

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5 March 2026

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Education

Report presented by: Councillor Tracy Coombs, Portfolio Holder for Education

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Education. It details their ambitions for their areas of responsibility, how they have and will undertake political challenge and leadership and what their priorities and ambitions are for the year ahead.

1. Recommendation

1.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1 The areas within the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder, as set out in the Council's constitution are:

- Adult Learning and Skills
- Attendance
- Elective Home Education
- Children missing education.
- Early Years
- Education Safeguarding
- Further Education
- Liaison between Further and Higher Education and Schools
- Quality of Education: Primary and Secondary Education
- Mainstream School Sufficiency
- Mainstream School Transport
- Early Careers Teachers
- Post 16 participation (including children not in education, employment and training)
- School Organisation and Capital Projects
- School Services (including Admissions and Medway Test)
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Including SEND Transport

3. Background

- 3.1 I am delighted to be in the role of Portfolio Holder for Education. I have been working closely with early years settings, schools, the college, post 16 providers and the Education and SEND department at the council as we strive for the highest quality inclusive education for all our children and young people and their families. I would like to thank all our staff and partners for their hard work and continued commitment to driving improvement.
- 3.2 This year has seen considerable policy and practice changes, a national focus on strengthening inclusion, improving early intervention, and addressing the challenges within the SEND system. We have made significant progress in the delivery of the Safety Valve Programme, with further SEND reforms coming built around the five principles —early support, local provision, fair resourcing, effective evidence-based practice and shared responsibility.
- 3.3 I have had the pleasure of visiting a wide range of education providers, where I have seen wonderful celebrations of success and heard directly about the challenges they continue to face. These visits have reinforced my appreciation for the significant work taking place across our local education system. Through strengthened leadership and a more collaborative, collegiate approach to inclusion, we are already seeing encouraging signs, including fewer exclusions and suspensions and improved attendance. As these developments continue to embed and our children and young people move through the system, we expect their impact to be increasingly reflected in the academic outcomes they achieve—an area that remains a clear priority for us.

4. Providing political leadership and challenge

- 4.1 I am a member of the Medway Education Partnership Group (MEPG). This group is a system leadership forum which provides education and wider system leaders with oversight and scrutiny across the key areas of education provision and performance in Medway. Members of the MEPG attend as representatives of their respective areas/agencies. Feedback from the stakeholder groups helps inform the priorities, which in turn underpins some of the activity of these stakeholder groups. The MEPG operates as a collaborative space across the partner network, allowing for sharing of good practice, timely identification of areas for development and jointly coordinated approaches to take action against areas of concern. All members of the MEPG hold a responsibility to share key messages within their professional networks.
- 4.2 I am a co-chair of the SEND Partnership Board. This board provides the local area partnership oversight and governance in driving the improvements in SEND outlined in our Joint Local Area Partnership improvement plan. This board is co-chaired by health and has representatives from all related partners across Health, social care, education, parents and carers and our young people. I am pleased to report that the 3 DFE/NHSe monitoring meetings over the year were positive and recognised the progress being made.

- 4.3 I am a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board ensuring that the education inequalities that we see across Medway are being considered at every appropriate opportunity. Education and Skills is a key building block for health and wellbeing, and 'All children achieve a good level of education leading to secure employment in adulthood' is a key activity within one of the strategy's themes.
- 4.4 I am a member of the Children's Oversight Board, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member). I ensure oversight of the effectiveness of education, and provide strong strategic leadership, support and challenge to the service. The Board is attended by DCS, the Assistant Director's for Education and SEND and Children's Services, and all Heads of Service. The board reviews performance data monthly. This provides an opportunity for me to challenge, question and better understand our compliance with statutory requirements across all service areas. Where there are identified shortfalls, I can question this with the operational managers and ensure they have plans in place to address this.
- 4.5 I attend Medway Parents and Carers Forum Liaison meeting and coffee mornings to hear the lived experience of our families.
- 4.6 I regularly meet with the Assistant Director for Education and SEND, and the Strategic Heads of Education for Planning and Access, and Quality and Inclusion. I would like to thank them as well as their teams for the support they have given me over the past year.
5. **Championing the Interests of Children and Young People**
- 5.1 I actively support the work of Child Friendly Medway which sets out a vision for making Medway a better place for children to live, learn, and contribute to our community. This has included attending several Town Hall events aimed at seeking the views of children and young people about the services they receive.
- 5.2 I am pleased to be able to celebrate the achievements of our children and young people in Medway and this year I have attended our Time to Shine Awards and our Youth Awards.
6. **Support for key service areas: Adult Learning and Skills**
- 6.1 Medway Adult Education (MAE) has had a successful year delivering quality education and developing skills for residents in Medway. This year has seen strong numbers for MAE, welcoming 4129 enrolments for 2091 individual learners in the 24/25 academic year onto 500 courses. A huge 40% of learners were new to the service. 162 low-income learners received travel support to attend classes with 92% those learners successfully completing their course. 31% of learners were unemployed, with 53% of learners coming from the 3 most deprived wards. 22% of learners indicated a need for support with those learners attaining a 96% pass rate. 90% of learners either agreed

or strongly agreed that their course had positively influenced their health and wellbeing. In the academic year we delivered 104% of our contract resulting in an over delivery payment from the DfE.

- 6.2 We have grown our presence in the community, attending many events across the academic year. The Community Learning team creative tutors modelled professional and employability skills by showcasing their work in an exhibition at the Royal Engineers' Museum. This was alongside launching a 'launch your creative business' course. We were also delighted that our Learner Choir performed at the Dickens Festival, every member has breathing challenges, so the choir helps with health socialising and having fun together. Our Work Skills team have delivered a focused employability programme on customer services in collaboration with a local employer who assisted with job interview practice. There was excellent feedback from the learners involved who reported increased confidence. One had never had an interview before (aged 50+) and was terrified but did it and is now looking forward to having her first ever real life interview in the near future. The team has also been busy engaging with the community attending 76 events over the year, directly engaging with 4747 people, indirectly engaging with over 24000 people.
- 6.3 Multiply has been a huge success, we have secured a further £50,000 to continue delivering Multiply in a smaller way, supporting with literacy and numeracy. One strand of work has been to partner with local schools to improve parents' confidence in literacy and using numbers for example we delivered a comic strip session focussing on history which helped developed the parents' interest in the children's learning and support engagement with the school community.

7. Attendance

- 7.1 The Attendance Team offers statutory support to schools to ensure children are safe and receiving their education. Alongside this statutory function, the Attendance Advisory Service to Schools and Academies (AASSA) operates as the traded service, providing additional support purchased by many Medway schools.
- 7.2 We continue to work in partnership with Kent through the joint Attendance Alliance, focussing on performance, challenge and support. This alliance remains supported by the DfE.
- 7.3 In the latest published national data for the academic year, 2023-2024, Medway average attendance was 93%, in line with the national average of 92.8%. Persistent absence was high at 20.91%, with the national average also high at 19.95%.
- 7.4 All schools now share attendance data consistently through a Wonde platform, strengthening monitoring and enabling a more comprehensive LA-wide view of attendance patterns. Wonde data from Jan 2026, shows an average 93.6% attendance, with persistent absence reduced to 17.9%.

7.5 The introduction of statutory DfE attendance guidance and the requirement on schools to provide detailed evidence of a 'support first approach' before submitting unauthorised absence referrals, has produced a significant decline in unauthorised absence penalty notices (358 in 23/24 to 158 24/25). The number of Education Penalty Notices for holiday absence during term-time, has also declined from 2935 issued in 23/24 to 2288 in 24/25.

7.6 The number of School Attendance Orders remains low, with 12 issued in 24/25. These are used in exceptional circumstances when enforcement action remains necessary.

8. Elective Home Education (EHE) and Children Missing Education (CME)

8.1 The number of our children and young people who are electively home educated in Medway continues to rise at pace. Between December 2024 and December 2025, the number increased from 1019 to 1326, representing a 30% year-on-year rise. This growth is significantly higher than 15% National.

While parents retain the right to make an informed decision to provide their child's education at home, work continues, to ensure that the provision of home education is appropriate in all cases, and that prior to removal, all other routes were open to and carefully considered by parents.

The substantial growth in EHE places additional pressure on the service's capacity to assess educational suitability, identify risk factors, and act swiftly where concerns emerge. I welcome the new statutory duties proposed within the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The Bill introduces:

- A mandatory national register of children not in school
- Requirements for parents in certain circumstances to obtain local authority permission before beginning home education
- Expanded expectations and levers to enable Local Authorities to assess the suitability and safety of EHE arrangements.

8.2 Whilst managing the increasing pressure is important, I was keen to understand the cause of Medway's high numbers so we can focus on prevention. I was pleased to commission a review into the reasons parents choose to EHE and to gain a better oversight of the challenges. The review evidenced that an increasing number of withdrawals are being driven by the lack of parental confidence in the education system's ability to meet the needs of their child. We continue to work with schools to develop inclusive practice, 70% of Medway schools have accessed the free offer of Trauma Informed Practice training and we have adapted the outreach offer to better meet the school's needs. Whilst we are seeing real progress in this, with reducing exclusions and suspensions and an increase in children with EHCP's being supported in their local mainstream school, this remains a high priority going forward.

8.3 The Inclusion team continue to work with school leaders to promote understanding of EHE responsibilities and processes. Fair Access Panel (FAP) protocols and reintegration criteria have been revised by headteachers to assist timely reintegration of pupils back into school and we have extended our tuition offer for EHE KS4 pupils working with Mid Kent College.

9. Early Years

9.1 We have a statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare provision, as far as reasonably practicable, for working parents, or parents who are studying or training for employment. The early years team engage with all early year's providers across Medway, facilitating access to the government funded childcare offer and providing support for Medway children to achieve and be ready for school.

9.2 The Medway Family Information Service (FIS) acts as a brokerage service to Medway families who require early years provision for children from 9 months to four years of age, including children with special educational needs. The service also supports Medway families in many aspects of family life, such as childcare choices, parenting support, welfare assistance and is a free confidential service. The Family Information Service directory has a wealth of services for families to access and a telephone service for families and practitioners and, sits alongside the Local Offer site that provides help to children, young people and families to understand what support is available and how to access it.

9.3 Currently there are 263 childcare providers registered with Medway Council. There are sufficient registered places to accept all currently eligible children. Officers track the take up of available childcare provision for working parents who can receive 30 hours of free childcare from the term after their child turns 9 months old until they start school. We continue to work closely with the Department for Education to inform of sufficiency of childcare within Medway.

9.4 High quality early years provision has a significant impact on children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, because it provides access to appropriate resources and experiences. High quality settings can reduce the gaps in child development, through those most important formative years, and better prepare our children to be ready for school. All childcare providers must register with and be inspected by Ofsted, who give an overall grade for the quality of provision. Childcare provision in Medway continues to be of a high standard; when it is identified that a setting needs improvement, a package of commissioned support is made available to a provider to support next steps.

9.5 At the start of the year, I commissioned a review of the Early Years provision and services to better understand what additional improvements and support we could provide. As a result of activity following that review, childcare providers are receiving funding in a timelier manner, We have recruited a Transformation lead (starting March 26) to develop centres of excellence and

establish a hub and spoke network aligned with the Best Start in Life programme, an Early Years partnership network is being established.

- 9.6 The DfE School Based Nursery programme aims to expand nursery provision on school sites to increase childcare availability, particularly in disadvantaged areas. By offering flexible delivery models and targeted capital funding, the programme seeks to deliver high quality early education, smoother transitions into school, and better outcomes for young children. In Medway, we have supported three schools to submit applications to the DfE to become a SBN, all of which were successful – Cedar Primary, Horsted Infants and All Faiths Primary. -Based Nursery programme aims to expand nursery provision on school sites to increase childcare availability, particularly in disadvantaged areas. By offering flexible delivery models-quality early education, smoother transitions into school, and better outcomes for young children.

10. Wraparound Childcare Programme (WAC)

- 10.1 The national Wraparound Childcare Programme (WAC) aims to ensure that all primary aged children have access to reliable before and after school childcare, typically between 8am and 6pm or equivalent hours, during term time. Access to WAC has expanded significantly in response to increased parental demand and government commitment to ensuring childcare availability for working families. -aged children have access to reliable before and after school childcare, typically between 8am and 6pm or equivalent hours, during term time. Access to WAC has expanded significantly in response to increased parental demand and government commitment to ensuring childcare availability for working families.
- 10.2 In Medway, allocation of capital and programme funding, has enabled us to work partnership with Early Years PVIs, Childminders and early years provision within schools (nurseries and reception classes) to provide an additional 1021 places to support working families, exceeding the DfE target for the local area of an additional 890 places.
- 10.3 I welcome the DfE Best Start in Life (BSiL) strategy that sets out a comprehensive plan to improve outcomes for children from birth to age 5. The core mission is to ensure 75% of 5 year olds in England achieve a Good Level of Development by the end of their Reception class year in 2028. I, with my Public Health colleague, are ensuring this work provides opportunities to strengthen partnership work with representatives from across the early years sector, building on established communication routes (Early Years Briefing meetings and Early Years Forums) through the creation of the Early Years Partnership Board and associated working groups with shared and common focus – to improve outcomes for the youngest children. The BSiL will formally be launched in April 2026.

11. Education Safeguarding

- 11.1 The Education Safeguarding Team (EST) is a part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service and is managed by the Safeguarding Service

Manager. We provide high quality advice, support, challenge and training to education settings in Medway to enable them to develop the best possible policy, practice and safeguarding culture. The service identifies and responds to wider safeguarding concerns and highlights emerging themes in safeguarding.

- 11.2 I am committed to building strong, professional relationships with education settings and to developing partnership working across the authority, to continue to improve safeguarding for Medway children.
- 11.3 The Education Safeguarding Team (EST) deliver Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training for Medway schools. This training is CPD accredited and allows schools to meet their statutory safeguarding training duty. It is the only DSL training that provides specific information on Medway policies, procedures and local safeguarding partners. Uptake has been strong, with over 75% of Medway schools sending at least one member of their team to a course. Since January 2025 we have trained over 200 school staff. Extremely positive course evaluations demonstrate that participants have their learning needs met and feel that their understanding of local practices and partners is developed.
- 11.4 In the past 12 months all DSL training courses have been fully booked, many with a waiting list. Since January 25 we have delivered 8 courses, two additional dates were added to meet demand. A large proportion of participants who attended their first training two years ago have chosen to renew their training with EST. Courses are income generating. Latest available income figures, from April – November 25 is £20,340. A proportion of income is used to finance the S175/157 Online Audit tool discussed below and online safety training for Medway schools has been commissioned and will be delivered at no cost to them.
- 11.5 From September 25 to date there have been 24 Complaints About School (CAS) received from Ofsted, compared to 40 for the similar period during 24-25, which represents a significant decrease. When a complaint is made to Ofsted, the regulator does not have the power to investigate those about the welfare of an individual child and passes the CAS to the EST. The EST works with school leaders to explore concerns, seek assurance of safeguarding practice and where necessary offers support and guidance to assist in addressing and resolving the issues raised within complaints. The officer responds to the regulator, with a summary of findings and recommendations. When a CAS contains a serious allegation one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) may liaise directly with the EST, prior to contacting the school. There is a duty to report school-wide safeguarding issues. In the past 12 months the outcome of CAS exploration with one school resulted in Ofsted inspection. The EST is also sometimes asked to provide assurance to DfE for CAS received regarding Academies and Independent schools.

- 11.6 Under Sections 175 and 157 of the Education Act 2004, governance bodies of all schools have a duty to assure the Local Safeguarding Partnership of the quality of their safeguarding practice. This is done via an online self-audit. The EST analyse and report on the audit. In the second year of using the tool we have achieved increased participation, with 94% of settings fully completing and all settings initiating the process – last year 4 schools did not. Schools’ feedback is that the tool supports continuous development of their safeguarding practice. Analysis of this year’s responses is currently in process. Findings will help identify key local priorities to improve safeguarding practice for children in Medway.
- 11.7 Last year’s key audit finding was that there is a disconnect between the good quality of schools’ operational safeguarding and strategic governance oversight. This has led to changes to the completion procedure and a strengthening of audit moderation procedures to hold governors to account.
- 11.8 The EST has a well-developed programme of safeguarding reviews offered to LA maintained schools. LA schools due Ofsted, and all schools where there is a significant cause for concern (e.g. an Inadequate inspection outcome, or a number of complaints) are prioritised for a full and comprehensive in-school safeguarding review. In addition, we offer a range of shorter, focused “Safeguarding Snacks” to all Medway schools.
- 11.9 Termly online DSL information meetings are offered. The DSL meetings promote partnership working with the Local Authority and other local safeguarding partners Kent Police Child Exploitation Team and, the sharing of best practice between schools. National agencies, such as the NSPCC and Talk Consent, have also delivered at these sessions. The meetings have been extended to include Early Years providers.
- 11.10 The EST deliver an annual Safeguarding Week with daily sessions on a range of topics, focussed on key local priorities. These training and information sharing events provide appropriate support to education teams and high-quality training in safeguarding matters is available to all those who require it. This year’s Safeguarding week is 2nd – 4th March and includes sessions from external partners, Children’s Services, Kent Police and the Prevent Education Officer.
- 11.11 In the MASH, the education leads now include Early Years providers in education check. They now account for 8% of all education checks. This means that the voices of early years children are considered in social care decisions. It has also strengthened information sharing between agencies and enabled social workers to gain a deeper understanding of the worries affecting Medway’s youngest children.

12. Further Education & Careers

- 12.1 Through our work with the Careers Enterprise Company (CEC), Enterprise Advisers and our Careers Consultants have been working with secondary schools to improve the quality and breadth of their career's strategies and programmes. Enterprise Advisers are senior leaders from the world of work, Careers Consultants coordinate the bridge between the world of work and careers education.
- 12.2 All eligible secondary educational institutions across Medway are in the Kent & Medway Careers Hub including the college, SEND schools and alternative provisions. This year we have launched a conference for Careers Leaders across Kent & Medway, with a focus on changes to statutory guidance, Gatsby Benchmark changes and readying the system for the new modern work experience programme. Medway Careers Consultants have piloted an internal leadership review with two schools, which explores distributing leadership of careers whilst creating a quality assurance framework for all careers activity. Across the year we have had excellent engagement from all educational institutions, who have regularly completed their careers assessment – Compass Plus. Careers Consultants organised a SEND inclusive careers fair, hosted by MidKent College, with over 140 students attending with 23 employers and providers.
- 12.3 There have been many training and development opportunities for Careers Consultants and school/college staff to prepare for new CEC initiatives, for example, Future Skills Questionnaires; Careers Impact System; Peer to Peer Reviews and Teacher Encounters. All of which aim to improve careers provisions in schools/college.
- 12.4 At the end of academic year 25/26 our Gatsby Benchmark scores are an average of 6.2 benchmarks achieved, higher than the national average of 6.0 and up from 6.0 last year.
- 12.5 The Careers Consultants share relevant resources with schools and MidKent college through newsletters, drop ins and careers network forum meetings. The Careers Consultants have become key conduits between careers providers and the schools and college.
- 12.6 I have agreed the purchasing of putting Medway schools' provision on the Kent Choices website to ensure all young people can clearly see all of the opportunities available to them.
- 12.7 The Medway Business Pledgers list continues to grow year on year, these are pledges employers/employees can make to engage with education, upskill their workforce and support the community.

12.8 We have been working together closely on promoting their supported internship programmes in Medway and are supporting students by promoting T Levels placement opportunities to businesses. This year we have run a Supported Internship event for business, with over 50 businesses in attendance. We have also delivered a Supported Internship Conference for professionals with nearly 100 attendees and delivered a Supported Internship Graduation event.

12.9 We work closely with Medway's Further and Higher Education colleagues through the Medway Learning Partnership. The purpose of this meeting is to provide an opportunity for Council and Higher and Further Education senior officers to engage on a regular basis around issues that affect their organisations and strategically plan together.

12.10 The Learning Partnership has three strategic objectives:

- To work together to exploit opportunities and address challenges in priority areas identified by the community.
- To drive forward and heighten the aspirations of all learners in Medway
- To encourage the engagement and retention of higher education learners within the community of Medway

13. Quality of Education: Primary and Secondary Education

13.1 Our priority remains to ensure all children and young people access high quality, inclusive education and be supported to be work ready. This ambition is being secured by working in partnership with education leaders, governors, trusts, the Regions Group (RG), the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted.

13.2 Both the Local Authority and the RG have mechanisms to intervene where there are concerns about school performance, including leadership and governance. Such intervention may include formal warning notices, removal of governing bodies and, in the case of academies, re-brokerage to another Multi Academy Trust (MAT). Our relationship with the RG and Ofsted is well established and is maintained through regular formal and informal communications to share intelligence and discuss a wide range of issues including the performance of all schools within Medway. I attend regular meetings with RG colleagues, where officers and I raise concerns and challenge when appropriate regarding Academy performance.

13.3 The education system leadership shares a collective responsibility for the quality of education for all children and young people in Medway. Partners work together through:

- Medway Education Partnership Group
- Education leadership associations (CEO group, MELA, MSHA and SSALE)
- The four primary zone network meetings

- Joint Local area SEND Partnership Board
- Medway Governor briefings
- Medway Children's Safeguarding Partnership
- Child Friendly Medway
- Thames Gateway Teaching School Hub Partnership Board
- Medway Health and Well Being Board

13.4 The Medway Education Partnership Group (MEPG) Partnership's priorities are:

- All children and young people in Medway access high-quality, inclusive education provision and are appropriately supported to achieve their potential.
- Services provided to children and young people in Medway, to support their education and development, are provided in a timely way; demonstrate value for money; operate within robust and efficient processes; and are informed by the voice of children, young people and their families
- All children and young people are educated and supported within the local provision(s) most appropriate for their needs.
- Children and young people in Medway are healthy and resilient and supported throughout their education and development to continue to lead healthy and positive lives into adulthood.

13.5 Prior to September 2024, the positive trend of Medway's schools sustaining a good or better Ofsted judgement was evident. In November 2025 a renewed inspection framework was introduced; Ofsted report cards show colour coded grades on a scale from Urgent Improvement, Needs Attention, Expected Standard, Strong Standard and Exceptional.

13.6 Early Years settings achieving good and outstanding Ofsted judgements remained consistently high and are also subject to the renewed inspection framework

13.7 Within the inspection framework, Ofsted allocates grades against the following areas: Attendance and Behaviour, Inclusion, Leadership & Governance, Curriculum & Teaching, Achievement, Personal Development & Well Being and Post 16 Provision and Early Years (as appropriate according to the school). A judgement against Safeguarding is made to state whether legal requirements are Met or Not Met.

13.8 For local authority maintained schools who are viewed as requiring additional capacity, support is brokered from the local education system. Where Academies are in an identified category following inspection or where concerns have been identified, we offer support and discuss with the RG and Ofsted.

13.9 The DfE has introduced Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) advisers are experienced education professionals — typically former headteachers, trust leaders, or school improvement specialists — to work directly with schools requiring support. The DfE states that RISE teams provide mandatory, targeted intervention for schools identified by Ofsted as needing improvement, regardless of their governance structure. This includes both academies and local authority–maintained schools. As of 2025–26, 65 advisers have been appointed nationally.

14. School performance – Academic Outcomes

14.1 Full analysis of our academic performance was shared in January in the annual school’s report. Whilst I am pleased that some progress has been made in the majority of outcomes, I continue to push to raise aspirations and challenge under performance. Our outcomes are still below national averages for most indicators and are particularly poor for disadvantaged children, care experienced children, and children with SEND.

14.2 I have asked officers to work with the education system leadership to develop a programme of symposiums and solution focused action learning sets to have a focus on these issues. Particularly, but not exclusively:

- Continued focus on literacy and numeracy
- Inclusion in our schools
- Outcomes at key stage 4 and 5 where the gap to national is the greatest
- Disadvantaged outcomes
- Outcomes for children with SEND
- Transition planning

14.3 Below is a brief summary of academic performance for 24/25:

14.4 **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**

- More pupils in Medway achieved a good level of development in the EYFS in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24, and performance in this measure remains above national.
- In 2025, 27% of pupils in Medway with SEN support achieved GLD. In 2024,
- Medway was 4.5pp below national but national achieved 26.4% in 2025
- creating a 0.6pp gap.
- In 2025, 3.2% of pupils in Medway with an EHCP achieved GLD, an increase
- of 0.8pp compared to 2024. Nationally 4% of pupils achieved this measure.

14.5 Phonics

- Medway Y1 performance in 2024/25 improved by 1pp when compared to 2023/24. Medway remains below national, but the gap has reduced to 3pp.
- Outcomes have improved in Y1 by 1pp when compared to the outcomes achieved in 2022/23. However, performance continues to be below national with the gap decreasing from 4pp in 2023/24 to 3pp in 2024/25.
- In 2025 the performance of SEN support pupils in Medway was 5pp below national at 47%, an increase of 2pp compared to 2024.
- In 2025, 10% of pupils with an EHCP achieved the expected standard in Phonics, an increase of 1pp on 2024, compared to 20% at national which did not increase when compared to the previous year.

14.6 Key stage 2

- Medway's average combined RWM score has slightly increased compared to last year whilst national stayed the same. This means the gap has widened in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24 when Medway matched national.
- In 2025, pupils in Medway with SEN support achieving the expected standard in the combined RWM measure was 26%, with the gap to national increasing from 1pp in 2024 to 2pp below national in 2025.
- In 2025, 11% of pupils in Medway with an EHCP achieved expected standard in the combined RWM measure, an increase compared to 2024. National remained the same for this pupil group.

14.7 Key stage 4

- The average attainment 8 score in Medway improved and matched national which remained the same when compared to 2024.
- In 2025, the KS4 average attainment 8 score of pupils in Medway with SEN support was slightly below national. Both Medway and national improved thus narrowing the gap between Medway and national.
- In 2025, the KS4 average attainment 8 score of pupils in Medway with an EHCP improved. National also improved with the gap between Medway and national narrowing when compared to 2024.
- The percentage of pupils achieving a standard pass, grade 4 or above, in English and mathematics in Medway decreased compared to 2024. National also fell, noting that the gap with Medway to national has widened between 2024 to 2025.
- In 2025, a higher number of pupils in Medway with SEN support achieved 4+ in English and mathematics compared to 2024. National also improved. Medway remains below national with the gap narrowing.
- In 2025, a greater number of pupils in Medway with an EHCP achieved 4+ in English and mathematics compared to 2024. This is 2pp below the national figure which saw an improvement on 2024.

- The percentage of pupils achieving a higher pass, grade 5 or above, in English and mathematics in Medway was 43.9%, a decrease compared to 2024. National fell by 0.7pp to 45.2% meaning the gap with Medway has widened in 2025.
- In 2025, pupils in Medway with SEN support achieving 5+ in English and mathematics improved compared to 2024. National also improved. Medway remains below national with the gap narrowing.
- In 2025, a greater number of pupils in Medway with an EHCP achieved 5+ in English and mathematics compared to 2024. This matches national which saw an improvement, for the same pupil group.

14.8 Key Stage 5

- Medway's average point score achieved per A-level entry in 2025 decreased compared to 2024. The average KS5 average point score at national increased that resulted in the gap between national and Medway widening.
- In 2025, the KS5 average point score per A level entry of pupils in Medway with SEN support was below national. Both Medway and national improved in 2025 with gap narrowing.
- In 2025, the KS5 average point score per A level entry of pupils in Medway with an EHCP declined compared to the previous year. National improved.
- The percentage of Medway pupils achieving AAB in 2 facilitating subjects decreased against an increase in the same measure at national.
- In 2025, pupils in Medway with SEN support achieving AAB in 2 facilitating subjects reduced compared to national.
- In 2025, 0% of pupils in Medway with an EHCP achieved AAB in 2 facilitating subject compared to an increase in national from 2024 to 2025.

15. Mainstream School Sufficiency

- 15.1 We have a statutory duty to ensure sufficient good quality school places are available to meet demand from the resident population. The School Place Planning Strategy 2022-27 sets out the framework upon which appropriate decisions are made. An annual review of the strategy is presented to Cabinet each year highlighting emerging need and offering proposals to meet demand based upon the latest pupil forecasts.
- 15.2 The strategy has been successful in ensuring sufficient places are available and the councils forecasts are recognised as being accurate to within the 1% margin of error indicated by the DfE.
- 15.3 Pressure on places continues with significant inward migration the main driver. To meet this demand a number of expansions to schools are underway and planned to cater for longer term demand, along with various bulge classes created to meet immediate need.

- 15.4 We are creating additional bulge classes for 2026-27 in the primary sector in Gillingham and Hoo St Werburgh to meet demand from continuous inward migration.
- 15.5 To ensure demand is met in the medium term, a capital programme has commenced to provide additional school places across the phases and sectors of education with a focus on inclusivity through specialist resourced provisions and includes expansions and new schools.
- 15.6 As part of the annual reviews of the School Place Planning Strategy planned bulge classes and expansions are identified in a table which covers the secondary sector for the next seven years. These have been planned and agreed with schools and will help to ensure that sufficient places are available.
- 15.7 Forecasting is undertaken twice each year to ensure that we remain best placed to react to surges in demand covering mainstream and specialist sectors.
- 15.8 Officers are working with planning colleagues to ensure a joined-up approach to providing the school places required to meet demand from the new local plan and other areas with large potential housing developments and have written an Education Infrastructure Delivery Plan which sets out , where, when and how sufficient provision will be provided in line with the increased demand from the housing schemes..

16. Mainstream School Transport

- 16.1 Numbers of mainstream pupils eligible for travel assistance continues to rise and has reached in excess of 2400 pupils with the previous high being last year with over 2300 pupils. It is expected that numbers will continue to increase as demand increases. The key drivers of this increase are inward migration along with a lack of school places within a reasonable distance of these new applicants. There is also an increase in applications from families who are eligible under the low-income criterion.
- 16.2 The majority of these pupils will receive a bus or rail pass to enable them to independently travel to and from school with less than 5 granted a taxi in exceptional circumstances. There are 47 families in receipt of fuel allowance which assists parents or carers to drive their children to and from school.

17. Early Career Teachers (ECT)

- 17.1 All ECTs must be registered with an Appropriate Body. TSH (Teaching School Hubs) and ISTIP (Independent Schools Teacher Induction Panel) can act as Appropriate Bodies. The ability to be the registered body was removed from LAs in September 2022, and therefore LAs no longer have responsibility for ECT induction.

- 17.2 Medway has an SLA with Thames Gateway TSH for this academic year to support the TSH with its monitoring of ECT reports (submitted 3 times a year) and quality assurance visits to Medway schools who are using Thames Gateway TSH for their Appropriate Body.
18. Post 16 participation (including children not in education, employment and training)
- 18.1 The Academic year 2024/25 saw an increase in the numbers of NEETs (Not in Education Employment or Training) and Unknowns (where no destination for the young person has been identified), although this is a national trend
- 18.2 The level of NEETs and unknowns aligns with our comparator authorities. However, Medway does sit at 1% higher NEET levels than the national average and South East regions.
- 18.3 A number of positive steps are being taken to reduce the numbers of NEET pupils, despite a lack of available provision and funding. These include:
- The implementation of Kent Choices, a one stop platform for young people where they can access information and guidance as well as applying for courses, training and apprenticeships
 - Pilots focussing on Electively Home Educated Young People and those within the Youth Justice System where a number of NEET young people are from.
 - A Neet Conference planned for April 2026 focussing on health inequality and aligning with the Marmot Place programme
 - Weekly analysis of course leavers at Mid Kent College to avoid them falling through a gap in the system
 - Various Maths and English courses through MAE and Runway
 - A retail training and work experience programme
 - Various CSCS courses for those interested in construction
 - Functional skills and Work readiness programmes
 - A NEET prevention initiative through CXK, which targets schools which produce the highest NEET numbers.
 - Increase the number of staff within the Post 16 team to enable greater coverage, programme delivery and NEET prevention initiatives.
- 18.4 The Information and Guidance Team (IAG) continue to assess the pathways required to support ongoing participation and collaboratively work with schools and local providers to seek out opportunities for our young people. I have concerns regarding availability of appropriate provision for academic year 2025/26, where we have seen an increased demand for vocational and level 1 and 2 post 16 courses, with limited availability. We are working with the post 16 partnership group and have raised these issues through our network forums and with the DfE.
- 18.5 The services have been collaborating with Adult Education to support interim provision, along with increased discussions with local alternative provision providers.

19. School Organisation and Capital Projects

- 19.1 The school's capital programme team ensures that the proposals, through the School Place Planning Strategy, to create additional capacity within the school system are delivered to budget and on time.
- 19.2 Since 2018 and until 2025 the council delivered over 6000 additional primary, secondary and specialist places.
- 19.3 The current programme, which commenced in late 2025 and runs through to 2030 will provide an additional 1435 school places across the various phases and sectors.
- 19.4 Funding for the projects is sourced from various streams including central government grants and section 106 contributions.
- 19.5 The team manage the local authority maintained schools' condition and maintenance programme, and we ensure that the schools under the LA's control are fit for purpose, and provide safe and warm environments for our young people to learn and thrive in.

20. School Services (including Admissions and Medway Test)

- 20.1 The Medway Test is an immense logistical challenge, which the team delivers successfully. The number of children who sat the test in September 2025 was the highest on record with 3,984 pupils registering for the test.
- 20.2 45% of Medway children who sat the test achieved a pass compared to 76% of out of area children. Pleasingly, more children with FSM and SEND sat the test than in previous years and we expect this number to continue to rise in the coming years as we have sought to make the test procedure more inclusive and accessible, whilst maintaining the academic integrity.
- 20.3 Our Medway Test Team implemented updates to information published about the test which set clearer expectations for children, parents/carers and schools, which avoided the confusion experienced last year. The team did not receive any complaints of the nature received last year.
- 20.4 Over 99% of all school admission applications are now completed online, and all statutory timelines are met.
- 20.5 Despite secondary transfer cohort sizes increasing each year, the Admissions Team sustain a good rate of children being offered a preference on national offer day. For September 2025 entry, 80% of Year 6 children were offered their first preference and 96% were offered one of their preferences. Outcomes are expected to be similar for September 2026 entry.
- 20.6 For September 2025 entry, 95% of incoming Year R pupils were offered their first preference and 99% were offered one of their preferences.

21. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Including SEND Transport

21.1 As co-chair of the SEND Partnership Board, through the Oversight meetings and through regular meetings with the Assistant Director: Education and SEND, I am kept abreast of the delivery of the joint local Area Improvement Plan and the Safety Valve Implementation plan.

21.2 We have made good progress to achieving the outcomes in our Local Area Improvement Plan. Of the 96 actions, 66 are complete and showing measurable impact, with the remainder ongoing. We have co-produced a new strategy for 2025-28, using a logical framework approach, which will further improve effective monitoring, and continue the improvement journey. Impact so far includes:

21.3 Improved Communication:

- The SEND Information Hub (Local offer) is up to date and provides comprehensive information on all the services available to families with a 50% increase in information available to families and young people.
- An increasing number of families are accessing the SEND Information Hub. Between Oct 24 – Sept 25, average views per month were 4,401, up from 1708 the previous year.
- An increasing number of families are accessing the Medway Family Hubs app. There are currently 21,491 users (Oct 2025); a significant jump from 8,504 in Dec 2024.
- The App has links to the Local Offer as well as a range of other SEND support services and continues to grow in terms of content, reach and usage.
- Regular SEND updates are being received by our SEND families. Sept 25 SEND newsletter was received by 1142 recipients with a 75% open rate. SEND term 1 newsletter was received by 1071 recipients with a 65% open rate.
- MPCF support communication directly out to families through social media pages (reach 4900 people, averaging 1963 followers, 3100 engaged followers and over 9700 views per month), face to face meetings, online webinars and discussions.
- A Medway Youth Coproduction Charter has been written using the voice of 55 Medway Young people from a variety of settings and age groups the majority of whom have SEND.
- There are fewer complaints from parents and carers to the council in relation to SEND communications. A 61% reduction from Sept 24 to Sept 25.

21.4 Improved Oversight, Quality and Timeliness:

- Children and young people are having their needs assessed in a timely manner. On average 46% of new EHC needs assessment results are processed within statutory timeframes, an increase from 4% in Sept 24. This is in line with the national average.
- The backlog of 712 EHCnas has been completed.
- As of end of September 25, 83% of children and young people referred for mental health support from CAMHS (non-ND services) are seen within 18 weeks. This steady reduction in wait times since Oct 23 is because of increased commissioned support at the low to moderate level and ensuring a wide services offer across the iThrive framework.
- Wait times for therapies (SLT & OT) are good for school aged children. SLT waits remain high for pre-school ages but are showing signs of downward trend. Project planning with staff is underway for the Balanced system. 73% of parents found the therapies pathway to be good or very good compared to 52% the previous year (MPCF parent survey). Additionally, from April to Sept 25, 100% of families across both pathways report that they both understand their child's needs and have the skills to manage.
- Implementation of 'This is Me' project to support Neurodiverse pupils at home and in school has commenced with 14 primary schools and MCH have recruited a Family Support Practitioner.
- All SEND panels have been reviewed with new terms of references and membership. There is a partnership wide representation at each of the panels which supports better and more equitable decision making.
- ICB SEND team are 'signing off' sections C and G in draft plans that fit within a criterion. ICB are developing Annual Review framework for Health to ensure up to date health advice is available for the annual review.
- The partnership is using Invision 360 an EHCP Quality Assurance tool, audits are identifying areas for improvement in relation to specific sections in EHC plans and training is provided. Quality is not yet good but rapid progress is being made.
- EHCP Champions have been identified within Children's Services and now attend 5 weekly meetings with the DSCO to promote knowledge of SEND reforms and share good practice.
- Protocols, tools and training to support the quality of social care advice into EHCPs has been developed and is ensuring consistency and compliance with statutory requirements.

21.5 Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood (PfA):

- The partnership knows where its young people with an EHCP are. - August 25, number of 'unknowns' at its lowest recorded level (0.3%), none with an EHCP.

- The availability of post 16 and post 18 pathways is regularly communicated with staff.
- NELFT have worked with KMPT, young adults and MPCF to co-design transition letters for 16, 17, 18 year olds to plan transitions from CYP to adult MH services to improve patient journey and experience. -Case studies from NELFT show continuity of care after referrals to KMPT even when criteria aren't met.
- Following delayed recruitment of DSCO, activity has happened at pace to establish PfA protocols across services.
- The phased transfer process is delivered within statutory timeframes. 98.6% met the statutory timeframe in Feb 26.

21.6 Access to Experiences outside Education:

- Short Breaks Innovation team has participated in different events and activities in community such as Medway GO event, Medway Youth Services activity day at Woodlands family hub, Club Ausome sessions, ROCC coffee mornings and Child Friendly Medway Hoo family day.
- ROCC has delivered a substantial uplift in overall 2,036 sessions delivered in 2024/25 (target: 1,035) Compared with 700 sessions in 2023/24 this demonstrates both strengthened operational capacity and a direct response to rising demand.
- More children supported: ROCC supported 638 unique children (target: 300) in 2024/25, compared with 150 in 2023/24 - a 212.67% increase. This demonstrates improved accessibility for families and CYP. High levels of satisfaction were highlighted in the service users survey.
- Advocacy offered to all young people in residential settings
- Families signed up to disability register receive a termly newsletter updating on range of opportunities and experiences. Over 150 families now signed up to the register

21.7 Improved access to provision:

Increased SEND Education provision:

- spaces at Danecourt Special School
- 60 additional spaces at Rivermead Special School (satellite site)
- New SEMH Resourced provision for 25 pupils at Victory Academy
- New ASD Resourced Provision for 25 pupils at Strood Academy
- MLD Resourced Provision for 25 pupils at Leigh Academy Rainham RP under design and planning.
- Agreements from two trusts to open Resourced provisions for 25 pupil each at grammar schools. Chatham Grammar to open 2026
- Extensive new and expansion programme beyond 2026 to 2041

Increased SEND post 16 provision:

- 40 spaces available with Runway Training for Functional Skills Maths and/or English, post 16.
- spaces with Medway Adult Education for 16–19-year-olds to undertake Maths and/or English Functional Skills.
- Construction Bootcamps with O’Hallahan and Brian
- CSCS and short courses available with Pole Position Training
- 40 spaces 16-25 years EHCP F2E - Supported Employment under Connect to work will offer additional places – this is also being developed 19+

Improved inclusivity of provisions:

- PINS pilot continues into year 2 with an additional 14 schools joining the pilot (21 schools participated in year 1). 575 parents took part in surveys. SEND families reported significant improvements in feeling welcomed and included in school communities.
- Education networks (MELA/MHSA/ SSALES/ SENCO network / Zone meetings) are regularly attended by stakeholders to support consistent schools messaging.
- Termly recorded Headteacher briefings with relevant updates.
- Inclusion conference held on 6th November 2025 followed feedback from initial survey for conference content schools and partners who wished to discuss mainstream inclusive practice, SEND support and EHCP pathways. The conference was attended by over 160 delegates, 72% school settings, where 91% highlighted the day was helpful and met their expectations.
- Inclusion rate in mainstream improved from 23% in 2024 to 46% in December 2025

21.8 Furthermore, we have now successfully completed our safety valve programme and received all the grant funding from the DfE.

21.9 However, this agenda is of national concern and impending reforms. Whilst I am pleased with the significant progress made in very challenging circumstances, I am aware that experiences for children and their families remains inconsistent. Officers and I are not complacent, it remains the highest priority to continue to drive improvements in the provision for children and young people with SEND.

22. SEND transport

22.1 The number of children in receipt of SEND travel assistance remains stable at just under 1,900 pupils. Although the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) continues to rise, we are not currently seeing the anticipated large growth transferring into the transport programme in Medway. This is, in part, due to an increasing proportion of children with EHCPs now attending their local mainstream schools, reducing the need for specialist transport

arrangements. We expect this trend to continue as more Specialist Resource Provisions come online in Medway.

- 22.2 SEND Transport continues to operate a mixed model of provision. Most pupils travel in shared transport vehicles, with a smaller number receiving solo transport. We have also expanded the number of pupils supported through bus and rail passes, and the team continues to promote and facilitate independent travel, including providing an adult pass where appropriate. Several families receive a Personal Travel Budget or fuel allowance, enabling them to make their own travel arrangements or transport their children themselves.
- 22.3 As part of our ongoing programme management, we are seeing the usual natural cycle of applications and departures: while some children become newly eligible, others exit the programme due to changes in eligibility, placement, or need. This has meant that the overall numbers remain balanced and manageable.
- 22.4 The service is now in a position to audit the entire transport programme, strengthening oversight and improving value for money. As part of this work, we have begun writing to parents to reclaim fuel allowance where a pupil's attendance has been 80% or below, in line with policy expectations.
- 22.5 The Council must meet its statutory obligations to provide services appropriately, but in doing so it must ensure that it delivers 'best value' for its residents.

23. Conclusion

- 23.1 I am proud of the achievements of the partnership and will continue to work with our education providers, wider stakeholders and excellent staff to ensure all children and young people in Medway receive the highest quality of education.

Lead officer contact

Celia Buxton, Assistant Director Education and SEND, Gun Wharf, 01634 331013, celia.buxton@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None