

Ofsted
Agora
6 Cumberland Place
Nottingham
NG1 6HJ

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted
lasend.support@ofsted.gov.uk



23 June 2022

Sally Rowe
Director of Children's Services
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Lichfield Street
Walsall
WS1 1TW

Sally Roberts, Chief Nursing Officer, Black Country and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group
Helena Kucharczyk, Local Area Nominated Officer, Walsall

Dear Mrs Rowe and Ms Roberts

Joint local area SEND inspection in Walsall

Between 20 and 22 June 2022, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited the area of Walsall to decide whether sufficient progress had been made in addressing each of the nine areas of significant weakness detailed in the inspection report letter published on 27 March 2019.

As a result of the findings of the initial inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) determined that a written statement of action was required because of significant areas of weakness in the area's practice. HMCI determined that the local authority and the area's clinical commissioning group (CCG) were jointly responsible for submitting the written statement to Ofsted. This was declared fit for purpose on 22 October 2019.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing seven of the nine significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. The area has not made sufficient progress in addressing two significant weaknesses. This letter outlines our findings from the revisit.

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted and a Children's Services Inspector from CQC.

Inspectors spoke with children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and parents and carers, including the parent carer forum (FACE Walsall). Inspectors also spoke to the recently formed Walsall Special Educational

Needs and Disabilities Information, Impartial Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). Inspectors held meetings with the local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. They visited a range of providers, spoke to leaders, including special educational needs coordinators, staff and governors, about how the local partnership has implemented the special educational needs reforms and responded to the issues raised in the written statement of action. Inspectors examined a range of information about the performance of the local area, including the local area's self-evaluation. They reviewed performance data and evidence about the local offer and joint commissioning. Inspectors met with leaders from the local area for health, social care and education. Inspectors examined a sample of education, health and care plans (EHC plan).

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.

Main findings

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:
 - The lack of a meaningful partnership and co-production with children and young people, parents, carers, schools and services, which has meant that the code of practice has not been effectively implemented over time.**
- Since the inspection in 2019, a new co-production (a way of working where children and young people, families and those that provide services work together to create a decision or a service that works for them all) charter has been co-developed with parents, carers and other stakeholders. Co-produced inclusion, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and accessibility strategies have been developed too. The recent Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme was reviewed in partnership with parents and carers who benefited from the service.
- Area leaders have worked with FACE Walsall to improve communication with parents and carers regarding SEND issues across the local area. Area leaders have completed 'listening and engagement' sessions related to children and young people's autism support needs. The FACE Walsall group now sits on the Local Area Improvement Board, ensuring that families' voices are clearly heard and understood.
- The local area, parents and carers have collaborated well to develop Walsall's SENDIASS. Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors and who have engaged with the service said they welcomed and appreciated the help and guidance this service provides.

- This effective co-production results in an increasing number of parents and carers making good use of the EHC hub. This hub allows families to be involved in the assessment of their child's needs and subsequent planning of provision.
- The development of the child and adult mental health (CAMHS) groups has been positive in gaining the views of children and young people on how the service can be improved. This positive development is mirrored by the work completed by social care partners with the Children In Care and Care Leavers Council. This council, which includes children and young people with SEND, is beginning to improve services for those children and young people in the care sector.
- Despite this progress, area leaders acknowledge that there is more to do to improve communication with children, young people and their families. Leaders recognise that they need to be better at telling stakeholders about the impact of the local area's actions. Too many parents, carers and families still feel negatively affected and hurt by the historical failings in Walsall. Despite considerable developments, these families feel that their past experiences have reduced their confidence in the system.

The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:
 - Poor-quality EHC plans, which do not accurately reflect children's and young people's special educational needs, and do not adhere to the statutory timescales for completion**
- Area leaders have not ensured that EHC plans accurately reflect children and young people's current and changing needs or future aspirations. Too many children and young people are not getting the education, health and care provisions to meet their needs. This is because EHC plan assessments, annual reviews and updates to EHC plans are delayed. This is despite the considerable work completed by the new EHC plan team. EHC plans do not routinely capture the child or young person's voice. The consideration given to the voice of parents and carers is also too variable. Contributions from social care and health services are too often delayed and variable in quality.
- There have been noticeable changes to EHC plan coordination, assessment processes and structures. For example, a new vision for closer collaboration with children, young people and their families has been developed. However, children and young people's EHC plans remain of poor quality. For example, EHC plans are not consistently informed by the voice of children and young people or by health and care agencies.
- Area leaders are aware of these weaknesses. Their evaluations of EHC plans are detailed and accurate. Nevertheless, there has been insufficient progress in improving the EHC plans.

- Leaders know delays and backlogs, including annual reviews, still need to be reduced. Their current plans to improve the quality of contributions from different services are promising and need to be realised quickly. Leaders acknowledge that the voice of children and young people and their parents and carers needs to be considered and acted on from the very start of the process.

The area has not made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

Poor outcomes for children and young people with SEND

- Children and young people who spoke with inspectors said they felt that their educational setting supported them in sharing, discussing and realising their aspirations for the future. Inspectors would agree that there are increasingly well-planned transitions for many young people in Walsall.
- Progress and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and an EHC plan are generally improving. This is not the case for those with SEND support, where the gap between children and young people without SEND is still noticeable.
- The area has established strong processes and expectations for improving children and young people's outcomes. For example, leaders have introduced the co-produced Walsall Right for Children - Getting it Right for SEND strategy. This sets a high expectation for improving the outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This document identifies a series of standards and expectations that the partnership, including schools, colleges and different services, should aim towards to get the best outcomes for children and young people.
- Leaders act quickly and effectively to challenge providers not achieving the high outcomes for children and young people expected in the Walsall Right for Children strategy. For example, Walsall's 'schools causing concern' protocols ensure that schools that need to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND are quickly identified and supported. Consequently, children and young people's academic, social, vocational and personal outcomes are improving.
- Performance at key stage 4 for children and young people with SEND in alternative provision in Walsall is significantly better than performance for children and young people with SEND educated in alternative provision nationally.
- The decreasing number of young people who are not in education, employment or training demonstrates leaders' effectiveness in ensuring young people stay in school or move on to college, employment or training. In Walsall, an increasing number of adults with learning disabilities are in employment.

- An increasing number of young people and adults in Walsall with SEND live independently or with supported care packages. Accommodation statistics for adults with learning disabilities in Walsall demonstrate that more people with learning disabilities, who received support from social services, now live in their own homes or with families.
- Children and young people who access education in special education placements who spoke with inspectors said that their health needs were being met. This also included timely access to specialist adaptive equipment that helped them in their day-to-day lives. Consequently, provision for children and young people with SEND in specialist settings is often based on secure identification, assessment and appropriate resourcing.

The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:
A lack of post-diagnostic support for children and young people with an autism spectrum disorder
- Since the 2019 inspection, the Autism Working Group was disbanded and a new group was established. This new group has a clearly defined role that informs the commissioning of services to meet the needs of children and young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Walsall. The newly refreshed Autism Strategic Group places the development and oversight of the provision and support for ASD at the highest levels of the strategic partnership board. Parents and carers attend these groups along with professionals from education, health and social care.
- Several initiatives are available that support children, young people and their families after an ASD diagnosis. There are clear improvements in the provision across the local area. For example, the 'Helping Hands' project supports parents and carers, increasing awareness of their children and young people's behaviours. It also supports children and young people, exploring emotions and positive strategies for managing them. It helps put support strategies in place at home and in school. Training for education providers in identifying and supporting children and young people with ASD continues.
- 'Living well with autism' is an information event developed recently to provide advice and support for families of children and young people with ASD. This event is delivered by the Walsall Child Development Centre for the 0 to 5 age group and Walsall Speech and Language Therapies and CAMHS for primary and secondary age groups. This covers autism theory, gender differences, strategies and support. Parents and carers are informed of this event when their child is diagnosed with ASD. During the pandemic, the delivery of the information event was undertaken remotely. Due to its success and in agreement with parents and carers, the event continues to be delivered remotely, allowing more people to access it.

- The Autism Education Trust training package, supported by the Department for Education (DfE), offers education professionals training and practical tools to help children and young people with ASD. This is currently being rolled out to all schools. It is also actively being rolled out for the chief executive officers and headteachers of multi-academy trusts. Parents who spoke with inspectors were keen that all schools, including special schools, complete this training to inform their practice and provision.
- The recent appointment of a designated clinical officer to work in partnership with the existing designated medical officer has been a positive development. Equally, the additional appointment of the senior programme manager for SEND demonstrates the importance placed on improving diagnostic pathway support in Walsall by the CCG and their partners. All have been working together to implement changes across the Walsall SEND agenda and review and implement changes to post-ASD diagnostic support.
- Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors said their child with ASD can access support in education settings. Parents and carers added that they can get support which helps them understand and manage their child's needs in the family home. However, the local area recognises that there is more to do to let families know about the support packages and make them readily available to all who might benefit.

The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:
 - A high and disproportionate number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions of children and young people with SEND**
- Since 2019, there has been a reduction in suspensions (fixed-term exclusions) and permanent exclusions for pupils with SEND support and those with EHC plans. However, school leaders, parents and carers who spoke to inspectors reported that accessing the right level of support children and young people need at the right time is difficult.
- The development of Walsall's Vulnerable Learner's Hub to support children and young people at risk of permanent exclusion is a positive step forward. The hub provides support, challenge and strategies to help children, young people and schools. For example, experienced headteachers with a track record of preventing suspensions and exclusions work with headteachers of other schools. Consequently, a growing number of potential permanent exclusions have been avoided.
- The Building Resilient and Inclusive Communities and Schools programme has started to positively change the inclusive culture across the partnership. Ongoing training provided by a range of providers has supported the trauma-informed response of schools. Nevertheless, some school-based leaders told inspectors

that they still believe that exclusion is the only option due to the perceived lack of support. These are relatively few now, compared to 2019.

- Area leaders feel that their training offer, including autism spectrum disorder training through a local authority commissioned service, is continuing to reduce the number of suspensions and permanent exclusions. Leaders acknowledge they need to tell education providers more about the support on offer so that all schools and settings are confident of getting the timely help they need to avoid exclusions.

The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:
A lack of appropriate provision and support, which has led to significant numbers of children and young people missing from education
- Since 2019, the number of children and young people with SEND missing from education has been considerably reduced. More children and young people with SEND are either in long-term sustained education or registered as electively home educated.
- The children missing education (CME) team ensure regular multi-disciplinary oversight of those pupils who are not attending an educational setting. For example, professionals within the speech and language therapy team help families accurately understand pupils' needs so appropriate provisions can be identified. Regular meetings with senior officers in the local partnership keep the profile of these children and young people with SEND high.
- There is developing oversight of children and young people with SEND who are, or might be, electively home educated. Leaders know where children are and provide comprehensive support if they are not in school.
- In the last year, 111 additional places for specialist provision have been created. This includes the development of two additional classes at special schools and three specially resourced provisions in mainstream schools. This helps to support pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This development has been successfully led by headteachers seconded to the area partnership. Consequently, the number of pupils missing from education is reducing over time. This realised commitment from partnership leaders is providing those specialist places that were not there in 2019. Leaders are committed to further developing the range and number of specialist provisions so that more children and young people with SEND can access the provision and support needed to overcome barriers to learning. Leaders are currently in discussions with some mainstream schools to open more specially resourced provisions in the future.
- Some school leaders who spoke with inspectors said that while the children and young people with SEND are not necessarily missing education, there are still too

many children and young people with SEND placed in the wrong provision. Also, while the number of pupils on part-time timetables is reducing, too many are still not accessing the full-time education they need. School leaders told inspectors this was because of the lack of support to meet the pupils' needs full time. They added that this has a detrimental effect on the child's progress. To address this concern, the scope of the CME team has been extended to monitor the provision for those who are not yet in the best provision to meet their needs.

The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

A failure to ensure an impartial information, advice and support (IASS) service for parents in the local area

- The development of the SENDIASS has been universally well received. Parents and carers who use the service feel that the support, advice and guidance given at crucial times help them navigate the local area's systems and processes.
- Shortly after the 2019 inspection, leaders acted quickly to restructure existing advice and support services as an interim measure before the existing and independent service could be commissioned.
- The local area co-produced a written service tender document for an independent external service to implement an independent advice and support service. This expectation has now been fulfilled, with a SENDIASS service being set up in Walsall that meets the needs of Walsall families. This service was established, via Family Action, in September 2020.
- SENDIASS provides regular reports to local partnership officers to ensure that value for money is achieved. More importantly, children, young people, their families and educational settings are getting the support they need.
- As well as providing support for these groups, SENDIASS is working to raise the profile of the voice of young people. A young person's development group has been created to help young people understand the local area's processes and their own needs. This includes, for example, explaining the purpose of EHC plans and how children and young people can be involved in developing their own plans. These opportunities are advertised on the Family Action website.
- While some schools still seek advice and support from elsewhere, the service already provides support for many educational settings. Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors identified the significant difference this service has made to their lives and how it helps them navigate difficult situations.

The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

The poor quality of the local offer, which does not meet the requirements of the code of practice

- Area leaders recognise that the local offer requires improvement and is not meeting stakeholders' needs sufficiently. Parents, carers, children, young people and inspectors agree. In practice, the local offer contains limited information. It does not include, for example, information about therapeutic support and how to access speech and language therapy services. Furthermore, there is no information regarding 'you said, we did' service improvement surveys. Too many parents, carers and other stakeholders do not know that the local offer exists. Those who know of its existence have found it to be of little or no use.
- Area leaders have recently engaged a coordinator to address these issues and to create a more Walsall-focused local offer in co-production with children, young people and their families. Unnecessary and broken links have been removed, and the information contained within the local offer is now less complicated.
- The local offer does not provide the necessary information that would help and support children, young people, parents, carers, education providers and service professionals in their day-to-day lives. This includes, for example, a lack of information about the support available following an ASD diagnosis. No information within the local offer reaches out to the multicultural diversity of Walsall.

The area has not made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

Weak arrangements for joint commissioning, which do not consider information about the local area well enough

- Since the inspection in 2019, the different education, health and social care services have worked in partnership to improve joint commissioning. This has included a refined analysis and use of data and intelligence about the local area. This analysis is now routinely used to understand the needs of children and young people with SEND and support the subsequent planning and commission of services. The Walsall joint strategic needs analysis is regularly updated. Leaders can confidently reflect on many jointly agreed and funded initiatives that have already started to positively affect children and young people's outcomes. The local area rightly acknowledges that there is more to do to engage all schools and share the local area's ambition to provide the right services to the right people at the right time.
- An area of success for this joint commissioning group is the HAF programme. This programme provides additional short break capacity, with many children and young people with SEND accessing the summer programme. Subsequently, the

joint commissioning group sought feedback from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. As a result, changes are being made to the HAF offer to ensure that it is fully inclusive for children and young people with SEND, including clarifying which activities are SEND-specific and inclusive.

- The short break and leisure opportunities offer has developed over time due to joint commissioning. There are now some consistent long-term providers of the local offer. Some of these provisions had to temporarily close during the pandemic, meaning that families could not access the support they did previously. However, these providers have recently started offering these essential short breaks and leisure opportunities again.
- While parents and carers appreciate this developing offer, they would like to see a greater range of commissioned options for children with SEND under the age of eight.
- Leaders are developing a proactive plan for the next five to 10 years to systematically address issues as they arise. Leaders recognise that they need to refine their quality assurance systems to judge more accurately how well the commissioned services enrich the lives of children, young people and their families. They also acknowledge that they need to ensure that the voices of children and young people contribute to decisions at the highest levels of commissioning.

The area has made sufficient progress to improve this area of weakness.

During the pandemic, leaders quickly worked with schools to identify those pupils with SEND who would be at risk if they did not regularly attend school. Consequently, a high number of pupils maintained attendance at school throughout the national lockdowns. The development of weekly, remote meetings with school and education leaders was welcomed and provided invaluable support. For example, schools welcomed the advice and support from NHS England in understanding what they should do to prevent the spread of COVID-19. School leaders also appreciated the advice for reassuring parents and supporting pupils when they returned to school. The local authority also used this time to develop system-wide approaches to develop emotional well-being and positive mental health in schools and remote learning networks between schools.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing seven of the nine significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. As not all the significant weaknesses have improved, it is for DfE and NHS England to determine the next steps. Ofsted and CQC will not carry out any further revisit unless directed to by the Secretary of State.

Yours sincerely

Chris Pollitt
Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted	Care Quality Commission
Andrew Cook Regional Director	Dr Sean O'Kelly BSc MB ChB MSc DCH FRCA Chief Inspector of Hospitals and Interim Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services
Chris Pollitt HMI Lead Inspector	Daniel Carrick CQC Inspector

Cc: Department for Education
Clinical commissioning group(s)
Director of Public Health for the local area
Department of Health and Social Care
NHS England