



# Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

**Date:** 29 September 2020

**Reference number:**

**Title:** Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Improvement Plan

**Relevant councillor(s):** Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member Education and Skills

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**Recommendations:** For the Select Committee to note the most recent update against the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Improvement Plan

## Executive Summary

**This report provides an overview of the improvement work that has been undertaken in relation to improving outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Buckinghamshire.**

### 1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 The SEND Reforms of 2014 set out a new approach to supporting children and young people with SEND, broadening the focus from education alone, to include health and social care more fully, binding us all by the Children and Families Act 2014. This aimed to improve the experience of families and ensure a more joined up approach to meeting needs.
- 1.2 In May 2016, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission instigated an inspection process to assess how well local areas (not solely local authorities) achieve the aspirations of the reforms. The 5 day inspections consider how well children and young people's needs are identified and met, as well as how confident leaders are that the support and services provided are achieving positive outcomes. Areas that fall short of expected standards are required to develop an action plan to address these failings.
- 1.3 Buckinghamshire has yet to be inspected and the cycle of inspections is currently paused due to COVID-19. The inspection programme is expected to resume in Spring 2021, with interim 2-day visits to some authorities anticipated between now and then.

Interim visits will not result in a judgement and will focus on the response to the pandemic in relation to SEND.

- 1.4 In reviewing the range of services that support children and young people with SEND and their families in Buckinghamshire, a self-evaluation document has been produced. This is a live document that has contributions from all stakeholders across Buckinghamshire including statutory and non-statutory services, schools, parent representatives and the voluntary and community sector. The self-evaluation identifies a number of areas of strength as well as some key areas for development.
- 1.5 The SEND Improvement Plan captures these development areas and outlines the actions being taken to achieve the desired outcomes. It identifies what we want to achieve, what needs to change and the outcomes we are working towards. It also evidences a direct link to the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy.
- 1.6 The SEND and Inclusion Strategy has been co-produced with key stakeholders and in particular with parent representatives from Families and Carers Together (FACT) Bucks. The strategy was consulted upon in March 2020 and has led to the development of a clear vision and a set of principles that link directly to the improvement work.
- 1.7 Improvement work is governed by the SEND Integrated Service Board that drives progress and provides scrutiny and challenge. This Board is chaired by the Corporate Director. An Improvement Group monitors the progress of the improvement plan, with actions driven forward by multi-agency Impact Groups. These are often co-chaired by local authority representatives alongside health colleagues or parent/carer representatives. The Impact Groups are themed as follows:
  - Coproduction and Parent/Voice of the Child
  - Statutory Performance (SEND Operations)
  - Quality of Education, Health and Care Plans
  - SEN Support
  - Preparing for Adulthood
  - Sufficiency; Autism Spectrum Condition and Social, Emotional and Mental Health
  - Integrated Commissioning
  - The Local Offer
- 1.8 In addition to the above, to ensure the aspirations of the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy are achieved, two new workstreams are being developed building on existing work. These relate to (1) further developing early intervention and family support in relation to SEND; and (2) enabling greater involvement of the voluntary and

community sector in supporting children and young people with SEND within communities. There is also a specific group entitled 'Needs and Provision' that is focused on driving the new funding model for high needs SEND in schools forward.

## **2. Progress to date and key challenges**

2.1 Significant progress has been made on our key priorities; however, there remain some areas of challenge. Achievements and current challenges are described below.

### Co-production and Voice of the Child

2.2 Co-production at a strategic level works well with parent representatives sitting on, or co-chairing all of the key improvement impact groups. This impact group is chaired by the chair of the parent / carer forum (FACT Bucks).

2.3 At an operational level, co-production is in its infancy. A reduction in caseloads has enabled Education, Health and Care Coordinators to engage more closely with families at key points in the statutory 20 week Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment process. Parent satisfaction is measured in part through our quality assurance programme; however, work is underway to develop a more comprehensive user satisfaction survey relating to the statutory processes.

2.4 Strengthening the voice of the child is a key part of the improvement work. We work closely with the SEND Youth Forum, a core mechanism to shape service development and delivery. Examples of this work include:

- Supporting young people to give their views to shape the new Preparing for Adulthood Service.
- Publishing case study films of work experience opportunities for young people with SEND on the Local Offer,
- Showing the benefits of work experience opportunities for both employer and employee
- Identifying new activities and groups to be inspected as part of developing the Young Inspectors Programme to increase promotion of activities suitable for SEND young people.

2.5 We have received positive feedback from the Chair of FACT Bucks about work completed in partnership with them:

"The strategy development process has been a great example of co-production - at the outset I asked for it to be an open, honest and co-produced process aimed at raising our aspirations as a Local Area. This has been delivered in full. Parents and Carers welcomed the tone and direction of the strategy during the consultations ... We will now work together to take it forward to focus on key aspects to improve the offer

being made and ultimately improve the outcomes of SEND CYP in Bucks. We do not underestimate the scale of the task, but it begins from a firm foundation.”

Statutory Performance (SEND Operations)

- 2.6 The Statutory Performance (SEND Operations) group is co-chaired by the Head of the Integrated SEND Service and a member of FACT Bucks, with the concept originally being proposed by the parent group. The group provides support and challenge particularly around these statutory markers. Compliments, complaints and tribunals raised with services are also monitored through this group. Representation across the multi-agency domain of SEND in Buckinghamshire is strong, including professionals from a variety of teams across the local authority and health, as well as internally commissioned services such as colleagues from transport. This enables the group to discuss, consult and monitor any operational changes to systems that can affect any partner.
- 2.7 Statutory performance has been an area of concern in Buckinghamshire over the past few years. Each year a national data return is published showing each Local Area’s average % for the completion of statutory Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments and the development of a Plan within 20 weeks (the latest reported national average is 60%). Buckinghamshire return data has been as follows:

2017	2018	2019	2020 (Jan – Aug)
18.9%	32.7%	40%	65%

- 2.7 During the latter part of 2019 and 2020, there has been a marked improvement in statutory performance in this area. Since May 2020, performance has been consistently above 75% and we are currently at a cumulative % of 65% for 2020 (as shown above), which is above the latest reported national performance (2019). Educational psychology advice that contributes to an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment must also be completed within a statutory timeframe, and performance for our Educational Psychologists during August was at 89%.
- 2.8 As of 7 September 2020, Buckinghamshire has 4879 children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) that they maintain via the process of an annual review. Processing annual reviews of EHCP in a timely manner is an area for development. That said, some progress has been made following the appointment of additional Education, Health and Care coordinators in April 2020.



## Quality of EHCPs

- 2.9 EHCPs are legal documents that describe the needs, provision and outcomes for children with SEND aged 0-25. They replace Statements of SEN that were purely focused on education. A Quality Assurance Framework has been developed that details a programme of ongoing auditing and moderation to assess and improve the overall quality of EHCPs. In addition, the Integrated SEND Service complete monthly audits as part of their management oversight of all Education, Health and Care Coordinators. Support is provided to individual officers to address issues and training is being rolled out across the service to raise standards.
- 2.10 The auditing demonstrates that the quality of plans is improving. For example, 19% of plans audited in July were judged to be good or above; this rose to 47% in August. While there remains a way to go to feel confident that all plans are high quality and fit for purpose, this work is now becoming embedded in the teams and is now viewed as integral to the work. Reduced caseloads have enabled this, as well as oversight from a designated Project Manager who has been able to drive this forward.

## SEN Support

- 2.12 The majority of children with SEN are supported within educational settings utilising the delegated resource for SEN already with our schools, without the need for an EHCP. As at January 2020, there were 9590 children and young people in Buckinghamshire on the SEN support register who are supported in this way. Duties to identify the needs, plan support, provide provision and review progress sits with each individual school. Within Buckinghamshire, as of the last census published in July 2020, 10% of our children have been identified as needing SEN Support, compared with 12.1% nationally. This is an area that requires further work to ensure the needs of children with SEN are being identified early enough and that appropriate support is provided to prevent their needs escalating.
- 2.13 Two projects have been launched over the past year to address this. One is the 'Ordinarily Available Provision' concept, co-produced with parents, schools and professionals, introducing a shared language when talking about the provision that should 'ordinarily' be available in schools, without the need for additional resource or statutory oversight. A guidance document was produced as a result of this work, and the concept launched in January 2020 as part of a training programme for schools. The document stipulates the provision expected to be made available for children and young people identified as requiring SEN Support. It clarifies the role of settings to provide early intervention to improve outcomes for children and young people.

- 2.14 Speech and Language link, launched in September 2019, is a jointly commissioned resource between the local authority and our health partners. [Speech Link](#) and [Language Link](#) is a tool intended to empower schools working with children with speech, language and communication needs at the earliest stage, indicating the need for further support for the child where required. This is implemented through an online tool that screens and plans intervention for children and schools. This tool was initially commissioned for one year, but this has recently been extended to March 2021.
- 2.15 Embedding this graduated response within schools is ongoing and steps are being taken to ensure that schools feel equipped and confident to support children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings. Part of this work is ensuring the offer from specialist services is sufficient and accessible, as well as developing a culture of inclusivity in all settings and learning from best practice that is happening in some of our schools. Greater awareness of alternative approaches to managing the presenting behaviour of children and young people with SEND is critical. There has been the introduction of surgeries held jointly with therapies and specialist teachers to support this. Schools can access these without the need for referral, resulting in quicker advice and support. From September 2020, specialist teachers also introduced a 'helpline' as part of their new 'tiered approach' offer, enabling even more efficient support when schools need advice on specific issues. Educational Psychologists are also introducing a SEND Support offer this month, to increase the capacity of the early intervention offer, supporting schools with identifying needs and addressing them sooner.

### Preparing for Adulthood

- 2.16 Preparation for adulthood is a key aspect of the Children and Families Act (2014) and as such the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy has been built around the 4 pillars identified in the Code of Practice: health, education and employment, social activity and independence. A new impact group has been established to drive this work, building on the experiences young people shared at the "Shout Out for SEND" conference in 2019, and recent feedback from members of the SEND Integrated Services Board. The four workstreams feeding into this impact group will focus on the four pillars, with cross working from a variety of teams, including housing, to really drive the goal of preparing our young people for adulthood forward holistically.
- 2.17 Alongside progressing these key areas, work is ongoing to integrate those aspects of Adult Social Care with the Children with Disabilities Team, to ensure smooth transitions into adulthood. The teams are currently co-located and an operating

model for an integrated 0-25 service with a single management and governance structure, aligned to best practice, is being developed.

#### Sufficiency; Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) / Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

- 2.18 The diagnosis and escalation of needs relating to ASC and SEMH needs in our children and young people is growing rapidly in Buckinghamshire, as is the pattern nationally. This group was originally created some time ago, and drove the creation of a new 42 place primary special school, dedicated to those children with SEMH needs primarily, as well as those with high functioning ASC needs, in September 2019.
- 2.19 The group has recently been re-configured and was re-launched in July 2020 as an impact group, co-chaired by the Head of the Integrated SEND Service and the Head of the Integrated Commissioning Service. Chairs were purposefully selected to drive through progress in this area on an equal footing between the local authority and health, given the issues cross both domains so significantly.
- 2.20 Separate workstreams, chaired by two Headteachers who are specialists in their relevant areas, have been set up focusing on ASC and SEMH independently. Their focus is to drive through early identification of need, enable equitable provision and support schools to be more inclusive. Identification of need encompasses issues at both an education and health level, and part of this work will focus on how we drive down waiting lists for diagnoses and the transition from children's to adults' mental health services. Sufficiency of provision is also critical to this work. These areas of need are increasing over time and we need to ensure that provision across education, health and care is in place to support our children and young people.

#### Integrated Commissioning

- 2.21 An all age Commissioning Service coordinates joint commissioning arrangements between the Local Authority and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Statutory budgets and pooled budget arrangements as well as non-statutory funding from the CCG for CAMHS, Integrated Therapies and Section 75 (including Community Paediatrics) facilitate smooth communication between services. Access is not dependent on any kind of funding agreement as joint commissioning is in place from the start, enabling the service to be child focused.
- 2.22 This is an area of real strength for us as a local area, as it demonstrates the strong partnership working in place, focused on the outcomes for children and young people, to create services to support them without delay. As an integral part of the Children and Families Act 2014, joint commissioning being evaluated as such a

positive aspect of our SEND improvement work, is hugely significant for Buckinghamshire.

### Local Offer

- 2.23 The Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Code of Practice requires all Local Authorities to produce a Local Offer that sets out in one place information about services available for children and young people with SEND aged 0 to 25 years. This includes people who do not have an EHCP. The Local Offer explains how to access these services and has useful information and signposting.
- 2.24 The [Buckinghamshire Local Offer](#) has been developed with parents, carers, young people and professionals and is continually being reviewed and improved. It aims to provide clear, accessible information about services and support available locally. Work is progressing to move the published Local Offer information onto the new corporate website platform and the new Family Information Service directory (due to launch November).
- 2.25 The Local Offer is responsive to feedback and there is a clear mechanism in place to publish feedback and the actions taken in the form of 'you said, we did' which is updated each month.
- 2.26 The Local Offer has involved young people in its development in a variety of ways. Young people have been asked to contribute to specific pieces of work and consultations. This has resulted in creating the promotional e-postcard and videos on topics suggested by local young people as they told us that they preferred video content to written information. Young people have been encouraged to promote the Local Offer and local activities through the SEN Young Inspectors scheme and Local Offer Champion training in schools to help raise the profile of the Local Offer amongst peers. Young people's feedback is regularly gathered through outreach at a wide range of events. For example, user feedback sessions led to the development of an [e-postcard](#) to help promote the Local Offer to young people. Several young people took part in user research interviews to inform the development of the new website content. This is an area we want to continue to develop to ensure the Local Offer is responsive to the needs of local young people.

### **3. Next steps and review**

- 3.1 The SEND Improvement work is ongoing and regular updates are provided to the SEND Integrated Services Board. These take place quarterly and provide an opportunity for scrutiny and challenge.