

LEARN SHEFFIELD FUTURE SHAPE



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Introduction

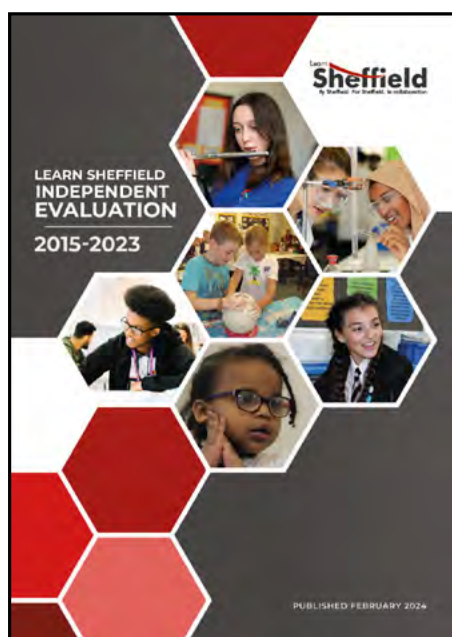
Learn Sheffield Future Shape has been developed as an additional paper for the 2025 Learn Sheffield AGM. It supports the Director's Strategic Report by providing an update on the way that the organisation has developed since the [Independent Evaluation](#) was published in February 2024.

This publication responds to the evaluation, describes the way that Learn Sheffield has developed in 2024, and looks ahead to the future shape of the organisation in 2025 and beyond.

Our intention, in sharing this document with stakeholders, is to inform the ongoing conversation about the role of Learn Sheffield in the city with our members and partners. The purpose of Learn Sheffield is to enhance the life chances of children and young people in Sheffield. This paper is designed to support reflection about the extent to which our priorities and plans will support our members to achieve this.



In the autumn of 2023, Learn Sheffield carried out an evaluation of its work across the eight years since it was incorporated in the summer of 2015. The [Learn Sheffield Evaluation 2015-2023](#) was accompanied by a number of supporting documents. These are listed below and can also be found on the [Learn Sheffield website](#).



*Learn Sheffield
Independent Evaluation
2015-2023*



*A brief history of
Learn Sheffield
2015-2023*



*Learn Sheffield
Questionnaire Responses
2023*



*Sheffield - Performance
Analysis 2023*



Insight Report: SEND



Insight Report: Attendance



Insight Report: Outcomes

Learn Sheffield Future Shape has been developed by the Learn Sheffield team in response to this evaluation and its supporting documents. We have tried to set out what we have learned from the process and the independent findings and recommendations over the following pages. In doing this we have considered the implications for the city, our organisation and other place-based education partnerships.

Responding to the recommendations

The [Learn Sheffield Independent Evaluation 2015-2023](#) concluded with five recommendations (see below and on pages 28 and 29 of the report). We have been working on many of these areas since they were published and have considered how to address others as part of our longer-term development planning.

The reflections on each recommendation provided the starting point for discussions about the future shape of Learn Sheffield. In describing this learning below, we have also identified the twelve themes which will inform the future shape of the organisation.

Recommendation 1

Ensure the Learn Sheffield school improvement activities, such as the CPD programme, in-school support and partnership working with other agencies (including the local authority), all maintain an explicit and ambitious focus on supporting schools to:

- improve attendance
- help disadvantaged children and those with SEND achieve as well as they can
- improve pupils' outcomes; improving Sheffield's rankings compared to those of other Core Cities
- improve behaviour.

Theme 1: School Improvement

This recommendation provided a helpful clarity about the key areas of focus for Learn Sheffield's school improvement activities. The priorities emerged clearly from our own analysis, that of the evaluation team and perspectives of the school leaders who spoke to the team.

Learn Sheffield has continued to provide 'external eyes' and expertise to settings to support them to improve the quality of education that they provide, and this will continue to remain a core aspect of our work. The areas identified in this recommendation have been scoped more explicitly in our latest subscription offer.

We recognise that they will require an explicit and ambitious focus in the future, through commissioned school improvement, the traded subscription offer and other civic and partnership working, especially in relation to improving outcomes. The other school improvement area which has become a focus for the future is safeguarding, where we will work with Sheffield City Council (SCC) and the Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) to ensure that high quality training is available to Sheffield settings.

We have also explored these areas in our work with partners and project opportunities, including partnership working with the Local Authority and other civic partners. The Insight Reports into [Attendance](#) and [SEND](#) were both produced as supporting documents for the evaluation and have provided a focus for the work that has followed.

Theme 2: Attendance

The [attendance project](#) was informed by the Insight Report and led to the development of a task and finish group focussed on improving attendance chaired by Greg Fell (Director of Public Health) and including colleagues from SCC, health and care.

Learn Sheffield followed this up in the autumn of 2024 with the publication of [Good Practice in the improvement of pupils' attendance in Sheffield Settings](#). This explored successful strategies around attendance in the city through interviews with settings which are out-performing their context. This report will inform the further development of Learn Sheffield's school improvement offer as well as supporting settings in Sheffield and beyond to improve their strategic approach to attendance.



Theme 3: SEND

The SEND Insight Report provided the starting point for discussions by sector partnerships, Learn Sheffield, the Local Authority and health colleagues about SEND in the city.

These discussions in the summer term led to a commission from Sheffield City Council for Learn Sheffield to lead the development of the local-area SEND partnership and a [Sheffield SEND Manifesto](#) for the city. This commenced from September 2024, and forms part of a multi-year commission to support better outcomes for children and young people who require something additional or different.

This is a significant development for the city and also for us as an organisation. Learn Sheffield has made significant changes and additions to enable us to make a difference in this space. This has driven some of the organisational changes described elsewhere in this document.

Theme 4: Inclusion

One of the impacts of the Local-Area SEND partnership not being effective has been the development of wider inclusion issues. This has been reflected in limited commissioning and a lack of effective approaches to inclusion more widely.

Learn Sheffield have also been commissioned by SCC, from September 2024, to work alongside colleagues from the sector and LA to develop a city-wide strategy and operational plan for alternative provision (AP) in the city. We plan to revisit and update the [Alternative Provision in Sheffield Research Study Report](#) which Learn Sheffield led in December 2019, before developing an AP Taskforce to take agreed recommendations forward and implement changes.

The challenges faced by the city in relation to exclusion cannot be separated from the work in relation to SEND or AP, as unmet need and a lack of suitable provision are often contributing factors. Learn Sheffield will seek to bring these strands of work together, in partnership with SCC and the sector, to develop a more coherent and connected strategic approach.

Recommendation 2

Ensure the factors which affect the outcomes in Sheffield are well understood by:

- conducting further data analysis to identify factors which do or might affect the outcomes in Sheffield in a different way to the Core Cities which appear to be attaining and achieving more highly, such as: the nature of disadvantage; the SEND profile; social and health indicators, pupil mobility and the specific make-up of the school population in Sheffield.

Theme 5: Data Analysis

The [Sheffield Performance Analysis 2023](#) document changed the way that we analyse outcomes in Sheffield and ensure that this analysis is widely understood. The [Insight Report: Outcomes](#) provided further data analysis to identify factors which might affect the outcomes in Sheffield. This approach contributed to the Learn Sheffield Independent Evaluation and modelled a way of working for the city. This includes identifying trails for further analysis which explore aspects of the data about which we remain curious.

In addition to this civic work, Learn Sheffield is also developing its traded data analysis offer. We have continued to work closely with the SCC Performance and Analysis Service but have also been developing a tool called MATpad. This tool was used in the summer term as a mechanism to distribute a new KS2 report.

This work has been further supported by our participation in the [Local Ed 2025 national school improvement pilot project](#), which includes an exploration of school report cards. We will shortly use our new online Insights Hub to publish our learning from the project in order to contribute to the national debate on report cards.

Theme 6: Pupil Voice

Our work on report cards also initiated a search for better ways to capture the voice of pupils and other stakeholders. In 2023/24 we held two workshops with colleagues from the Cynefin Institute about the use of a tool called Sensemaker.

Learn Sheffield has secured funding from Public Health to explore this tool to seek to better understand young people's experience of education and barriers to learning, engagement and attendance. This tool will also be used in relation to the development of the SEND Manifesto, initially as part of a significant piece of enquiry in February and March 2025.

If these initial applications of Sensemaker are successful, we hope to further develop our capacity to provide insights into the experiences of stakeholders within education and beyond in our contribution to the [Sheffield City Goals](#).

Recommendation 3

Formalise approaches to evaluate the impact of Learn Sheffield's work by:

- establishing a cycle of quality assurance and evaluation of the partnership itself
- ensuring clear lines of communication and information sharing between all colleagues interfacing with a particular setting; scheduling regular update meetings to maintain a well-coordinated approach.

Theme 7: Organisational Improvement

One of our considerations in commissioning the independent evaluation, was a recognition that we had not fully implemented the recommendation in our 2018 [Peer Review](#) to do more to demonstrate progress and impact. Learn Sheffield will use aspects of the evaluation process, including the routine collection of stakeholder perspectives, more strategically going forwards.

The recommendations also highlight some of the challenges for internal communication which have arisen through the growth in the capacity and offer of Learn Sheffield. The value of information sharing between Learn Sheffield colleagues to enable a well-coordinated approach to supporting settings is well understood. We have reflected on this as a team and have identified ways to overcome those challenges in the next phase of our development.

Internally, Learn Sheffield has made considerable progress since the evaluation in relation to systems and processes. More detail on this will follow later in this document but a self-evaluation (based on our purpose, vision and values) has been designed and used to inform a more developed improvement planning process. This will support the more distributed leadership model that Learn Sheffield will require in the coming years.

Recommendation 4

Strategically plan the Learn Sheffield CPD programme (designed to meet improvement priorities) much earlier in the school year by:

- routinely canvassing the views of setting leaders, MAT leaders and the LSIP team to ensure the CPD programme aligns with the key MAT, individual school and Sheffield priorities and to avoid replicating training already scheduled
- scheduling one-to-one subscription meetings with education settings and MATs earlier in the school year - to help tailor Learn Sheffield development support and training to the school's and MAT's key improvement priorities.

Theme 8: Subscription Development

This recommendation aligned with Learn Sheffield's intention to redevelop the structure of the subscription offer ahead of 2024/25. The new offer was launched in May for a September 2024 start and is more flexible and less 'all-in' in nature. This enables settings and groups of settings to buy a package linked to their priorities.

The [Learn Sheffield Evaluation Questionnaire Responses](#) included a series of questions about the subscription offer. Whilst this identified the primacy of in-school support days, it also made clear that all aspects of the current subscription are valued by a significant proportion of settings. Learn Sheffield will structure the way that it canvasses views, to inform the subscription, more routinely. The new subscription offer also enables non-Sheffield settings to purchase a package, whilst retaining the option for Sheffield subscribers to access discounts which reflect their ownership of the company.

The recommendation was helpful in reinforcing the importance of co-constructing the subscription and ensuring that it is available earlier to enable colleagues to make best use of the offer alongside their existing resources. The new model, for 2024/25, was shared as quickly as possible but the intention in subsequent years is to publish the first outline plan of the subscription for the following year by the end of the spring term.

Recommendation 5

Ensure the structure and shape of Learn Sheffield and its partnership working enables the organisation to maintain and build upon its many strengths by:

- building on the greater financial resilience brought about by the Finance and Operations Director to ensure financial sustainability
- considering the capacity of the leadership structure of Learn Sheffield going forward to respond to the need for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement services (including requests from other local areas)
- continuing to work alongside the Local Authority as a catalyst for improvement, ensuring lines of responsibility are clear to all
- continuing to build the Improvement Partner and school-based Support Partner teams, through rigorous recruitment and induction processes with time for training, quality assurance and ensuring clear communication channels.

Theme 9: Organisational Structure

The improved finance and operations capacity of Learn Sheffield has enabled the organisation to overcome significant financial challenges in recent times. Whilst the organisation is now considerably more financially resilient, financial sustainability will always be relevant due to the nature of our funding.

The Learn Sheffield Board and leadership have consistently taken an aspirational approach to managing these risks. The development of the new subscription model carries financial risk, as settings use the opportunity to reduce costs in the current climate but is necessary to ensure longer term viability. Similarly, the development of new activities and services require initial investment in order to achieve the strategic impact required.

The recommendations also reflected the challenges of maintaining consistency whilst growing the team. The tightness of the LSIP deployment model has made it difficult to bring the team together but we have set aside twelve days in 2023/24 to ensure that this happens. We recognise that, as we continue to grow and include more school-based Support Partners, it will be essential to invest and build in sufficient opportunities for colleagues to work together.

Learn Sheffield carried out a leadership restructure in the summer of 2024 to enable the necessary organisational growth. This was linked to additional recruitment to ensure that we have sufficient capacity to deliver on new commissions, in particular relating to SEND. These developments have prioritised the development of our team and our internal structures so that the future shape of Learn Sheffield is underpinned by the necessary capacity.

Theme 10: Projects & Programmes

In 2023/24 projects and programmes accounted for more than half of all Learn Sheffield income. Whilst the majority of this funding goes into Learn Sheffield and is then spent on the agreed activities, this does support us financially and is part of the future model for a more resilient and sustainable organisation. More information and examples of projects and programmes can be found in the Projects section of our [website](#).

Similarly, the significant range of projects and programmes provided many strong examples of impact in the evaluation report. The scale and scope of these projects varies a great deal, but all of them offer opportunities to contribute to our purpose, vision and values.

We are also conscious of the increasing, but not always predictable, connectivity between different strands of work. The 'can-do' culture of Learn Sheffield leads to positive impact and this often goes beyond that which was initially expected or planned for.

Theme 11: LA Strategic Partnership

The evaluation and its evidence base was very clear in relation to the importance of Learn Sheffield working in partnership with the Local Authority, including the need for clear lines of responsibility which are shared with the sector. The recommendation reflects the much-improved relationship, the potential for this to be a catalyst for improvement and the importance of Sheffield settings understanding who does what.

We will return to this theme later in this document, but it is important to be clear how pleased Learn Sheffield is to be working closely with SCC once again. We had set out the difficulties and made preparations to work differently when the loss of alignment made the strategic relationship no longer viable, but this was never our preferred position. The challenges faced by SCC and the city are considerable, and this brings risks for Learn Sheffield when working closely in partnership, but this is also where we can have the greatest impact on the life chances of our children and young people.

Theme 12: Civic & System Leadership

The final theme relates to the partnership working referred to at the beginning of the recommendation. We recognise that changes to the education landscape in recent years, not least through the pandemic, have had an impact on the effectiveness of the partnership infrastructure in the city. These changes were highlighted by the evaluation process and team, who noted a widespread sense that the purpose of partnerships have become less clear but that colleagues do not have a consistent perspective on next steps.

Learn Sheffield will undertake a review of the partnership infrastructure in 2025 to consider its purpose and how it could interact with MATs and SCC processes. We will seek to make recommendations which can then be discussed by settings and organisations across the city.

Building on strong foundations and culture

Whilst the content of the evaluation provided the themes on which Learn Sheffield's current and future work would focus, there was another clear lesson to be drawn.

The culture of Learn Sheffield has been crucial to every success that it has had so far. This message came through many of the quotes in the independent report and its supporting documents. The organisation works because it does the right things but also, crucially, does them in the right way and at the right time.

We reviewed our [purpose, vision and values](#) just over a year ago, at the same time that the evaluation was taking place. The purpose stayed the same, the values were updated and the vision changed to reflect the very different landscape of 2024.

As we have developed, and in some case begun to work on, the themes below, we have used our purpose, vision and values to ensure that we retain a clear focus on why Learn Sheffield exists and the importance of maintaining our strong culture in all that we do.



The question of sustainability has always been a focus for Learn Sheffield, as it is for many organisations of our size and scope. It is a question that everyone involved in the executive leadership and the Board of the organisation has wrestled with over the past nine years.

The image below is taken from a slide from an internal team day in December 2024. It is a reminder of our priorities and the underlying approach 'more resilient, same culture and values'.



The bridge symbolises that, for us as a team, we are trying to build a bridge between our current shape and the organisation that Learn Sheffield needs to be to deliver in the next phase of its development.

The priority of becoming a more sustainable organisation is present in every strategic discussion or activity. We believe that Learn Sheffield needs to develop a more distributed leadership model combined with more team working, so that we are less vulnerable to the impact of losing individual colleagues.

Resetting the civic role of Learn Sheffield

The other topic that has been ever present in the history of Learn Sheffield is the nature of the strategic relationship with Sheffield City Council.

At some points this question has focussed on how the organisation balances a strong relationship with SCC with the need to be independent enough to advocate for the sector. More latterly it focussed on the loss of alignment between the partners. The papers for 2023 Learn Sheffield AGM included an additional Position Statement setting out the challenges faced by the organisation in this regard.

More information about this can be found in the [Brief History of Learn Sheffield](#) document that was one of the supporting documents for the Independent Evaluation, which charts both the changes in the school improvement commission and the wider relationship.

The evaluation has provided a clear direction for Learn Sheffield. Members have been clear that their preference is for a strong strategic relationship, which maximises the benefits of the Learn Sheffield vehicle for the city. This coincided with changes in SCC that have made a stronger and more responsive partnership possible.

The strategic relationship has developed considerably during 2024, leading to new commissions and a longer-term shared strategic perspective. Both SCC and Learn Sheffield are clear that, as we enter 2025, establishing the framework for this approach and way of working will be a priority so that the extent of the civic role of Learn Sheffield is resilient to changing circumstances.





Learn
Sheffield

**.By Sheffield
.For Sheffield
.In Collaboration**

Establishing the future shape of Learn Sheffield

Learn Sheffield has undertaken its most significant and rapid phase of evolution in the year since the Independent Evaluation was published. The past year has been comparable to the first year (when the company was being established) or the third year (when the subscription was being developed) in both the pace and scale of development.

Some of this has been external and in public. The launch of a new subscription model (in May) and a new commission in relation to SEND (in September) being good examples of this. The nature of Learn Sheffield, as a member-owned organisation, makes this kind of transparent development the default approach.

Much of the recent development, however, has been internal and, whilst we have talked openly about it, will be less obvious to our members and stakeholders. The development of the leadership and team structures, the implementation of a more widely distributed internal improvement model and the scope of the reset with SCC are all examples of this. The drive to produce this document is, to some extent, an attempt to share this with members.

Learn Sheffield has prepared thoroughly for the future shape that emerged from the evaluation and has been developing over the past year. As always, for an organisation with few peers or comparable points of reference, this has involved reflecting on the available evidence and determining a path. We have developed an improvement cycle which is bespoke to the organisation because there isn't an obvious approach to borrow or pick up and use.

We are acutely conscious that whilst our members expect transparency and care deeply about the outcome, they are also very busy with the demands of their own settings and organisations. We hope that this document provides the transparency and shares our working, which in itself makes us more resilient, but also reflects the need for Learn Sheffield to get on with this work.

When we commissioned the Independent Evaluation, we were interested in the learning for education partnerships like Learn Sheffield, as well as our organisation itself and city. In this spirit, we have chosen (below) a small number of key pieces of learning. These are the things that feel the most significant to us a leadership team now and which might provide a useful starting point for others in the future.

School improvement will always be the core business of place-based education partnerships. What this involves will, however, change over time to respond to the always changing education landscape nationally. Clarity about the current school improvement model, which will always be school-led, is crucial.

To be resilient and sustainable, partnerships like Learn Sheffield need to make a broader contribution to education. In our case this includes traded activity, taking broader responsibilities (SEND for example) and taking a lead role in bringing projects and programmes into the city.

The great strength of Learn Sheffield, and similar partnerships, is the trust and connectivity of the relationships with a fragmented sector. Increasingly, a clear and shared understanding of the challenges faced by settings needs to direct the work of the partnership vehicle.

A strong and effective culture has been key to the success of Learn Sheffield and will be crucial to successful growth in the future. We need to continue to be flexible, solution-focussed, willing to work at risk, innovative and true to our shared values. This is more difficult in a growing organisation, with more capacity and a more distributed leadership model, but it is essential.

Learn Sheffield also has a significant role to play in the city. Our purpose is to improve the life chances of the children and young people of Sheffield, and this will be heavily influenced by the extent to which Sheffield thrives. We can both connect our education sector to the strategic direction of the city and also engage directly with some of the biggest challenges, through the City Goals.

Horizon scanning: the third five years

Learn Sheffield will have been in existence for ten years at the end of the current academic year, in August 2025. Horizon scanning is always difficult in education, given the perpetual nature of change, but we are considering the areas where Learn Sheffield can make the most constructive and helpful contribution in the next (third) five-year period.

The timing of this document coincides with some significant changes to the education landscape. The largest of these changes has been the arrival of new government, with some uncertainty about the specifics of future policy, and also a change of Ofsted's Chief Inspector.

In recent years there has been a consistent local and national perspective that school improvement is a traded activity. Learn Sheffield is hopeful that the next few years will see a more comprehensive national school improvement strategy that goes beyond structures and recognises that the how (implementation) is as important as the what (ideas and approaches) and that 'scaled intervention' (identify an approach, test it and scale it up) is not the only mechanism for improvement.

Learn Sheffield will also consider school improvement strategy, working with the sector to refine our understanding of what works at an organisational level and consider the roles of different partners, including civic and LA roles. It is likely that developing a broader education strategy will be important so that Sheffield can mobilise its civic and sector resources to address the complex challenges that we face collectively.

The context in which our member settings are working is currently impacted significantly by financial challenges. This includes a funding crisis in education, where



funding has failed to keep pace with costs or demand, and also the cost-of-living crisis in which so many of our families are struggling. It will be important to recognise that any local education strategy must consider this wider context.

Locally, issues relating to inclusion stem from a perfect storm of weak strategic decision making, poor funding (in comparison to other similar places historically) and the wider contextual challenges of our city. If Sheffield is to increase attendance, reduce exclusions, and better meet the needs of children and young people who need something additional or different, then this will require concerted civic activity.

Some of these local challenges are mirrored nationally, but have a local dimension, whilst other national issues, including the challenges in relation to recruitment and retention, are felt in the city in the same way that they are elsewhere.

Learn Sheffield has already changed in response to many of the themes identified in this document. It will continue to develop a future shape which is fit for purpose for the next five years. We will continue to work with our members to ensure that the future Learn Sheffield understands their challenges and priorities, and can respond to them.





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of which 80% is owned by schools and colleges and 20% by Sheffield City Council.