are we inclusive? Where do we fall short?

How do different stakeholders currently experience our system?

Our recent inspection (November 25) found an increased stability in leadership, a shared commitment to partnership working and a clear, ambitious and shared vision. This has led to improved lived experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families. Feedback from Parent Carers Together illustrates how we have worked to build confidence and trust: "BCP Council and NHS Dorset have strengthened partnership and co-production, embedding trust, empathy, and respect into SEND services. Some families are seeing earlier identification, faster support, and a stronger voice through initiatives like co-designed charters."

Over the last year we have been delivering some key areas of work to build our inclusive practice, supported by the DfE SEND Intervention Support Fund. As a result we have seen a notable improvement across several key indicators when comparing the current academic year to date (Sept-March) with the same period last year. The number of permanent exclusions has reduced from 83 to 58, suspensions have decreased from 4,950 to 4,155, and the number of pupils receiving one or more suspensions has fallen from 1,626 to 1,452. Attendance outcomes have also improved for pupils with known vulnerabilities, with the proportion who are severely absent decreasing from 5.60% to 4.45% in primary schools and from 19.28% to 17.88% in secondary schools.

However, we recognise that fragmentation remains within the system and children and young people and their families still have inconsistent experiences. and Parent Carers Together noted that "While progress is encouraging, challenges remain with diagnostic delays, school consistency, and building trust—continued effort is needed to deliver reliable, timely support".

Over the last few years we have seen a sustained increase in the number of EHCPs, 5,090 EHCPs (at 31 March 2026), with the proportion of children and young people aged 0-25 with an EHCP increasing from 2.1% in 2020 to 4.3% at 31 March 2026. This has been an 108% increase between 2020 and 2026. We have also seen a significant increase in EHCNAs from 434 in 2022 to 1,101 in 2026, which equates to 154% increase, and is above national and regional trends. as is the percentage of EHCNAs that proceed to an EHCP. The increase in EHCPs has also been reflected in an upward trend in pupils with a SEN support need, with a 21% relative increase from 2019/20 to 2025/26.

We have seen a particular increase in children and young people with needs of Autism (30.1% of maintained EHCPs), social, emotional and mental health (25.8%), and speech, language and

WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

What big changes or events have shaped us?

Have there been turning points, either positive or negative?

The formation of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council in April 2019 marked a major structural change. Bringing together three previously separate local authorities required the alignment of systems, processes, thresholds, and service cultures. This transition created both opportunities for a more consistent and unified SEND offer, and challenges in achieving coherence and equity across the area.

Following a SEND inspection in 2021, BCP was required to produce a Written Statement of Action to address areas of significant weakness. In 2024, the BCP area partnership was issued with a statutory direction, in response to slow progress against the Written Statement of Action. Since that point we have made significant strides in improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Our most recent inspection in November 2025 found that as a result of increased stability in leadership, a shared commitment to partnership working and a clear, ambitious and shared vision, partnership leaders are securing better lived experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families. However, we recognise that despite this progress challenges remain, and children and young people with SEND in BCP have inconsistent experiences across education, health and social care provision.

The Written Statement of Action noted that we had poor co-production practice at a strategic and operational level. There is now a clear recognition of the vital importance of co-production with children, young people, and families and increased engagement with parent carer forums and lived experience has helped to shape more responsive and inclusive services. We have worked closely with Parent Carers Together to address historic weaknesses and by the time of our last inspection at the end of 2025 they noted the positive changes we had made to strengthen co-production. We have begun the work of building trust and confidence with our families, and positive feedback is showing that we are making an impact (86% of parents carers reported contributing to writing EHCPs and 77% felt listened to), but we recognise that, as our inspection report highlighted, we have not yet fully secured the confidence of children and young people with SEND and their families.

Co-production has sat at the heart of our approach to developing this plan, with six sessions held with children and young people in their schools, feedback gathered from students at Bournemouth and Poole College and care experienced young people, two sessions with parents and carers, attendance at a SEND Information event and a padlet for parents and carers to share views. This in addition to three multi-agency practitioner sessions including 128 practitioners from across health, education and social care and a session for our local area SEND senior leadership. The co-production phase also included

WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO NEXT?

What would true inclusion and sustainability look like here?

How will stakeholders know things are better? Please ground your aspiration in measurable data e.g.

By the end of FY27-28 we aim to:

Improve attendance of pupils in all maintained schools (mainstream and special) with SEN from X to Y

Reduce spend on ISS places from X to Y

Increase no. of children supported by Education Psychologists in maintained provision from X to Y

Improve overall effectiveness of provision from X to Y with particular attention to a, b and c [see recent Ofsted inspection report]

We belong. We're listened to. We can thrive.

We have listened carefully to children, young people and families. As one young person told us: "We want schools to be accepting, welcoming and supporting so that everyone has the same experience in every school." This insight shapes our ambition to build an inclusive system where our local family of schools and settings shares responsibility for children and young people with SEND, and where belonging is part of everyday practice.

We want every child and young person to feel they are valued for who they are, and are supported to flourish in their local community. Our vision is rooted in a shared commitment across education, health, care and the voluntary sector to ensure that all children and young people have the best possible opportunities in life, and that families feel confident, listened to and supported.

We want BCP to be a place where children grow up feeling safe, included and understood, and where support is responsive, needs-led and available early. Through this reform plan, we will strengthen inclusive mainstream education, provide timely and flexible support without unnecessary barriers, and ensure the right provision is available at the right time. Skilled practitioners, strong partnerships and consistent approaches will enable early identification, early help and better outcomes.

We will work together to build trust, improve communication, reduce crisis responses, and use resources sustainably so that children and young people with SEND can thrive - in their schools, their families and their communities.

True inclusion in BCP will mean that children and young people with SEND are educated, achieve and belong in their local communities wherever possible, with mainstream settings confident and skilled in meeting a wide range of needs. Sustainability will be evidenced by a system where need is met early, reliance on high-cost specialist placements is reduced, and outcomes improve without disproportionate increases in spend. Inclusive practice will be characterised by:

Strong universal ordinarily available provision in all settings

Earlier identification and graduated response reducing escalation to EHCPs

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO GET THERE?

What are our priority shifts/changes?

What help do we need—local and national?

What is our theory of change/reform strategy?

What will success look like in 1 year, 3 years, 5 years?

Our Local Partnership Maturity Assessment shows that BCP is moving from emerging to developing across most pillars. Leadership stability, governance, co-production and inclusive practice are strengthening, but experiences for children, young people and families remain inconsistent. Too much support is still reactive, fragmented or delayed. Our theory of change is that sustainable improvement comes from coordinated shifts across all pillars, not isolated actions.

Pillar 1: Co-production with parents, carers, children and young people

Co-production is embedded as everyday practice (not a one-off activity), children, young people and families will influence decisions, feel listened to and trust the system. This leads to services that are better designed, more accessible and more effective.

Pillar 2: Effective system leadership and governance

Partners share a clear vision, strong governance and collective accountability, decisions will be timely, transparent and focused on outcomes. This enables consistent practice and reduces variation across the system.

Pillar 3: Accurate understanding of need through data

We use shared quantitative and qualitative data to understand need and demand, so that we can plan sufficiency earlier, target intervention more effectively and prevent escalation, particularly for SEMH and neurodevelopmental needs.

Pillar 4: High-quality service delivery

Inclusive mainstream practice, ordinarily available provision and the graduated approach are consistent across the local family of schools, with flexibility to respond to individual needs, so that more children will have needs met early, and reliance on specialist and crisis provision will reduce.

Pillar 5: Effective partnership working

Education, health and care work as one system through joint commissioning and shared pathways, so that children will experience coordinated support rather than fragmented services.

Pillar 6: Skilled and organised workforce

Embed a workforce that is stable, skilled and confident, so that children and families will experience



The Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool

Select the local area partnership this plan relates to from the box below:

839 Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Purpose of the tool	This tool is intended for use by local SEND & AP partnerships (which should include local authorities, integrated care boards, education providers and representatives of families and children and young people) to identify their relative maturity in terms of collaboration and partnership working, providing a shared understanding of opportunities to strengthen the culture and practice of partnership in context. It has been co-developed with input from stakeholders and refined through testing as part of the SEND & AP Change Programme. To be most useful, it is important to complete this tool as honestly and transparently as possible. It will be used to support ongoing conversations across your local area partnership, and as a vital foundation to inform DfE officials' and health regional SEND leads' work with local areas on SEND improvement and reform.
How to complete it	The 'ASSESSMENT' tab below contains summaries of the maturity descriptors for each dimension which can be selected via a drop-down. There is a fuller framework with more detailed descriptors available in the document 'Partnership Maturity Assessment Guidance' that accompanies this tool. Local areas can use this additional guidance where needed, for instance to help guide your assessment in an area where partners cannot reach consensus, or to provide more input into plans for improvement. In addition to the rating, we encourage areas to summarise into this tab the identified strengths/successes or work in progress, along with issues/gaps that they want to address and (where possible) any agreed focus areas for improvement. Local partnerships can approach completing the tool in whatever way works best in their context. There are a number of principles that support the most effective use of the tool: 1) Input from a wide range of partners, ensuring that the overall assessment is an 'on balance' judgement that reflects the collective views of the partnership 2) Maximise space for dialogue about where the partnership is currently, as well as reflecting on how you got here and where you would like to go next; 3) Consider what you need to focus on as a result of the assessment and what it would take to further mature your partnership working and collaboration 4) Encourage constructive challenge between partners, ensuring there is a robust assessment of factors such as culture, behaviour, and leadership not just formal arrangements. Assessment ratings should be based in evidence and examples but it is not necessary to exhaustively capture these in the assessment tool. Illustrative examples should be used to help demonstrate why the relevant rating was arrived at and where practice is varied, the boxes on strengths and gaps can be used to highlight any areas that are positive or negative outliers relative to the overall rating.
How to use the results and the role of DfE	The partnership can use the tool's results to reflect, plan, act, and evolve collaboratively - ensuring that local improvement activity is strategic and evidence-led, enabling wider changes to provision for SEND and AP focused on meaningful outcomes for children, young people and families. In addition, sharing your results with the Department for Education, including identified gaps/issues and related improvement activities, also helps to build a national picture of the support required for local partnerships to be consistently strengthened.
Description of the ratings	
ASSESSMENT	The tool uses four levels of maturity for the assessment of partnership arrangements - an overview of what is meant by each of these levels is included below as a guide but local areas should consult the more comprehensive guidance if required.
0 - NOT YET EMERGING	<i>There are currently no significant arrangements or plans in place for this area. Collaboration or partnership working has not yet been considered or initiated. There may be little to no awareness of the need for development, and no structured discussions or intentions are evident at this stage.</i>
1 – EMERGING	<i>If you are 'emerging' it is likely that only basic arrangements are in place and any plans to improve or extend these arrangements are at an early stage or have not yet been fully formulated. There may be a range of positive relationships and partner intentions but these have not yet resulted in sustained collaboration and partnership working.</i>
2 – DEVELOPING	<i>If you are 'developing', arrangements are established and being actively strengthened. Collaborative working is increasingly consistent across partners, with shared goals and clear responsibilities. There is growing evidence of joint initiatives and improved outcomes, as partnerships deepen and systems evolve. Continuous improvement is recognised and partners regularly reflect on progress and refine their approaches together.</i>
3 – MATURING	<i>If you are 'maturing', collaborative arrangements are well-established and fully integrated into everyday practice. Partnership working is sustained, effective, and widely recognised for driving improved outcomes. Continuous feedback and joint decision-making are routine, and a strong culture of trust and shared responsibility ensures that improvement is ongoing and adaptive to changing needs.</i>

SENDO & AP PARTNERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT	
ASSESSMENT CONTEXT – please add any relevant information about how you have completed the tool, including any limiting factors in arriving at a shared assessment.	Our national self-assessment of the tool has been robust, thoughtful and honest. The partnership also decided to focus the post-trial focus group on areas where it felt the partnership's strengths, so we present our findings as follows: The first was an initial survey conducted to gauge the effectiveness of the tool and the outcomes of our first SEND and AP Leadership Group in November 2020. The results of our SEND Survey are as follows: SEND and AP Leadership Group, as well as the range of officers, chairs and children and young people, our SEND Self-Assessment Report November 2020 and our SEND and Alternative Provision Self-Assessment Report November 2020. The evidence was then reviewed through a SEND and AP Working Party including representatives from Parent Carers, Teachers, Health, Education, Social Care, Commissioning and the DfE. These assessment ratings were agreed as follows: The tool has been robust, including evidence gathering to establish the tool's validity. The tool has been used to inform the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy for the 2021-2025 period. The tool has been used to inform the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy for the 2021-2025 period. The tool has been used to inform the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy for the 2021-2025 period.

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