

**4 May 2022**

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TR21 0LW

Kate Shields, Accountable Officer, NHS Kernow Clinical Commissioning Group  
Sarah-Jane Trubody, Local Area Nominated Officer, Isles of Scilly Council

Dear Ms Khan and Ms Shields

**Joint area SEND inspection in Isles of Scilly**

Between 21 and 25 March 2022, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC), conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Isles of Scilly to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors including an Ofsted Inspector and a children's services inspector from the CQC.

Inspectors spoke remotely with children and young people with SEND, parents and carers, and local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. They visited providers remotely and spoke to leaders, practitioners and governors about how they are implementing the SEND reforms. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the area, including the area's self-evaluation. Inspectors met remotely with leaders from the area for health, social care and education. They reviewed performance data and evidence about the local offer and joint commissioning.

In reaching their judgements, inspectors took account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SEND arrangements in the area. Inspectors considered a range of information about the impact of the pandemic and explored how the area's plans and actions had been adapted as a result.

This letter outlines our findings from the inspection, including some strengths and areas for further improvement.

## Main Findings

- Leaders are acutely aware of the needs of individuals, particularly those with education, health and care (EHC) plans. They are conscious of the challenges that living on the islands bring and the opportunities that island life can offer. They know when things are going well. When they do not go right for individuals, they strive to make things better.
- Leaders, including council members, are aware of the isolation of the islands and the potential implications for their work. They make sure that they are well informed of national expectations. Leaders have made important links that are supportive of their work, including with Cornwall Council. They welcome regular scrutiny and external advice to check on the quality of their work.
- There are strong working relationships between the clinical commissioning group and local authority officers. These relationships ensure effective joint working at a range of levels. Leaders use joint commissioning well to ensure that there is access for Isles of Scilly residents to a wide range of services. They ensure that the partnership is represented in policy and practice. Leaders offer each other help, support and resources for complex issues.
- Individual practitioners do their utmost to support families. Parents and carers frequently mention practitioners by name. The energy that practitioners bring to their work is obvious. In the best cases, practitioners from different agencies problem-solve together to remove barriers, find resources and look for alternative solutions so children and young people can succeed. The area also draws on the resources of the whole community, for example, to provide social activities for all age groups.
- Early years provision across the local area is a strength. In particular, partners identify needs quickly.
- Most children and young people with EHC plans are achieving well. They meet challenging targets towards aspirational outcomes.
- The area meets statutory requirements. Leaders ensure that the processes expected by the code of practice are in place. Assessments and plans are reliably completed within the statutory timescales. The required annual reviews are conducted in time and include all the relevant partners. Leaders are aware of what needs to be done to further strengthen this area. They have begun this work. A new team and plans are in place. The quality of EHC plans is improving over time. There is still some variability, but they capture the voice of the children, young people, parents and carers well.
- Local leaders realised that for the spirit of the code of practice to be implemented, a change of culture on the Isles of Scilly was necessary. In 2019, local councillors, agencies, parents and carers developed a shared

vision and key strategic outcomes. Parents and carers largely feel that co-production (a way of working where children, families and those that provide the services work together to create a decision or a service that works for them all) is now understood and that their contribution is valued. Some momentum has been lost in this work, largely due to COVID-19. Some partners, parents and carers remain sceptical that continuing the work will add further value. However, many are now looking to the next consultation in April 2022. Partners have planned to reflect on the vision, the work so far and set targets together for the future.

- Currently, too much depends on the strength of the individual relationships between practitioners, children, young people and their families. When this works, barriers are removed and parents' and carers' satisfaction is high. When it does not work, parents and carers feel that there is nowhere else to go. They withdraw from services. As roles and responsibilities are not always clear and some service offers are not well defined, dissatisfaction or praise is often related to the quality of the individual practitioner rather than whether the service has been delivered effectively. This leads to issues not being resolved and relationships being damaged.
- Leaders depend too much on their own knowledge of individual cases or individual practitioners to assess the quality of their work. This is frequently effective and means the services are very responsive. However, information from a range of sources is not brought together routinely and systematically to examine whether there are any underlying themes, potential strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders are aware of this. They have plans in place to improve the systematic use of management information.
- Not all major partners are engaged sufficiently at a strategic level to influence the direction of the area. In particular, this affects efforts to raise the education outcomes of children and young people with SEND and the preparation for their transition at 16 plus.
- The parent carer forum is currently being reformed. It is very early days for the new group. In the past, some parents and carers have found the group to be a supportive network. Members have worked with the local authority on co-production. The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) is also available to parents and carers. Despite the existence of these groups, some parents and carers feel their views are not heard. They are unclear about how to share concerns and queries.

## **The effectiveness of the local area in identifying children and young people's special educational needs and/or disabilities**

### **Strengths**

- Area partners give a high priority to the importance of supporting families and identifying need in the early years.
- Expectant women benefit from a holistic health needs assessment. This alerts health visitors to additional needs and risks that may impact on the baby's health, development and well-being at the earliest opportunity.
- Together, health visitors and community nurses provide a flexible approach to implementing the healthy child programme. There is a high take up in child immunisations, important child developmental reviews and the use of flexible 'drop in' sessions so that families receive support in a timely way from experienced practitioners.
- Pathways for the assessment and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are under review across the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly areas. However, support strategies are put in place while children undergo the various stages of assessment. Parents and carers report that there is effective planning in place for transfer into school, ahead of an ASD diagnosis being reported formally.

### **Areas for development**

- Leaders do not have a full understanding of the systemic problems faced by children and young people with SEND and the impact on their daily lives. For example, they do not collect and monitor diverse information sufficiently well to inform decision-making at a strategic level. This limits the opportunity for proactive responses.
- There is insufficient information in the area about children and young people who have SEND without an EHC plan. This means leaders cannot support and challenge providers to improve provision and outcomes further.
- Information-sharing is underdeveloped. Records of assessment, planning and review have only recently been pulled together. Mechanisms to share information between practitioners lack clarity. This is not efficient. On occasion, too much information is held by individual practitioners. The richness of work with children, or the detailed information collected, is frequently not captured so it can be shared systematically and easily.

## **The effectiveness of the local area in meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities**

### **Strengths**

- Practitioners across the area work hard to ensure children and young people's needs are met. They put in place bespoke provision to meet individual needs. Ongoing work tackles new barriers or needs. For example, practitioners are aware of the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of some of the children and young people they work with. There are extra resources available and adaptations are made when a child or young person needs them.
- Effective case workers coordinate support and follow issues through when necessary. They capture the future aspirations of children and young people so that these influence EHC plans.
- There are clear processes in place regarding annual reviews that lead to the updating of EHC plans. Documents show timely submission of reports and drafting of plans. Parents and carers are typically content with assessment conclusions and advice.
- Practitioners are committed to offer a high-quality service that is shaped according to need. In addition, they are trained in specialist techniques. Practitioners use these if a child or young person requires more-targeted intervention. This specialist work by practitioners frequently means that children and young people's needs can be met on the islands. This avoids the need for intervention off island and the disruption this causes.
- The local authority funds the use of transfer boats between the islands so that families can meet with practitioners to have their children and young people's needs assessed in a timely way, and also to access activities. There is a wide variety of activities on offer, such as 'stay and play' sessions and 'Scilly Splash'. All families on the Isles of Scilly are offered funding to access nursery education from two years old. All these activities support children's earliest development.
- The majority of parents and carers praise the work of the Five Islands Academy. Many praise the appointment of a special educational needs coordinator who is supported by the multi-academy trust. The school values the close links it has with health and social care practitioners to enhance their work with individuals. This has led to more joined-up working.
- The jointly commissioned programme that supports young people's mental health helps to equip young people with the tools and knowledge to maintain their well-being.
- Children at the Five Islands Academy are assessed to identify those who might require additional support, for example, prior to moving to mainland

education. This helps to ensure that emotional support is provided at the earliest opportunity.

- The school nursing service uses an effective system of assessment so that individual children and young people's needs can be met prior to transition. This can include, for example, additional educational advice on the risks of substance misuse or gang culture that young people might not have experienced on the islands.
- The local offer is well known among the island's population. It carries a wealth of helpful information. Parents and carers find it useful, but it is not used very often. Most of the residents of the islands rely more on information sharing among the small and closely knit population.
- Parents and carers recognise that the work with external agencies in 2019 has improved the area's partnership with them. Parents and carers subsequently co-produced the Isles of Scilly Charter and the strategic objectives. Parents and carers are fully involved in the upcoming review.

### **Areas for development**

- Therapists and other practitioners' visits to the island are frequently affected by the weather. Alternative dates are not offered quickly. These eventualities are widely known about, but not built into service continuity planning. Parents and carers sometimes feel that waiting times are too long. Some feel abandoned. Practitioners on the island also do not receive timely and regular support.
- EHC plans are not consistent. However, there are some excellent aspects. For example, parents, carers, children and young people's views are captured well. There are some weaknesses. For example, some targets are too vague and there are some gaps in important sections. Leaders are deploying new audit tools, including a parents' and carers' survey. However, it is too early to see the impact of this.
- Currently, there is no specific guidance provided to health practitioners to use when writing their evidence for EHC plan assessment. This makes it difficult for the author of the plan to ensure they have included the most important information. This hinders their interpretation of the information to reflect the needs and desired outcomes for children and young people.
- Some therapists are not provided copies of EHC plans. This means that they might not know important information that could inform their interactions with children and young people.
- The area does not have a systematic way of ensuring the quality of provision for children and young people without EHC plans. The local authority has



recently appointed a virtual headteacher to improve co-ordinated work with the Five Islands Academy, but this work is just beginning.

- Although the SENDIASS contract is reviewed regularly, the area does not have any measure of the satisfaction of parents and carers or the extent of the service's effectiveness.
- In this tight-knit community, some parents and carers say they feel somewhat constrained when relating to practitioners they know well. In some cases, parents and carers may assume the practitioner is judging them. Practitioners say they listen, there are complaint procedures or they have an open door for parents and carers. However, more than a few parents and carers are dissatisfied with a service or an aspect of a service. They do not know how to deal with this without issues becoming personal and potentially impacting on them or their child or young person.

## **The effectiveness of the local area in improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities**

### **Strengths**

- Vulnerable families of children under five years benefit from additional support. The 'Thriving Together' mental health service strengthens attachment and improves emotional well-being.
- Training for families in ASD or ADHD helps them manage their child or young person's diagnosis and build resilience. This helps improve outcomes overall.
- There is a great deal of satisfaction that children and young people are seen quickly by therapists. When waiting lists are long, the triage process is frequently effective to assess risk so that more immediate actions are put in place, should they be necessary.
- The majority of children and young people with EHC plans make good progress towards their targets, whether these are academic or wider outcomes. Where there are concerns, leaders are acting to make improvements.
- The arrangement of provision for those young people with the most complex needs after the age of 16 has improved in recent years. Plans for young people's next steps are discussed increasingly early. These include a growing range of options. The area supports parents' and carers' choices of mainland residential specialist provision. College leaders on the mainland are complimentary about the transition partnership to support young people. They praise practitioners' detailed knowledge of the young people and their needs, clear decision-making in relation to additional funding, and excellent communication.

- If transition placements fail, or if a young person does not wish to attend college on the mainland, officers from the Isles of Scilly work intensively to support the young person. They look for innovative solutions, including supported internships.
- Parents and carers report feeling well supported where a young person is in transition from child to adult social care services. Adult Care South West is proactive about contacting parents and carers, and engaging them in next steps.
- There is clear evidence that young people with SEND are successful in employment, living independently or carrying out supported internships and apprenticeships.

### **Areas for development**

- There are weaknesses in the systematic sharing of information across services. Sometimes practitioners are not clear about what work has been carried out. Effective handover is hindered.
- The systematic quality assurance of assessments and EHC plans is at a very early stage. This means that consistency cannot be assured, and practitioners cannot be supported effectively to improve their practice.
- The area does not routinely pull outcome measures together from a variety of sources. This means that leaders cannot be sure whether there are areas that require their attention.
- At times, young people are not well prepared for the personal and social challenges of moving into mainstream further education on the mainland. Most of the parents and carers that inspectors met expressed satisfaction with the arrangements made for their children after the age of 16. However, some remain disappointed at the lack of options for those not requiring specialist provision, but for whom mainland mainstream further education may not be appropriate. Some innovation is taking place, for example in developing supported internships and apprenticeships on the Isles of Scilly, but these options are not yet freely available.
- Some parents and carers are not confident in the current services and in the procedures that exist to communicate their concerns. There is some individual deep dissatisfaction with aspects of different services. Some parents say they find it difficult to complain to the person who works with their child due to the familiarity of everyone on the islands. They are not confident in other procedures that exist. Consequently, they do not feel listened to and they remain dissatisfied.
- Some areas of partnership working across agencies are stronger than others. Sometimes, roles and responsibilities are not clear. Expectations of each other



are not well defined. This hinders the fulfilment of strategic objectives and the development of approaches across age groups that might benefit children and young people with SEND.

- Some agencies and practitioners work in isolation. This limits their ability to contribute to a whole-island approach to priorities and so improve outcomes further.

Yours sincerely

Stephen McShane  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

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