

Report to PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY SELECT COMMITTEE

Update on the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Inspection Re-visit

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Purpose of the Report

To give the Performance and Value for Money Select Committee (PVFM) an update on progress to date addressing the two remaining recommendations from the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) that have formed the priorities identified in the Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) being monitored by the Department for Education (DfE).

Executive Summary

Following the reinspection in September 2019 and identification of two remaining areas requiring improvement, the APP was developed to ensure significant improvement continued to be made in relation to area 3 (Education, Health & Care (EHC) process and quality of plans) and area 5 (Achievement of children and young people with SEND, including the high rates of fixed term exclusion and persistent absenteeism). The final draft of the APP was submitted to the DfE in March 20 including 6 and 12 month milestones.

Due to the closure of all schools in England on the 18th March 2020 during the national lockdown and the cancellation of national performance tables and national examinations for all Key Stages, the actions identified in area 5 were amended and updated to reflect the significant challenges presented by the Coronavirus situation. This update was completed and agreed with the DfE ahead of the review meeting held on the 31st July 2020.

Following a successful review meeting on the 31st July 2020, a formal monitoring review meeting was scheduled for the 14th January 2021 to consider the impact and progress being made towards the 12 month targets in the APP and any associated impact on plans resulting from the Coronavirus situation.

Despite the challenges provided by the Coronavirus situation, actions related to area 3 have proceeded at pace through creative approaches, with the clear message of 'business as usual'. The fixed term additional team to deliver the annual review recovery plan continue to produce high quality EHC plans following annual reviews. However, due to several staff securing permanent roles in other Local Authorities, contract extensions have been secured for the remaining roles until the summer 2021 to complete the recovery plan. The contract extensions remain within the original funding

envelope agreed in March 2020. The main education, health and care plan team continue to work effectively. Co-productive work continues to take place across the partnership to provide challenging but constructive feedback to improve working practices and the quality of information included in the EHC plans. Quality standards continue to be reviewed and raised through increasingly rigorous audit processes. A quality assurance workshop with our DfE advisor and representation from across the local partnership to review the quality of EHC plans confirmed this view.

Work to improve the achievement, attendance and reduce exclusions for children and young people with SEND, as identified in area 5, has continued despite the turbulence of the Coronavirus situation. Overall exclusions have fallen during the Autumn term 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. Whilst some of the difference is explainable by the variation in attendance due to bubble closures and associated Coronavirus transmission rates, the work to raise awareness, understanding and tolerance of schools and settings following the trauma experienced by all during the national lockdown appears to have made a positive impact.

The positive impact on attendance can also be seen at the start and end of the Autumn term when attendance rates were in line with national averages, despite high levels of Coronavirus transmission in Oldham. There is a clear correlation between rising infection rates, increasing numbers of children and adults isolating and reducing or lower levels of attendance in Oldham schools during the Autumn term 2020. This correlation was acknowledged by the DfE advisory team during the visit on 14th January 2021.

Despite the introduction of a third national lockdown on the 5th January 2021 with schools reducing their opening to vulnerable children and critical workers, attendance in Oldham schools has been above the national average for children with an EHC plan or supported by a social worker. A strong multi-agency approach to encouraging attendance and safeguarding Oldham children and young people has been introduced following the lockdown announcement to discharge our statutory safeguarding duties alongside schools and other key partners. This will be the vehicle to support and increase, where appropriate, the attendance in Oldham schools during this time.

Due to the ongoing disruption caused by the Coronavirus situation and the refocus towards greater system wide improvement the SEND strategy and development plan was updated in the Autumn term 2020. The development plan includes outcomes to be delivered by the end of 2021 and was approved by the SEND Partnership Board in November 2020 to become operational in January 2021. Further work is planned to develop clear outcomes to be delivered by the end of each year leading up to March 2024 that will be informed by recovery planning to ensure that children and young people with SEND maximum opportunity to catch up and succeed following the turbulence experienced since March 20.

Recommendations

- That PVFM commend the Local Partnership for maintaining the significant ongoing improvements to quality and consistency of EHC plans being delivered and quality assured through effective partnership work. In addition to the strong positive focus on attending schools and settings, despite the challenges presented by the Coronavirus situation.
- That PVFM request an update report in August 2021 on the completion of the actions identified in area 3 and continuing progress made to improve attendance, reduce exclusions and raise achievement for children and young people with SEND.
- That PVFM request an update in August 2021 on the SEND strategy and refinements made to deliver strong recovery for children and young people with SEND.

Update on progress delivering the APP following the SEND Inspection Re-visit**1 Background**

1.1 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) completed a SEND inspection re-visit in September 2019 to review the progress made against the WSOA. Whilst the inspection was positive in many areas, two remaining recommendations from the WSOA were identified as still requiring further improvement. These have formed the priorities identified in the APP being monitored by the DfE.

2. Current Position – EHC Needs Assessments (Area 3)

2.1 EHC needs assessments continue to be processed; there are approximately 75 CYP undergoing assessment. Timeliness for issuing plans within 20 weeks remains high and above 90% for the full 2020 calendar year, which is well above the national average of 60% in 2019. Advice givers continue to send timely advice using alternative methods of capturing information. Educational Psychologists and health professionals are completing telephone/video call assessments where possible. Social care advice is being received in its usual form directly from social workers for children who are looked after, on a child protection plan or identified as a child in need.

2.2 Person Centered Planning meetings are taking place virtually and then provision and outcomes are being coordinated by the SEND Officers via virtual multi agency meetings. SEND Officers are using telephone conversations with families to ascertain aspirations and views of the parents and the child/young person. This way of working continues to be positive leading to enhanced information available for section A of an EHC plan related to the views, interests and aspirations of the child and their parents/or young person. We will continue this way of working as we move into the next phase of school opening post lockdown and likely beyond as part of business as usual practice. The EHC plan resource decision making panel is taking place weekly albeit virtually. A new EHC plan Triage panel has been introduced to streamline the decision to assess process and consider suitability of advice at an early stage in the process. Draft and final EHC plans are being sent out electronically to families and posted as the SEND assessment and transport team have retained continues access to the Civic offices during the Autumn term and into the third national lockdown.

2.3 Co-production is strong as officers become increasingly confident in seeking constructive feedback from partners and working together to find creative solutions to challenges. Attendance at Parent Carer Forum events continues to be strong with regular attendance from the SEND Assessment Team Manager. Fortnightly multi-agency update meetings between senior officers across SEND LA, health, social care and early years teams with the Parent Carer Forum ensure regular communication of challenges, action to address the issues and provide clear messages to parents and carers.

2.4 Quality assurance of the education, health and care needs assessment process continues via internal quality audits and collaborative scrutiny via the partnership. Robust evaluation and challenge occur during the education, health and care plan workstream chaired by the CEO of Parents of Oldham In Touch (POINT). Governance arrangements have been updated with revised terms of reference and membership of the SEND Implementation

Board (IAB, formally SEND TAB) and SEND Partnership Board. Membership has been strengthened through the attendance of senior officers from Children's and Adults Social Care teams. Workstreams continue to drive operation activity, with the Graduated Response workstream refreshed with new membership and clear focus. A new workstream called Making it Personal has been introduced to explore and review the funding arrangements for EHC plans and how this can deliver better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

3 Current Position - Annual Reviews (Area 3)

3.1 Annual reviews continue to be led by schools and settings and have taken place face to face and virtually with only a few issues reported by schools or families, which the SEND officers are working to overcome. A virtual annual review process has been circulated to all schools and settings, with positive feedback received on the process from a wide range of schools, academies and settings.

3.2 The annual review recovery plan, which is identified in area 3 of the APP, continues to be delivered and achieved the 6-month milestone target of 40% of plans to be reviewed, updated and re-issued by the end of November. Staffing changes with two members of staff securing permanent appointment in other LAs and the inability to replace these colleagues quickly have impacted on the ability to maintain the pace of work in this area. However, following review from the SEND Partnership Board contract extensions have been agreed until the summer 2021 to ensure the recovery plan is delivered. An important point to note is that up to the end of December 2020 87.3% of annual reviews had been completed by schools and settings with documentation shared with the SEND team to review the information and facilitate the update of plans.

4 Current Position - Achievement of children and young people with SEND, including the high rates of fixed term exclusion and persistent absenteeism (Area 5)

4.1 Work to improve the achievement, attendance and reduce exclusions for children and young people with SEND, as identified in area 5, has continued despite the turbulence of the Coronavirus situation. Overall exclusions have fallen during the Autumn term 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. Whilst some of the difference is explainable by the variation in attendance due to bubble closures and associated Coronavirus transmission rates, the work to raise awareness, understanding and tolerance of schools and settings following the trauma experienced by all during the national lockdown appears to have made a positive impact.

4.2 The positive impact on attendance can also be seen at the start and end of the Autumn term when attendance rates were in line with national averages, despite high levels of Coronavirus transmission in Oldham. As a comparison, on the 10th December 2020, attendance for children and young people with an EHC plan was above the GM and national average for this cohort. There is a clear correlation between rising infection rates, increasing numbers of children and adults isolating and reducing or lower levels of attendance in Oldham schools during the Autumn term 2020. This correlation was acknowledged by the DfE advisory team during the visit on 14th January 2021.

4.3 Despite the introduction of a third national lockdown on the 5th January 2021 with schools reducing their opening to vulnerable children and critical workers, attendance in Oldham schools has been above the national average for children with an EHC plan or supported by a social worker. A strong multi-agency approach to encouraging attendance and

safeguarding Oldham children and young people has been introduced following the lockdown announcement to discharge our statutory safeguarding duties alongside schools and other key partners. This will be the vehicle to support and increase, where appropriate, the attendance in Oldham schools during this time.

- 4.4 Due to the ongoing disruption caused by the Coronavirus situation and the refocus towards greater system wide improvement the SEND strategy and development plan was updated in the Autumn term 2020. The development plan includes outcomes to be delivered by the end of 2021 and was approved by the SEND Partnership Board in November 2020 to become operational in January 2021. Further work is planned to develop clear outcomes to be delivered by the end of each year leading up to March 2024 that will be informed by recovery planning to ensure that children and young people with SEND maximum opportunity to catch up and succeed following the turbulence experienced since March 20.

5 Key Issues for the Performance and Value for Money Committee to Discuss

- 5.1 Discuss how the updated SEND strategy has been revised to deliver continued improvement in the two remaining areas discussed in this report, whilst ensuring system wide improvement is also being delivered to support children and young people receive the support they require during this unprecedented period.
- 5.2 Discuss how the SEND strategy has been revised to reflect the significant challenges faced by SEND support services, particularly in health, during the Coronavirus pandemic and the implications for service recovery priorities and timescales.
- 5.3 Discuss how the SEND strategy supports post Coronavirus recovery planning for children and young people with SEND who may have found remote learning and the turbulence of this period more challenging than other children and young people.

6 Key Questions for the Performance and Value for Money Committee to Consider

- 6.1 What challenges are anticipated with the return to schools and settings when national lockdown is eased for children and young people with SEND, and how does the SEND strategy or APP areas support us meet these challenges.
- 6.2 How the SEND strategy and development plan have been updated to reflect changes to SEND service priorities resulting from the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. How the strategy will be used to drive future transformation and deliver sustainable improvement through efficient use of resources.
- 6.2 How post Coronavirus recovery planning is being developed and facilitated to ensure children and young people with SEND have the best chance of recovery following the challenges and turbulence experienced during the last year.

7. Links to Corporate Outcomes

- 7.1 SEND links to all the corporate priorities impacting on children and young people. It also links to the health and wellbeing priorities of the council and partners and the SEND strategy 2021-22.

8 Additional Supporting Information

- 8.1 It is anticipated that following consideration of recovery planning and the easing of national lockdown the SEND strategy will be updated and finalised in the Summer term 2021 to reflect current evaluation of emerging trends and priorities. This work will inform the outcomes developed and operational from January 2022 – January 2026.

9 **Consultation**

9.1 N/A

10 **Appendices**

10.1 SEND Strategy Principles and Priorities – Year 1 Outcomes and Development Plan



SEND Strategy
Principles and Priors