Hello and welcome to my fifth blog as independent chair of the Oxfordshire SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB).

The board met once more on 24 April.

Chair's remarks

I really enjoyed attending the recent Better Together event at the end of March hosted by Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum (OxPCF) at the Kassam. This annual event provides an opportunity for family carers, professionals, and organisations who support children and young people with SEND to work together to find a positive way forward to improve services and outcomes.

It was a good day, well attended and I hope we got a lot out of it. OxPCF is due to feedback on this soon.

In my initial comments I said that I was pleased that there were lots of plans that were on track. But in the next month or so, we need to make sure that all of the tracks (to keep the railway metaphor going) cross over in the right place and that we've got all the signals and junctions working. This involves pulling improvement actions and activity together into a coherent plan, supported by agreeing our key performance indicators (KPIs).

First on the agenda, we checked in on the forward plan for the board.

Forward plan

We have populated agenda items for this meeting for the next couple of months. May will look at programme progress, the programme plan and a performance report on KPIs. June's agenda will be occupied with a stocktake, referenced in my last blog, with the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England. We have neurodiverse conditions and children's integrated therapies pencilled in for July. Members of the LAP were encouraged to be active participants and to contribute topics for us to address or learn from.

Next on the agenda, we heard from Ian Smart, SEND Transformation Programme Director, who provided an update on progress we are making as a partnership on the transformation programme.

Programme update

Ian reminded us about the strategic transformation approach and the three key pillars of activity:

1. Right support, right time, in inclusive settings.
2. Right plan, right first time, every time.
3. Right provision, right time, looking to independence.

Our work is now focused on consolidating all activity into one overarching delivery plan and obtaining sign-off at the May programme delivery group (PDG) and

improvement board to all the projects that make up the transformation programme. The co-chairs of the thematic groups can then report regularly on progress being made against the expected outcomes and benefits. The aim, as I shared above, is to go into the DfE stocktake at June's board, with a SEND programme plan that replaces the current priority action plan.

Lisa Lyons, Oxfordshire County Council's Director of Children's Services, commented that this improvement work is key but is one part of the system wide strategy for improvement for all children. Lisa highlighted that some of the delivery work happens elsewhere, which should enrich what happens to SEND improvement, for example, around school placement sufficiency, numbers of schools and teaching for all children.

Next up, we had Jules Francis-Sinclair, Co-Chair of OxPCF, who gave us an update on recent activity and feedback from parent carers.

Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum (OxPCF) update

Jules started by highlighting the next steps following the Better Together event on 28 March. OxPCF is collating all the data, summaries and commitments from members of the LAP and will be writing a report that will be published in May.

The SEND network is currently being set-up, which will be made up of a group of professionals, organisations and support groups for children and young people with SEND and their families. The group will be able to network online and meet monthly. This will be launched later this term.

Great news! A new community co-ordinator has been appointed and will be starting in May. She will be attending parent support groups, school forums and connecting with wider networks to listen to examples of parent carers' lived experiences and share that wider with OxPCF and the LAP.

OxPCF recently hosted a webinar on being new to the world of SEND together with the special educational needs and disabilities information, advice and support service (SENDIASS). A summer series of webinars with Oxford Health's child and adolescent mental health service on neurodevelopmental conditions is currently being planned. These will be on a variety of topics including demand avoidance, eating and sensory difficulties and transitions.

OxPCF also shared some feedback themes shared by parent carers. This included concern around statements issued about the funding of Autism Family Support Oxfordshire; GPs restricting access to adult attention deficit hyperactivity disorder medication and care; waiting times for assessment; queries around the OWL Centre referral process (and wait) for autism diagnoses; and praise for the SEND dental service. These were acknowledged by the board and some noted for further discussion outside of the meeting.

Next on the agenda was a focus on school funding – the high needs block and dedicated schools grant.

School funding

The purpose of this agenda item was to help all partners understand the complexities of school funding arrangements. Lisa Lyons talked through this supported by Nathan Thomas, CEO of Acer Trust and Chair of the Schools Forum.

There is an annual grant determined by central government to cover schools. There are three parts to this:

1. Early years – covering all early years settings.
2. Schools - covering primary and secondary schools through a national funding formula determined by government.
3. High needs – covering special schools and top ups to all schools.

There is very limited movement allowed between the three blocks. Nationally, schools forums are critical in supporting the funding regime. There is a forum for Oxfordshire.

Membership of the forum is determined by government regulations – includes all the statutory education sector (not post age 16, which is funded differently). Schools and academies together must make-up at least two-thirds of the total membership of the forum. The balance between maintained primary, maintained secondary and academy members must be broadly proportionate to the pupil numbers in each category.

Schools forum is the key decision making forum for all school funding. One example could include delegating from mainstream maintained schools budgets for prescribed services to be provided centrally. Another is to create a fund for significant pupil growth to support the local authority's duty for place planning.

Most local authorities overspend within their high needs block. It is widely acknowledged that there isn't enough funding nationally for high needs. This block covers all spending related to SEND in schools, such as top up funding for children with education health and care plans (EHCPs); alternative provision; special school funding, including independent special schools; and costs to independent schools. It does not cover home to school transport relating to children with EHCPs (which is funded by the local authority).

The Department for Education (DfE) has a delivering better value plan (known as a deficit management plan) to support local authorities and local area partners improve the delivery of SEND services whole working towards financial stability. In Oxfordshire, this is being captured within the transformation programme with invest to save opportunities being developed.

Lisa highlighted the challenges of having different funding regimes with a mixture of grants and charges. The way funding is mainly allocated is determined by the DfE and then local authorities and schools forum have to then work with this.

This then led onto a discussion around co-production and engagement.

Co-production and engagement

The last month has been busy with several significant engagement events and the initiation of activities to involve and engage people in the co-production workstream of the transformation programme.

Highlights have included:
- **SEND Oxfordshire Conversations** – the first two events held on 19 March. Dates are being confirmed for the summer and autumn term events.
- **Co-production charter sessions for parent carers facilitated with OxPCF** – a summary of views was provided to the board with feedback requested. Co-production themes and potential future ones are being considered. Following this, a joint meeting will be offered to families to reach a shared view and agree next steps.
- **Better Together** – as above, this was a face to face event for parent carers and partnership leaders on 28 March, with around 150 attendees. Feedback and outputs will be shared by OxPCF soon.
- **Conversations starting with children and young people** to get their views on engagement, co-production, giving their views and being listened to – an initial proposal is in development.
- **SEND Live Conference** – this was a networking and information sharing event for professionals and stakeholders working in the partnership on 17 April. Some young people with SEND helped to support the delivery of the event through work experience opportunities and also presented. Professional feedback has been very positive and lots of connections were made.

Lisa moved on to talk about how we capture the voice of the child in our work.

Voice of the child

As part of the LAP's communications and engagement strategy for SEND improvement, a specific commitment has been made to engage children and young people with SEND where appropriate to gather their views.

Consideration is being given to how these views can be gathered and listened to. Some examples of good practice have been shared and we have been reviewing existing arrangements for how we currently do this (due to complete end of May).

It is proposed that one strand of the approach to gathering the views and opinions of children and young people with SEND should be built on and integrated with existing ways of talking to children with trusted adults. For children of statutory school age, those views should be gathered through schools and settings (mainstream, specialist, alternative provision and colleges). Katie Geran-Haq, Headteacher, Windale Primary School and representative of primary schools on the board, outlined her support for this.

This could potentially be achieved by working with schools and settings to make effective use of school councils and personal, social, health and economic education and lessons. We would need to make sure that there are other channels available for

children and young people with SEND who are not school age or who don't go to school. The aim would be to then connect the views expressed to policy makers and decision makers across the SEND local area partnership and have arrangements in place to ensure that there is feedback and an ongoing conversation.

The board was asked to discuss and feedback on the initial proposals. Further feedback and refinement of the proposals will be sought from representatives from families, schools and settings, youth services and partners to consider and shape these proposals and develop a plan.

The final bits of the agenda looked at data and insight.

Data and insight

The board has previously endorsed the direction of travel for the development of a data dashboard, a way of monitoring improvement progress and encouraged prioritisation of a smaller number of strategic indicators.

In the last month, further suggestions of data have been added to the long list of key performance indicators (KPIs) organised by theme and feedback from service leads on the first iteration of the data dashboard.

We now have a set of strategic outcomes and measures against them, some of which are in development still, as shown below.

Emerging strategic outcomes	Proposed measurements
1. More children and young people with SEND are benefitting from effective early help.	• To be developed through the early help working group.
2. Increased confidence of mainstream teachers, leaders and staff to identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND with the right support at the right time.	• Percentage of schools actively engaging in outreach/relational schools programme. • Percentage of schools successfully using the guidance toolkit.
3. Increased parental and student confidence that the right support is available at the right time to support children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings.	• Parent and student voice shows year on year increased confidence in services to meet the needs of SEND learners in mainstream settings. • Reduction in independent and non-maintained special school placements. • Reduction in unsuccessful education, health and care plan assessment referrals. • Reduction in suspensions and exclusion for SEND learners.

	• Increase in SEND learners making good progress (attendance, attainment, engagement) in mainstream settings.
	• Reduction in SEND leaners on part-time timetables and in alternative provision.
4. Timeliness of education, health and care plan assessments is maintained and improving.	• Percentage of education, health and care plans issued in 20 weeks excluding exceptions.
5. Quality of education, health and care plans is improving.	• Measurement to be developed using a quality improvement framework agreed by the programme delivery group.
6. Annual review outcomes are improving.	• Measurement to be agreed through the right plan workstream group.
7. More children and young people with SEND are benefiting from specialist support when it has been identified that they need it.	• Median wait time for children and young people starting neurodevelopmental assessment process (first contact) and percentage of referrals seen within 18 weeks.
	• Median wait time for children and young people referred to integrated therapies (first contact) and percentage of referrals seen within 18 weeks.
	• Number of children and young people with neurodiversity accessing Living Well service.
8. More young people are benefiting from opportunities that align with their ambition.	• Use data on children and young people not in education, employment or training, vocational pathways, and percentage of children and young people with SEND aged 14 and over with transition plans.

Further work and prioritisation of the KPIs needs to take place. We will work on a high level visual representation of our data following this and develop a delivery plan for the KPI dashboard, with the agreed strategic indicators being prioritised. Rachael Corser, Chief Nursing Officer for NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board, committed to providing health data to support the KPI work.

As mentioned earlier, we are developing one programme plan that will be agreed at the programme delivery group in May. To support this, a SEND transformation roadmap is in train to provide a high-level view of the key milestones and programme deliverables until April 2025. This will be published at the start of May.

The design of a parent carer survey has also started. This will provide a baseline of views that will be followed up to provide a mechanism for measuring trust and confidence across the partnership.

So that's it from me for now, and I hope, as always, this is useful. We next meet as a board on 22 May 2024.

If you are a parent or carer and have any thoughts or comments, please share with OxPCF by emailing info@oxpcf.org.uk. If you are a partner, please do feedback through your organisation. You can find a list of the LAP member representatives on the board on the [SEND improvement webpage](#). Also don't forget to [sign-up to receive the SEND e-newsletter](#) if you're not already receiving it.

Until next time.

Steve Crocker