

## SEND Ofsted Inspection Update

**Purpose**

To inform the People and Families Scrutiny Committee of the:

- Outcome of the recent Ofsted/CQC SEND Local Area Review Inspection;
- Work required across partner agencies to improve services and provision across Essex for children and young people with SEND;
- Progress made so far in response to the inspection.

**Background**

The 2014 Children and Families Act introduced sweeping reforms to improve services and outcomes for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) across the country and made it a statutory duty for all agencies involved in working with children and young people to follow the SEND Code of Practice 2014.

To support the introduction of the reforms a new inspection framework was introduced in May 2016. The SEND Local Area Review Inspection Framework is a joint inspection conducted by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and it covers three questions:

- How effective is the local area in identifying children and young people with SEND;
- How effective is the local area in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND;
- How effective is the local area in improving the outcomes of children and young people with SEND;

All local areas will be inspected under the framework over a five-year period. To date 105 local areas have been inspected.

The inspection does not have a grading system in the way that schools and children's service inspections are reported; instead Ofsted and the CQC identify strengths, areas for development and significant weaknesses. Where significant weaknesses are identified a Written Statement of Action is required to be submitted.

The expectation placed on local areas has increased since the 2014 reforms were introduced; which has resulted in a significant increase in the number of local areas required to submit a Written Statement of Action if they were inspected in 2019 as compared to previous years.

Across the region, of the 9 local areas inspected to date, 7 areas have required a Written Statement of Action to be submitted.

## **The inspection in Essex**

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) visited Essex from 30 September to 4 October 2019. Five days notice of the inspection was provided as per the framework. During the preparation week, every parent of a child in Essex with SEND was notified about the inspection and invited to contribute their views. Interview groups were organised involving staff, providers and with families directly. During the inspection week over 600 parents contributed their views.

The inspection report was published on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2019 and is attached as a background paper. The timing of the publication of the report was delayed due to purdah.

Ofsted and the CQC found the following areas of strengths during the inspection:

- Progress towards the implementation of the reforms has accelerated since 2017 and senior leaders are demonstrating a shared commitment towards driving change.
- School leaders understand the need to change the way the local authority works together to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- Leaders have an honest and broadly accurate picture of the current strengths, weaknesses and complexities of practice across the quadrants, the five CCG's and the 3 STPs- the Self Evaluation was deemed to be accurate
- The area is effective in accurately identifying needs in the early years phase of education
- Significant progress has been made to support young people to prepare for adulthood
- Outcomes for children with EHCP's have improved at the end of Key Stage 2.

Ofsted and the CQC also determined there were three areas of significant weakness.

- The joint commissioning arrangements between the local authority and the CCGs do not work well enough to provide children and young people with the services that they need:
  - Too much variation between the CCGs leads to inequality, inconsistency and unacceptably long waiting times for services.
  - Joint commissioning is not sufficiently informed by what is already known about the gaps in services for health and education across the 0-25 age range, across the whole local area.
- The reasons for, and accuracy of, the high proportions of children and young people identified with moderate learning difficulties are yet to be resolved. Potential over-identification could mask underlying difficulties in communication and language, and social, emotional and mental health development.

- Too many EHC plans do not include the information needed to secure high-quality outcomes for children and young people.
  - The EHC plans do not consistently secure the right professional advice to meet children's and young people's needs, and do not have specific details of the provision that will be put in place.
  - Strategic oversight is not effective in making sure that EHC plans are fit for purpose.

Essex County Council and the five Essex CCGs fully accept the outcome of the Ofsted/CQC inspection.

### **Actions taken since the inspection.**

A SEND Improvement Board has been established; membership consists of senior leaders across the local authority, the five CCG's and the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service. This has met 5 times since the inspection. An improvement budget has been agreed across the 6 lead agencies.

A lead CCG has been identified to lead on the improvement work on behalf of all 5 organisations. The lead is NE Essex CCG who has been involved in the Suffolk inspection. Basildon and Brentwood CCG and Castle Point and Rochford CCG also have experience of the Thurrock and Southend inspections respectively. NEE CCG have agreed governance with the other CCGs to ensure work is coordinated and consistent. This will be done via the CCG's Directors of Nursing and Accountable Officers' meetings.

Four workshops have been held, three focusing on each of the areas of significant Weakness and a final workshop to pull the outcomes together into a working draft action plan.

A full report has been given to the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board.

The DfE and NHSE have visited the area to assess progress since the inspection and to outline the process for monitoring progress going forward.

### **Next Steps.**

The Written Statement of Action is required to be submitted to Ofsted by the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Ofsted will determine if the plan is fit for purpose, if it is not deemed fit for purpose further work will be required. From the date the plan is accepted by Ofsted, the local area has 18 months before it will be re-inspected. A key benchmark for the re-inspection will be what difference has been made to the lived experiences of children, young people and families as a result of the improvements made.

### **Wider considerations for the PAF Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee will be fully aware that ECC education services have been on a SEND improvement journey over the past 3 years. This was acknowledged by Ofsted when they recognised that the pace of improvement has accelerated since

2017. Information and updates on the SEND vision and our consultation with families has been shared at previous meetings and it is important not to view the SEND Inspection in isolation of the wider improvement plan but to incorporate this into ongoing service improvement. A restructure of the Education workforce has also recently been completed.

The biggest challenge in responding to the three areas of significant weakness will be addressing the inconsistency of provision and quality of services across the county. Ofsted and the CQC expect there to be a consistent experience of services by children, young people and families.

As a result, developing a countywide SEND Outcomes Framework is one of the first actions to complete as this will drive all further work. A draft framework is in development.