

# People and Families Scrutiny Committee

## SEND Update Part 2: Next steps, improvement work underway and progress since regulatory inspections

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Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Lifelong  
Learning and Employability



# A quick recap

- Local area SEN inspection in October 2019 – three areas of significant weakness (joint commissioning; over-identification of moderate learning difficulties; quality of education health care plans);
- Local area required to produce a joint written statement of action;
- SEN revisit in May 2022 – sufficient progress against all three areas;
- ECC's new SEN structure operational January 2020 (just in time for Covid);
- SEN Strategy launched Autumn 2022;
- Inclusion strategy launched Autumn 2023;
- SEND Sufficiency Plan – engagement Spring 2024

# National context

- Local area inspections under the new framework;
- High Needs Block accumulated deficit amounting to tens of millions of £££ in numerous LAs;
- Safety valve and delivering better value;
- Continued rise in the number of requests for assessment and new Education Health Care Plans;
- DfE improvement plan;
- ISOS LGA work on sustainable SEN systems.

# LGA on SEND (Isos partnership)

- Reform of SEND policy / arrangements (and other policies / arrangements that relate to young people with SEND) is essential ... SEND arrangements are not working – the SEND reforms have not delivered better outcomes, a less adversarial system, financial sustainability. Strong view that the system is incentivising the wrong outcomes – should focus on inclusion, preparing for adulthood.
- ... and urgent. The issues within the SEND system are unavoidable (choice of when, not if, reform is needed) and existential (costs and cumulative deficit continues to rise; risk of increasing numbers of councils becoming insolvent if issues not addressed.)
- The root causes are systemic in nature – national reform is required. Must acknowledge poor practice (of which there are many examples). Equally, avoid blaming individual actors – local government, schools, health service, parents. All reacting to a system that incentivises the wrong things. Addressing these requires fundamental national reforms that foster partnership between professionals and families.




What  
difference  
are we  
making?

IMPACT

IMPACT

IMPACT

We know that too many children, young people and their families are yet to feel the benefit of the improvement work that we are undertaking across the local area. Until this changes, we know that some children, young people and their families will not receive the level of service we would expect to deliver for them.



## Our partners in the SEND local area

- **Health transformation** from five Clinical Commissioning Groups to three Integrated Care Systems with additional resources jointly funded to support coordination and delivery of the SEND agenda with a nominated CCG lead.
- We share our health partners with other local areas which makes prioritization more difficult (MSE – Southend and Thurrock; SNEE – Suffolk; HWE – Hertfordshire).
- The financial commitment from health partners has become ever more challenging with some in ‘triple lock’ which fetters their ability to contribute to the improvement programme.
- However, their commitment as strategic partners leading improvements in diagnostic timescales (ADHD and ASC) and therapies (OT, PT and SALT) remains strong.

# Our partners in the local area – schools and settings

- There are over 550 schools in Essex; over 1700 pre-school settings and 8 FE colleges;
- We know that a lot of parents and families report variable experiences for children and young people with SEN; however, 91.8% of schools inspected by Ofsted are rated good or outstanding and SEN is very often referred to positively in reports:
- *Southview School is a thriving, joyous place to learn. Pupils are inspirational, happy and delightful to speak with.*
- *Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are included in all aspects of learning. Staff make skilful adaptations to the curriculum that help all pupils to succeed. Leaders identify pupils with SEND early and work with parents to ensure success.*
- *Teachers skilfully adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEND so that they become increasingly confident and knowledgeable.*



# Governance

- **SEND Improvement Board** established (2019) by health, social care, education, public health, the Essex Family Forum and key providers. This led development of the **Joint Written Statement of Action** and establishment of the **SEND improvement programme**.
- JWSOA agreed as **fit for purpose** in April 2020 and by this time the improvement workstreams were established with agreed scopes, plans and representation in place.
- SEND was made a **key priority** of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (2020).
- Wider SEND Governance landscape including operational oversight reviewed and resulted in:
  - The SEND Improvement Board and SEND Strategic Governance Group combining, under new Terms of Reference as the **SEND Partnership Board** to oversee all SEND improvement and business as usual activity re SEND
  - SEND Partnership Board reports into Health & Wellbeing Board and Children and Young People's Partnership Board
  - Health sub-group was created with a specific remit to bring together health partners across Essex on health specific SEND matters
  - SEND Quadrant Joint Working Groups were reviewed and terms of reference strengthened
- The **Essex Family Forum** are represented at all levels of the governance structure
- Regular updates provided to **Scrutiny committees**



# Financial sustainability – and why it is important

- In 2018/19 the High Needs Block was in a deficit position with a projected forecast accumulative deficit of £40 million;
- This necessitated a transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block which affects all schools and all children who attend them (including those with SEN);
- Special school banding was set at a default level depending upon the type of school;
- The HNB is now in an accumulative surplus which has enabled us to unfreeze special school top up, make no further transfers from the Schools Block and invest in SEN – early intervention, outreach and the workforce.
- Other large shire authorities (Devon, Kent, Norfolk, Suffolk etc) have enormous accumulative deficits which puts them into a position where cuts to services are inevitable.
- Essex has exercised careful financial management which protects services and ensures we make decisions about spending locally.

# **Working and Innovating as a System**

# Local Area SEND Strategy

Equity, inclusion, ambition

Overarching strategic vision, commitments and outcomes for the SEND system as a whole.

Ordinarily Available  
Universal

TPP

Inclusion  
Framework

Local  
Offer

Inclusive ethos, culture and consistent, high quality universal level support. Self-care and self-help.

Inclusion Framework - Level 2/ Triage

Ordinarily Available  
Targeted

Recommended Assessments  
SEMH, SLCN +

Through profiling and recommended assessments, understand barriers and individual's/ cohorts needs. Plan additional targeted support and intervention.

Inclusion Framework - Early intervention

One Planning - SEN Support

Focus on effective reviews

Delivery of creative solutions, early intervention through assess, plan, do review cycle linked with One Planning.

EHCNA

Statutory assessment as appropriate

# SEND data headlines EHCPs

- In 2016 Essex was responsible for 7550 children and young people with an Education Healthcare Plan; in January 2024 the number has risen to 13,228 – a 75% increase.
- In 2015/16 we received 1638 requests for assessment and agreed 58%; in 2022/23 we received 3986 requests for assessment (an increase of 143%) and agreed 56%.
- In 2015/16 56% of requests were from schools and 27% from parents; in 2022/23 68% of requests were from schools and 30% from parents.
- Requests for assessment from 2018/19 (the last full school year before the pandemic) have risen by 69%.

# Supporting Inclusion



## Inclusion Strategy

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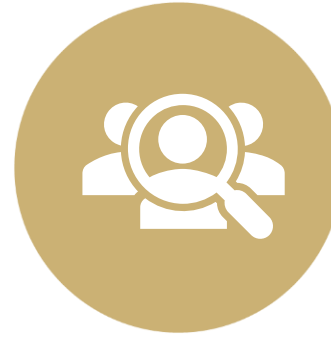
Our vision and commitments, for equity and excellence in education for all children and young people.



## Inclusion Framework

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Enabling early intervention and inclusion in mainstream schools through the principle of Lives without Labels.



## Inclusion Reviews

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Supporting schools to review and reflect on their culture, provision and practices.



## Resources & Learning

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Research visits, gathering and sharing intelligence and best practice, as well as professional learning programmes.

# Position



## Progress

In 2022, overall progress and attainment of Essex pupils was too low.

Spotlight on SEND and disadvantaged pupils.



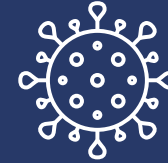
## Attendance and participation

Continued increase in absence, persistent absence, suspensions permanent exclusions and children removed from roll for home education.



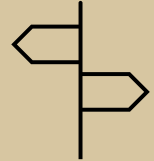
## Wellbeing

Concerns over pupils' social, emotional, and mental health are rising, and becoming increasingly complex.



## Impact of the pandemic

Impact of the pandemic on schools; real term reductions in education funding, recruitment challenges, staffing shortages, and rising pressure on school staff.



## Rising demand and a complex system

Unprecedented demand for mental health, Social Care and SEND services

Most Essex schools are committed to inclusion and success of all pupils, but find the landscape difficult to navigate.

# Vision

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Positive, mutually respectful **relationships** underpin and support the inclusion of all pupils and their families, and promote equality and diversity.

The **wellbeing** of all members of school communities is well-supported.



All pupils enjoy school and have high levels of **attendance**.

All pupils are empowered and eager to **participate** in all aspects of school life.



An equitable, high-quality curriculum supports all pupils to **achieve** well, from their different starting points.

All pupils are well-supported to **move-on** to appropriate next steps.



# Education Health Care Needs Assessments

We fully recognise that the current timescales for completion of assessments fall significantly short of the 20 weeks set out in the SEN Code of Practice and understand the impact that this can have for children and young people being assessed, their families and their educational setting; we take this matter very seriously and improvement is our main priority.

- The recruitment and retention of Educational Psychologists is a major problem for Essex County Council and other LAs. We are working hard to recruit EPs. We are developing our approach to using 'virtual assessments' where appropriate, which is a piece of work that has been led by Essex CC on behalf of the East of England, as well as increasing our associate EP pool, which is our independent EP workforce.
- The number of requests for assessment has risen sharply since the Covid lockdowns ended; we have over 3,500 a year with the largest number being from schools. This has placed additional significant strain upon our SEND teams. In order to ensure that we have sufficient capacity we have recently invested additional funding to expand our teams by 46 FTEs.
- Parents have shared a lack of confidence in the offer from some mainstream schools which is driving both requests for assessment and requests for special school places. With special schools being full or over capacity this provides additional challenges for the SEND teams which must be addressed at the same time as undertaking an increased number of assessments.
- We put into place an extensive improvement plan to improve the quality of assessments and plans which was recognised in May 2022 when Ofsted and CQC revisited Essex and found that this was no longer an area of significant weakness. We make no apologies for continuing to focus on the quality of advice, assessment and the plan but will be working to do this in as timely way as possible.

# **Co-ordination and Oversight Groups (COGs) & Examples**

# Co-ordination and Oversight Groups (COGs)

Delivery of strategy, transformation and continuous improvement under the inclusion umbrella.



\*COG with additional governance/working arrangements



New for Sept 23!

# Quality of EHC Plans COG

Objective: To improve the quality and timeliness of new EHC Plans and the planning process, including quality of requests and advice.

**EHCNA Guidance  
and Quality of  
Requests**

**Decision Making  
Structures, Roles  
and Processes**

**Quality Assurance  
Process/  
Framework  
(new EHCPs)**

**Evidence Writers  
Guidance**

**Learning from the  
QA activity, &  
Exemplar Plans**

**CPD for Plan  
Writers &  
Contributors**

**Way Forward  
Meetings/  
processes**

**Post 16 plans/  
Reassessment**

**Digital  
Opportunities**

**Timeliness**

# Annual Review COG

Objective: To improve the quality and timeliness of the Annual Review process and resulting amended plans.

**Updated process  
for ARs (working  
document)**

**AR Paperwork**

**AR Guidance  
/ bitesize training  
videos**

**Lead SENCOs  
Coaching: Improve  
end to end Annual  
Review cycle**

**Co-ordinating AR  
Info  
(dates) with  
Schools/Health/ SC**

**ARs for EHE  
children and young  
people**

**EOTAS**

**Quality Assurance  
of amended plans**

**Data / Reporting -  
response times and  
amendments**

**Facilitation Skills  
Training**

**Ordinarily Available  
provision in plans**

# Sufficiency & funding COG

*SEND Sufficiency strategy for places, provision, skills etc for the next 5 years. Delivery plan and strategy business case to achieve strategy aims.*

*Main links: SEND Strategy, Workforce development, School place planning, Early Years, Mainstream and Post 16, OA*

SEND  
Sufficiency  
Plan

SEN Top-Up  
Funding  
Framework

HNB Spending  
Plan

Enhanced  
Provisions  
Review

SEND  
Forecasting

Personal  
Budgets

Special School  
Capacity  
Assessments

SEND Capital  
Programme

# SEND headlines - provision

- In 2015 there were 2293 Essex pupils in maintained special schools in the county; in 2023 that figure had risen to 3498 – an increase of 53%.
- Since 2015 four new special schools have opened in Essex (Chatten, Greenwell, Grove House and Hawthorns) with Sir Geoff Hurst in construction, and a consultation open for a new special school in Rayleigh.
- We have invested in expansions and improved facilities at Cedar Hall, Glenwood, Harlow Fields, Kingswode Hoe, Langham Oaks, Lexden Springs, Market Field, Oak View, Ramsden Hall and Southview.
- Development of Market Field Farm – a unique and innovative new provision funded via a developer's enabling contribution.
- New PRU builds in North-East and South with Mid PRU in development (the first time there has been investment in our provision for children and young people who have been excluded or medically unable to attend school).
- Investment in specialist provision in mainstream schools (Grow/SEMH provision, autism support centres, new provision for children with severe learning difficulties).
- An overall capital investment of over £110 million and rising.



# Engagement, advice and support for parents and families

- The newly launched and improved local offer;
- SEND roadshows;
- SEND newsletter;
- Strengthened and expanded SENDIASS.

Visit the [Essex Local Offer](#) website to find out more.

Find out about  
help available  
for children and  
young people  
(aged 0-25).

This is called  
the Local Offer.



# Family Feedback COG

Graffiti Wall  
Feedback Loop

Family Impact  
Survey


Task & Finish  
Group re  
Communications

Ofsted/CQC  
revisit/ inspection  
feedback to  
families

Individual & Team  
feedback

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## Preparing for inspection

- The new inspection framework launched in 2023 and Essex could be inspected at any time;
  - We are working with health partners and the Essex Family Forum on our self-assessment;
  - We have taken part in a 'courageous conversation' (a peer review) to help us understand and mitigate delays in assessments and diagnosis;
  - We have held workshops both across the local area and regionally.
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- A series of four yellow curved dashes in the bottom right corner, arranged in a diagonal line from bottom-left to top-right.

# Our priorities

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We have a series of immediate and longer-term initiatives in train to address the challenges of increased volume of need and requests for support, alongside the limited ability to increase capacity in specialist provision:



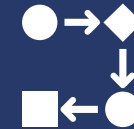
## Increased funding and operational capacity

Investing in increased top-up funding for schools, back-dated support for those assessments that take longer than 20-weeks and permanent additional capacity in the LA SEND operational teams.



## Sufficiency Plan

Over the course of this academic year, we will launch the new SEND Sufficiency Plan, including the review of the Enhanced Provision model in Essex and continue the work on the new SEND Top-Up arrangements.



## Continuous Improvement

Pilot a new approach to Annual Reviews; update resources and support around One Planning; and increase the workforce development offer.