

Area SEND inspection of Trafford Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 October 2023

Dates of previous inspection: 30 January to 3 February 2017

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

Trafford Council and NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board (ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Trafford.

Since the 2017 inspection, there have been changes to some of the senior leadership of Trafford's SEND services. The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. On 1 July 2022, NHS Greater Manchester ICB became responsible for the commissioning of health services in Trafford from Trafford Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), with the chief executive of the council also being appointed as the place based leader.

The local authority has two alternative provision (AP) settings which provide education for children or young people. This includes those who cannot attend school due to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and medical needs, or for those who are at risk of, or have been permanently excluded. The local authority also commissions other AP when appropriate.

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

Many children and young people benefit from the effective identification of their SEND in Trafford. This starts with young children's needs being accurately recognised in a timely way by health visitors. This means that children are referred to services, and parents and carers are provided with useful advice and support at an early stage. Similarly, children and young people with more complex needs have their needs identified early and receive prompt assessment from education, health and care services.

Children and young people receive timely assessments from services such as the school nursing service, sensory support service and therapists. However, children and young people wait too long for an assessment of neurodiverse needs such as autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. As a result, their needs are not identified and understood as quickly and effectively as they could be. For some children, this delays the referral for an education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment when timely assessment of those needs would be appropriate. For these children and young people, this negatively impacts on the support that they receive and their chances of success in education. Additionally, children and young people with mental health needs often find themselves repeatedly moving between different services because of a lack of clarity about how they should access an assessment.

Children and young people's voices are present in care planning and in their EHC plans. Their individual needs, talents and personalities are evident in records and their views are often recorded in their own words. Positive multi-agency work, and strong professional relationships, typically support these children, young people and their parents to contribute to the decisions made about their care and education. However, there are still many children and young people who feel that they do not have enough of a say about the decisions made about them individually.

Children and young people with SEND in Trafford are known well by the adults who work directly with them. They are dedicated and compassionate professionals who work collaboratively to plan and deliver flexible, personalised provision. Children, young people and their families are offered high-quality support and advice from both the educational psychology service and SEN advisory service. Close-knit professional working is evident for young children and their families, where communication between professionals is strong. Once they are able to access support, such as for mental health and neurodevelopmental diagnoses, children, young people and their families say that they are offered high-quality, child-centred assessment and effective support.

Some children and young people are effectively and sensitively supported to join in all aspects of school and community life by the professionals and families around them. Children and young people are particularly positive about the support for 13- to 18-year-olds from the LGBT+ community, and several sports and arts-based clubs. However, social activities are limited for children and young people living in some parts of the borough. This is particularly true for children and young people with the most complex needs and includes limited opportunities for overnight short breaks.

When children and young people are well known by the team around them, the transition between key stages and their preparation for adulthood are personalised and effective. For example, children and young people benefit from helpful, impartial careers information, advice and guidance from the local area's commissioned provider. Schools and colleges play an important part in raising the aspirations of children and young people, offering them support for their next steps in education, employment or training. However, some young people's transition into adulthood is not well supported in Trafford, and although the transition from children's to adults' services has become smoother recently, there is still work to be done to ensure a consistently positive experience for young people.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Leaders across the partnership are ambitious for children and young people with SEND. Leaders have committed, strategic relationships and seek to ensure the best for children and young people in Trafford. The local area partnership has strengthened its strategic planning across education, health and social care. The development of the SEND strategy, the 'ambitions plan', has been coproduced and is being delivered by all stakeholders in the partnership.
- Leaders have taken decisive steps to set up effective, strategic oversight and operational boards for the delivery of the SEND strategy. The local area partnership has strengthened their operational grip and has increased the pace of change. The recruitment of an independent chair of the SEND strategic board has improved the partnership's accountability and focused their implementation of workstreams. The local area partnership's ability to appropriately hold each other to account and challenge ways of working is in the early stages of development. However, there is a shared commitment to driving the SEND agenda forward. An example of impact is the improvement in the timeliness of EHC plans.
- Leaders have an accurate view of strengths and areas for development. In turn, this has led to a solid foundation for improvement. Operational leaders are starting to use data to understand the demands on services and to manage capacity. Tangible improvements can be seen in a number of areas across the partnership. For example, the increased capacity in the health visiting and school nursing services is leading to timely identification of children's needs. In addition, the improved use of data within the speech and language therapy service is reducing the waiting times for initial assessments.
- The partnership between the local area and the parent carer forum, known as Trafford Parent Carer Forum, has strengthened since the last inspection, due to improved communication and opportunities for the forum to be involved in strategic working. There is positive parental representation on several strategic boards and initiatives to ensure that the voice of many parents and carers are heard. Their development of the lived experience advisory panels has been influential in developing service provision, including the refreshed short breaks service.

- The partnership between early years services and Trafford education providers is strong. Local partnership leaders have successfully built relationships with providers, including schools, both selective and non-selective. Education staff appreciate the range of SEND training opportunities offered to schools. These include useful training to meet children and young people's SEMH needs. Within social care, social workers, including agency staff, benefit from regular supervision and relevant training. Social workers who work with adults and education providers have access to young people's social care records. This promotes continuity of care and ensures a better understanding of young people's needs.
- There are some positive examples of services commissioned that meet children's needs well. For example, the valued Trafford Early Development Service team is an innovative, intensive intervention approach for pre-school children with complex needs. The sensory support service puts children and families at the heart of their work. This results in positive outcomes for children and young people who access these services.
- The local area partnership has effective and embedded systems and structures to support commissioning and robust quality assurance of AP within the local area and out-of-area placements. This includes residential special schools. In turn, this helps to ensure that these children and young people are safe and benefit from appropriate placements which are tailored to their individual needs.
- On the ground, there are dedicated and compassionate teams of practitioners and clinicians who support children and young people. Children and young people with SEND are well understood by professionals who make accurate and detailed assessments. This helps proactive information-sharing and escalation to wider networks for advice and support when required.
- The dynamic support register in Trafford is well established and provides effective support for children and young people with complex needs. This includes learning disabilities and autism, particularly at times of emerging crises. There is a positive culture of shared risk and prevention to ensure that children and young people receive the right support to prevent escalating needs. This is strengthened further by the recent addition and involvement of Greater Manchester Police.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- Although Trafford's SEND strategy is in place, it requires further work to be fully embedded across services. In its present form, there is a disconnect between strategy and practice in some of the workstreams, meaning that some parents, carers, children and young people have not felt the benefit. For example, the elements of the strategy related to improving children and young people's voice, and their mental health, are having varying degrees of impact across the local area.
- During the transition from Trafford CCG to the Greater Manchester ICB, the lines of accountability for some areas of health commissioning and decision-making

have become less clear. This has slowed the local area partnership's ability to respond to local needs.

- There is an absence of a partnership approach to address SEMH and neurodiversity needs across Trafford. This has resulted in variability in practitioners' understanding of the additional needs of these children and young people. For some children and young people, this is impacting negatively on the timely identification of need and ongoing support.
- The data available to help inform the partnership's understanding of the local area, particularly across health services, is still in development. This means that services are not always able to take full advantage of information to gain an accurate understanding of children and young people's needs. In some instances, this limits the local area's ability to drive improvement and accurately inform commissioning. Additionally, the multiple, fragmented patient record systems operated across the neurodevelopmental and mental health pathways are restricting leaders' oversight of both pathways and provision. This is impacting negatively on children, young people and their families' experiences.
- There are limited opportunities for children and young people with SEND to influence the development of services. Typically, education providers capture the views of children and young people with SEND well. However, area leaders do not capitalise on this rich source of information in their strategic work. The development of services therefore does not routinely reflect the broad range of children and young people's needs and experiences across Trafford.
- Children and young people experience an inequity of access to social opportunities across the borough, depending on where they live. Furthermore, those with complex needs do not benefit from the same range of social activities as those with less complex needs.
- Local area partners have made improvements to the quality and timeliness of EHC plans, although there is still variability. There remains inconsistency in the quality of advice given by professionals to inform the EHC assessment process as well as variability in the accuracy of the professional advice which appears in some plans. For example, health professionals do not always receive a draft EHC plan to ensure that their advice has been interpreted correctly and is meaningful for the child or young person.
- Transition arrangements across the partnership are underdeveloped. Some children, young people and families have to tell their story more than once. This is because practitioners do not always talk to one another as children and young people move between schools, settings and services. Furthermore, review meetings, including EHC plan annual review meetings and social care reviews, are not always aligned.
- Provision for preparing young people for adulthood is not as strong as it should be. Some EHC plan annual review meetings do not focus enough on young people's aspirations. Housing choices for young people moving into adulthood are limited and commissioning for individual supported accommodation is not well developed. Transitions to adult social care services for young people without a

learning disability is also underdeveloped. These factors cause parents unnecessary worry about their young people moving into adulthood.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
<p>Leaders across the partnership should ensure that the SEND strategy is fully embedded across health, education and social care. They should tighten their strategic oversight so that all workstreams have equal clarity in how they are mapped out and organised. This is to reduce the disconnect and to improve accountability between strategy and practice.</p>
<p>Leaders across the partnership should improve transitions for children and young people between children's and adults' services and within health, education and social care. They should improve their strategy and timeliness in relation to preparing young people with SEND for adulthood.</p>
<p>Leaders across the partnership should develop, deliver and embed a clear approach to address how they will support children and young people with a range of mental health and neurodiverse needs. This includes identification, assessment and support for children and young people, with or without a diagnosis.</p>
<p>Leaders across the partnership should increase the opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard and acted on both at a strategic and individual level. They should also develop the range of, and access to, social opportunities for children and young people in order to reduce the current inequality across some areas within Trafford.</p>

Local area partnership details

Local Authority	Integrated Care Board
Trafford Council	NHS Greater Manchester ICB
Mrs Jill McGregor, Corporate Director of Children's Services	Mark Fisher, Chief Executive
www.trafford.gov.uk	www.gmintegratedcare.org.uk
PO Box 40, Trafford Town Hall Talbot Rd Stretford Manchester M32 0EL	4th Floor Piccadilly Place Manchester M1 3BN

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 an HMI from social care and an Ofsted Inspector from education, lead Children's Services Inspectors from Care Quality Commission (CQC) and a Children's Services Inspector from the CQC.

Inspection team

Ofsted

Sue Eastwood, Ofsted HMI Lead inspector

Janet Fraser, Ofsted HMI (social care)

Andy Lawrence, Ofsted Inspector

Care Quality Commission

Kaye Goodfellow, CQC Lead inspector

Lesley Perry, CQC Lead inspector

Gerry Bates, CQC inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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