

Scrutiny Briefing Note

The **Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel** have asked to monitor progress on the following issues. This briefing contains the latest position as at 25th August 2021.

Subject: SEND inspection written statement of action – progress update

In July 2018 the Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were inspected jointly by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in respect of our services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The inspection found 3 key areas that require improvement. These were:

1. Local area leaders have a limited understanding of the needs of children and young people who have SEN and/or disabilities and the education, health and care outcomes they achieve. This fundamentally weakens the local area's ability to jointly plan, commission and provide the right services, resources and support for this group of children and young people, and their families.
2. The local area's strategy for improving arrangements for identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people who have SEN and/or disabilities, and improving their outcomes, is ineffective.
3. Children, young people and families have too little involvement in meaningfully co-producing the education, health and care services they need.

As a result a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was developed by the Council and the CCG and approved by Ofsted and the CQC. Ofsted and the CQC were due to return to undertake a revisit around June 2020 however due to the pandemic all Local Authority Joint Inspections were halted, and these then restarted around Easter 2021. We have continued to maintain contact with the Regional Lead for the DfE and NHS England and have had 4 monitoring visits during the last 12 months. Ofsted and the CQC are now due to return to the borough to undertake a revisit in the Autumn of 2021 when they will make a judgement as to whether we have made sufficient progress against the actions identified in our WSOA.

Since our inspection in 2018, NEL has strengthened strategic leadership in the borough. We have a new DCS, Assistant Director for Early Help and Safeguarding, an Assistant Director for Education and Inclusion and a Head of SEND and Inclusion (SEND Strategic Lead). These new appointments, alongside the strengthened Union Leadership (joint NELC and NELCCG) arrangements, as well as a Political Portfolio holder who is sighted regularly, have significantly raised the profile of SEND across the Partnership and have overseen significant improvement in services for children, young people and families.

Progress on the WSoA has continued throughout the pandemic, albeit at a slower pace than we would have liked. We have developed strong governance arrangements which oversee the progress on all SEND activities.

Despite the capacity of NELPPF and parents/carers generally to engage with us around co-production, due to the pandemic, and their understandable priorities in terms of caring and home schooling; we have seen positive progress. We have continued to create opportunities to engage/co-produce for those that were able and wished to. A new weekly virtual parent engagement meeting is held with SENDIASS, NELPPF and any parent/carer that wants to is invited to attend. This is followed up with a weekly co-produced newsletter issued to all parents/carers. Our links with families of children with EHCPs has strengthened during COVID as officers have been able to contact every family with a child with an EHCP to discuss fears and concerns and ensure they feel supported. Local Authority and CCG staff used feedback from these calls to adapt their response and service delivery, be it updating the SEND Local Offer with clearer signposting to services families needed, or working with therapies and mental health teams to ensure children could still receive their intervention and support.

During the pandemic, a school link officer approach to keeping close contact with schools and academies has been implemented which has significantly improved our working relationships with education settings. Our relationship with Academies in particular have been enhanced through this process, enabling officers to provide appropriate support and challenge to ensure pupils continued to receive high quality education provision.

Key Improvements So Far...

- The recruitment of a full-time Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) to ensure the health needs of children and young people with Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP) are being identified and met. This has improved the quality of contributions from health professionals to EHCPs, ensuring that the holistic needs of a child are known, understood and supported. Parents/carers are offering positive feedback and educational settings have welcomed the appointment of a specialist nurse for complex health care needs.
- The recruitment of a full-time Designated Children Looked After Nurse. This brings the role in line with national guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children” to ensure there is clear oversight for strategic planning, quality assurance and performance monitoring for CLA.
- The design and implementation of a ‘working together’ Engagement Strategy across NELC and NELCCG to ensure families and those that provide services work together to make decisions or create a service which works for them all. A wider group of parents/carers have engaged with us to co-produce this guidance and as a result report feeling like the council are working with parents/carers.
- We now have a SEND Strategy and SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy which has been informed by a detailed Vulnerable Children’s Needs Assessment (Children’s JSNA) including those with SEND. This provides clear direction for service and team development, ensuring that children and young people have access to the right services and support at the right time, in the right place.
- SEND is now a consistent standing agenda item in all leadership settings such as Leadership Team, Scrutiny, Union Board and partnership meetings such as Head Teacher meetings. This has ensured that appropriate resourcing has been prioritised and allocated to the SEND Transformation Plan. Additional resource has enabled areas of priority to be actioned, resulting in improved service offer for children and young people with SEND.
- We now have in place a SEND Sufficiency Strategy to ensure that the borough has a range of

appropriate provision over the next 5 years to meet the current and future needs of children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND. The action plan for this strategy will ensure that there is a greater range of specialist provision in borough, reducing the need for children to go outside of North East Lincolnshire to be educated. Children are educated within and therefore are part of their community, rather than feeling outside of it.

- The implementation of the EHCP hub, a new online virtual way to streamline the existing EHCP process has so far been implemented positively. This has improved our communication with parents, carers and professionals ensuring that there isn't a delay in families receiving outcomes of decisions and has enhanced co-production of a final plan.
- The number of EHCARs completed with the 20-week timescale significantly increased throughout 2020 despite the increased number of requests during the pandemic, in March and May 2020 the LA were processing 100% of plans within the 20-week timescale.
- Nationally, there is a challenge in the recruitment of Educational Psychologists and also the difficulty with undertaking face-to-face assessments due to Covid. This position is reflective in North East Lincolnshire and has impacted on our recent timeliness of the 20-week assessment.
- We are actively seeking to recruit Educational Psychologists and looking at other models to add capacity to improve the timeliness of the 20-week assessment timescale and improve access to this service.
- The launch of Valuing SEND, a methodology to help professionals further understand young people's needs and the services they require to meet those needs. This will help closely identify the needs of the learner against the settings ability to meet those needs.
- The number of 2-2.5yr checks undertaken by the Health Visiting service has increased from below 30% in 2018/2019 to over 86% in Q3 of 2020/21. This ensures that where children are not meeting their developmental milestones, services can respond to address any health or care difficulties.
- The new Local Offer has now been launched, it has been well received by parents/carers and other key stakeholders and it has improved accessibility to SEND services for all. The appointment of a Local Offer Co-Ordinator has enabled the Local Authority to make timely and relevant updates that parents, carers and professionals can access around operation service information, as well as celebrating successes and advertising opportunities for engagement.

Key Areas for Development are...

- Joint commissioning arrangements need to be fully embedded and reflective of the joint commissioning cycle.
- Co-production needs to routinely be a part of strategic as well as operational processes and decision making.
- Multi-agency approach to post 16 transition.
- Improved use of data and data analysis from health, education and social care to inform planning and joint commissioning of services.
- Improve data transfer from schools and Academies to provide more up to date intelligence to inform planning and commissioning.
- Renew respite and short breaks offer.
- Internal and external communication around services and organisations available to support children, young people, their families and professionals across Education, Health and Social Care.

- Implementation of the recommendations and actions from the SEND Strategy, SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy and the Sufficiency Strategy.
- Transform the access pathway into a 0-25 neuro-developmental model which incorporates the re-shaping of the Child Development Centre.
- Use the high needs provision capital allocation to create additional school places for children with SEND.

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