

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 DECEMBER 2017

Joint Local Area Inspection of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Report by Director of Children's Services

Introduction

1. The first local area SEND inspections took place in May 2016. By May 2017, Ofsted and CQC had completed 30 inspections. Just under a third of the local areas inspected (nine) were required to provide a written statement of action. The Ofsted and CQC report '[Local area SEND inspections: one year on', October 2017](#) highlights the main findings from the first 30 inspections. The first three key findings are:
 - Children and young people identified as needing SEND support had not benefited from the implementation of the Code of Practice well enough.
 - Children and young people who have SEND were found to be excluded, absent or missing from school much more frequently than other pupils nationally.
 - School leaders had used unofficial exclusions too readily to cope with children and young people who have SEND.
2. Between 25 September 2017 and 29 September 2017, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Oxfordshire to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the disability and special educational needs reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.
3. Inspectors spoke with children and young people with disabilities and/or special educational needs, parents and carers, local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. They visited a range of providers and spoke to leaders, staff and governors about how they are implementing the special educational needs reforms. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the local area, including the local area's self-evaluation. Inspectors met with leaders from the local area for health, social care and education. They reviewed performance data and evidence about the local offer and joint commissioning.
4. The report was published on December 4th and stated that the local area is required to produce and submit a written statement of action to Ofsted that explains how the local area will tackle the following areas of significant weakness:
 - the lack of clearly understood and effective lines of accountability for the implementation of the reforms

- the quality and rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring and the limited effect it has had on driving and securing improvement
 - the quality of EHC plans
 - the timeliness of the completion of EHC plans
 - the high level of fixed-term exclusion of pupils in mainstream secondary schools who have special educational needs and social, emotional and mental health needs in particular.
5. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has determined that the local authority and the area's clinical commissioning group are jointly responsible for submitting the written statement of action to Ofsted within 70 days of the published report (March 14th).
6. The committee is recommended to consider the outcomes of Oxfordshire's inspection and the initial actions that have been taken to address the areas for improvement that relate to education.

Strengths identified by inspectors in relation to education

7. The effectiveness of the local area in **identifying** children and young people's special educational needs and/or disabilities
- The local area's SEN and/or disabilities (SEND) guidance document for children at SEN Support.
 - EHC plans consistently capture the voice of the child and their family.
 - The local area is on track to have completed all conversions, from statements to Education, Health and Care plans (approximately 2,700) by the required deadline of March 2018.
 - The identification of educational needs in EHC plans is relatively strong. Literacy and numeracy needs are typically well defined.
8. The effectiveness of the local area in **meeting the needs** of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- The single point of referral in the early years for multi-disciplinary assessment and onward referral to services.
 - The 'readiness for school task force'.
 - A network of early years 'system leaders' is helping to ensure that early years' settings are able to gain the support and training necessary to meet the needs of children who have SEN and/or disabilities effectively.
 - Special schools and specialist provisions at mainstream schools.
 - The services provided by the local authority's Oxfordshire School Inclusion Team (OXSiT).
 - The integrated service (commissioned by the local authority) , providing SALT, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, particularly support provided by the SALT team.
 - The autism team is also highly valued by schools.

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- Specialist services such as for hearing impairment, visual impairment and Down's syndrome are highly regarded by parents and professionals.
 - Nursing in secondary schools, an assigned nurse in primary schools and support for those with complex needs.
 - SEN transport, including training of drivers and escorts and passenger passports.
 - The successful supported internship programme.
 - Co-production, taking the views of children, young people and parents into account when planning services, eg the development of the SEND handbooks for primary and secondary school.
 - Children and young people who spoke to inspectors reported that they feel listened to and involved in decisions about their educational provision.
 - The Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service and the well-established network of trained volunteers.
 - Some effective partnership working, for example, joint working with other local authorities has resulted in places being secured in specialist residential provision for a number of children with social, emotional and mental health needs, whose needs could not be met within the local area.
9. The effectiveness of the local area in **improving outcomes** for children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- On average, children with a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan achieve in line with similar children nationally, at the end of each key stage.
 - The achievement of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities without a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan has improved considerably over the last three years, most notably in the early years and primary phases. The proportion of these children reaching a good level of development in early years has increased steadily since 2014, and is much closer than previously to that of similar children nationally.
 - There has been a similar increase in those meeting the expected standard in the national phonics screening check at the end of Year 1. Achievement at the end of key stage 2 improved notably in 2017, having been particularly weak in the first year of the new tests and assessments in 2016.
 - The proportion of young people who have SEN and/or disabilities reaching at least level 2, including English and mathematics, by the age of 19 has also improved considerably.
 - The achievement rates of students who have SEN and/or disabilities who attend Oxfordshire further education colleges are above the national average for students with similar needs.
 - The growing supported internship programme is helping the majority of young people taking part to progress successfully to sustained employment.
 - Parents who met with or contacted inspectors reported positively on the achievement and wider outcomes, such as growth in confidence and self-reliance, of children and young people with hearing impairment.

Areas for development identified by inspectors in relation to education

10. Leadership

- During the implementation of the reforms, leaders have not taken sufficiently determined action to tackle key areas of weakness.
- Local area leaders' self-evaluation is not sharp enough to inform improvement planning. Leaders often do not have a firm understanding of the extent of success, or otherwise, of their work, or what they might need to do differently in the future.
- Action plans typically do not capture the starting points for improvement work or the impact the work should have by key points in time. As a result, leaders and elected members are not well-placed to evaluate the success of improvement work or intervene quickly when a change of approach is needed. Leaders are starting to improve the situation, for example by bringing in a suitable consultant to work on improving the timeliness and quality of plans. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this work.
- Arrangements for holding leaders to account across education, health and care services are not effective enough. No single, identified body holds a strategic overview of work across education, health and care services. Leaders and officers do not have a consistently clear understanding of which project board or person has oversight or responsibility for which aspect of implementation of the reforms.

11. Education, Health and Care Plans

- Children and young people's needs are not identified comprehensively enough in EHC plans.
- Typically EHC plans do not identify social care needs and in some cases health needs.
- Wider academic educational needs are often not clearly identified.
- At times, out-of-date information is used to inform the writing of an EHC plan.
- EHC plans are not completed in a timely manner. Just under a third of EHC plans were completed in the statutory 20-week timescale in 2015. This situation has improved a little recently.
- Plans not being completed early enough prior to children and young people moving to a new school or college at the end of a key stage or onto post-16 and post-18 education.
- EHC plans are typically not written well enough to ensure that all of a child or young person's SEN and/or disabilities are consistently well met.
- Assessments of social care needs, in particular, are often missing. Even when the health and/or social care needs are identified, the information about what is to be provided is often too vague to ensure that the child or young person's needs are met well or to support accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan.
- The quality of outcomes writing in EHC plans is not detailed or precise enough to enable sharp monitoring of the effectiveness of the plan.

12. Mainstream schools

- Some mainstream schools are not making sure that staff have the skills needed to identify and meet the needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities consistently effectively
- The needs of children and young people with social, emotional and mental health at SEN Support are typically not met well enough in mainstream schools. This is evident in the high level of fixed-term exclusions, which contribute to poor attendance. Some schools resort to reduced timetables for such pupils. School leaders do not consistently bring in the support needed to make sure that these pupils are able to access their full educational entitlement or provide suitable alternative provision.

13. Attendance and exclusions

- The proportion of children and young people who have SEN and/or disabilities without a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan with one or more fixed-term exclusions is high and has increased notably in recent years.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities without a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan with poor attendance is also high, linked, at least in part, to high levels of exclusion. This is particularly the case in secondary schools.

14. Attainment

- Despite improvements, the achievement of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities without a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan remains low at the end of each key stage in relation to similar pupils nationally. Improving achievement for these pupils remains an area for development, particularly in secondary school. In 2016, the achievement of pupils with middle and high starting points at the start of secondary school who had SEN and/or disabilities without a statement of special educational needs or an EHC plan was low in mathematics and notably lower in English. Achievement in non-EBacc subjects (the open element) was even weaker.

15. Education services

- Leaders have not made sure that there is a clear, shared strategic approach between the Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance (OTSA) and the local authority's OXSIT.
- Some positive work has been undertaken to help schools improve provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This has included the introduction of therapeutic approaches and training for staff. In the schools where this has been trialled it has proved successful. Additionally, a training programme for support staff on meeting pupils' emotional needs is also underway. However, it is too early to judge the impact these initiatives will have on mainstream school provision across the local area.

16. Local Offer

- Leaders have spent considerable time consulting with parents and working to ensure that the local offer on the council website contains much useful information. However, the local offer is not well known to parents and the limitations of the search facility make it difficult for those who do use it to quickly find the information they are seeking.

Actions to address areas for improvement in relation to education.

17. Since the inspection there has been an opportunity to reflect and begin to implement the learning from the experience. The spot light on SEND has raised the importance of the area's joint responsibilities and emphasised how austerity measures have been impacting on Oxfordshire's ability to deliver the SEND reforms.
18. The Programme Board is overseeing the implementation of the reforms and is chaired by the Cabinet member for Public Health and Education, Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles, and will report to the Children's Trust and Oxfordshire's Health and Wellbeing Board, ensuring joint accountability.
19. Resources are being considered to strengthen services and provision for children and young people with SEND to enable the local area to fulfil its duties. Some immediate decisions have been made including
- (a) reversing the planned savings for the SEN casework team from April 2018 (£250,000) and providing an extra £250,000 to maintain the current staffing levels in the casework team if the DfE SEND grant ceases (April 2018).
 - (b) 3 additional educational psychologists.
 - (c) A manager to take a lead for improving behaviour.

As the detailed action plan is developed further resource implications will be identified.

20. Oxfordshire's SEND action plan is being updated to address the areas of weakness identified and in line with Ofsted guidance. The written statement of action will be submitted to Ofsted and the CQC within 70 working days of the published report (March 14th). The SEND Programme Board will sign off the action plan before submitting it to the DfE.
21. A performance dashboard containing targets across education, health and care is being developed.

RECOMMENDATION

22. **The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider the outcomes of the SEND area inspection and implications for Education Scrutiny's work on exclusions.**

LUCY BUTLER

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Background papers:

Local area SEND inspections: one year on, Ofsted and CQC , October 2017

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspections-one-year-on>

Oxfordshire's Joint SEND Area Inspection report <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/oxfordshire>

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