Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) newsletter

Welcome to Barnet's SEND Local Offer newsletter!

In this Newsletter you will find:

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- Siblings Group
- Autistic Discovery Journey

Summer 2026

Local Offer news: new homepage coming soon!

Families have been working with us to co-produce a redesigned Local Offer homepage. This will launch in the coming weeks, so keep an eye out for updates and more opportunities to get involved as we continue improving the website next year to make it easier to find information and support.

Here's a sneak peek of the new theme in our launch poster:



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Local summer activities

Unitas Youth Zone Holiday Club: Unitas Youth Zone offers a safe and affordable youth facility for junior aged young people on school holidays, with fantastic activities on offer every single day including a host of sports, games, arts and crafts, and cooking sessions! Please note that Holiday Club is for 8—12 year olds only.



Photo credit: ©KOPMAN UK

Unitas 'Limitless' for young people with SEND: 'Limitless' team is dedicated to ensuring the Youth Zone's offer is accessible for all young people aged 8—25 with additional needs, plus parents, carers and siblings. This takes place on Wednesdays from 10am—2pm.



Fair Play Barnet Playground: Victoria Park Recreation Ground contains the Fair Play playground with maximum accessibility and inclusivity. It is designed so people of all ages and abilities can play together. The equipment in the playground is extensive and includes a wheelchair seesaw, wheelchair swing, ramped multi-play unit, netted swing, raised roundabout, 360-degree swing, climbing net and musical instruments.
Click here to watch the video

Better: Better leisure centres across Barnet are Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) accredited and host a range of accessible opportunities. There are also benefits for Barnet residents who sign up for a Fit and Active Barnet (FAB) card.

Barnet Children and Families Autism Hub: This Resources for Autism hub provides a supportive, neuro-affirmative space for autistic children, young people, and their families. They offer a one-stop community hub for resources and information, both before and after diagnosis. Explore the activities calendar to see what's on including drop-ins, clubs and outings groups.

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Join in the fun with Barnet Youth this Summer!

Barnet Youth is part of Barnet Council's Child and Family Early Help Service, working with children, young people, and families across the borough to provide opportunities, support and activities that promote wellbeing, personal development and positive outcomes. Through a network of approved local partners and providers, Barnet Youth delivers programmes and services that help children and young people stay active, develop new skills, build confidence and access support when needed.

BACE Holidays (Barnet Active, Creative and Engaging Holidays) is Barnet's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme for children and young people in the London Borough of Barnet who are **eligible for** benefits-related free school meals. Delivered by Barnet Council and Young Barnet Foundation, the programme provides free, fun, and enriching activities during the school holidays, including sports, arts and crafts, performing arts, trips, wellbeing sessions, and healthy meals. BACE Holidays is committed to being inclusive and works with providers to ensure children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) can access welcoming, engaging, and supportive opportunities tailored to a variety of needs.

Families can find out more about both BACE Holidays and Positive Activities, including eligibility information, upcoming activities and booking details, at https://barnetyouth.uk

For children and young people who are **not eligible** for benefits-related free school meals, Barnet's Positive Activities programme offers a wide range of free and low-cost opportunities throughout the year. Positive Activities provide inclusive recreational, creative, sporting, and social experiences for children and young people aged 0–19 (or up to 25 for those with additional needs), helping them stay active, develop new skills, build confidence, make friends, and enjoy their free time in a safe and supportive environment. Many activities are designed to be accessible for children and young people with SEND, ensuring families can find suitable opportunities that meet their needs.



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Barnet SEND reforms: building a stronger Local Offer for children, young people and families

Key message: nothing is changing overnight.

Barnet will develop its SEND reforms carefully over the next three years. Families should not expect significant changes to the current system before 2029, and parent carers' legal rights remain fully intact throughout this period. Between the 23rd of February until the 18th of May 2026, the DfE ran a consultation on the proposals for SEND Reform, as set in the Schools White Paper. DfE's response to this consultation will shape how Barnet will deliver the reform.

Barnet is excited to be developing a more comprehensive and joined-up specialist offer for children and young people with SEND. We know that families want clear information, reassurance and confidence about what SEND reform will mean locally.

The reforms will be developed through a test-and-learn approach. This means we will try new ways of working, review what is working well, listen carefully to feedback, and make changes as we go. We want to get this right, but we also know that new models may not be perfect from the start. Feedback from children, young people, parent carers, schools, settings and partners will be essential in helping us improve the offer over time.

Parent carers' legal rights remain intact

It is important to be clear that parents carer's legal rights remain fully intact throughout this change period. Current statutory duties, rights to request an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment, rights of appeal, and responsibilities around Education, Health and Care Plans remain in place.

Barnet's local reform work during this time is about strengthening support and improving how the system works around children, young people and families. It is not about removing rights or reducing statutory protection.

Our ambition

Barnet wants all children and young people with SEND to feel a strong sense of belonging in their school, setting and local community. We want support to be available earlier, closer to home, and in a way that helps children and young people participate, progress and thrive.

Our approach will be need-led, not diagnosis-led. This means that children and young people should be supported based on their strengths, needs and presentation, rather than families having to wait for a diagnosis before schools and services think about what help may be needed.



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What is changing?

The main development in Barnet will be our Specialist Support Offer, known in the reforms as 'Experts at Hand'. This is about making sure that schools and settings can access specialist advice, guidance and support earlier, without families having to wait for needs to escalate before help is available.

This support will be developed through a clear graduated response, which means support will be available at different levels depending on need:

Level	What this means
Universal support	Whole-school and whole-setting strategic support, training and advice to help schools strengthen inclusive practice for all children and young people.
Targeted support	Focused advice, support and modelling for groups of children or young people, including advice around communication, sensory needs, emotional wellbeing, adapted teaching and reasonable adjustments.
Targeted Plus support	More individualised specialist advice, support and modelling where a child or young person needs a higher level of adaptation designed for their individual needs in order to remain included and make progress.
Specialist support	Access to specialist bases or special school provision where this is appropriate, while keeping children and young people connected to their peers, school community and local area wherever possible.

More support in mainstream schools

A key aim of the reforms is to strengthen support in mainstream schools and settings. Barnet wants children and young people with SEND to feel understood, included and supported at the right time.

Over the next 3 years, we will work with schools, settings, parent carers, young people and partner services to develop a stronger offer around:

- An accessible training offer for schools and settings
- inclusive classrooms and ordinarily available support
- specialist advice for schools and settings
- modelling and mentoring for school staff
- practical coaching so strategies can be used confidently in the classroom
- therapy support at universal and targeted levels
- support for neurodiversity, communication, sensory needs and SEMH
- adapted teaching approaches
- nurture spaces, low-arousal spaces and support bases
- clearer routes into specialist support when needed
- Parent/carer workshops and training



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This is not about removing specialist help. It is about making sure specialist knowledge is available earlier, in the places where children and young people spend most of their time. We want schools to feel better supported and more confident, so that children and young people can receive help earlier and remain connected to their class, peers and community.

A joined-up approach with education, health and social care

The reforms will also support a more joined-up approach across education, health and social care. We know that children, young people and families often need support from more than one service, and that this can feel difficult to navigate.

Through the development of local clusters and the Specialist Support Offer, we want professionals to work more closely together around children, young people, families and schools. This includes bringing together education services, specialist advisory teams, educational psychology, therapies, health partners, social care, Early Help, mental health support and other key services where appropriate.

The aim is to create a clearer and more coordinated system, so that support feels less fragmented and more responsive to need by being part of a Team Around the Cluster.

Developing more SEND spaces locally

Barnet is also developing more SEND spaces and support bases across the borough. These spaces will help schools provide more flexible, adapted support for children and young people who need something additional to the mainstream classroom, but who can still benefit from being part of their school community.

The aim is to create more local options, reduce the need for children to travel far from home where this can be avoided, and make sure support is matched to children's need in a thoughtful and planned way.

A test-and-learn approach

Barnet's reforms will be developed through a test-and-learn approach. This means we will try new ways of working, review what is working well, listen carefully to feedback, and make changes as we go.

We want to get this right, but we also know that new models are not always perfect from the start. We will rely on feedback from children, young people, parent carers, schools, settings and partners to help us improve the offer over time.

Your feedback will be essential in helping us understand what is making a difference, what needs to be clearer, and where further improvements are needed.



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A three-year plan

Barnet's local SEND reform work will take place over three years:

Year	Focus
2026/27 - Mobilise and test	We will work with families, schools/settings and partners to design the offer, use learning from the Change Partnership Programme and test new approaches and develop clearer routes into support.
2027/28 - Roll out and embed	We will expand the cluster model, develop the Specialist Support offer further, and strengthen SEND spaces and support bases.
2028/29 - Sustain and evidence impact	We will review what is working, evidence the impact, and continue to improve the offer based on feedback from children, young people, families, schools/settings and partners.

Keeping families involved and informed

Co-production will continue to be central to this work. Barnet will keep families updated through the Local Offer and will provide opportunities for parent carers and young people to ask questions, share feedback and help shape the next stages. We understand that any changes to SEND provision can be confusing and cause concern, but we hope through transparency and co-production we can build on a system that works better for all.

Our Barnet Parent Carer Forum (BPCF) will be involved in the workstreams and development of the services. If you would like to participate at this level please join our BPCF: click here for the link or contact info@barnetpcf.org.uk

Please look out for upcoming Q&A sessions, where we will share more information about the SEND reforms and hear your views.

We will continue to update the Local Offer as the work develops, so families can see what is changing, when it is changing, and how they can be involved.

Barnet is proud to be building on its strong foundations and is excited to develop a more comprehensive specialist support offer that helps children and young people with SEND achieve, thrive and feel a strong sense of belonging in their local communities.

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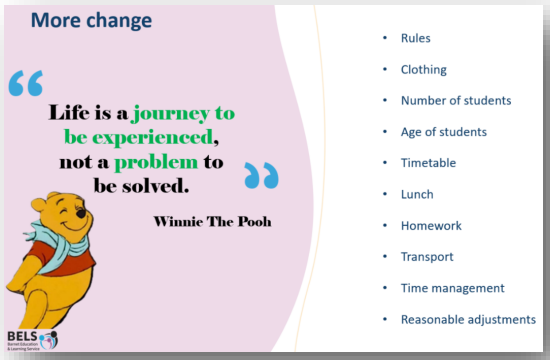
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Summer term events highlights

ADHD workshop

In April, the Inclusion Advisory Team hosted an ADHD workshop for parent, carers and young people at the Arts Depot, North Finchley. It was an incredible afternoon, hearing from our fantastic guest speakers about ADHD, movement and technology! It was great to hear and share real life experiences, we all thoroughly enjoyed.





From primary to secondary transition conference

In May, Barnet Specialist Inclusion Services hosted a Primary to Secondary Transition Conference for parents and carers of Year 5 and 6 children with SEND. The event provided practical guidance and reassurance on key topics including SEND support, wellbeing, independence, transport and transition planning, with families having the opportunity to hear from and connect with a range of professionals. The conference was very well received, with parents reporting increased confidence in supporting their child's transition.

Best Start in Life Launch Day

In June, BELS staff were delighted to be present at Barnet's Best Start in Life Launch Day at the RAF museum. Barnet's Best Start in Life is an integrated early years strategy that provides comprehensive health, education, and parenting support for families with children from pregnancy up to age five (or up to 25 for those with special educational needs). It builds on Sure Start to offer community-led, one-stop access to essential services. Locally the strategy is delivered through Best Start Family Hubs and network sites (which are expanding across the borough) and Children's Centres. These hubs offer a wide range of free, holistic support to parents under one roof.



Keep up to date with Barnet's Best Start in Life:

Click here for the Facebook page

Click here for the Instagram page

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Specialist Teaching Team, Vision: Working together

We are delighted to announce that the Specialist Teaching Team, Vision has launched its first collaborative training session with HumanWare — the first of four — inviting parents of our Braillists (blind tactile learners) to take part.

This initiative followed a clear need identified at the end of last academic year, which was that our three Braillists using Brailliants (specialist electronic Braille devices) and transitioning to secondary school in September 2026, required personal specialist equipment for learning beyond school. Working with families and the Powell Foundation (an independent charitable organisation that provides grants to access Assistive Technology), we secured funding to provide essential home equipment. Two students now have their own laptop and Brailliant device, and we continue efforts to support the third. Offering families direct access to HumanWare support was a natural next step.

The session introduced families to HumanWare's support services, giving them a direct contact point and building confidence in using the technology (brailliants/ laptop and screen readers).

Our goal is for every Brailliant user to have their own equipment at home, ensuring consistent and equitable access to the curriculum.

Spotlight on Supported Internships: Hassan's experience

Hassan Karim, now currently employed by BELS as a Project Officer, shares the experience he gained from his Supported Internship in a YouTube video.

Click here to watch the video

He also shared this:

I did a Supported Internship (SI) in Goldman Sachs which was such a meaningful and impactful opportunity for me, as I got to meet different members of staff and established a lot of new skills and developed different qualities that worked well for the workplace. You will get a follow-on job coach that will support the young person and also help them in their rotations if needed. If a job coach isn't available, the young person can always ask their mentor, manager or other member of staff within a division for help.

I highly recommend doing Supported Internships as it can build young person's confidence and give an insight into the working life. There are three rotations which are three months each, spread across the academic year. By the end of the academic year, young people will have had opportunities to gain a lot of confidence in terms of interacting with other people and graduate their achievements. I believe that parents and carers will see a positive change in their young person's life.

Click here for the West London Guide to Supported Internships 2026

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Spotlight on Supported Internships: BELS INSPIRE

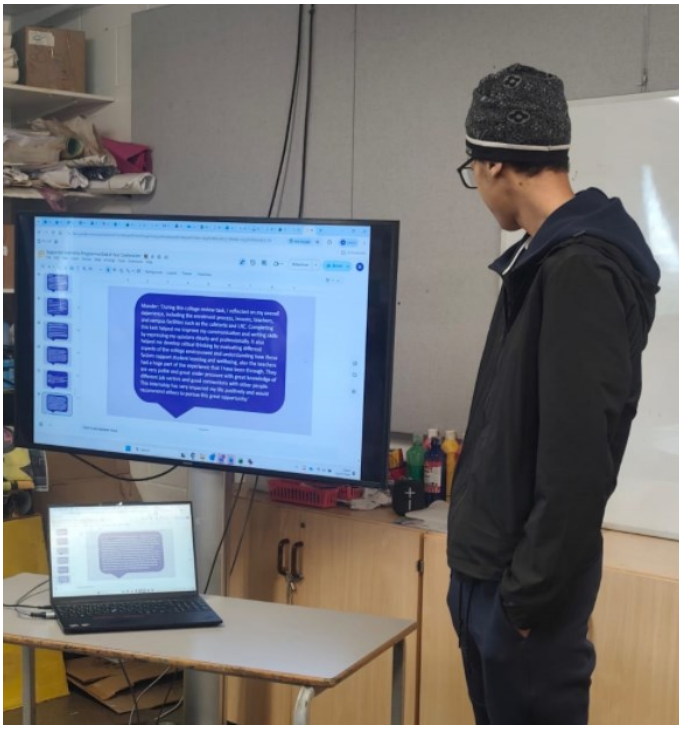
BELS INSPIRE is a tailored Supported Internship programme for 25 young people with SEND who have the potential to gain employment but need specialist training and support. Running from October 2025 to July 2026, it aims for 60% of participants to move into sustained paid work, with the remainder progressing into further education or training.

Working with Barnet and Southgate College, Harrington, First Rung and Arts Depot, the programme supports young people with a wide range of disabilities to build work skills, independence, confidence and social abilities through teaching, practical experience, and coaching.

Learners are recruited from the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) list or existing study programmes and undergo a detailed assessment process. Performance is closely monitored through service agreements, biweekly provider meetings and regular feedback from learners and families.

To strengthen employment outcomes, INSPIRE+ will offer enhanced employer engagement and job brokerage—partnering with CER to secure suitable roles, tailor job tasks and improve recruitment processes so young people receive the right support to succeed.







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Deaf and Hard of Hearing Support Team: Celebrating success

It gives me great pride and pleasure to share with you all this story of success of a deaf young person who has recently finished his A levels at Wren Academy Finchley.

I have been given consent by him and his parents to share his story with our wider community. I want to thank them for letting us share this.

Like many hearing parents of deaf babies his parents were overwhelmed when they first got the news that their son had a hearing loss and would need to use hearing aids to access the world around him, for his language and communication to develop. Dorian has Treacher Collins syndrome which can cause hearing loss and facial dysmorphism. When I asked his mum for a quote for the article she shared the following:

"as a parent of a child with Treacher Collins syndrome and unknown hearing impairment I remember feeling incredibly down in the early days. I didn't dare to expect much or to look too far ahead. Instead, I constantly worried about future unknowns at the same time trying my best to just take everything step by step. 18 years later I am filled with pride seeing how he accepts his challenges and simply pursues what he loves, and he is a happy child.

He has always worked twice as hard as the average child and achieved more than we ever hoped for. He did not speak until he was over 5 years old and sat on the low ability table during the first years of primary school. He was always obsessed with Space, Lego Star Wars and would for hours draw planets. All before he could communicate verbally fully. The picture attached makes me smile always. (he is drawing the planets sitting on his desk!)



Now he is leaving secondary school and the 6th Form with predicted A and A* at A level, University offers, and additional offers for a sponsored degree apprenticeship in engineering with British Aerospace Systems.

I would like to encourage him in the future to speak about his experience. Personally I am happy to volunteer and speak with other parents and share my experience or answer questions to help families walking a similar path"

Dorian's story is one of determination, resilience and grit. He is a humble and very quietly confident young person. Dorian enjoys studying he was student of the year twice in Art and Product Design at Wren Academy Finchley, he got runner up in National junior engineering competition in year 9 and he has attended a local scouts for 14 years. He plays volleyball for a local team. Right now, he is in Spain resting after his A Levels playing beach volleyball with his friends and enjoying the hot weather!





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UNICEF UK Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA)



Start the new school year with belonging, voice and respect

How can every child feel they belong, are listened to and have the confidence to thrive?

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award gives schools a clear, practical framework to strengthen belonging, inclusion, wellbeing, pupil voice and global citizenship through children's human rights. In London, state-funded schools can access free Rights Respecting Schools Award membership until March 2028, including training and resources. Sign up today and get the next school year off to a strong start.



Photo credits: ©UNICEF/Maule-ffinch

[Click here to register online]

Siblings Group

Siblings group will be back in the Autumn term. This is for children aged 8-12 with an autistic sibling (with or without a diagnosis). It's a space for them to have fun, make friends, and share experiences with those who understand. Through games, creative activities and relaxed conversations, children can explore their feelings, build confidence, and learn about autism in a positive way. The group celebrates individual strengths, develops coping strategies, and ensures each child feels heard, valued and supported.

When: Wednesdays, 5.30-7.30pm

Where: 858 Finchley Road, NW11 6AB

Cost: Free

[Click here to find out more]

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[Click here for the full flyer with further information and sign-up details]

AUTISTIC DISCOVERY JOURNEY 8 WEEK GROUP

ADJ is a partnership between Barnet Education and Learning Service & Aucademy

An online group for 6 to 10 people who identify as autistic (Diagnosed or self identified)

For more info on Aucademy visit https://aucademy.co.uk/

WHEN?

Wednesdays at 16:30 - 17:30,
30th Sept - 2nd Dec 2026.
No sessions 28th Oct or 18th Nov

If you are interested in joining this group please email:
Autism.Team@Barnet.gov.uk
With the subject title:
"Aucademy/BELS Autistic Discovery Journey"

REQUIREMENTS:

- **Aged 13-18**
- **Living in Barnet**
- **Access to Zoom on a laptop or PC (phone/tablet may be manageable) and a quiet space**
- **Parental/carer consent is required for young people under the age of 18 and for an adult to be at home during the session.**
- **No expectation to use your camera or microphone if you do not want to. Chat box participation is embraced, especially if using mouth words is not your preferred method of communicating**

BELS Barnet Education & Learning Service

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