

Southern Family Support Hubs Strategic Analysis Report 2025/26

**Integrating Family Support Hub and
Outcomes Monitoring Evidence**

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can achieve alone.*



Executive Summary



This report brings together Family Support Hub monitoring information and Outcomes Monitoring data to provide a deeper understanding of demand, need and future planning implications within the Southern Outcomes Group area.

Southern presents one of the clearest early intervention narratives across the Family Support Hub network. Parenting support remains the dominant presenting need, schools remain the principal referral pathway and performance against timelines measures remains strong. Alongside this, neurodevelopmental need continues to grow, highlighting increasing demand for support relating to autism, ADHD and assessment pathways.





Understanding Demand

Family referrals increased from 916 families in 2024/25 to **989** in 2025/26. This follows a reduction recorded in 2024/25 and indicates renewed growth in demand. The increase was accompanied by growth in children **1238** and parents **1335** referred. Compared with Belfast and Western the increase was modest, suggesting relative stability in demand.



Demand and Activity

Parenting support remained the most common presenting need, increasing from 510 referrals in 2024/25 to **574** in 2025/26. This exceeded referrals relating to school-age emotional and behavioural difficulties. Unlike Belfast and Western, financial support remains a relatively small component of demand. The data suggests a strong focus on strengthening family functioning and parental capacity.

Disability and Neurodevelopmental Need



Children with disabilities increased from 216 in 2024/25 to **302** in 2025/26 and support for children awaiting assessment increased from 150 to **164**. Autism remained the largest disability category. Outcomes Monitoring data shows increasing autism diagnoses, rising DLA rates and growth in Special Educational Needs statements, supporting the trend observed within Hub referrals.



Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Referral data demonstrates increasing emotional wellbeing and support needs alongside significant levels of counselling and one-to-one support requirements. Outcomes Monitoring indicators show continuing CAMHS pressures alongside elevated levels of self-harm and alcohol-related admissions. Unmet need information further reinforces demand for counselling, mentoring and targeted emotional wellbeing interventions. These findings suggest continuing pressure in relation to emotional wellbeing support.

Referral Pathways

Schools remained the largest referral source in both years, accounting for 19% of referrals in 2024/25 and **17%** in 2025/26. Southern remains unique regionally in being consistently school-led. Self-referrals increased from 12% to **16%**, suggesting growing family awareness of Hub services.

Identifying Need and Early Identification

Children aged 5-10 remain the largest referral group, increasing from 487 to **590** referrals. This supports the view that primary school years remain a critical period for identifying need and delivering early intervention.

Family Circumstances and Vulnerability

Southern demonstrates one of the most balanced household profiles in Northern Ireland. In 2024/25 referrals were almost equal between one-parent and two-parent households. By 2025/26, referrals involving two-parent households exceeded one-parent households. The data reinforces that family support need exists across all family types.

Inclusion and Accessibility

Referrals from ethnic minority communities increased from 12% to **14%**, placing Southern similar to the regional average. At the same time, interpreter availability worsened significantly, falling from 8 interpreters secured in 2024/25 to only **2** in 2025/26 despite similar levels of demand, however Southern Area were first to pilot the new VASCO Interpreting devices across their Hubs with the device utilised 11 times.

Outcomes and Performance

Southern continues to achieve strong performance. Referrals completed within four weeks increased from 83% to **86%**. The majority of families were connected to at least one service and service uptake remained high. These findings demonstrate a responsive and effective Hub model. The Outcomes Monitoring Report highlights that Southern has the highest proportion of children **24.9%** within its population in Northern Ireland. Autism diagnoses, Disability Living Allowance claims and Special Educational Needs statements continue to rise. Southern also has significant newcomer communities in parts of the Trust area. These wider population trends align strongly with Family Support Hub activity.

Implications for Future Planning

Future planning should focus on: - Maintain and strengthen evidence-based parenting support programmes. Partnership working with schools as the primary referral pathway. Strengthen support for families awaiting neurodevelopmental assessment. Address declining access to interpreting services. Continue investment in early intervention and prevention. Use unmet need data to inform commissioning priorities, particularly around counselling, bereavement and one-to-one support.

Points for Discussion

- How can Southern continue to build on its strong parenting support model?
- What additional supports are required for children and families affected by neurodevelopmental need?
- How can interpreter provision be strengthened?
- What learning can other areas take from Southern's school-led referral approach?

CONCLUSION

Southern appears to operate as a highly effective early intervention system centred on parenting support and school-based identification of need. The evidence suggests that difficulties are often being recognised and addressed through support to parents and families before escalation. Increasing neurodevelopmental demand represents the most significant emerging pressure.

Southern Family Support Hubs provide a strong example of prevention and early intervention in practice. Parenting support, strong school partnerships and effective referral management remain defining strengths. Future planning should continue to build on these foundations while responding to increasing neurodevelopmental and inclusion-related needs.

Data Sources:

[Southern Family Support Hub Annual Report Card 25/26](#)
[Outcome monitoring report 24/25](#)



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