

Area SEND inspection of Telford and Wrekin Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 March 2023

Dates of previous inspection: 22 to 26 May 2017

Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.

The next full Area SEND inspection will be within approximately 5 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

Telford and Wrekin Council and NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board (NHS ST&W ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Telford and Wrekin.

There has been stability in the senior leadership of Telford and Wrekin's SEND services since the last inspection. The partnership is well established. The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. On 1 July 2022, NHS ST&W ICB became responsible for the commissioning of health services in Telford and Wrekin.

Alternative provision across the local area is delivered via a number of providers, including schools and academy trusts. Area leaders oversee the commissioning of placements in alternative provision.

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

Children and young people with SEND are visible, valued and included in the Telford and Wrekin community. For example, the voices of children and young people, and their parents, are sought during the statutory assessment process. As a result, education, health and care (EHC) plans capture the interests, thoughts and feelings of the child or young person clearly. Area leaders check the quality of these plans to ensure consistency. EHC plans are issued in a timely manner.

Children and young people appreciate the wide range of accessible services and activities available to them. They have enjoyed some impressive recent initiatives, such as the 'ten by ten' project and successful holiday schemes organised by Parents Opening Doors, a local parent carer forum. The Autism Hub organises a weekly drop-in session where children and young people can mix with their peers while their parents enjoy a coffee. These activities help children and young people to feel included in the local area. However, some activities have become so popular that they are oversubscribed. Not all parents and carers are clear about the options that their children can access.

Children and young people with SEND benefit from effective joined-up working between education, health and social care providers. This is particularly strong in the early years. Partners also work together well to prevent any unnecessary hospital admissions for those children and young people who are supported through the dynamic support register process. As a result of effective partnership working, children and young people's needs are typically identified and assessed quickly and accurately. Hence, the right help is put into place to meet their evolving needs.

Some children and young people with SEND wait too long for health assessments, such as mental health and neurodevelopmental assessments. This leads to frustration and delays for children and young people and their families. In response to this, area leaders of provider NHS services have put into place some creative solutions to address a range of issues. These include meeting children's needs while they wait for health services. This is known as 'waiting well'.

Children and young people who require physical adaptations to attend a mainstream education setting benefit from a joined-up approach between occupational therapy, physiotherapy services and education providers. Schools and settings speak positively about the help and support available to them. This includes the education psychology service, the learning support advisory team and the virtual school.

Children and young people who attend specialist provision benefit from a system where they are continually assessed. If it is in their best interests, a child or young person with SEND will transfer to a mainstream school that is more fitting to their needs. This fluidity between specialist settings and hubs in mainstream schools is supported by effective transition. This helps children and young people to transfer successfully back into mainstream education.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Area leaders evaluate themselves accurately and are continuing to make improvements to the provision for children and young people with SEND and their families. Partners work together well and have the passion, determination and commitment to develop the care and provision for children and young people with SEND even further.
- Leaders have developed the 'belonging strategy' to improve the educational experience for children and young people with SEND. The strategy is underpinned by the work of the behaviour support advisory team and the effective use of alternative provision. Alternative provision is used as an 'intervention and not respite'. Leaders and staff are committed to provide those at risk of exclusion with the strategies needed to remain in mainstream education, wherever possible. As a result, the belonging strategy has a positive impact on reintegrating children and young people with SEND back into mainstream settings. Consequently, this has reduced the number of suspensions and exclusions in primary and secondary schools.
- The area has a multi-layered approach to addressing any concerns around absence levels for all children and young people, including those with SEND. This is having a positive impact on rates of attendance. Area leaders closely monitor young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Effective systems help to support these young people to return to a suitable placement. As a result, the number of young people with SEND who are NEET is below the national average.
- Area leaders listen to and act on the views of parents and carers. For example, additional provision for young people with SEND was set up within an existing educational setting, following feedback from a parent group. Also, area leaders responded to concerns raised around transport by making relevant changes. Typically, parent groups believe that area leaders listen and respond to their views.
- In response to the significant increase in demand for speech and language therapy, a system-wide plan has been implemented acknowledging that all partners have a role to play in supporting children to develop their speech, language and communication skills. There is a range of provision available for families and professionals to access while awaiting assessment. These include training programmes to enhance knowledge and skills for those working directly with children and young people with SEND. The redesign of the service delivery has supported a reduction in waiting times and there is a comprehensive action plan to remedy this further.
- Children and young people receive a wide and effective range of support from social care at an individual level. For example, area leaders provided an opportunity for young adults to 'flat share' to promote independence and maintain friendships. Support from social care has been strengthened to ensure that it is

equally strong at the early intervention stage as it is for children and young people known to the children with disabilities team. There is a broad range of respite opportunities in the community for families to enjoy, with additional capacity being developed. The hiatus caused by national factors resulted in more limited respite provision, but area leaders responded to this. For example, they increased the use of foster care to fill the gap.

- Young people with SEND who access further education and skills (FES) settings experience a well-planned transition process. This includes having their needs identified and assessed accurately in a timely manner. This enables the young person to settle well. In some FES settings there are different tiers of provision for young people depending on the complexity of their need. In FES, effective partnership working supports young people with SEND to achieve well. For example, some young people with SEND move into supported internships, voluntary work or paid employment.
- Area leaders identified that, at the end of Year 11, outcomes for pupils with SEND in English and mathematics are lower than national outcomes. In response to this, they are now working more closely with secondary schools and keeping a closer eye on pupils' progress. In addition, the belonging strategy is helping to keep pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in mainstream schools. This means that more pupils with SEND are now transitioning into post-16 education and training.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- There has been an absence of robust oversight of health services for children and young people with SEND by NHS ST&W ICB. Consequently, the commissioning of some services does not meet the current demand and actions to address the situation have not moved sufficiently at pace. NHS ST&W ICB knows that more needs to be done to monitor, adapt and respond to the growing demand for a range of health services. They are looking to find sustainable solutions so that the needs of children and young people with SEND can be continually met. For example, a number of health services have closely scrutinised their operating models and secured additional funding to implement waiting list reduction initiatives.
- Some parents and carers are not aware of the advice, help and support that are on offer to them to support the needs of their child. There is a disconnect between the actual provision for children and young people with SEND and the experiences of some families in the local area.
- Some parents and carers are concerned about their child's next steps when they reach 18 if they are not in specialist education. Area leaders are continuing to develop the working relationship between adult and children's services. If the young person is known to the children with disabilities team, transition from children's services to adult social care typically works well. Area leaders have recently created the role of SEND champions, which is starting to ensure greater

consistency in practice across all services to support transition into adulthood.

- Area leaders provide parents and carers with useful support and guidance when applying for a personal budget. This works particularly well in the children with disabilities service. However, some parents would value more services to spend their budget on and do not find the process straightforward.
- Currently, how the voices of children and young people are heard and acted on at a strategic level is in its infancy. Area leaders have supported the development of the Shout Out for SEND (SOS) group, which is made up of a 'small but mighty' group of children and young people with SEND. However, their reach and impact are still growing.

Areas for improvement

Leaders from NHS ST&W ICB need to work closely with other partnership leaders to improve the governance, monitoring and oversight of diagnostic pathways (including neurodevelopmental, mental health and speech and language therapy assessments) for children and young people with SEND, so that their needs are assessed and met consistently well and in a timely manner.

Partnership leaders should improve communication with families, beyond the formal consultation routes, to share effective information and advice about the provision available to children and young people with SEND.

Local area partnership details

Local Authority	Integrated Care Board
Telford and Wrekin Council	NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board (NHS ST&W ICB)
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www.telford.gov.uk	www.shropshiretelfordandwrekin.ics.nhs.uk
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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 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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