

Area SEND inspection of Blackpool Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 May 2024

Dates of previous inspection: 28 February to 4 March 2022

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 three 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

Blackpool Council and NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Blackpool.

There have been several changes to the senior leadership of Blackpool's SEND services since the previous inspection. A new head of SEND joined the Council in June 2022 and a new cabinet member for young people and aspiration was appointed following the local elections in spring 2023. An interim assistant director for education and SEND has been in post since February 2024.

The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. On 1 July 2022, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB became responsible for the commissioning of health services in Blackpool, and the role of executive leader for children and young people, SEND and safeguarding was established.

The local authority commissions two providers to offer alternative provision for children and young people who are at risk of or have been permanently excluded. The local authority commissions places from a small number of unregistered alternative providers. They carry out quality assurance of these providers and share this information with schools and the local college.

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

Children and young people with SEND have mixed experiences of the quality of services and support in Blackpool. Leaders have identified the areas that they need to improve and have put in place strategies which pinpoint the actions needed to help progress those improvements. Early indications show that these are starting to make a difference. Some children and young people with SEND, and their families, reported that the services and support that they receive have improved, for example the support for mental health concerns. However, some of the developments have not been fully embedded and are therefore not improving outcomes for all children and young people with SEND.

Where children and young people have their needs identified swiftly and accurately, support is usually provided by expert professionals. However, there are some services where the wait is too long. This means that some children and young people do not always get the help they need in a timely manner. Despite this, in some instances children and their families are signposted appropriately to interim support while waiting for a needs assessment.

Joint commissioning is improving. Local area partners identify children and young people's needs well using the local area's joint strategic needs assessment. They then successfully work together to make improvements. Partners have listened to the feedback from children, young people and their families to inform commissioning. The mediation and special educational needs and disability information, advice and support service jointly commissioned services are examples of services where outcomes are now more positive for children and young people with SEND and their families.

The local area partnership aims for children and young people with SEND to be valuable and visible in their communities. It successfully ensures that the voices of children and young people with SEND are heard. For example, the youth empowerment group and the young people's SEND advisory group regularly feedback about the services that they have experienced and how these could improve. Co-production with children, young people and their families has successfully shaped new policy and practice. Children, young people and their parents, alongside the parent carer forum, have been appropriately involved in co-production. They feel listened to as their suggestions and ideas become reality. This was shown in the development and implementation of the preparation for adulthood strategy, which aims to ensure that children and young people in the local area are well prepared for their next steps.

The quality of children and young people's education, health and care (EHC) plans is variable. In the best examples, the voices of children and young people routinely influence their plans and the support required. They reflect their personal goals and ambitions. However, some plans are not always informed by the range of professionals involved with the child or young person. This means that the plan's outcomes are not always informed by the full suite of professionals involved with the child or young person.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Early help workers complete thorough assessments with children, young people and their families, identifying individual needs alongside wider family issues. This includes prompt consideration of whether there may have been previously unidentified SEND and leads to prompt intervention where needed.
- Although children can wait for extended periods of time to enter some therapeutic interventions, there is a wide range of additional support measures that are employed while they wait, according to the individual needs identified.
- Social workers take time to get to know and understand the children with whom they work. This enables them to develop an insight into children's interests and aptitudes, such as in sport or music. Social workers use this insight to support children in the development of their skills and talents, for example by helping to secure attendance at clubs and activities. This work makes an important contribution to children's confidence and independence.
- There is regular, robust and appropriate oversight of children who are placed in care out of area. This ensures that children's experiences are monitored and understood, and that typically children's needs are met by the right services in their new locality.
- Social workers, early help workers and educational settings ensure that most children, young people and their families have access to impartial careers advice. Help is provided to support them with appropriate transitions into employment, training or education. This allows multi-agency partners across health, education and social care to better prepare children and their families for the significant changes that adulthood brings.
- Assessments of children and young people's needs, completed by the children with complex needs team, are detailed and thorough. These assessments routinely consider the children and young people's holistic needs, as well as those in relation to their SEND.
- Practitioners from across the partnership work effectively to identify the individual needs of most children and young people who have just moved into the country. Support for children and young people with SEND who are new to the country is put in place swiftly.
- Effective early planning takes place for children and young people transitioning between children's and adults' health services. The process of transition begins from the age of 14.
- Children's needs are usually identified by health visiting services via an eight-stage model of care that includes anti-natal contacts. This enhanced model helps to ensure that children's needs are identified at the earliest stage so that appropriate care and support can be put in place.
- Some health services have adapted to meet the ever-changing needs of the local population. For example, drop-in clinics are well utilised by parents in situations where children's poor mental health is indicated and are seen as a resource for advice

and guidance. Likewise, monthly Sunday clinics are held by speech and language practitioners so that parents can better engage their children with the service. This prevents them from having to take time off from work or to remove their children from education. The clinics are also well used and appreciated by parents and carers.

- There is a wealth of mental health support available across the local area, which children, young people and their families can be signposted to according to need. Children and young people can self-refer for mental ill-health assessment or can attend regular drop-in clinics held across Blackpool. Their specific needs are then assessed, and a referral is made. Families can also receive advice on how to get the right help at the right time for their child.
- The school-age neurodevelopmental pathway adopted by Blackpool successfully focuses on the immediate needs of most children and young people, sometimes before any type of formal diagnosis has taken place. Support groups and programmes are available for parents whose children and young people are waiting for support.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- Data is not always used and analysed effectively in order to monitor the impact of the work undertaken for children and young people with SEND. This is an area that the local area partnership is prioritising to ensure that it has a realistic picture of its effectiveness and to inform the necessary next steps.
- Although some children and young people in Blackpool receive timely identification and assessment of their needs, this is not routinely the case. At times, this is due to a lack of joined up practice between practitioners across education, health and social care. Where children and young people's needs are not identified quickly, for example by using the dynamic support register, these needs can sometimes escalate, meaning that some children and young people require more intensive support later, having reached crisis point.
- While the waiting times for some services are improving, waits for some services remain extensive, for example the pre-school neurodevelopmental pathway and the long waits for wheelchairs. Although leaders are aware of this and have put plans in place to respond to this, it has an impact on those children and young people whose lives are being significantly restricted while they wait.
- Child-in-need plans, child protection plans and care plans for children with SEND do not always link with EHC plans. Social workers do not always contribute to EHC plans. This lack of coordination between EHC plans and children's other plans means that agreed outcomes for children are not always fully informed or holistic, which means that not all needs are considered by all relevant practitioners.
- Some health services do not translate medical information, such as appointment letters, into a family's first language. While these translation services are available, not all health professionals access them. This means that children and young people sometimes miss health appointments.
- Children and young people with SEND who attend the maintained alternative provision benefit from a high level of support. However, this provision is too often put

in place when a child or young person's needs have not been assessed or met in a timely way, which sometimes means that they have reached a crisis point.

- There are some hard to reach families and children and young people who do not know about the support that is available to them. This means that some children and their families do not have the knowledge of support and services to access the right services at the right time.
- The local area partnership recognises that there is more to be done to signpost children, young people and their parents to the community activities on offer. Many parents, children and young people would like access to clubs and activities. This is not always possible, due to club organisers' occasional lack of understanding and training around supporting children and young people with SEND.
- Across all agencies, there is inconsistency in the speed with which practitioners recognise quickly enough that children may have SEND. This means that some children do not have their needs recognised and responded to quickly enough. There is more to do to ensure that practitioners across the partnership routinely consider if children have any SEND needs with which they need support.
- Children and young people benefit from the support provided in special schools and other specialist settings. Mainstream schools, including some with specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, work closely with the local authority to be fully inclusive. However, for many children and young people with SEND, academic outcomes and attendance are too low, while exclusions remain too high. In the early years, there are signs of a developing, more positive picture. This is because children are getting a positive start to education and are increasingly well prepared for starting school. Despite this work, there are some families who remain concerned about the ability of mainstream schools to meet their children's needs.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
<p>1. The local area partnership should ensure that strategic action plans are in place to identify the outcomes that they want children and young people to achieve. Data should be regularly reviewed and analysed to evaluate the area's progress towards these outcomes and to inform future decision-making.</p> <p>2. The local area should ensure that the voices of hard to reach parents, carers and their children are heard in any co-production work and that parents and children know how to access the right support and services at the right time.</p> <p>3. The local area partnership should improve the quality of EHC plans, ensuring that all relevant agencies contribute to planning and review, and that EHC plans link with children's other plans where appropriate.</p>

4. Leaders from the local authority should further strengthen the relationships that they have developed with mainstream schools and academies. They should continue to work with them, with support as appropriate from the wider partnership, to ensure that attendance and academic outcomes for children and young people with SEND improve, and rates of suspensions and exclusion decrease.

Local area partnership details

Local authority	Integrated care board
Blackpool	NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria, Integrated Care Board
Victoria Gent, director of children's services	Kevin Lavery, chief executive
www.blackpool.gov.uk	www.lancashireandsouthcumbria.icb.nhs.uk
Number One, Bickerstaffe Square, Talbot Road, Blackpool FY1 3AH	NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria, Integrated Care Board, Level 3, Christ Church Precinct, County Hall, Fishergate Hill, Preston PR1 8XB

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 and an Ofsted Inspector from education and social care; a lead Children's Services Inspector from the CQC; and another two Children's Services Inspectors from the CQC.

Inspection team

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