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Clare Nesbit, Place-Based Lead, Central Integrated Care Partnership, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
Beverley Scanlon, Local Area Nominated Officer, South Tyneside Council

Dear Mrs Gallagher and Mrs Nesbit

Joint area SEND revisit in South Tyneside

Between 10 and 12 October 2022, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited the area of South Tyneside to decide whether sufficient progress has been made in addressing each of the areas of significant weakness detailed in the inspection report letter published on 3 September 2019.

As a result of the findings of the initial inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, His 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 17 December 2019.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing all five of the significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. This letter outlines our findings from the revisit.

The inspection was led by one of His 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 (SEND), parents and carers, school and college leaders, and local

authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the area in addressing the five significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection, including the area's improvement plans and self-evaluation.

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 quality of education, health and care (EHC) plans, the regularity with which they are reviewed and the involvement of education, health and social care professionals in their development and review are too variable.

Leaders have remodelled the local authority's SEND services team. There are now staff whose sole focus is on the annual reviews of EHC plans. Annual review completion rates, and the quality of the plans themselves, have improved significantly. Leaders recognise that this improvement was from a low starting point.

Practitioners are trained to ensure that their contributions to EHC plans are detailed and accurate. Leaders quality assure all EHC plans. They check the quality of the contributions made by agencies to a plan when it is first written and when it is reviewed. The contributions from health and care to initial and reviewed EHC plans have improved recently. Leaders recognise they are still on a journey of improvement. For example, social care staff contact all families as part of the initial EHC plan assessment and when reviewing plans to check if there are any unmet care needs. This is a positive step. However, the outcomes of these calls do not appear as clearly as they should on some reviewed plans.

Leaders worked with children and young people to develop an 'all about me' section. This is a new addition to the initial and review EHC plan process. The contributions from children and young people to EHC plans have improved since 2019.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

Strategic, needs-led joint commissioning is not fully developed or embedded and there are unacceptably long waiting lists for some services.

Leaders now recognise that to achieve effective joint commissioning they must work closely with all partners and stakeholders. This, and an honest stock take of where they were in 2019, has led to system-wide change. Leaders have set up and embedded alliance groups of key partners from across the SEND landscape. Examples include the mental health alliance and the autism alliance. The alliances scrutinise data and feedback from the children and young people with SEND and families who use their services. This information is used well to inform strategic decisions. The autism hub is a strong example of jointly commissioned support for children and young people with SEND and their families. The support is not limited to children and young people who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.

Through networking and information gathering, leaders recognised a need to provide an early intervention response to mental health issues. For example, they developed a healthy minds team to work in schools across South Tyneside. Demand for this service is high.

Leaders have taken steps to address waiting times for health services. Waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and the neurodiversity pathway have improved from a very low starting point. Leaders' plans to redesign the integrated therapies service have not progressed as quickly as planned. The roll-out of a redesigned service was affected adversely by redeployment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leaders are aware that, while the processes around strategic joint commissioning have improved significantly since 2019, some redesigned services are very recent. Consequently, evidence of impact for children and young people with SEND and their families is limited. Leaders continue to scrutinise the impact of their strategic decisions on children and young people with SEND in order to further improve provision in South Tyneside.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

Leaders do not understand fully the impact of the local area's provision on the experience and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, and their families.

Leaders have a more accurate view of the demands and pressures on the South Tyneside SEND offer than was the case in 2019. They have taken steps to understand the impact of these demands and pressures on children and young people with SEND, and their families. There are clear examples of leaders at a strategic and operational level gathering better information and using it more effectively. For example, prior to 2019, information collected by the mental health service did not give a clear picture of the types of referrals that were coming in. There is now more information at the point of a referral about the context of the referral. This is leading to a more responsive way of allocating referrals to practitioners. At a strategic level, this information is regularly reviewed by the SEND leadership board. Leaders use this information to inform their planning. This is contributing to a reduction in waiting times for CAMHS.

Leaders have a clear picture of ongoing demands for mental health support, including the sharp increase in social, emotional and mental health needs over the past two years. They have invested in programmes that provide more support and early intervention quickly. These include an online mental health support service and the healthy minds service.

Leaders recognised the need for more specialist school-based provision. Since 2019, there has been an expansion of the additional resource base and outreach offer for children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs. Leaders scrutinise termly data from these specialist provisions. Leaders are better placed to ensure that provision is available to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

Leaders have put systems in place to ensure that practitioners feed back views from children and young people with SEND. For example, since April 2022, there have been over 900 comments from children and young people who use the mental health service. This information is shared with the SEND leadership board, which meets monthly.

The local special educational needs and disability information advice and support service (SENDIASS) has established a forum for children and young people with SEND. This relatively new group has contributed to a national review on SEND and reported their views to the SEND leadership board.

Leaders gather the views of children and young people with SEND more than they did in 2019. However, there is more to do in this area. Leaders have appointed a participation and engagement officer for children and young people with SEND. It is too early to judge the impact of this investment, but it is an indication of the ongoing commitment from leaders to inform themselves about the impact of SEND provision on children and young people.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

Co-production, engagement and communication with parents require development.

Leaders appointed a participation and engagement officer in Sept 2020. This post is jointly funded by the local authority and the integrated care board. Leaders now have systems in place that provide clearer information from parents and carers about gaps in services. The South Tyneside Parent Carer Forum (STPCF) has a permanent seat on the SEND leadership board. A particularly strong example of the impact the STPCF has had is on the development of the short breaks grant.

Parents and carers rightly speak warmly of SENDIASS. There is now a SENDIASS intelligence group which shares information from parents and carers with leaders and practitioners on a regular basis. The lead for SENDIASS also sits on the SEND leadership board. Leaders have expanded the service and monitor its capacity and effectiveness.

The local offer has been redesigned and was relaunched in March 2022. Parents and carers are positive about the new local offer website. Leaders have improved the information they send out to parents and carers. For example, there is a handbook to help parents and carers who are applying for an EHC plan. The 'SEND an Update' newsletter is sent out regularly through schools. This informative newsletter has been well received by parents and carers.

Communication with parents and carers remains an issue. Leaders are aware of this and have recently remodelled the SEND service team to improve responsiveness to parents and carers.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

- At the initial inspection, inspectors found the following:

Arrangements for meeting the needs of 16- to 25-year-olds with SEND and improving their outcomes, especially in preparing for adulthood, are not fully effective.

Partners from education, health and social care are working together more effectively than they were at the time of the last inspection. There is a new post-16 panel attended by partner agencies from across education, health and care.

Complex cases are discussed and timely decisions about referrals are made at the new transitions forum, again attended by education, health and care. The post-16 panel and transitions forum make timely decisions about placements and transition support. They also identify gaps in service provision, which are reported to the SEND leadership board to improve the joint commissioning decisions for 16– to 25-year-olds with SEND.

Leaders have put additional capacity into the Connexions service for children and young people with SEND. Connexions is a careers and guidance service. Connexions' workers are attending more annual reviews and providing more specialist guidance on post-16 options. There is an improvement in the numbers of young people with SEND who are in education, employment or training post-16.

Leaders recognise that Year 9 is a key transition point and that discussions at review meetings in Year 9 play an important part in preparation for adulthood. Adult social care staff offer to attend the annual reviews for children in Year 9, even if that child is not actively known to social care. This is a huge improvement since 2019.

Leaders have listened to what children and young people with SEND want in terms of leisure activities. There is now improved access to leisure activities for children and young people with SEND in local sports centres. There is still a gap in access to creative activities outside of school, such as art and music. Leaders are aware that they need to continue to gather the views of children and young people with SEND to properly reflect the breadth of interests to be catered for in South Tyneside. Independent travel training remains a gap in provision. Leaders have recruited to posts in this area, but it is too early to see the impact of this investment.

The area has made sufficient progress in addressing this significant weakness.

As the area has made sufficient progress in addressing all the significant weaknesses, the formal quarterly support and challenge visits from the DfE and NHS England will cease.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Head
His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted	Care Quality Commission
Katrina Gueli Regional Director	Dr Sean O'Kelly BSc MB ChB MSc DCH FRCA Chief Inspector of Hospitals and Interim Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services
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cc: Department for Education
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