

Area SEND inspection of Warrington Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 6 to 10 February 2023

Date of previous inspection: 10 to 14 December 2018

Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.

The next full area SEND inspection will be within approximately 3 years.

Ofsted and CQC ask that the local area partnership updates and publishes its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

Information about the local area partnership

Warrington Borough Council and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Warrington.

There have been several changes to the senior leadership of Warrington's SEND services since the previous inspection. These include the appointment of a new director of children's services and cabinet member for children and young people. The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. On 1 July 2022, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB became responsible for the commissioning of health services in Warrington.

The local authority commissions a single provider to provide education for children or young people, including those who cannot attend school due to social, emotional, mental health and medical needs, or for those who are at risk of or have been permanently excluded. The local authority does not commission any other alternative provision.

What is it like to be a child or young person with SEND in this area?

Children's and young people's voices matter in Warrington. They take part in decision-making about their support. Most children and young people who responded to the online survey reported having a trusted adult in their lives. This adult listens and acts on their views.

Many children and young people enjoy a wide range of inclusive leisure activities across Warrington. The Warrington Youth Zone offers dedicated sessions for children and young people with SEND. Additionally, the local area partnership supports young people to gain valuable work experience. These experiences help children and young people with SEND to be visible in the community and prepare them well for the future.

Most children and young people benefit from effective identification of SEND. There is a clear focus and shared commitment across services to identify and assess children's and young people's needs prior to starting school and throughout their education. School leaders receive effective training opportunities. These help to improve staff's ability to quickly identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in school.

Some children and young people wait too long to be assessed for health services. This includes those waiting for assessments from the speech, language and communication therapy service, the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) and the neurodevelopmental pathway. Leaders have introduced support and guidance for children, young people and their families while they wait. However, some needs escalate as children and young people continue to wait for specialist support and guidance.

Children and young people in specialist day and residential schools and colleges typically receive high-quality education, health and care support. Leaders have increased the number of high-needs placements in further education and developed supported internship programmes for young people with SEND. This means that more young people with SEND have their needs met locally but some are still required to go out of the area.

Young people with SEND generally receive effective careers education information, advice and guidance. This includes useful proactive support for those young people at risk of not being in education, employment or training. Consequently, most young people who are at risk move back into education, employment or training.

Children and young people who spoke to inspectors were positive about their aspirations for the future. Practitioners increasingly support children and young people to focus on preparing for adulthood. However, this preparation does not start early enough for some children and young people with education, health and care (EHC) plans. This means that these children and young people are not prepared sufficiently well for the next steps in their lives.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Senior leaders across the partnership are ambitious for children and young people with SEND. This is evidenced through partnership leaders' strategic plans and effective relationships. Strong governance arrangements ensure that leaders are held to account for the area's statutory duties.
- Leaders from health, social care and education work together effectively to review their strategic plans regularly. For example, leaders quickly recognised the growing prevalence of social, emotional and mental health needs in children and young people with SEND. As a result, they focused their resources appropriately to meet the needs of this cohort of children and young people.
- Leaders across the partnership know the area well. They regularly analyse why processes are not as effective as they should be. For example, leaders identified that the EHC panel process needed to change to include multi-agency professionals. The panel now has appropriate expertise from across health, education and social care. The improved process ensures that referrers receive useful feedback if their application is declined, so that children's and young people's needs can be better met in their current setting.
- The local parent carer forum (WarrPAC) are actively involved with many development projects. These focus on improving SEND provision across health, education and social care, for example the review of the neurodevelopmental pathway. Consequently, leaders in Warrington receive regular feedback from parents and carers. They use this effectively when planning and evaluating services.
- The SEND information, advice and support service (SENDIASS) is highly valued by families. The service helps parents and carers receive useful advice and guidance. This helps families to successfully navigate the SEND system and reduces their anxieties.
- There has been a renewed focus recently on ensuring that EHC plans are of an improved quality. Effective training across the partnership has improved staff's knowledge of the SEND Code of Practice in relation to EHC plans. Recent plans capture the child's or young person's aspirations positively. Most education and health provision is suitable and quantified. Until recently, the social care contribution to relevant EHC plans and the quality of EHC plans in general were inconsistent. Leaders have therefore resourced additional capacity and training across the SEND team and social care services. This is leading to improved consistency and quality in EHC plans, although it is too early to see the full impact.
- Joint commissioning is well established in Warrington. Leaders work together to secure improvements for children and young people with SEND. For example, leaders have a shared funding agreement for all adult social care and health provision. This means that young people receive provision promptly. Some senior leadership posts in the partnership are jointly commissioned. This helps to

improve decision-making and quality assurance across the partnership. Leaders have established robust arrangements to check on the suitability of commissioned alternative provision and out-of-area placements, including residential special schools. This provides reassurance that children and young people benefit from personalised programmes of support at suitable and safe providers.

- Training and development for SEND across the partnership is effective. An example of innovative training includes young people speaking to GPs about how their needs affect their lived experiences. This training helps professionals to improve their confidence and ability when identifying, assessing and planning to meet children's and young people's needs. This training also promotes the importance of GPs providing an annual health check to young people with SEND with an annual health check.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- Information about individual children and young people with SEND is held in isolation. As a result, professionals do not use the wealth of information available to them smartly enough to have an efficient, shared and accurate understanding of children's and young people's emerging and changing SEND. This impacts negatively on the efficiency and quality of support that children and young people receive.
- The increased demand of EHC needs assessments outstrips some services, such as the educational psychology services' capacity to complete their reports in a timely manner. This impacts negatively on the number of EHC plans that are completed within the 20-week statutory time frame. As a result, some children and young people do not have their needs assessed or met quickly enough.
- At the time of the inspection, there was a current backlog of annual reviews. The area has plans in place to complete all outstanding annual reviews by the end of the academic year. However, this means that these EHC plans do not recognise children's and young people's changing needs. This makes it more difficult for professionals to meet children's and young people's SEND effectively.
- Leaders have not embedded the 'tell it once' approach successfully across Warrington. Too many families repeatedly tell their story to professionals. For example, children and young people who are waiting for services have information completed on several different referral forms at once. This results in missed opportunities where professionals could have shared useful information to provide a more efficient and effective service to children, young people and their families.
- Leaders are aware of the future demands on their services. However, they have not secured sufficient resources, particularly workforce and educational places, to meet the current and future increase in demands across services.
- Inspectors learned of many individual staff members and services across the partnership that deliver services beyond their current service offer to ensure that

children and young people receive the right help at the right time. This is because leaders have not updated some service specifications to reflect that therapy services continue for young people until they reach the age of 18. Consequently, the children's therapy team continues to provide support as 'good will' until young people transition to adult services.

- Parents, carers and professionals report problems with communication. Too often, professionals signpost parents and carers to other services. While this is enough for some families, other families struggle while they wait. A significant number of parents and carers who are waiting for their child to be assessed on the neuro-developmental pathway reported that they are not updated often enough on wait times. This causes increased stress and worry.
- Leaders do not promote personal health budgets well enough. This reduces the choice for parents and carers when they require bespoke packages of care.
- The Local Offer, 'Ask Ollie', does not provide useful, up-to-date information about the range of services across the area. Leaders are aware of this and are taking action to improve this information by working closely with WarrPAC and other agencies.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
Leaders from across health, education and social care must improve the efficiency and quality of their information gathering processes to ensure that children's and young people's assessments are coordinated across providers and services.
Leaders across the partnership should ensure that assessments for EHC plans are completed within the statutory time frames.
Health commissioners and providers should ensure that children and young people receive health services in line with area plans and that service specifications better meet children's and young people's needs in Warrington.
Leaders across health, social care and education should ensure that they have effective systems to share information about children's and young people's needs in a more useful, timely and effective way.

Local area partnership details

Local Authority	Integrated Care Board
Warrington Borough Council	NHS Cheshire and Merseyside
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Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

The inspection was led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors, including: two HMI from education and social care; a lead Children's Services Inspector from the Care Quality Commission (CQC); and another Children's Services Inspector from CQC.

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