

Leicestershire SEND/Inclusion Peer Challenge 24-26th November 2021

Confidential Report

Sector-led Improvement within Children's Services in the East Midlands Region

SEND PEER CHALLENGE REPORT

Local area: Leicestershire Dates: 24-26th November 2021

Review Team members:

- Richard Jaramba - Parent Carer Forum – Leicester City LA & EM NNPCF rep
- Young reviewers - five young people from Nottingham City
- Christopher Jones - Education rep – Nottinghamshire County Council
- Sandrina Mapletoft - Social care rep – Nottinghamshire County Council
- Michelle Sherlock - Health rep – DCO Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire ICS
- Pat Bullen - Team Lead & East Midlands SEND Network Coordinator

Background/ context

Leicestershire was inspected as a local area for SEND and inclusion in February 2020 with a report published in March 2020, by OfSTED and CQC. A Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was required to address two areas of significant weakness identified at the SEND inspection. The local area will be re-visited by OfSTED/CQC, usually within 18 months of the action plan submission from the local area.

In preparation for a re-visit taking place in 2022, Leicestershire Local Area commissioned a SEND Peer Challenge from the East Midlands region, to check on progress and corroborate their self-assessment.

Lines of enquiry from Written Statement of Action:

- 1. Joint Commissioning**
- 2. Quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)**

Methodology

The peer challenge was conducted using the agreed and adopted East Midlands Region methodology.

Following a Teams conference between the team lead and senior officers to agree the key lines of enquiry, a team of five reviewers plus young reviewers, spent two virtual days in the local area meeting with parents and carers, young people and a range of managers, commissioners and providers. There were also several focus groups with a range of educational settings, both mainstream and specialist, across Early Years, Primary, Secondary Education.

The team scrutinised local area strategies and policy documents, associated data, a sample set of anonymous EHC Plans, as well as information from the Local Offer.

The purpose of these meetings was to see how well the local area had accurately identified strengths and areas for development through the self- evaluation process and evidence of impact.

A PowerPoint presentation and verbal feedback were given at the end of the second day to SEND local area leaders.

Over 50 practitioners (schools/LA/CCG/LPT) and parents/carers were interviewed through focus groups, spanning over 40 hours of interviewer time. 12 young people from four schools - mainstream and special, were interviewed by Nottingham City young reviewers.

Evidence

This comprised:

- A detailed self-evaluation
- Strategy and policy documents
- Extensive dataset provided before the visit with additional reports and

data provided following discussions with managers

- A sample of EHC Plans
- The Local Offer website
- A presentation by leaders in the area
- Discussions with parents, children, and young people
- Meetings with the local area parent/carer forum (PCF) – the SEND Hub

and members of the previous PCF; practitioners and managers, voluntary sector representatives.

Overall Findings

KLOE 1: Joint Commissioning Strengths:

- This is an area which the Local Area partners has committed much time and effort to developing joint commissioning and partnership working since the 2020 inspection.

- Senior leaders have committed time, energy, and resources to a broad engagement process to develop a new LLR Joint Commissioning SEND Strategy, launched on 29.11.2021. The Strategy is jointly owned by the three local authorities and three CCGs covering the future ICS footprint
- The partnership made good use of evidence and narrative to support where the area is at, and to demonstrate a better understanding of the impact of approaches/strategies
- There is now a strong sense of confidence in the Leicestershire community. There is a clarity of vision and shared values across partners with respect to joint commissioning, despite the challenge of the Covid era. Partners told us that new systems and online technologies had enabled some improved aspects to joint working
- There is a now a joint commissioning strategy in place, with a clear approach to joint working across the LA and the ICS/CCG for SEND and Inclusion
- Outcomes for Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) are developing
- Improvements in schools' knowledge and skills include the availability of the SEN Support Handbook which sets out services that are ordinarily available to schools. This also supports the Graduated Response approach and arrangements for BERA - Best Endeavours and Reasonable Adjustments. SENCOs that we met felt better supported and informed and able to develop their schools' strategies and approaches. They appreciated the Head of SEND and Service Managers attending termly SENCo networks, taking feedback and updating them about developments
- Elected members are committed to SEND/Inclusion. They have allocated additional resourcing to promote improvements, they listen to their community and hold Officers to account. They would like to link even more coherently with health leadership
- Joint commissioning is evident in the:

- Neurodevelopmental assessment pathway
 - SEND and Inclusion Board partnership (coproduction)
 - Key worker Early Adopter programme (a very good example of co- production noted by the Chair of the SEND Hub)
 - Aide Memoire for health and social care guidance
 - Social worker seconded to SEND initially, now a Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) role in place (since August 2021)
- Colleagues across education, health and social care are sharing information and are seeking to achieve more by aligning outcomes and systems thinking
 - Young people reported positive levels of provision and PfA pathway approaches - they spoke of wanting jobs, holidays, and friends

Areas for development:

- The local area's knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses in joint commissioning is much better developed. There is now an 'operational lag' - a delay in all families in Leicestershire believing that planning and outcomes, alongside access to services, will be readily available. SEND Hub members reported concerns about some families still experiencing anguish in accessing the right support in a timely manner. The intent is in place, implementation emerging, with evidence of impact to be developed
- Schools reported that during the Covid response period, therapies were much less present in schools, and worry that this change could continue. Special schools commission Diana nursing (Community Service provision for children) to support the meeting of needs of children in school. School leaders report concern at the funding going forward
- DCO role and capacity appears to have impacted upon the presence of health representatives at an operational level; we saw few providers, possibly reflecting the current Covid community response. This limited the evaluation of impact and embedding of practice e.g. the quality of EHCPs
- The Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) role had been vacant for a short period at the point of the peer review, with plans to offer short term coverage. This has had an impact on recent operational activity. There is a considerable reliance upon the DCO role, to have accountability and co- ordinate across the whole ICS footprint

- Greater attendance at Annual Reviews by SENA, particularly post-14/PfA, would strengthen the positive outcomes focus and personalisation agenda of the local area and increase confidence across families , (though an increasing presence of LA officers was reported by schools and families)
- Parents and practitioners noted a shortage of Educational Psychology (EP) services. Within the Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service, this related to both recruitment challenges and to the demand on the service for increased statutory assessments. This is a national trend, not only within Leicestershire

KLOE 2: Education Health and Care Plans Strengths:

- Colleagues across the local area demonstrated a collaborative approach to achieve system improvement. They talked of a recent acceleration in their activities in order to improve impact and outcomes
- Special Educational Needs Assessment (SENA) service developments - families and providers recognise the implementation challenges of changes to this central service but are confident that this is the right approach – quality is the central objective and is widely supported
- The DCO instigated Aide Memoire has improved the consistency of health advices to the EHC needs assessment process and to EHC Plans
- The appointment of a DSCO is supporting the development of a coherent social care pathway response, starting with early help all the through way to planning for transition to adult support
- EHC Plans in Leicestershire, are improving in quality. Reviewers were provided with recently produced plans which were of improving quality and sufficiently personalised
- There is incremental improvement in the quality of EHC plans:
 - Plans are more child/family focused

- SENCOs and school feedback suggest schools are also seeing positive change
- Assurance mechanisms have been developed and implemented by health service providers
- Learning and Improvement is important in Leicestershire. Quality audits of EHC Plans are identifying learning needs (service level) and feedback is being shared in order to drive improvement within SENA and across services providing advices
- Schools and families prefer the layout and style of the reformatted EHC Plans. One Page profiles and emerging person-centred tools are improving the focus upon the views, interests and aspirations of the child or young person - schools and families simply want to stick with this iteration now
- Teachers / SENCOs wanted to note their appreciation of the STS (Specialist Teaching Service) involvement in Annual Reviews as positive
- Partnerships have strengthened throughout the Pandemic. Much of the system continued to perform well and the increasing use of ICT tools has boosted engagement between professionals across disciplines

Areas for development:

- Across SENA developments, though the intent is secure, operationalising the system is a current challenge as restructure plays out, resulting in a lag in families seeing positive outcomes fully realised at this stage
- The Quality Assurance mechanism has potential to support wider and sustainable quality improvement in EHC Plans. Numbers are currently small and the area would benefit from a wider peer moderation through the EM SEND regional approaches
- EHCP Plan writers need succinct advice which they can develop into a holistic plan. This would be strengthened with health advice givers or the DCO/SEND Officer working closely with SENA to secure improvement
- Families and schools prefer the changes to sections E/F of plans. A further focus upon PfA (Preparation for Adulthood) from Y9, similar to the Newcastle approach or using the PfA NDTi Year 9 review checklist could assist with a

focus upon wider outcomes, linking to the transformation commitments of the area

- The processing of Annual Reviews are emerging as a concern (nationally as well as within Leicestershire), aligned to the quality of EHC Plans. Families and schools reported that changes to some plans are delayed for over a year and some are still not finalised. The local area is seeking to prepare for the statutory reporting from January 2023 through an emerging system response. Schools feel that they could assist with amendments to plans if their changes were accepted electronically, as they understand the pressure on SENA time in updating the new plan
- Private reports and their status - there are different views at play across the local area, with practitioner concern for quality and knowledge of context and parent/carers concerned to secure the best advice for their children. It could be helpful to raise this with both the regional DfE SEND Adviser, NHS England, and NHS Improvement lead for the Midlands region and with regional/national NNPCF as this issue is live across England and is not yet resolved
- Schools recognised the strategic progress made. They believed that not all intended improvements have reached the frontline but felt positive at progress being made
- Reviewers heard that when an EHC needs assessment is refused/declined, that the school gives feedback to the family. This should be given by the local area to the parent/carer directly
- We have gathered evidence and note positive progress in a number of areas of EHC Plan development. We heard directly from parents from the SEND Hub, and note that some progress is yet to be felt in the lived experience of some children, young people and their parents/carers in Leicestershire

Other aspects of the Peer Challenge

- It was noted in both KLOEs, within focus groups, that SENDIASS is under pressure and requires more resource to meet need from both the CCGs and from the LA

- The initial presentation was very strong and focused. It gave a clear and succinct overview of complex developments. The only suggested improvement would be for leaders from health as well as the LA and parent leaders to share aspects of the presentation
- In other focus groups, it worked best when the team had prepared for the session, including using some slides to give information, e.g. in the inclusion group
- Most of the young people interviewed shared their ideas about future work and had a good idea of what they would like to do (college, apprenticeships, work, hobbies)
- Most young people didn't know about EHC Plans but they all knew about Annual Reviews and saw them as an opportunity to reflect on achievement and to plan for the future, especially with regard to employment

Recommendations/ considerations:

1. To focus upon implementation of new processes, checking back with schools and the SEND Hub, and wider groups of families of children at SEN Support, that the impact is occurring in:
 1. a) Checking quality assurance of EHC Plans with families and providers; does planning accurately describe need/action/provision/outcomes.
 2. b) Consider if internal quality assurance (QA) mechanisms are sufficiently robust or whether the Local Area would benefit from a regional moderation QA exercise. The Regional SEND Coordinator can arrange this
 3. c) Changes across the SENA service appear to be on the right course and checking again with parents/carers and schools about processes and quality, for example accepting school suggested changes to EHC Plans from Annual Reviews, could assist all parties
2. Consider how to address health challenges by working collaboratively on some issues through the closer working with CCGs and the LPT provider, to ensure therapies and nursing are considered at a strategic level

3. Invite the support of the DfE SEND regional adviser, NHS England and NHS Improvement Adviser and NNPCF to consider the position of private advice within the EHC Plan pathway

Pat Bullen, East Midlands SEND network lead, on behalf of the peer review team