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Berkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Area SEND monitoring inspection to Oxfordshire Partnership

Between 29 September and 1 October 2025, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited Oxfordshire to decide whether effective action has been made in relation to each of the areas for priority action detailed in the inspection report published on 15 September 2023. The inspection was conducted under section 20 of the Children Act 2004.

I write on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Education, Children's Services and Skills and the Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services and the Chief Inspector of Primary Care and Community Services of the CQC.

As a result of the findings of the initial inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, HMCI required the local area partnership to prepare and submit a priority action plan (area SEND) to address the five identified areas for priority action.

The local area has taken effective action as it has taken reasonable steps to address all the areas for priority action identified at the initial inspection. This letter outlines our findings from the monitoring inspection.

The inspection was led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, accompanied by a further HMI; and two Children's Services Inspectors from the CQC.

During the inspection, we spoke to local area leaders, parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and education, health and social care professionals. We also met with representatives of the parent carer forum (PCF), the Department for Education (DfE) and regional NHS England. We examined relevant documents and correspondence about the performance of the area in addressing the areas for priority action identified at the initial inspection, including the area's priority action plan and self-evaluation.

Findings

Area for priority action 1

Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should urgently prioritise systems to gather the views of children and young people with

SEND effectively. Leaders should use these views to inform their strategic planning for, and evaluation of, services that improve the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.

Outcome: Effective action

The local area partnership has a strong strategic focus and vision. Leaders have taken several actions to gather the views of families and children and young people with SEND. The partnership has strengthened governance and leadership structures to ensure stable representation of partners and stakeholders, including the PCF, at the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board. Leaders have developed a range of groups and committees which feed into this board. Data collection and analysis have improved to better identify children and young people's needs and monitor progress towards identified improvement outcomes.

Leaders have increased opportunities for families to meet with them, such as at 'SEND Together' events. These allow families to learn about and shape improvements. Staff are supported to develop various communication tools to engage children and young people actively in planning and decision-making.

Children and young people with SEND who are members of the Youth Forum are inspirational and proactive. They contribute to partnership developments. Members of the forum benefit from leaders' support to understand and review information and provide feedback. For example, they have improved areas of the local offer using their own experiences and outcomes to help others access information and understand how they can feedback.

School leaders, SEND coordinators (SENCOs) and practitioners gather children and young people's views and needs to feed into system-wide developments. Leaders have improved oversight and understanding of the views and needs of children and young people with SEND who do not attend full-time education, increasing their chances of receiving the provision that they need. For example, children and young people have contributed to the planning of family hubs and the development of the recommissioned children's home.

Despite these actions that have provided several additional opportunities to gather and use children's and young people's views, some parents reported that their child's voices remain unheard. The PCF confirms this concern in their representation of families' views. Furthermore, leaders recognise the need to expand membership of the Youth Forum to capture a wider perspective, including children and young people with SEND who are in care.

Area for priority action 2

Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should develop communication systems across the partnership to improve the efficiency and quality of their information-gathering processes to ensure that children's and young people's needs are understood and met effectively through coordinated approaches.

Outcome: Effective action

Leaders have put in place clear communication structures to improve partnership working. Information-sharing has been strengthened from board level through to the improvement groups. This established structure supports the flow of information and continuous improvement planning. As a result, professionals have a better understanding of their roles within the local area partnership. However, some inconsistencies in communication between health and education remain despite these relationships and communication methods improving.

Professionals and services are working together more closely. This is starting to improve experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families. Leaders use learning from quality assurance processes and feedback to support professionals to work together more effectively. This is helping children and young people with SEND and their families experience a more integrated approach to planning and decision-making. For example, leaders have developed networking and training events that have strengthened professionals' knowledge of SEND. However, school leaders continue to find that children's and young people's needs and provision are not recorded accurately.

Professionals across services are beginning to improve their use of children's and young people's views to help plan their support. For example, children and young people with complicated situations, complex needs and/or barriers to education now benefit from multi-agency working to identify and meet their ongoing needs. Families' experiences still depend on which practitioners provide their support.

Area for priority action 3

Leaders across the partnership should establish rigorous processes to help ensure the improved timeliness and quality assurance of education, health and care (EHC) plans. Leaders should use this learning to improve the quality of new and existing EHC plans.

Outcome: Effective action

Leaders have taken effective steps to improve both the timeliness and quality of EHC plans. Following the last inspection, action was taken to review quality assurance

processes, identifying sensible improvement actions. These improvements are continuous. As a result, waiting times have improved for children and young people on the EHC plan process to have their needs assessed. The timeliness of newly issued EHC plans has improved. Although stakeholders, including some parents and carers, have experienced swifter decision-making, they and settings still experience inconsistencies in the quality of, and detail included in, EHC plans. In some cases, the quality has been impacted by rushed plans to meet timeliness.

The quality assurance processes for EHC plans include broad representation of stakeholders, including the PCF and links directly to the Youth Forum. The process is cyclical and provides opportunities for regular, effective feedback. This enables leaders to make further improvements across services.

Most EHC plans sampled during this inspection were timely and up to date. However, their quality continues to be variable. Contributions from children's social care and health practitioners often lacked relevant detail, limiting the ability of stakeholders to fully support children and young people with SEND. In some cases, there was still a lack of evidence for the most vulnerable children and young people with SEND, such as appropriate contributions from the virtual school.

Leaders and stakeholders in the partnership are clear on what further improvements are needed to EHC plan timeliness and quality. Although annual reviews are now completed within appropriate timescales, improvements have not yet had an impact on this process. Practitioners do not always contribute to annual reviews so that a child or young person's changing needs are identified and supported effectively.

Area for priority action 4

Leaders across education, health and care should improve the commissioning of services to ensure that children, young people and their families receive sufficient support to better meet their needs and improve parental confidence in the SEND system.

Outcome: Effective action

The local area partnership has jointly commissioned a range of appropriate services since the last inspection. There are clear processes in place to help ensure that children and young people with SEND only access services that have been quality assured by the local authority. Leaders have created improved oversight to ensure that children and young people with SEND use suitable and safe provision that meets their needs more effectively. This includes placements in residential special schools and alternative provision.

School leaders have benefited from increased training provided by the partnership. In some schools, partnership-funded enhanced pathways have been implemented to support the inclusion of all children and young people with SEND. As a result, many children's and young people's needs are being more effectively met in mainstream settings.

Joint commissioning arrangements to reduce long waiting times for health services have started to have a positive impact on children's and young people's experiences. The pilot of a screening tool for speech and language needs in primary schools has been well received and used to identify young children's needs more quickly. The Community Wisdom pilot has supported swifter triage of children's and young people's needs to inform referrals to the children's and adolescents' mental health service and improves the efficiency of neurodevelopmental assessments.

The progress of these initiatives is being monitored by the partnership at monthly reviews where parents are appropriately represented. Stakeholders are concerned about the longevity and sustainability of some projects, including ensuring the sufficiency of specialist provision.

Area for priority action 5

Leaders, including education, health and care providers, should identify the steps that they will take to collectively monitor and measure the impact of their strategy and actions. These plans should be co-produced with and communicated clearly to children, young people and their families so that their experiences and outcomes improve.

Outcome: Effective action

Partnership leaders now have effective oversight of the progress and impact of initiatives designed to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. Through this, they can adapt to emerging needs and respond to actions that have not had the desired impact. The strengthened partnership structure brings together health, social care, education and parents, productively enabling a move toward more effective collaborative working. In this way, the foundations for improvement are now stable and systems to monitor and measure the impact of partnership work are in place.

Leaders have improved opportunities for stakeholders to engage in activities to contribute to strategic and operational planning and implementation. For example, the PCF were consulted and actively involved in the review, design and award of contracts of short breaks services. This piece of work ensures that service delivery is directly informed by the needs of children and young people and their families.

Although leaders have clarified their definitions in terms of working with stakeholders, there is still confusion and a feeling among some parents that their views and the views of their children and young people with SEND are not sought or considered. Leaders know they have more work to do to gain the confidence of all families and to truly make use of their valuable opinions and those of their children and young people with SEND in the improvements that are to come.

Next steps

Inspectors will reach an effective action outcome if, having gathered and evaluated evidence, they find that the local area partnership has taken reasonable steps to address the area for priority action since the full inspection, based on the relevant evaluation criteria.

Effective action does not mean that the area for priority action is no longer a concern or that the local area can stop taking action to address it. Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation. Areas for priority action that receive an effective action outcome may still be identified as areas for priority action in future inspections. This can happen if the local area does not continue to take action and/or the action has not continued to have a positive impact on the experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Ofsted and CQC ask the local area partnership to update their priority action plan (area SEND) as a result of this inspection.

I am copying this letter to the DfE and regional NHS England.

Yours sincerely

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