

[referred to in paragraph 17 a\)](#)

Reflections from Steve Crocker: 20 Dec 2022

Hello, welcome to this blog and a happy new year to all of you. I am the recently appointed independent chair for the Oxfordshire SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board. The board is made up of senior leaders from Oxfordshire's local area partnership – spanning health, education, children's services – and the parent carer forum (PCF) and, yesterday, we met for the third time, the second under my chairing.

The board has been set-up to drive the action required to deliver better services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This follows Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission's local area partnership inspection of SEND services in July. You already know the [outcome of the inspection](#) and the need for rapid and collaborative action to improve and deliver services that children and young people deserve.

My role is to help to bring all the partners together to focus on the needs of our children with SEND and to help them to drive the necessary improvements to their services for those children. My role will not duplicate or replace in any way the key statutory roles such as the director of children's services or the chief nursing officer as examples.

Part of this is [keeping people informed on progress](#) and, where appropriate, involved in designing solutions. Following our last meeting, I was thinking of the best way to keep a number of our partners and councillors, as well as parents and carers of SEND children, up to date and informed on what is being discussed at the board, and crucially what decisions are being made and action taken, and by whom.

So I thought I'd try my hand at a blog. An attempt at highlighting the key discussion points, next steps and any decisions made. Do bear with me as I try this and let me have any constructive feedback.

To the agenda. It was a full one. I was keen to make sure we have a collective understanding around the key challenges we need to address as a partnership to affect change. Getting the issues on to the table so to speak.

Commissioning

First up was a focus on commissioning. Health colleagues outlined the current pathways, the processes and assessments, that children and young people with mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions (and their parents and carers) go through to access support.

There were discussions on the challenges, mainly around the time it takes to get help due to demand outweighing overall resources to both process referrals and then provide support and plans to address these. This included how help can be provided while children are on waiting lists; investment into recruiting and retaining people to

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help those most in need access support quicker; and the use of digital technology and artificial intelligence to speed up some processes.

A strong theme, however, was around the importance of investing more in early intervention – to help children and young people at the earliest opportunity to prevent needs escalating. To do this it was agreed that identifying both the strengths and needs of children as soon as possible, and revisiting these over time, was key to each child getting the right support at the right time.

Health colleagues referenced the children and young people emotional wellbeing and mental health strategy and outlined the priority areas in train to deliver that. Examples such as a digital mental health app, improvements to family learning and support offers, training for frontline staff in the early identification of mental health issues, and a whole school wellbeing resilience programme were discussed as opportunities for joint partnership work to deliver overall service improvements. While strategic plans are well laid, it was clear that this is an area that we will need to revisit to gauge progress and impact for children.

School places and support

Next on the agenda was school places and support for children with SEND. We discussed the importance of building a programme of support to make all schools inclusive, across state funded and independent schools. There was a strong consensus that continuing to build more special schools (and one is opening in 2024) could not be the only solution to growing need and demand.

We recognised the different needs of children and what support can be provided for each child with an education, health and care plan. This included enhancing support within a school with some additional teaching; having a mix of mainstream classes and those from a separate unit called a resource base within a school; and having specialist provision in special schools for those whose needs cannot be met elsewhere.

The board noted and approved of the funding for two dedicated project posts to help scope and deliver new resource bases, in existing schools as well as new schools.

SEND transformation programme

Finally, we discussed our SEND transformation programme. Transformation programmes can take many guises but for us, it is essential to giving us the framework and accountability to measure our outputs and progress following the inspection. So what does it mean? Well, we have taken the five priority areas of the partnership's [priority action plan](#) recently published and aligned them with three main challenges that we need to address to transform what we do.

We want to provide the:

1. **Right support at the right time:** The right educational support is provided to children and young people in mainstream schools and early years settings.
2. **Right plan, and get this right first time, every time:** EHCPs are child centred and strengths-based, meet the needs of children and young people

[https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/special-educational-needs/20 December 2023 steve blog SEND improvement.odt](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/special-educational-needs/20%20December%202023%20steve%20blog%20SEND%20improvement.odt)

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and are produced in a timely manner to a high standard and are reviewed annually.

3. **Right provision at the right time, looking to adulthood:** Where children require a special school setting to meet their needs, this is provided at the right time. Children and young people are also given options and routes into further education and employment, helping them to transition into adulthood.

The board agreed the direction of the programme and gave the green light for development of data benchmarks for what we can then measure success against – what does good and improved look like. These will be developed together with the PCF and reported back to the board as soon as possible.

That's it from me for now, I hope this is useful. We next meet on 31 January 2024 and will continue to discuss the gap between demand and service availability and how we can close that, including through alternative provision. We will also focus on how we can ensure we have the voice of children and young people at the heart of our programme of improvement.

If you are a parent or carer and have any thoughts or comments, please share with the PCF by emailing info@oxpcf.org.uk. If you are a partner, please do feedback through your organisation.

Until next time.

Steve Crocker