

Report to Cabinet

12 March 2024

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND): Area SEND Inspection Report and Next Steps

Report by Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Electoral divisions: All

Summary

1. Headline Finding

- 1.1 This report summarises the outcome of the Area SEND inspection of services provided by the West Sussex Council and Integrated Care Board (ICB) partnership. The report was published on 29 February 2024 and is attached.
- 1.2 There are three outcome judgements that the joint inspectorate can make related to the experiences of children and young people:
 1. Typically positive experiences and outcomes
 2. Inconsistent experiences and outcomes
 3. Widespread or systemic failings leading to significant concerns

The judgment of the West Sussex Inspection is in category 2:

'The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.'

- 1.3 This outcome is in line with the partnership's own self-evaluation prior to the inspection. The report provides details of the experiences of children and young people with SEND in West Sussex. It identifies aspects of the Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Partnership that are effective and those that require further attention and improvement. The report provides a list of 'Areas for Improvement' that the services need to consider. The report notes that all of the areas of improvement were already reflected in the partnership's Continual Improvement Plan and, as such, action is already underway to address them.
- 1.4 The report has been shared with the Local SEND Partnership on publication. The inspection judgement aligns with Children's Services' own self-evaluation, undertaken prior to the Inspection. Its detailed findings will be the subject of a full analysis and will inform and build on our improvement planning process and will be monitored by the SEND & Alternative Provision (AP) Partnership Board.

Recommendation:

Cabinet is asked to note and comment on the attached report and approve the plan for the Cabinet Member for Children Young People and Learning to receive an improvement plan for endorsement.

Background

2. The Inspection judgement

- 2.1 This Inspection has placed the West Sussex partnership in the second category of available judgments. The inspection report provides evidence of some effective services performing well and some that require improvement. The inspection also noted that West Sussex has strength and ambition within its leaders, who know their service and have appropriate plans in place to improve service provision.
- 2.2 Amongst those aspects of the service that are **performing well**, the inspectors noted; effective support for children known to Social Care, identification of needs through Early Help – including through mandated health checks; positive engagement from schools; examples of good practice in Early Years settings, Special Schools, good practice in Further Education establishments, the active role of the Parent Carer Forum (PCF); and the ability of professionals to come together effectively in a multi-agency environment.
- 2.3 Amongst those aspects of the service where **improvement is required**, the inspection noted; Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA) are not achieved in a timely way; a recovery plan is in place but is in its infancy and has not yet had impact; waiting times for specialist services are too long, exacerbated by recruitment issues; families experience difficulties in accessing services, with variability in commissioning and delivery; school attendance issues; shortcomings in the recording of children and young people's needs; greater attention is required on young people approaching employment age and adulthood; a shortfall in special school provision.
- 2.4 The SEND & AP Partnership had previously recognised that significant improvements were required, and its own self-evaluation aligns closely with the views of the inspectors. Plans are in place to provide long term and sustainable improvements in these areas. This alignment with the inspection provides a sound basis for a new phase of improvement planning and implementation that will be overseen by the SEND & AP Partnership Board.

3. Next Steps – responding to the Inspection findings

3.1 The areas where improvements are required are as follows:

Areas for improvement
Local area health leaders should act swiftly to identify and address 'waiting well' arrangements, and gaps in service provision to meet the full range of needs of children and young people with SEND. This includes speech and language provision, neurodevelopmental pathways and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
Health leaders should act immediately to ensure that children identified as at high risk of aspiration are fully assessed including access to video-fluoroscopy as necessary.
Leaders across the partnership should work at pace to further develop their strategy to improve the timeliness of EHC plans to ensure processes are rigorous, sustainable and lead to plans of consistent quality.
Leaders should continue to implement their oversight and commissioning arrangements of suitable specialist school places and alternative provision so that there is sufficient high-quality provision that meets children and young people's SEND.
Leaders should review and further strengthen their strategic approach to preparation for adulthood, so that young people consistently receive the right help and support they need to lead successful lives.

3.2 Ofsted and the CQC expect the Local Area Partnership to update and re-publish its Improvement Plan based on the recommendations set out in the Inspection report. There is an established process for reviewing and endorsing the action plan within the West Sussex Partnership and its governance will be through the SEND and AP Partnership Board. This includes arrangements for co-production with all stakeholders, including the West Sussex Parent Care Forum and the children and families who are the users of the service. This activity is now underway and the revised improvement plan will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for endorsement.

3.3 The leadership team is fully focused on rapid improvement of those parts of the service where performance has been unsatisfactory and at the same time building a strong evidence base to demonstrate the positive changes being enacted. The leadership team is committed to providing improvement at pace but also ensuring it is fully embedded, sustainable and that it leads to permanent improvement in children and young peoples' experiences and outcomes.

4. Resources

4.1 There remains a full committed to providing the right resources to support service improvement and the budget has been increased to achieve this. This includes an increase of £1.6m in revenue funding and the capital programme includes £20.205m for the SEND sufficiency programme and a further £1.097m for schools access initiatives which will allow SEND children to

attend mainstream schools. The £1.6m revenue increase has been included within the 2024/25 budget for and provides:

- Continuation of external contracting of educational psychology assessments next year (£0.4m)
- Temporary posts within the Special Educational Needs Assessment Team (SENAT) to tackle the existing EHCNA backlog (£0.4m)
- Additional permanent posts within SENAT to meet increased demand for both EHCNAs and Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) annual reviews (£0.8m)

4.2 In addition, resources to support the implementation of the transformation and improvement work will be provided through two government initiatives in which West Sussex Council is participating; 1. Delivering Best Value (DBV) and 2. Change Programme Partnership (CPP) programmes. These will add an additional circa £2.5m over the next two years to support service improvement and development.

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Appendices

Appendix – Area SEND inspection of West Sussex Local Area Partnership

Background papers

None