



# Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

<b>Date:</b>	2 November 2023
<b>Reference number:</b>	n/a
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Programme Update</b>
<b>Cabinet Member(s):</b>	Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member, Education and Children's Services
<b>Contact officer:</b>	Lucy Pike, Head of Improvement and Transformation
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All wards
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>To note progress made against the SEND Improvement Programme across the local area</b>
<b>Reason for recommendation:</b>	Paper is for information only

## 1. Executive summary

### 1.1 This report provides:

- a progress update on the SEND Improvement Programme since inspection
- a brief overview of the new SEND Inspection Framework

## 2. Background

2.1 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspected the services provided for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Buckinghamshire between 28 Feb – 11 March 2022. The inspection outcome report can be found [here](#).

2.2 Following inspection, the Local Authority and the Integrated Care System (formerly the Clinical Commissioning Group [CCG]) were jointly responsible for submitting an action plan to Ofsted, detailing how 3 areas of significant weakness would be addressed. The Plan, submitted on 8 August 2022 was approved by Ofsted on 25 August 2022.

- 2.3 The 3 areas of weakness identified are:
- The lack of a cohesive area strategy to identify and meet the needs of those children and young people requiring speech and language, communication and occupational therapy.
  - Waiting times for assessments on the autism and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder diagnosis pathways and the system-owned plans in place to address this.
  - Waiting times to see a community paediatrician.
- 2.4 The action plan, known as a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was co-produced with key stakeholders across education, health and care services including voluntary and community sector organisations and parent/carer representatives.
- 2.5 The WSOA has been integrated into the wider SEND Improvement Plan.

### 3. SEND Improvement Programme Progress

- 3.1 Key achievements since inspection have included:
- **Streamlined and increased neurodevelopmental support.** This has included moving to a single provider model for 5- 19 age group; increased digital assessment availability for children with less complex Autism presentations; and the delivery of online neurodevelopmental workshop sessions led by clinicians and professionals, targeted at school settings and GP surgeries. A coproduced [All Age Autism Strategy](#) has been publicly consulted on and feedback is currently being analysed.
  - **Reduced backlogs and increased support within community paediatrics.** This has included completely eradicating the backlog of medication reviews following the appointment of prescribing pharmacists thereby alleviating pressures on community paediatricians; validating waiting lists to ensure children are on the right pathway and their needs are understood; an increase in the commissioned support available for those awaiting health assessment and diagnosis through third sector partners; and the provision of an online support and guidance offer.
  - **A refreshed approach to the provision therapy.** This is encapsulated in the development of a Local Area Strategy (2023-26): *Early Identification and Intervention to Better Support Children and Young People's Therapy Needs*, which promotes the required whole system transformation in relation to early support for these needs. The recommissioned Therapies Service will further support delivery of this when the new contract goes live in 2024.

- **Increased support for the SEND workforce.** This has included strengthening induction and training leading to an improvement in the quality of new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) audited, from 11% graded good or above in May 2021 to 78% in Aug 2023.
  - **New offers of support for key groups.** This has included the development of a new pathway, toolkit and support for children experiencing [Emotionally Based School Non Attendance](#) (EBSNA); a new support offer for young people with SEND who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) or who are at risk of NEET; an expanded post 16 offer, including an increase in the number of Supported Internships available (from 12 in September 2022 to 40 in January 2024) and an expanded [Holiday Activities and Food \(HAF\) programme](#) for children and young people with SEND in the school holidays (991 specialist SEND places in the summer holidays 2023 including overnight stays).
- 3.2 It is anticipated that the additional £4.6m ICB investment agreed in April 2023 will reduce waiting times for those health services identified in the WSoA. Current trajectories suggest that this will take some time and require recruitment to specialist posts. It is critical therefore that families are supported while awaiting assessment and diagnosis, and new children entering the system have their needs met through an early intervention approach where this is appropriate, to reduce the demands on specialist services. Non-recurrent funding available until March 2024 will support some one-off initiatives and pilot projects over the coming months, with a view to informing system change longer term.
- 3.3 The national [Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme](#) is currently underway in Buckinghamshire which aims to support local areas to address the three key challenges facing the SEND system. They define these as “poor outcomes for children and young people with SEND and in Alternative Provision; low parental and provider confidence; and financial unsustainability.” Early intervention and support is emerging as a key area of work that will result from this, and joining up efforts across the local area will be essential to ensure that the offer for families is comprehensive and easy to navigate, leading to an improved experience. This funded programme will enable the system change required to strengthen early intervention to be implemented (based on need, not diagnosis).
- 3.4 Challenges in relation to the provision of therapies for children and young people with an EHCP remain significant. September 2023 figures identify a 24 week wait for Speech and Language therapy advice to inform new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and a 52 week wait for Occupational Therapy advice (against a 6 week statutory timeframe). This means that children’s EHCPs are issued without all the relevant advice. While this is in line with the SEND Code of Practice, it does mean that the child’s needs are not fully presented within the Plan initially and there is a

delay in providing the appropriate therapy support. To rectify this, EHCPs are reopened and updated once the advice is available.

- 3.5 The therapies service is currently being recommissioned and over establishment recruitment is taking place to mitigate these issues, however a national shortage of therapists does make this more challenging. Therapists are now involved in EHCP assessment decisions at the very beginning which is ensuring that the right children join the waiting list for advice to avoid unnecessary backlogs accumulating.
- 3.6 The timeliness of issuing EHCPs is sharply declining due to a number of late Educational Psychology assessments which inform the EHCP. These are needed for the Plan to be legally compliant when issued. This is a result of an increasing number of EHC assessment requests (22% increase Jan – July 2022 compared to the same period 2021) and a higher % progressing to assessment (74% in 2022 compared to 64% in 2021 – 193 more assessments). The causes are complex but include a lack of confidence by parents and schools in SEN support. Actions are being taken to address this including increasing the number of Educational Psychologists employed by the Council, and an associate model to manage spikes in demand.
- 3.7 There are multiple Boards providing governance and oversight of the SEND improvement programme and the WSoA, including the SEND Improvement Board, SEND Integrated Services Board and the Buckinghamshire Executive Partnership. All Boards provide support, scrutiny and challenge. A review of governance is underway with a view to streamlining the approach.

#### 4. Ofsted/Care Quality Commission SEND Inspection Framework

- 4.1 The SEND Improvement Programme priorities are in line with the new [Ofsted/CQC SEND inspection framework](#) that was published in January 2023. This new framework places greater emphasis on the journey of the child and their lived experience and outcomes. It also includes for the first time the addition of Alternative Provision. This is for all pupils, not just those with SEND. Other changes of note include a Social Care Inspector being added to the inspection team and the creation of a new set of judgements following inspection. Local areas will now receive 1 of 3 possible grades:

Inspection Outcome	Further inspection
1. The local area partnership’s SEND arrangements <b>typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes</b> for children and young people with SEND. <b>The local area partnership is taking action</b> where improvements are needed.	Full inspection usually within 5 years



<p>2. The local area partnership’s arrangements lead to <b>inconsistent experiences and outcomes</b> for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.</p>	<p>Full inspection usually within <b>3</b> years</p>
<p>3. There are <b>widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns</b> about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.</p>	<p>Submission of <b>Priority Action Plan</b></p> <p>Monitoring inspection usually within 18 months of the full inspection.</p>

4.2 Buckinghamshire will continue to have a WSoA until a full inspection under the new Framework has taken place.

4.3 Since inspection 2 monitoring meetings have been completed with the DfE and CQC (December 2022 and April 2023). A third meeting is being planned for November 2023. Feedback to date has been generally positive and our approach to reporting on progress and impact being shared as good practice with other local areas.

## 5. Corporate implications

5.1 The SEND Improvement Programme aligns with the following [corporate plan](#) priorities:

- Strengthening our communities
- Protecting the vulnerable

## 6. Next steps and review

6.1 Progress against the SEND Improvement Plan and the WSoA will continue to be reported as part of the agreed governance including taking updates through SEND Improvement Board, Buckinghamshire Executive Partnership and SEND Integrated Services Board.

6.2 Preparations will continue to be made for a potential SEND inspection. This includes ongoing reflection and update of the local area Self-Evaluation which is informing a refresh of Buckinghamshire’s SEND and Inclusion Strategy, due to be published in 2024.