

Case Study: Structuring Early Years Teams in Sefton

This case study provides insight into how Sefton Borough Council structures its early years team. This is what they told us.

Where does the early years team sit?

About two and a half years ago, we unified our Early Years Service by bringing together the quality team (previously part of Communities) and the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) service. This created a cohesive remit for children aged 0-11 years, with collaboration across different areas. Our early years team is now strategically placed within the Education Services department, which aligns with our school readiness agenda.

What do the structure and roles of the early years team look like?

The **Early Years Service Manager** maintains strategic oversight over the Quality Improvement and SEND teams.

Our key teams include:

Quality Improvement Team: This team is headed by the **EY Quality Team leader** and includes **five Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs)** with roles tailored to specific settings.

- **Three QIOs** support childminders and PVI (Private, Voluntary, and Independent) providers.
- **One QIO** supports schools and PVI providers offering out-of-school care and wraparound childcare services.
- **One QIOs** are dedicated to nursery and reception classes in schools.

The QIOs challenge, support, and monitor providers to help them fulfil their statutory duties under the Early Years Foundation Stage. We guide providers in addressing identified needs, preparing for Ofsted inspections, and achieving improved outcomes for children.

SEND team: To address the growing demand for inclusive education and specialist support, we have significantly expanded our SEND team over the past two years. This team is headed by an **EY SEND Team Leader** and includes:

- **Two Portage workers** provide early support for children before they enter formal childcare or education. Traditionally these workers focused on home visits, but the growing caseload has led to the introduction of 'stay and play' sessions, allowing children and families to engage with the service earlier, as they wait for full case allocation.
- **Three Inclusion Consultants** and **four Inclusion Officers** manage individual cases. They support children and families, guide settings through the SEND referral process, and offer one-to-one support for children with complex needs.

- **Three Inclusion Consultants** focus on transitions from nursery to reception and from Reception to Year 1. They ensure schools are ready to meet the needs of incoming children, provide training plans for teachers, and offer advice to improve inclusive practices.

Our collaborative approach ensures comprehensive support for children with additional needs throughout their early years and into formal education.

Early intervention: We added **two Early Intervention Officers** to reinforce our proactive support. They use a whole setting approach rather than focusing on individual children. Their responsibilities include:

- Implementing a graduated approach to inclusion.
- Reviewing Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) processes.
- Delivering whole-setting training to upskill staff.
- Creating and monitoring action plans to improve inclusive practices. Providers value our Early Intervention Officers for their accessibility and hands-on support.

Partnership coordination: Our **Partnership Coordinator** plays a vital role in linking our early years service with other sectors, including social care, early help, housing, and health services.

- A significant achievement has been launching the Early Years Advocates programme, uniting professionals from diverse fields such as youth justice, housing, and job centres to provide families with consistent, coordinated support.
- The coordinator has also strengthened our relationships with health services, working collaboratively on campaigns such as toilet training, tooth brushing, and other health-related priorities for young children.

What makes this approach a success?

The new structure gives a more focused approach to supporting providers in an integrated way, across SEND support and quality improvement work

In sum, through thoughtful restructuring and proactive strategies, we continue to make a positive difference for children and families in Sefton.