

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	Education, Skills and Growth	6 October 2022

“There were several reasons we decided to carry out this review which forms part of our revised¹ four-year programme of scrutiny activity. Firstly, the national picture was that the number of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) increased to 1.37 million in 2020. Secondly, during the Covid-19 pandemic the attainment gap between SEND and average attaining pupils increased by over 20% across all age groups, nationally. Locally, data indicated timescales for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were not being met. This data prompted a necessity to carry out this review as soon as possible but we were delayed due to Bracknell Forest being inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. When we did commence our activities, we spoke to parents/carers and visited several schools, early years and post-16 settings. We fed back our findings to decision makers along the way to ensure swift action to address any issues we found. However, some issues require longer timescales and significant investment. Our recommendations below are aimed at addressing those issues in order to strengthen services and support provided for children, young people and their families in the borough in the future.”



Councillor Mrs Gill Birch,
Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Recommendations

1	Ensure Bracknell Forest Council SEND team deliver on their statutory responsibilities within agreed WSOA timescales. Embed culture change with health teams and the SEND team so better communication ensures we move away from crisis management and put the children and young people first.	Short term = six months
2	The departmental structure of the SEND team should be reviewed to ensure accountability at all levels and monitoring of outputs and outcomes to meet statutory requirements is in place and consistent.	
3	Strengthen and recognise voice of CYP and parents/carers in improving SEND service provision. Use co-production to form strategies and forward planning.	
4	Clarify what financial support is available to young people, parents/carers, schools, and providers and ensure it is well publicised.	
5	Review the functionality of the Local Offer and information on the website to ensure it is presented clearly and includes more 'visual' aids so there is a clear pathway for parents and carers to access SEND advice and services.	

¹ Bracknell Forest Council Overview & Scrutiny Commission revised its four year plan of scrutiny activity in November 2020.

6	Ensure all partners complete EHCP assessments within statutory timescales. Consider commissioning independent therapists if not possible due to shortage in current service provider.	Medium term = 18 months
7	Review current training offered to parents/carers of children and young people with SEND and training for all professionals, including staff in early years settings.	
8	Review consistency of offering a Carers Assessment to parents/carers/siblings. Ensure Carers Assessments are offered at the earliest opportunity and that support is offered according to eligibility criteria.	
9	Review availability of Personal Budgets to support EHCPs with a view to all statutory partners supporting requests in the future.	Long term = three years
10	Explore the financial impact on the service of appointing a key worker to the family to help with crisis management i.e. admission to hospital and discharge.	
11	Explore options to train therapists locally including liaising with Universities and schools to train staff locally in Bracknell schools. To promote 'Grow Your Own' opportunities in health and SEND team.	
12	Review SEND provision in the borough to ensure it is sufficient and effective at addressing the needs of children and young people with special needs and disabilities in Bracknell. This includes annual reviews of Specialist Resource Provision located in schools, the offer in post 16 education and bespoke provision for children and young people with SEND.	
13	Explore option of an IT software platform which allows the Council and Frimley CCG to share information with children, young people and parents/carers safely and be time sensitive. Also, carry out a feasibility study for a secure portal to share EHCP information with neighbouring Councils.	

Approach

The Panel met to agree the scope of the review in October 2021 but, due to Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) announcing an imminent joint SEND inspection in Bracknell Forest it was agreed the scope would be revised and split into two parts in order not to over burden schools and organisations involved.



Scrutinise background documents including strategies and data available; review good practice nationally; carry out 'secret shopper' exercise on the Local Offer.



Carry out interviews with children, young people, parents/carers; lead officers in partner organisations; schools; early years settings; post-16 settings and other local authorities. Review Bracknell Forest's Written Statement of Action (WSOA).



Good practice

During the review Panel members identified the following areas of good practice:

- ✔ Following the lockdowns, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Bracknell Forest Council Child Development Centre allocated a key worker to each pre-school. Staff in those settings we visited said this had helped identify and provide support more quickly to children they identified as potentially having SEND.
- ✔ Dedicated teaching and learning posts have been created in the SEND team to support schools and this was helping teachers to implement Quality First Teaching in all schools.
- ✔ The locality 'cluster' structure for schools has recently been implemented across the borough which should help schools in each cluster to support each other.
- ✔ Co-production with parent/carer forum representatives was apparent in helping to write the strategic future vision for the borough, including the Written Statement of Action.
- ✔ SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SEND IASS) were highly regarded by everyone interviewed, including young people, parents/carers, schools, Post 16, and early years' staff. Parents/carers said they appreciated SEND IASS staff's empathy skills and that they listened to children and communicated their needs clearly to others.
- ✔ Three members of Croydon Borough Council's SEND team had built a new team to liaise between the Local Authority and schools. Evidence showed schools felt listened to by the local authority and education staff they felt they were supporting children/young people better, had better access to necessary resources, that the number of EHCPs had been reduced and the strategy had resulted in significant savings for the local authority.
- ✔ The Written Statement of Action was accepted by Ofsted without any changes.
- ✔ Health Visitors were beginning to visit nurseries again, which had ceased during the pandemic, and nursery staff said it helped because they knew who to contact.
- ✔ It was recognised NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group were looking at a key worker project to prevent crisis and hospital admissions. Parents said they felt this would help them navigate crisis admissions but wanted it extended so all parents had a health key worker.
- ✔ A local school had 'grown their own' therapists to deal with the national shortage of availability of Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists, which young people in the school said provided them with vital support.



Review findings

During this review Panel members found evidence which largely corroborated Ofsted's judgment that Bracknell Forest Council and Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group, who provide statutory support and services to children, young people with SEND and their families, required a Written Statement of Action to help improve. During this review Panel members noted:

The SEND department at Bracknell Forest Council was being reorganised but there were still several vacancies which was impacting on the service children, young people and their families received. **(Recommendation 2) (WSOA ref: 2.1.4)**



There was evidence of productive partnerships in the past between external agencies, but this needed rebuilding after the pandemic. A key issue was communication and poor response times for getting back to people. **(Recommendation 1) (WSOA ref: 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3)**

Co-production was apparent in the Written Statement of Action but there needed to be more opportunities for 'hard to reach' parents/carers' views to be incorporated into shaping the strategic vision. **(Recommendation 1) (WSOA ref: 2.1.3, 2.3.1, 3.1.3)**



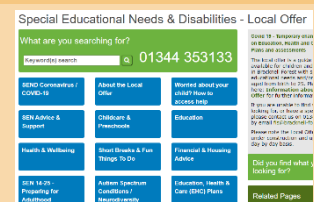
The culture of the SEND team was highlighted as an issue by parents/carers, school, Post-16 and early years' staff. In particular a lack of empathy for the needs of the child/young person with SEND but also for the staff supporting the child. **(Recommendation 1) (WSOA ref: 2.1.4)**

Training was raised as an issue by parents/carers as well as school, Post-16 and early years' staff. Parents/carers wanted training that helped them support their child better rather than generic parenting courses. Specifically, school/college/early years' staff said they wanted courses that would help identify needs and give them techniques to better support children/young people. **(Recommendation 7) (WSOA ref: 3.1.4, 6.1.5)**



Parents/carers and school staff said they wanted consistency of key worker assigned to them and to be informed immediately when their key worker changed. **(Recommendation 1 & 2) (WSOA ref: 2.1.4)**

Few children, young people, parents/carers were aware of the Local Offer and, those that were, said they rarely used it. One parent who did use it said the functionality should be improved as filtering when looking for a suitable school did not work properly. **(Recommendation 5) (WSOA ref: 9.1.5, 9.1.6)**



EHCPs were not reviewed in a timely manner although it was recognised there had been recent improvements in timescales. **(Recommendations 1, 2, 6) (WSOA ref: 2.1.2)**

Parents/carers said they wanted to access different types of therapy for children, such as art classes, but were not able to as they didn't have control of the finances. Only one child had a Personal Budget to date. **(Recommendations 3, 4, 6, 9 & 11) (WSOA ref: 5.1.7)**



Parents/carers said they felt they had to say negative, not positive, things about their child when completing forms/assessments. Also, where strengths were identified, they were not feeding into their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to help their child continue or use that strength to progress. **(Recommendation 1, 3, & 7) (WSOA ref: 2.1.2, 2.1.3)**

It was unclear what the processes were for monitoring budgets by senior staff. **(Recommendation 2) (WSOA ref: 6.1.1)**



All of the parents/carers interviewed said they were not offered a Carers Assessment. One parent had pushed for a Carers Assessment but was informed they would not qualify for any support. **(Recommendation 8)**

Parents/carers said they would like someone to hold their hand at the beginning of their journey, similar to the Kickstart programme, a 'peer mentoring programme'. **(Recommendation 1, 3, 8 & 10) (WSOA ref: 2.1.3)**



Feedback from parents/carers and schools was that EHCPs needed to be more deliverable as they felt the current Panel set up did not allow for those directly involved with the child to advocate for them at those meetings. **(Recommendation 2 & 3) (WSOA ref: 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4)**

Masking signs of autism, especially girls, was thought to be on the increase and there was not enough training in this area. **(Recommendation 7) (WSOA ref: 3.1.4, 6.1.5)**

There was a significant lack of access to trained therapists, especially Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists. **(Recommendations 6 & 11) (WSOA ref: 5.1.7)**



Specialist, local provision needed to be reviewed as currently provision could not cater for all children/young people with SEND in the borough. **(Recommendation 12) (WSOA ref: 4.1)**

There were some issues with data sharing between the Local Authority, Frimley CCG and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. **(Recommendation 1 & 13) (WSOA ref: 6.1.1)**



Financial considerations

There are likely to be financial considerations attached to staff changes and alternative provision options although most are included in the Written Statement of Action. However, the recommendation regarding reviewing Carers Assessments and investing in new IT software to create a 'one stop shop' are not included in the Written Statement of Action currently. A feasibility study will be required to explore financial implications prior to commissioning new IT software.

“I am always proud of how the Borough works with partners for it is one of our strengths, and I feel this is a good example of partnership working to enable us all to support our most vulnerable children and young people.

My thanks go to all those who contributed, particularly my Vice Chair Councillor Michael Brossard, all the Councillors who took part, officers, and our health colleagues, to improve the services on offer to children and young people with special needs. The participants are listed below, and my grateful thanks goes to all of them. This report depends on good support, and I particularly thank Louise Connelly for all her help.

I look forward to reviewing the recommendations in early 2023.”

Councillor Mrs Gill Birch,
Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review Panel

Councillor Allen	Councillor Ms Gaw
Councillor Mrs Birch (Chair)	Councillor Gbadebo
Councillor Bhandari	Councillor Mrs Gibson
Councillor Brossard (Vice Chair)	Councillor Hamilton
Councillor Brown	Councillor Ms Hayes
Councillor Temperton	Councillor Skinner

Contributors to the review

Grainne Siggins	Executive Director: People, Bracknell Forest Council
Cheryl Eyre	Assistant Director: Learning, Bracknell Forest Council
Fiona Slevin-Brown	Managing Director: NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group
Samina Hussain	Senior Transformation Lead, Children and Young People, Bracknell Forest, NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group
Tracey Faraday-Drake	Executive Place Managing Director (Slough) East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Julian Emms	Chief Executive of Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust
Karen Cridland	Director of Children's, Young People and Families Service, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust

Councillor Dr Barnard	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning, Bracknell Forest Council
Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	Many children and young people with SEND were interviewed during visits to educational establishments.
Parents/carers	Parents/carers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Schools/Early Years settings/Post-16 settings/Specialist provision	10 educational establishments around the borough allowed Panel members to visit during the course of this review and interviews were held with Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers and Sencos.
Croydon Borough Council representatives	Mark Southworth, Locality SEND support, Consultant Lead, Croydon Borough Council Sonal Desai, Area SEND Lead, Croydon Borough Council Keran Currie, Area SEND lead, Croydon Borough Council
Louise Connelly	Governance and Scrutiny Officer, Bracknell Forest Council