

# Together

for Norfolk's children  
and young people to

**flourish**



Dear colleagues,

Happy New Year to all of you. I hope you managed to get some rest over the festive break and feel ready for the new term and new year.

2025 promises to be quite a significant one in terms of policy reform that will impact on how services are delivered to improve outcomes for children and young people. We have seen the launch of the child wellbeing and schools bill before Christmas which had its second reading this week, and we expect more detail on SEND reforms towards the end of this term and the recommendations from the government's curriculum review due by the end of the year.

From an education perspective, the top priorities continue to be raising levels of attainment at Key Stage 2 and further improving support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, through our [Local First Inclusion Programme \(LFI\)](#).

Before Christmas, I visited the Department for Education to talk to officials about our **Local First Inclusion** (LFI) programme and our focus on supporting inclusion in mainstream education, wherever possible. We have offered to work closely with the government on their plans for reform, so that we can create a system that works for children, for families and for schools, colleges and early years settings. Ultimately, our focus is on supporting children with SEND to flourish.

In the meantime, our LFI programme continues at pace. Last term, we launched our new [SEND and Inclusion Support Model](#), including our new phoneline, Teams Around the School (TAS) and Zone Inclusion Partnerships (ZIPs). The first ZIP meetings took place just before Christmas in North Norwich and King's Lynn and there was a real sense of everyone wanting to come together to support one another in the interests of our children and young people.

As part of the new model, you will have received an update in December about our plans to [change the offer from the Educational Psychology and Support Service \(EPSS\)](#) so that EP time is spent more directly with schools and to provide the right advice as early as possible. This will ensure more equity of access to all schools, with practitioners working as part of our team around the school offer. As part of the proposals the service will cease its current traded activity. We are still working through the final details of this but will send a full update next week in what will be a new look eCourier.

Another key milestone in our programme has been the Department for Education's registration of our first **Alternative Provision** Centre, at King's Lynn Academy, supporting secondary students who are at risk of exclusion.

Our AP model, developed with schools, expands the outreach and prevention support on offer. The strategy is still based on the DfE three-tiered approach to provide a continuum of support for children who are at risk of exclusion.

The outreach and prevention offer will ensure school staff have access to high quality training, including the Norfolk Secondary Steps programme and Trauma Informed training in partnership with the Norfolk Virtual School.

To support the transition of pupils who are vulnerable to suspension and / or exclusion in Key Stage 3, we will be piloting a targeted offer of outreach support to provide direct interventions for children, during summer 2025, prior to their transition into the next academic year.

For pupils who need support to prevent their needs escalating, we have enhanced our plan to create Early Intervention Bases and Alternative Provision Centres across Norfolk.

Nine Early Intervention Bases are planned to open from September this year, and will provide support, intervention and assessment for up to one term for up to 90 pupils.

Following the first Alternative Provision Centre opening this term, a further nine are planned, creating 224 places for intensive support and intervention for up to three terms. The next centres will be opening from September 2026.

In other SEND news, I know schools have been waiting for our latest guidance on **Element 3** funding, which has now been [published here](#). We are expecting the Element 3 budget to be around £35m – matching the 2024/25 levels. This needs to be approved as part of the budget process next month. I've mentioned before that we have increased this figure from £9m in 2020/21, as part of our strategy to support mainstream inclusion but the cumulative deficit on the overall budget has continued to rise.

We know that schools are feeling significant pressure in this area, which is one of the reasons we have developed the new **SEND and Inclusion Support Model**. However, we have to ensure the budget is sustainable. There has been significant work with schools on how Element 3 funding should work, and we have combined this with the feedback from the Dedicated Schools Grant consultation to come up with some new principles. Schools have also told us that they would prefer to have increased certainty and stability of funding, so the model distributes part of the funding (equivalent to the Schools Block to High Needs Block transfer from September) as a formula to provide increased certainty for all schools to plan from. The other key change is that the remaining Element 3 funding allocations will focus on whole school or cohorts approaches to supporting children with high needs, rather than just individual children. In the future, we are proposing to move towards either reducing or removing the Schools Block transfer to High Needs.

This is in response to the significant engagement undertaken with school leaders along with reviews of our closest physical, as well as statistical, neighbours' arrangements.

The aim is to ensure schools have all the funding that would have been allocated to them via the National Funding Formula (NFF) from September 2025, alongside increasing notional SEN allocations to move towards aligning with the national average (and neighbouring authorities), to enable them to meet the needs of most children with SEND.

Looking beyond LFI, this term the programme of activity around the **Norfolk Learning Collaborative** and **Norfolk Learning Ambition** continues in full swing, with the next NLC meeting taking place on the 29 January. Thanks to continued offers from the system, there are new opportunities to collaborate with and share in the experiences of colleagues through the [Norfolk Key Stage 2 Challenge](#). Just some of the offers available this term includes writing moderation, reading for pleasure groups and the chance take part in an EAL grammar and writing pilot intervention scheme for years 5 and 6.

Remember, the KS2 Challenge wants to hear from you. Whether it is reaching out to others with a question, sharing how you are working towards your goals for KS2 or if you think you may be able to offer an opportunity to work with others collaboratively, get in touch [norfolklearningambition@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:norfolklearningambition@norfolk.gov.uk).

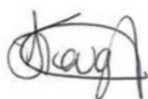
Alongside the KS2 Challenge, work also continues around the other sector-led learning ambition key priority areas. More information will continue to be shared around each theme but look out in the next few months for events such as the Get into Teaching in Norfolk on January 22, where those interested in a career in teaching can come along and find out more, at a single venue.

Next week, this academic year's first [Norfolk Executive Headteacher Network meeting](#) takes place, on Thursday 16 January 3.30-5pm at Diocesan House. A true collaborative effort, the network is facilitated by NCC, VNET, NSLA and the Diocese and is open and is free to access for all executive leaders across Norfolk.

We are currently collaborating on a range of pieces of work with ITT providers to secure the pipeline into teaching in our county. Look out for an engagement piece, later this term, to hear about the benefits of engaging with the UEA cohort of international students, recruited specifically to support our local recruitment crisis in shortage subjects, such as mathematics, physics and MFL, as well as hearing more about the variety of routes into teaching offered by local providers and the diversity this brings to our Norfolk workforce.

As you can see, a very busy term, in a very busy year, with lots of opportunities to collaborate for our children. There's lots of challenges ahead but also much to be optimistic about. Thank you for your continued work to support Norfolk's children and young people to flourish. I very much look forward to working together over the coming year.

Yours sincerely



**Sara Tough OBE**  
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