



04 September 2024

NCC general enquiries: 0344 800 8020
Text Relay Number: 18001 0344 800 8020

Your reference:

Email: sara.tough@norfolk.gov.uk

Dear colleagues,

I hope that you had a restful and relaxing break, and that the first day back has been (or will be) a smooth transition for staff, children and young people alike. The start of a school year is an exciting time, with fresh starts, challenges and opportunities, and I firmly believe that it is by facing all of these together we can most positively impact on children and young people's lives, helping them to Flourish. I wanted to write to you all, to update you on some key activities which are taking place and to highlight some opportunities to get involved in shaping the future of education in Norfolk, be it in giving children the best possible start, shaping their academic journey or preparing them for their future.

Our collaborative work on the **Local First Inclusion programme** enters its second academic year. It has always been our intention that the programme should be owned by the whole education system, and we know that it will only succeed if it is shaped by the expertise within it. It is also vitally important that those in the sector are involved in, and aware of, the design of any changes to ways of working. With that in mind we have reflected on how the LFI programme is working and are making some changes:

- We have now agreed to establish a more formal, strategic LFI Reference Group which will be a key forum of education leaders who can co-design or comment on all major developments and changes in the LFI programme, helping us to create a system which works for schools, children and families.
- We have appointed Mark Vickers MBE, CEO of the Olive Academies Trust, as an independent chair for the LFI Executive Board. He will provide some external scrutiny of our approaches and will also work to engage a range of voices from across the system to ensure all views are heard.

This autumn we will also have the **annual consultation on the Dedicated Schools Grant**. This year, as well as the more technical consultation on funding allocation we want to undertake a broader listening exercise in relation to the SEN system in Norfolk and to gather as much feedback as possible from education leaders about what you want to see changed, enhanced or prioritised. This is an important opportunity for us to come together as a system to design the right models for Norfolk children and young people, and I would encourage you all to participate in the consultation which runs from 1 to the 24 October. We are running a series of consultation briefing sessions during this period, and you can find the dates and times for these in our [online calendar](#).

Once the consultation process has completed, we will also publish more information on our plans for the next phase of the programme. We know that the challenges in the system are substantial, but we do also think that we are making progress and bringing forward some very positive new projects – in particular our new **SEND support phone line**, launching on 23 September and available weekdays from 9am to 5pm.

This line will provide a single point of contact for professionals and families seeking advice or support for children with SEND, replacing the Inclusion Line and EHCP Line. It aims to simplify access to information, reduce the need to contact multiple teams, and help prevent exclusions. The line will be closely monitored and adjusted as needed, with further updates and additional school support coming later this term. This, alongside our existing School to School support, plans for an enhanced outreach model from special schools into mainstream settings, a new approach to support children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDD), working closely with Health colleagues, and our intention to create a really joined up 'team around the school' should make it a lot easier for schools, settings, colleges and families to access the support they need.

Thank you to all who attended and contributed to the ongoing work regarding **Element 3 resource** during the Summer term. We know our schools will be keen to be updated on the Bridging Fund for Yr R and Yr 7 phase transfer pupils, as well as the process for the Unexpected Situation Fund. More details of these will be issued to colleagues through a separate message shortly; it will also form part of the DSG consultation as an opportunity for discussion and collaboration and will be discussed at the next LFI reference group.

We know that the impact of falling numbers of primary age pupils in Norfolk is being felt in schools across the county. The overall capacity of places in Norfolk schools, both primary and secondary, is currently 9,800 places. In September 2024 we anticipated 7,800 places being needed through the recent admissions process that continues to place children. This means there are approximately 20% of surplus places across the system; the DFE guidelines recommend a surplus capacity of only 5%. We will be writing in more detail to all maintained schools and academies in the coming weeks to set out the Local Authority approach for this year's **Published Admission Number consultation**, so please look out for further information.

As the government session restarts, we are seeing changes and developments at national level, including plans to promote children's wellbeing, a [review of curriculum and assessment](#), new skills partnerships with employers, changes to the Apprenticeships Levy and the [removal of single headline Ofsted grades](#). As ever, alongside our work locally, we continue to lobby for reform nationally – your participation in the consultation will also allow us to engage you in gathering key messages to relay to government.

These national changes also align with our work as part of **the Norfolk Learning Ambition**, which continues to gain momentum. There will continue to be a sector-led programme of activity to address the [seven strategic priorities](#), which is overseen by the Norfolk Learning Collaborative (NLC). The NLC will be meeting later this month to set in motion activity for the coming year and there is always time to get involved. You can find out more about the work that has already been taking place, current activity and how to get involved [here](#). For more information please do [get in touch](#).

We want to make sure that we are able to **keep you up to date** with key messages, support offers and information, without this creating additional workload. Hopefully you have already seen some of these, in the form of ongoing developments to the schools' website and eCourier. This work will continue, alongside a range of positive engagement work that we will be doing, including more regular updates and sharing positive stories from across the Norfolk Education system.

This term sees the start of full rollout of the **Wraparound Childcare Scheme**. We have funding available to support the expansion (either of hours or number of places) or setting up of new wraparound provision for primary aged children between the hours of 8am and 6pm, during term time. As Norfolk was an Early Adopter for this national scheme, we are already working with a number of schools across the county, and have been able to provide support, both practical and financial.

This is a time-limited programme so we would encourage all schools to make contact as soon as possible if you are interested in accessing support. Contact the team [by email](#) to find out more.

We are also rolling out the next stage of the **expansion of funded early years places**, with funding for children from the age of 9 months starting this term. This may have some impact on the demand for places for children from the age of 3 upwards, so please do remember that if you have nursery provision you are able to take children within your published age range. So, for 3-year-olds, you can now access funding from the point the child turns 3, rather than the term after, if they meet certain eligibility criteria. If you would like to discuss your current arrangements, please [contact the team via email](#).

This is also a really exciting time in young people's educational journeys for those students who move into **Post 16 learning**. We also know for some it can be more challenging, and we appreciate the work you do to support young people in this next phase of their lives. Please continue to use the [Help You Choose](#) website as our one-stop shop so that any young people directed to the site can see the full scope of your 16-19 offer. We look forward to continuing to work with you to develop Norfolk's 16-19 offer, ensuring that it meets the needs of young people and enables them to flourish. This work is built on the strong commitment from the college sector and our wider partners to develop sufficiency, increase participation and reduce NEET, and of course respond together to any emerging national policy updates over the coming months. Communication from the Secretary of State for Education this week has signalled that the government wants to ensure that no 16- or 17-year-old is blocked from pursuing their education because of a limit on available places and our discussion with the ESFA has confirmed that there is an appetite to fund growth in places to meet needs, subject to affordability within the Treasury.

Our **Music Hub** is looking forward to another extremely busy academic year and following a successful bid to lead the new [Music Hub](#) across both Norfolk & Suffolk, have lots of exciting musical activities and projects planned for educational settings to engage with. This term alone includes an exciting vocal project with Gabrielli Roar, opportunities for young musicians to play with the British Army Band Colchester, online beatboxing workshops for Black History Month, Friday Afternoon's Big Sing, the Virtual Pantomime as well as performance opportunities in various locations across the county and beyond. They are keen to welcome Norfolk Schools to their [music curriculum conference](#) in November and offer unlimited access to CPD as well as a fully subsidised Charanga licence via their free subscription offer. To find out more please visit the [Music Hub website](#).

And finally, please expect to receive information from our attendance support team early next week, so we can work together and ensure strong and sustained school attendance particularly so for our most vulnerable children and young people.

I look forward to working with you all.

Yours sincerely,

Sara

Sara Tough OBE
Executive Director, Children's Services