

SEND Local Area Inspection Cabinet Report

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SEND Local Area Inspection

Slough was subject to a local area inspection between 27 September and 1 October. This is a joint inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission for the area of Slough and considered the effectiveness of the area in implementing the SEND reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. The results of the inspection were sent to the Council and Frimley CCG (CCG) on 9 November 2021 and were published on Ofsted's website on the same date.

Outcome of SEND Local Area Inspection

Her Majesty's Chief Inspection (HMCI) has determined that a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) is required following a local area inspection of SEND services within Slough as a result of identified significant weaknesses in the area's practice. This WSOA is to be jointly owned and submitted by the Council and the CCG.

Main Areas of Concern (7 Key Areas)

- Weak arrangements for ensuring effective joint leadership and accountability, self-evaluation, and improvement planning at a strategic level across education, health, and care services (including considering the high turnover of staff and an area-wide commitment to inclusion).
- The overlooked voice of the children and young people with SEND and their families and consequent lack of understanding of their lived experiences and the lack of readily available, helpful, and accurate information in this regard.
- The lack of effective use of meaningful performance information to inform the area's strategy and planning, as well as to evaluate its effectiveness.
- The limited opportunities for parents, carers and children and young people with SEND to be involved in planning and reviewing area services.
- The timeliness with which EHC plans are produced and updated, particularly nearing transition points and the absence of systematic processes for the quality assurance of EHC plans.
- the absence of social care considerations in EHC plans, for children and young people not known to children's social care, and in services in the area, including the lack of age-appropriate social opportunities for children and young people and limited offer of short break or respite services for parents and carers.
- the inequitable access to SALT and OT services, excessive waiting lists and waiting times and the absence of a dysphagia service for those aged five and over.

LA Specific Strengths

List below is not exhaustive:

- Early years leaders and practitioners speak favourably about the positive relationships and arrangements for joint working they have established.
- The SENCo networks are viewed similarly positively among schools, particularly primary schools.
- The area's 'whole-school' SEND initiative is an important step towards developing inclusive practice in schools, strengthening skills, knowledge and understanding to improve the universal offer for children and young people.
- Children and young people who are looked after and care leavers are typically carefully considered and have their needs identified. Planning for their needs is detailed and shared appropriately.
- Support for the needs of children and young people who are known to children's social care is identified clearly in their EHC plans.
- Where parents and carers know of and have accessed SENDIASS, they are complimentary about the help they have received.
- Children with SEND in the Slough area frequently get off to a good start and are supported well to achieve good educational and health outcomes in the early years

LA Specific Areas for Development

List below is not exhaustive:

- Information on the local offer webpages is not consistently easy to find, useful or up to date.
- Staff turnover across the area has been high, including in senior leadership positions. There is no coherent workforce development strategy. Linked with a high staff turnover, the completion of EHC plans within the statutory timeframes has fallen
- Statutory assessment processes are not completed efficiently enough, and the area takes too long to produce EHC plans.
- Requested changes to EHC plans following annual reviews are not completed in a timely manner. Many children and young people are in possession of extremely outdated plans. High levels of staff turnover and the associated relative inexperience of new staff have exacerbated the situation.
- Transition planning for children and young people with SEND moving into adult care and health services is weak.
- The social care needs of children and young people with SEND are not routinely or reliably identified, assessed or met unless they are known to children's social care.
- The local offer is not sufficiently helpful, informative or up to date. A significant proportion of parents and carers were unaware of its existence. Those parents and carers familiar with the local offer website reported that it was of limited help.

Local Area Response (WSOA)

Our shared ambition as leaders across Slough in partnership with parents' carers and children and young people is to secure real change through our concerted and collective efforts by all our partners across the local area.

It (WSOA) has included input from the LA, Social Care, Health, parents and school leaders. It is underpinned by our common purpose and shared values and principles which are embedded in our desire to reduce health inequality, remove barriers to learning and enable children and young people to flourish.

This co-produced written statement of action has been a truly collaborative effort and signals our intention to collectively ensure that improving the outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities within our communities remain our absolute priority.

Summary

There is a clear desire to improve at all levels and across services. Leaders have recently begun to implement their improvement plan, known as the 'rapid action plan' to address weaknesses identified in their self-evaluation. This improvement work is in its infancy and the details are not widely known. It is too early to be confident that the cycle of cuts to services, regular changes in leadership, interim appointments and vacancies, and the pattern of disjointed communication and initiatives not being seen through has been broken.