

OT

**The occupational therapy offer
for children and young people**
living in County Durham

a guide

April 2023



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Who is this guide for?

This guide is intended for use by parents/carers, education staff and practitioners supporting children and/or young people living in County Durham. It outlines the complete offer of Occupational Therapy services and support across the county, irrespective of provider. If you have any doubt about where your provision comes from this can be checked with the local GP in the first instance.

What support is available?

Some children and young people often experience difficulties in carrying out everyday tasks or establishing daily routines such as sleeping, bathing, dressing, using the toilet, or participating in mealtimes. This could be due to several reasons including developmental delay, medical needs, behavioural issues, learning difficulties or physical disabilities.

As the young person grows older, and if the difficulties continue, they might need focused intervention or support, so they can participate in school, college, or leisure activities.

Traditionally, the intervention to meet these specific needs has been referred to as Occupational Therapy. However, every child is different and various levels of support may be required at different times depending upon the changing needs of the child/young person.

To ensure the child/young person receives the right support, in the right environment at the right time, it is important that we ensure that parents/carers, schools, and practitioners working with the family know what is on offer across County Durham to ensure we all work collaboratively to support the child's needs, particularly where services overlap.

What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapy (commonly known as OT) is a service delivered by Occupational Therapists who are health and social care professionals. Occupational therapists help people of all ages (babies, children, adults, and older people) to carry out activities (or occupations) they need, want, or are expected to do, but are prevented from doing, because of physical or mental illness, disability, or as a result of changes in their lives as they get older.

Please use the link for more information on Occupational Therapy:

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/4217/rcot-leaflet-occupational-therapy-and-children-and-young-people.pdf>

How can we identify if a child has Occupational Therapy needs?

All children develop at different levels. Ongoing functional difficulties and needs are often identified either by parents/carers or Early Years providers (e.g., nurseries and childminders and primary schools). If it is felt by Early Years providers that these difficulties are impacting upon a child's ability to learn, they must notify the child/young person's parent/carers and discuss what support can be offered to the child/young person. Likewise, if a parent is concerned, they should speak with the child/young person's teacher and/or the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). There is much that can be done in school before a referral to other professionals like an Occupational Therapist is needed.

Quality First Teaching

Quality First Teaching (QFT) focuses on high quality and *inclusive* teaching for every child in a classroom. This may include strategies, resources and adaptations to the curriculum and environment that teaching staff use to remove barriers to learning for children and young people.

Examples of these adjustments could include providing a writing slope or an alternative pen for children who experience difficulties with handwriting, using a wobble cushion for a child who needs more sensory feedback in order to be more settled when working at a table, or sensory breaks during the day.

SEN support

In County Durham we expect every child who requires special educational needs (SEN) support to have an individual SEN support plan which gives a clear set of expected outcomes and details the "additional to or different from" provision they are receiving.

All education providers follow a graduated approach which is a model of action and intervention to support children and young people who have special educational needs.

This follows cycles of:

- **Assess:** Assess a child/young person's special educational needs.
- **Plan:** All teachers and support staff who work with a pupil should be made aware of their needs, the outcomes sought, the support provided and any teaching strategies that are required.
- **Do:** The planned interventions should then be put into place.
- **Review:** Reviews should take place and inform feed back into the analysis of the child's needs. The Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice suggests schools should meet with parents three times a year, good practice would indicate that such reviews will be at least termly. The decision to involve specialists can be taken at any time and should always involve parents

A guide for how schools support a child/young person with SEN and a list of local authority teams who provide SEND support are available on the SEND Local Offer website – see the link below:

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/19057/How-different-needs-are-supported-in-schools>

Education Health and Care Plan

If a child/young person is not making progress despite all of the additional provision being put in place and needs are ongoing so that they impact on learning or access to the curriculum, it may be deemed necessary to request an education, health and care needs assessment. An Education Health and Care (EHC) plan *may* be issued following the assessment. This is a legal document that describes a child/young person's special educational, health and social care needs. It explains the extra help that will be given to meet those needs and how that help will support the child or young person to achieve what they want to in their life. More information can be found on the Local Offer website on the link below.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/19058/Education-Health-and-Care-EHC-assessments-and-plans>

Funding for additional support in mainstream schools and early years settings

Early Years SEND funding is available to support early years settings to make provision additional to and different from provision for all children accessing their early education entitlement.

Funding is allocated via the local authority or, for academies, directly from the Department of Education.

For school aged children core funding is allocated annually to an educational setting directly from the Local Authority. From the core and notional funding allocation, the school must fund up to £6,000 of provision to meet the needs of the child or young person, as set out in the SEN support plan or Education Health and Care plan. Most training, resources, and equipment for pupils with SEND are included within Quality First Teaching and reasonable adjustments. However, in some cases where individualised training and/or resources are required to support pupils, additional money can be requested from top-up funding (see below).

Top up funding is the funding required over and above the core and notional funding in a mainstream educational setting to enable a pupil with high needs to participate in education and learning. The provision will be outlined on the SEN support plan or EHC plan. This might include:

- Increased adult facilitated programme to develop fine motor skills, which is regularly monitored.
- Increased adult facilitated programme to develop gross motor skill under the guidance of a specialist.
- Additional support in PE as recommended by a specialist
- Increased personal care provision to facilitate self-care such as eating, drinking, toileting and to support development of independence in these areas.

This also might include:

- Adult facilitated movement/sensory breaks very frequently throughout the school day.
- Adult facilitated personalised gross motor/mobility program overseen by a specialist.
- Adult support to use specialist resources (e.g., specialist seating).
- Adult facilitated personalised fine motor/mobility program overseen by a specialist.
- Direct adult support to manage personal care needs, due to an underlying condition, include eating drinking and toileting.

The funding can also be used to

- Purchase specialist equipment/auxiliary aids that may be required.
- Provide staff resources and staff training to manage daily care and medical needs.
- Carry out therapy programmes to improve gross/fine motor skills, strength, stamina etc.
- Access curriculum activities such as PE, swimming equal to peers.
- Support daily activities and personal care needs such as toileting and eating/drinking.

Additional details about the process for top-up funding can be found in Mainstream Schools Provision Descriptors and Funding Bands document. This guidance will be published on the Local Offer website once the review of funding for special schools is complete.

Funding for special schools

Arrangements for funding in special schools is different from that in mainstream schools. Special schools are funded via bandings based on provision. For school aged children core funding is allocated annually to an educational setting directly from the local authority. The process for allocation of this funding is currently under review (*April 2023*).

Personal budgets

A personal budget for SEN is money identified to pay for support specified in an EHC plan for a child or young person with special educational needs. It can include funds from the local authority for education, and from the Integrated Care Board (formerly the clinical commissioning group) for health.

A child does not have to have a personal budget. Parents of a child with an EHC plan, or a young person with an EHC plan can request a personal budget. An EHC plan is not needed for social and health care but is required to get a personal budget for special education provision.

For more information about rules around personal budgets and how they can be used, follow this link to the Local Offer website

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/22511/Personal-budgets-for-children-and-young-people-with-an-Education-Health-and-Care-plan>

Pupils with medical conditions

It should be noted that not all children with a medical condition have a special educational need. More information about the statutory duties on schools to support pupils with medical conditions can be found on the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>

NHS Occupational Therapy services in County Durham

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) are contracted to provide Occupational Therapy services to children within County Durham from birth to 18 years of age who have difficulties or a disability which affects their ability to carry out everyday tasks.

The Occupational Therapy Team sees children in a variety of settings depending on their needs. This may be at home, nursery, school, or college settings. The service also provides general advice, training and support to schools enabling them to embed strategies and techniques that can be used within their Quality First Teaching. This might be for those children who have not been, and may not need to be, referred to an Occupational Therapist, but may have lower-level needs which require support or adjustments at school so that they can progress with their education.

There are three categories of services offered by CDDFT:

Universal Occupational Therapy information, advice, and support – advice and information about the development of childhood skills that are available and suitable to all children and families; signposting to appropriate services or community activities that may support such activities for local children and families. Drop-in sessions by the Occupational Therapy Team to schools and nurseries who want to seek advice on further development of skills for children in their care.

Targeted Occupational Therapy assessment, advice, and intervention for children with identified difficulties in one or more aspect of daily living skills. This may involve verbal

discussion and advice and/or short episodes of focussed interventions, delivered with programme or activity recommendations for families and schools to follow.

These episodes of care are designed to be short and focussed on solutions – giving the child and family something to work on to improve overall skills. Children and young people are not kept on for lengthy periods of time but will be discharged with advice and strategies to build into their everyday lives at home and school.

Children and young people can be re-referred as needed, but it will be anticipated/expected that the advice and strategies which were provided have been tried and put into place if the reason for referral remains the same.

Specialist Occupational Therapy intervention - specialist and specific assessment and intervention for children with more complex needs. Specialist interventions will usually need an Occupational Therapist to carry out the intervention in relation to early development, assessment for seating and postural management, splinting, assessment for equipment and adaptations etc.

Universal

- Advice on skill development.
- General strategies to support sensory challenges.
- Signposting to appropriate services or community activities.
- School/nursery drop-in sessions.
- Sensory Smart Classroom training. Any teaching and/or training that is held *within* the school or early years setting has the benefit of supporting and upskilling the whole school workforce and increase internal confidence and expertise that will undoubtedly help other children with similar difficulties
- Sensory Smart awareness sessions for professionals.

Targeted

- Assessment and recommendations/strategies to support a child/young person with daily activities.
- Occupational Therapy assessment to identify the reason why a child may find difficulty with their everyday tasks and activities, followed with strategies and recommendations for activities and approaches that will help them to develop their skills. An example of this might be a child who struggles to hold a pencil and cannot write or draw – the Occupational Therapist will identify why this might be and what can be put into place at home and at school to help the child improve in their skills.
- Sensory Smart Families course. If a child is experiencing difficulties in their everyday life, as a result of sensory needs, the Sensory Smart Families Programme may be recommended. This is a series of three sessions when parents/carers are invited to attend a group session run by the Occupational Therapy Service. The sessions explain why children might have sensory difficulties and how these impact on their everyday activities. Sessions look at activities such as dressing, personal care, and the impacts at school, and help families understand their child's needs in a slightly different way. This programme is recommended following referral to Occupational Therapy. It is also available as a series of pre-recorded video-based sessions.
- Visit to school/nursery. Upskilling of school or early years staff. Following a child's referral to Occupational Therapy it may be decided that a visit to their early years setting or school would be beneficial. This gives the Occupational Therapist an opportunity to train and up-skill the school or early years staff who are working with the child each day. In this way, not only does that child benefit, but the staff in those settings are also able to help other children who may be experiencing similar difficulties. Schools and early years settings have regular access to Occupational Therapy visits like this so it may not be needed in every situation.
- Occupational Therapy health advice for Education Health and Care plan (EHC plan). Occupational Therapy reports are often used within the Education, Health, and Care plans for children. They may be used as part of the initial assessment or as part of the annual review of a plan that is already in place. All Occupational Therapy reports for children coming for a targeted assessment or intervention include the information that is relevant for an EHC plan, so a separate more specific report is not needed in addition. This is especially helpful when a child has seen an Occupational Therapist but has then been discharged. The report can be used to support ECH plan information.

Specialist

- The Occupational Therapist may be involved in early development assessments for children with complex needs along with other members of the multi-disciplinary team.
- The Occupational Therapist would provide assessment, recommendations, and interventions for children with complex needs who have difficulties with their everyday activities. For children who fall into the "specialist" level of care, their needs are often more specific due to a physical or developmental condition, and a qualified Occupational Therapist may be needed for more elements of the process – handing over to parents, carers and school staff or early years settings as the treatment programme continues.
- The Occupational Therapist can provide specialist assessment and recommendations for minor adaptations to a child's home, to improve their ability to access their home environment and improve their safety within the home. An example of this might be an additional banister or grab rails within the house to help a child get in and out of the house and up and down stairs more safely. The Occupational Therapist will link in with other agencies when needed as part of this process.
- The Occupational Therapist can also assess for and recommend major adaptations for properties of children with complex needs to allow their essential care to be met. This includes adaptations to help the child get in and out of their home safely and have safe access to bathing and a room to sleep in. Major adaptations will vary according to what a child needs and how it can be solved, but may include things such as ramped access to the house, a wet-floor shower instead of a bath, a lift for a wheelchair user to get upstairs etc.
- Many children will also require assessment, recommendation, and provision of specialist equipment to help them be moved throughout the day. Specialist equipment may include hoisting and each child is considered based on their assessed need.
- Occupational Therapy reports are often used within the EHC plans for children. They may be used as part of the initial assessment or as part of the annual review of a plan that is already in place. All children on the specialist pathway should receive a specific Occupational Therapy report for the ECH plan assessment and/or annual review. This should be discussed with the child/young person and their carers to make sure that the needs and aspirations of the child are considered, and the Occupational Therapy programme is helping to support this.
- The Occupational Therapy Service works closely with the local and regional hospitals in the area to ensure that appropriate planning and support is in place when a child needing specialist Occupational Therapy support is ready for discharge from hospital and this may involve the provision of specialist equipment, possible minor or major adaptations to the family home, and rehabilitation/specific Occupational Therapy interventions that may be required.

Assessed social care needs

The NHS team works across both County Durham and Darlington Local Authorities. Within County Durham, the Children's Occupational Therapy Team provides assessment and recommendations for minor adaptations to improve access or safety within the home, linking in with other services when needed. They also provide assessment and recommendations for major adaptations for children with complex needs to allow their essential care needs to be met (access to the house, safe access to bathing and bed).

More information about CDDFT's Occupational Therapy Service plus helpful hints, tips and resource links for parents who haven't yet referred to an Occupational Therapist can be found on their website: <https://www.cddft.nhs.uk/our-services/community-services/children's-services/children's-occupational-therapy.aspx>

Local Authority Occupational Therapy – Durham County Council's SEND and Inclusion Service

The local authority provides an Occupational Therapist who works into County Durham schools and education settings. They support the education setting to make adjustments and adaptations to buildings and access specialist equipment if needed. They may assess children with significant complex SEND and work closely with colleagues from the Specialist Inclusion Services to support children with significant needs. Requests are usually made by the child/young person's education setting; details are available within Durham Local Offer.

The roles and responsibilities of the local authority Occupational Therapist include:

- Carrying out joint and integrated assessments with health and local authority colleagues, for the purpose of:
 - Enabling safe and barrier-free access around the nursery and school environment.
 - Promoting inclusion in all nursery and school activities – compliance with the Equality Act 2010.
 - Promoting access to the national curriculum equal to non-disabled peers.
 - Supporting schools to manage student disabilities, medical and daily care needs at nursery and school.
 - Supporting schools and early years settings to ensure all related documentation i.e., care plans, risk assessment, intimate/toileting plans etc. are in place.
- Carrying out environmental assessments to ensure the student can access all areas of the school and there are appropriate facilities such as a changing area, ramps,

grabrails, hoists etc., so that needs can be met and making recommendations to the local authority for building adaptations where required.

- Providing advice and guidance for schools in line with their own accessibility policy and adapting the environment under anticipatory duty.
- Assessing for and providing training for staff in the safe use of the auxiliary aids and equipment provided in schools and early years settings to enable management of student care and rehabilitation needs.
- Being the manual handling coordinator for nurseries and schools in the local authority. Carrying out assessment of manual handling tasks, giving advice/guidance on safe techniques and providing written manual handling plans in line with best practice. Carrying out training in back care awareness for staff. Monitoring up take of manual handling training and ensuring safe practices are being implemented in schools.
- Being the local authority advisor for developing pupil risk assessments based on managing medical/physical/care needs of students. Providing training for schools on carrying out risk assessments and ensuring utmost safety and best practice for students and staff.
- Advocating for students/parents and schools in dispute resolution and ensuring responsibilities are being met in line with government legislation and local authority responsibilities.
- Being the local authority's specialist advisor for all matters related to management of physical and medical needs in nurseries and schools. Developing guidance and advisory documents such as toileting and intimate care guidance, wheelchair use in schools' guidance, evacuation of pupils with disabilities and medical needs guidance etc.

Privately paid for Occupational Therapy assessments

Whilst the NHS service is freely available there are occasions where, for a variety of reasons a privately commissioned Occupational Therapy assessment may be requested by parents/carers and schools. The Local Offer and an internet search will bring up a range of appropriately registered private Occupational Therapy companies that can offer support for families in County Durham – see the link below.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/3722/About-the-Local-Offer-in-County-Durham>

If the assessment has been privately commissioned by a family or education setting to provide supporting advice for an education, health, and care needs assessment or an EHC plan Annual Review, the Council for Disabled Children have many resources. This link specifically offers guidance on writing good quality health advice.

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Health%20Advice.pdf>

The Royal College of Occupational Therapy provides a guide that outlines the added value that Occupational Therapy can bring and factors for consideration when determining quality, resourcing, and organisation.

<https://www.rcot.co.uk/sites/default/files/Information-for-funders-and-commissioners.pdf>

Educational settings must ensure that when they commission a private Occupational Therapy assessment, there is a discussion with the parent/carer, school, and local authority representatives such as a SEND case worker, if appropriate, about how the recommendations and provision will be funded. Please note, if there is an equivalent NHS provider that offers the same service, the local authority will not accept a request to fund the private equivalent.

In addition, please remember there is a requirement for schools to implement Quality First Teaching and a graduated approach, which might include everyday strategies and reasonable adjustment that teaching staff can implement.

Sensory needs assessments

Some children and young people experience challenges with processing sensory information (e.g., noise, touch, movement, taste, and sight), and this can also lead to difficulties in daily life and impact upon functional skills, particularly at school.

This has led to a significant increase in referrals to the Occupational Therapy Team, particularly seeking 'Sensory Integration Therapy' provision. In seeking to provide evidence-based interventions, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists has published their Informed View on Sensory Integration and sensory-based interventions (2021). Their view is that:

"Currently, the evidence for Ayres Sensory Integration and sensory-based interventions is limited and inconclusive"... "Occupational therapists must be clear about their rationale and the evidence base for using or recommending these interventions. They should consider how the interventions would promote the person's occupational performance and engagement, along with its efficacy and the cost of delivering the intervention to the service, person, and their family".

<https://www.rcot.co.uk>

In addition, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) recently carried out a Randomised Control Trial to determine the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of sensory integration therapy for children with autism and sensory difficulties across behavioural, functional, and quality-of-life outcomes. It was concluded that the "intervention did not demonstrate clinical benefit above standard care" (2022).

Sensory integration therapy for children with autism and sensory processing difficulties: the SenITA RCT published a <https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hta/TQGE0020/#/abstract>

Making Changes Together (County Durham's parent/carer forum) has published a parents' guide to supporting children with sensory processing difficulties in school. This sets out the expectations of supporting children within quality first teaching methods and services that can offer further advice – see PDF.



SchoolSupportSensoryProcessingDisorder.

CDDFT Occupational Therapy Service carries out functional assessments and provides strategies to support children and young people with their sensory needs.

Elective home education

Parents/carers may choose to teach their child at home. This is called home education (or sometimes elective home education, or home schooling).

Parents may decide to use private tutors or other adults to help in providing a suitable education, but there is no requirement to do so. Learning may take place at a variety of locations, not just the family home.

If a child has an EHC plan, it is the local authority's duty to ensure that the educational provision specified in the plan is made available to the child - but only if the child's parents have not arranged for the child to receive a suitable education in some other way (i.e., private school). Therefore, if the home education is suitable, the local authority has no duty to arrange any special educational provision for the child; the plan should simply set out the type of special educational provision that the local authority thinks the child requires.

It should be noted that parents who choose to educate a child in these ways rather than sending the child to school full-time take on financial responsibility for the cost of doing so, including the cost of any external tuition and any educational aids or adaptations. Further details can be found on the Local Offer website – link below.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2338/Educate-your-child-at-home>

Access to Occupational Therapy Services is the same, wherever a child is educated, within County Durham.

Supplementary services

There are services and resources available to supplement statutory services and provision. Examples of these services are listed below:

Local Services

The Learning Library loans specialist equipment, activity items, games, jigsaws, toys, musical instruments, and specialist sensory equipment (some of which may be beyond the reach of the average family budget). Additionally, they provide themed discovery boxes and travel bags.

An outreach service is also available where outreach workers visit members in their own environment to discuss individual needs.

Individual members can refer themselves or can be referred by family workers, health care professionals, schools, or private nurseries.

This service provides an excellent opportunity for families to try different toys and equipment for a period of time before making a purchase, or to change items to keep a child interested and stimulated without the cost for purchasing.

For more information about Learning Library, follow this link:

<https://www.learninglibrary.org.uk/>

Internet Resources

There is a range of useful resources on the internet that can help and support families of a child with SEND. These include:

[Worcestershire OT YouTube channel](#)

<https://sensoryprocessinghub.humber.nhs.uk/>

SEND toolkit – used by SENCOs:

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/22218/SEND-toolkit>

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/31276/Special-Educational-Needs-and-or-Disability-SEND-in-schools-A-guide-for-parents-and-carers/pdf/SENDparentsguide.pdf?m=637755894714830000>

Advice for parents who are dissatisfied with the support their child is receiving

If a parent/carer is not satisfied with the support their child is receiving or if they disagree with, or do not understand a decision made concerning their child by a professional they should approach the professional involved with their child and discuss this with them in the first instance.

This may be a case worker, school representative or occupational therapist.

It is hoped that clear communication and early identification of any issues will enable a prompt resolution and prevent the issue from becoming worse.

However, if a parent/carer continues to be dissatisfied then they should ask for details of the complaints process for the respective organisation so the matter can be considered formally.

Advice and support may also be provided by the SENDIASS Service (see useful contact information for details).

Glossary of Terms

Term	Description
Quality First Teaching	Is teaching that emphasises high quality, inclusive teaching for all pupils in a class.
SEND	Refers to special educational needs and/or disabilities
SEN	Refers to special educational needs
EHCP or EHC plan	Education, Health, and Care Plan
SENDIASS	SEND Information Advice and Support Service

Useful contact information

Local Offer – The Local Offer website reflects the local offer of services (including social care and health) available in County Durham to children with SEND. Information has been developed to allow parents, carers and young people to see more clearly what services are available locally to meet their educational needs and/or disabilities from birth to the age of 25. Many of the links provided throughout this guide take you directly to relevant sections of the Local Offer website.

A dedicated [Special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\) and our Local Offer](#) section has been created on the website and a directory of services are linked to through the [Families Information Service: Local Offer](#).

<http://www.countydurhamfamilies.info/kb5/durham/fsd/localoffer.page>

SENDIASS - Durham SEND Information Advice and Support Service is a service which provides information and support to parents of children with special educational needs. In addition, they have a range of information leaflets available to download. Alternatively, you can contact SENDIASS for paper copies. <https://durhamsendiass.info/>

Making Changes Together (MCT) - A group of experienced parent carer volunteers from County Durham and who represent the interests of parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and or disabilities in County Durham. They do this by working in partnership with the local authority, health and social care also other groups and organisations (locally, regionally, and nationally) to influence service provision and highlight the issues and needs of the families they represent. They deliver workshops, bi-annual parent carer conferences and various events within County Durham to get views from all parent carers and influence “Changes Together.” <https://www.mctdurham.co.uk/>

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) - provides a range of advice and support to families for many areas of life, beyond issues relating to SEND. If parents feel they need some support with any aspect of life they can check the SENDIASS, Local Offer or Families Information Service websites, or approach any of the professionals involved with the family e.g., health visitor, school, case worker, therapist, who can make a referral to the VCS Alliance who will identify relevant advice and support services in the local area including contact information, for the family.

To be reviewed and updated in April 2024.

This document was produced in collaboration with staff working in relevant service areas across the County Durham Care Partnership in County Durham.

This document is available in alternative format on request.

Please email necsu.comms@nhs.net