

Area SEND inspection of Southend-on-Sea Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 6 to 10 March 2023

Date of previous inspection: 1 to 6 October 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 the Care Quality Commission (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

Southend-on-Sea City Council and the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) are responsible for planning and commissioning services to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in Southend-on-Sea, as part of the Southend SEND Partnership. The Southend SEND Partnership oversees the commissioning of local education, social care and health provision for children and young people with SEND.

On 1 March 2022, Southend-on-Sea changed from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council to Southend-on-Sea City Council. The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. On 1 July 2022, the responsibility for health services in Southend-on-Sea passed from the Southend Clinical Commissioning Group to the Mid and South Essex ICB.

The Southend SEND Partnership commissions a range of alternative provision. Alternative provision provides education for children or young people who cannot attend school due to social, emotional and mental health and medical needs, or for those who have been or are at risk of being permanently excluded from school. The local authority maintains a directory of registered and unregistered alternative providers that have been subject to an annual check of their safeguarding arrangements.

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

The experiences of children and young people with SEND in Southend-on-Sea are variable. There have been improvements to waiting times for access to services such as The Lighthouse Child Development Centre, which provides speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, general paediatric and neurodiversity assessment. However, many children and young people do not gain access to these wider health services and support in a timely way. Sometimes, children and young people are waiting for long periods to access health needs assessment, especially in respect of neurodiversity. Children and young people with disabilities often wait long periods for support or equipment. This can limit children's and young people's independence and access to the wider opportunities that are available within their local community.

Many children and young people are positive about the help and support they receive in school. This includes sensory support and working with caring and dedicated staff. Young people appreciate the adjustments that are made when they are taking part in examinations. Improved access to alternative provision placements is supporting more children and young people with SEND to engage positively in learning. However, too many children and young people with SEND, including those with SEND support, are not achieving as well as they could in school.

For those children and young people with disabilities, they and their families benefit from access to a range of services that are identified through an effective multi-agency response tailored to meeting individual needs. However, this wider support is often not identified in children's and young people's education, health and care (EHC) plans. This includes in the EHC plans for children and young people who are placed in educational settings that are located out of the Southend-on-Sea local area.

Children and young people with SEND do not benefit as well as they should from effective multi-agency working when it comes to reviewing individual EHC plans. Schools routinely consult with children and young people with SEND and with their parents and carers as part of the EHC plan review process. However, health and social care services are often not involved in EHC plan reviews. Sometimes, schools are acting on information from health services that is out of date or is less relevant to the child's or young person's current needs. EHC plan reviews often do not reflect how agencies will coordinate their work to help improve the outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND.

Young people appreciate the flexible pathways and support that is available to them when they leave school. This includes mentoring and small group sessions which help young people with SEND to develop their confidence so that they are better prepared for further study and the world of work. However, for too many young people, preparation for adulthood does not begin early enough. This limits the choices available to some young people when they apply for further education or training.

Children and young people access opportunities that are available through organisations

such as Little Heroes, the scout movement, swimming and the local theatre. However, children and young people do not know enough about the clubs and facilities that are available for them to socialise with others out of school and during the school holidays. Children and young people with SEND access a range of services that are available to meet their social and emotional health and well-being. This includes voluntary sector services such as online counselling, for example KOOOTH.

Children and young people with SEND are benefiting from improved access to alternative provision and, where appropriate, education other than at school (EOTAS), which are carefully considered to meet their individual needs.

Children and young people with SEND are beginning to be more involved in the wider decision-making of the area, such as by taking part in the Southend Youth Council. Children and young people who are involved in the youth council are positive about the impact of their work. They say that adults listen and act on their ideas. However, they feel it would be better if the needs of children and young people with SEND were more widely understood across the community in which they live.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- The local area partnership has consulted widely on the local area's strategic priorities for improvement. Work between the partnership and the parent carer forum (Southend SEND Independent Forum, or SSIF) is making a strong contribution to improving the experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.
- The views of children and young people, and of parents and carers, are now being captured more systematically as part of the EHC planning and review processes. Changes in the way that SEND caseworkers engage with schools and families have been welcomed. School staff appreciate the guidance and support they receive from the local authority SEND team to help identify and support children and young people with SEND at an early stage.
- Access to early help is supporting families to better meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. Some services, such as early help and The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service, help parents and carers to navigate the local offer and access the right support in a timely way.
- Additional capacity within the local authority inclusion team is supporting more effective partnership working between education, social care and health services for children and young people with SEND who are electively home educated, and their families. This work is at an early stage.
- Effective multi-agency working between education, social care and the police helps reduce identified safeguarding risks for children and young people with SEND. There is strong partnership working to identify and support children and young people with SEND who are at risk of missing education or who are not engaging

with education or training. This is helping to ensure that young people with SEND are successful in continuing their education once they leave school.

- The local area partnership has extended the opportunities available to children and young people with SEND who access education and support through alternative provision. This is supporting children and young people with SEND to re-engage successfully with their education. The local area partnership's oversight of alternative provision is robust.
- Southend local area's systems for supporting children and young people through the dynamic support register (DSR) and the use of care, education and treatment reviews (CETR) are developing well. The Southend local area is benefiting from an ICB-wide approach to the development and oversight of the DSR. There is evidence of better multi-agency working in Southend with a stronger focus on supporting children and young people and families at the right time as a result of improved oversight and review of individual need.
- Most children and young people with SEND who are referred to physiotherapy and occupational health services are seen within 18 weeks of referral; the triage system helps ensure that those with acute need are seen promptly.
- Primary care teams undertake annual health reviews for young people with a learning disability in a timely way. There is an improving picture on the uptake of this offer. At these reviews, children and young people's medical, and their social and emotional, needs are considered. These reviews support a more individualised approach to meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.
- More children and young people with disabilities are taking up the offer of short breaks. The local area partnership has acted on feedback and improved communication with parents and carers about the arrangements for accessing short breaks.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- The pace of improvement has been too slow. The implementation of the local area partnership's draft SEND strategy has been delayed. Strategic improvements that the partnership has identified are not being delivered at pace. This means that not enough children and young people with SEND are accessing the help and support they need in a timely way. Work to build trust with parents and carers has often been undermined by weaknesses in service delivery across the local area partnership.
- The processes of EHC planning and review are not sufficiently focused on raising the ambition of what children and young people with SEND can achieve with the right support. While EHC plans are usually issued promptly, this is not the case for EHC annual reviews. Co-production to develop individual EHC plans is not carried out consistently well. In some cases, there is not sufficient contribution from health and social care to ensure a comprehensive review of a young person's needs and how these can best be supported through a joint, multi-agency approach.

- Leaders recognise that too many children and young people with SEND are not achieving well enough at school and are not well prepared for their next steps in education and/or training. Where there have been improvements to joint services, for example in the early years, this is not translating into improved educational outcomes for children with SEND.
- The information that services obtain through quality assurance processes is not used well to evaluate the effectiveness of leaders' actions and improve practice. This includes the valuable information obtained from the quality assurance of EHC plans, the annual review process and placements in out-of-area residential special schools.
- Local area partnership leaders have recognised that the work to support young people to prepare for adulthood does not start early enough. For many young people, the transition to adult social care and health services is not well coordinated. This can result in a break in access to appropriate services and support for young people at an important time.
- The current transition processes in place for children and young people with SEND who are accessing child and adolescent mental health services do not begin until the age of 17 and therefore do not support preparation and transition to appropriate services in a timely way. Although there is an identified adult service for Learning Disability, the current services available in the area do not meet the range of needs for adults with SEND.
- Speech and language therapists have limited capacity to provide support for children and young people with SEND who attend mainstream settings. Although plans are written for other professionals to follow, this is not always done in a way that meets individual children's or young people's needs well.
- The local area partnership is supporting the ICB's work to address issues in access to assessment at The Lighthouse Child Development Centre. However, children and young people with SEND and their families continue to experience significant delay in accessing diagnostic pathways, especially for autism spectrum disorders.
- Although parents and carers and children and young people with SEND are positive about some of the wider opportunities that are available to them within the local community, there are not enough clubs and activities available to children and young people with SEND, including during the school holidays.
- The local area partnership has worked to improve communication, including understanding of the local offer. However, this work has not had the desired impact. Parents and carers and professionals can experience confusion in how to access the range of services that are available from education, health and social care. This can lead to delay and frustration for families in accessing the right support at the right time.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
The local area partnership and stakeholders, including the council, the ICB and wider partnership, should ensure that leaders in education, health and social care are empowered to drive forward improvements at pace so that the Southend SEND Partnership strategy impacts positively on the experiences and outcomes of all children and young people with SEND.
The local area partnership should evaluate the quality and impact of services and joint working more effectively, to inform improvements that lead to better outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND.
Local area partnership leaders should improve the effectiveness of joint working to support the co-production of EHC plans and annual reviews so that at each stage the provision that is planned takes full account of children's and young people's current and changing needs.
Local area partnership leaders should ensure that they share accurate data across health, education and social care to support rigorous and effective self-evaluation and inform joint commissioning.
The local area partnership should ensure that appropriate support is in place from health services for children and young people who are awaiting health needs assessments, so that early intervention reduces the risk of any escalation of concern.
The local area partnership should make sure that parents and carers and professionals receive clear and reliable information about how to access the range of support and services that are available.

Local area partnership details

Local Authority	Integrated Care Board
Southend-on-Sea	Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board
Michael Marks Director of Children's Services	Anthony McKeever Chief Executive of the NHS Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board
www.southend.gov.uk	www.midandsouthessex.ics.nhs.uk
Southend-on-Sea City Council, Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea SS2 6ER	NHS Mid and South Essex ICB, Phoenix House, Christopher Martin Road, Basildon SS14 3EZ

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/Ofsted Inspectors 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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