

# Area SEND inspection of Buckinghamshire Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 November

Dates of previous inspection: 7 to 11 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 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

Buckinghamshire Council and the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board are responsible for commissioning and planning the services for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in Buckinghamshire.

Since the last inspection in 2022, there have been significant changes to the leadership structure in both organisations. This includes the appointment of different senior leaders across education, health and care.

Buckinghamshire County Council commissions a range of alternative provision (AP) in Buckinghamshire. The offer includes reintegration placements, full-time AP for children and young people who cannot otherwise access education, as well as provision to support children and young people who struggle to attend education due to emotionally based school non-attendance. The local authority also maintains a list of registered AP that they check with a focus on safeguarding and quality of education.

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

- Children and young people with SEND and their families experience some extended delays in the local area partnership identifying their needs. This means they do not always receive the right support at the right time, including timely, suitable school places as well as prompt diagnosis and treatment. Education, health and care (EHC) plans are not always easy to read and lack the detail needed to understand a child or young person's needs and the support they require. However, changes across the partnership now mean necessary improvements are being implemented that are beginning to improve the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND. For example, inspectors saw improved quality of EHC plans where they were written or reviewed more recently.
- Many children and young people with SEND and their families build positive relationships with professionals who have a secure understanding of their current experiences. For example, most disabled children who attend specialist education settings receive effective support from dedicated practitioners.
- Some children and young people with SEND attend AP while they are waiting for school places. Those with SEND who are electively home educated benefit from the work of practitioners to assess their needs quickly and effectively. These children and young people often benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach to supporting their needs, which supports a successful transition into full-time education, where appropriate.
- Practitioners support children and young people with SEND to access activities in the community by promoting disability lanyards, access cards or signposting to community and charitable organisations. Although the holiday and food programme has been well received by families, many children and young people with SEND and their families struggle to find activities which are local to them and can meet their needs.
- The small inspirational group of children and young people with SEND, who are members of 'Shout out for SEND', represent the views of their peers well. They value opportunities to provide leaders with thoughts and suggestions to improve services. They have plans on how they would like to work more closely with settings and to provide training to practitioners. However, they would appreciate more information about how leaders have used their input in their work.
- Young people who are preparing for adulthood now benefit from improved partnership working with further education settings. As a result, young people have a range of increased options, such as supported internships and pathways. However, for some young people with SEND, transition plans are put in place too late to make sure they are well prepared for their next steps.
- Parents and carers have access to information, support and guidance through the local offer published on the council's website. They are supported by the parent and carer forum, 'Families and Carers Together in Buckinghamshire', who

represent parents on a range of strategic boards and working groups. Families can access Buckinghamshire's SEND information, advice and support service (SENDIASS). However, the partnership recognises that issues around funding mean there is insufficient capacity within the service. This means that some parents do not get the support they need.

## What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Recent improvements are beginning to have a positive impact on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership has a refreshed strategy, appropriately restructured teams and suitable action plans in place. The partnership recognises that there is more to do to ensure further necessary improvements are made. Appropriate governance processes are in place to check that these have the intended impact.
- Recent restructuring has started to have a positive impact on responding to children and young people's needs. The commissioning of support and provision is improving, particularly in education. This includes support for children and young people with SEND who are not well enough to attend school, those who are permanently excluded and those with social, emotional and mental health needs. Leaders oversee a list of approved AP providers, through an annual assessment, which can be commissioned for individual children and young people. However, commissioning processes are not always clear. This can mean the intended outcomes of the placements or provision are not always achieved.
- Children and young people with SEND at risk of hospital admission or on the Dynamic Support Register are supported through Care, Education and Treatment Reviews. The Dynamic Support Facilitation Team works alongside families and partners to reduce admission risk and promote reintegration into education.
- Therapy services have been transformed through investment in staffing, training and a new integrated care model that is more accessible to children and families. A new online platform now provides practical guidance during neurodevelopmental assessment waits, including advice on transitions and coordination with multi-agency professionals. This provides guidance to education settings on how to meet the social and emotional needs of children and young people with SEND.
- Leaders' SEND improvement programme is beginning to improve the processes and systems in place to support early identification of need. Universal health services have been strengthened with newly appointed staff who support the team of practitioners and community paediatrics with referrals. Families benefit from a 'think family' approach that addresses unmet needs but also supports them to navigate health, housing and care systems effectively.
- Education and health care coordinators receive useful training and supervision to strengthen their knowledge of identified needs. Leaders have developed the High Support Needs Team. They provide multi-agency support for some identified children and young people with SEND. Stronger relationships between those professionals have led to an increase in support. However, there remain some instances where this is variable and communication is not effective. This slows

processes and compounds some parents' lack of confidence and trust in the support provided.

- Early years settings are positive about the improvements that have been made to partnership communication. This includes the early years notification system, single points of access into health services and the more effective portal for EHC needs assessment requests. Practitioners have found forums useful to bring the voice of children to the assessment meetings and reduce further requests for information. Settings use the helpful resources, support and advice available, as well as their links with health and social care practitioners, to identify children's needs effectively.
- For children and young people in care with SEND, the virtual school provides valuable support and resources to families and professionals. This includes effective personalised education planning and coordination of multi-agency working to meet their needs.
- Most children and young people with SEND, who are receiving support from early help and social care, benefit from comprehensive assessments of their needs. The appropriate level of support is identified and provided by practitioners across family support, early help or the specialist Children with Disabilities team. Children, young people and their families' voices are included in the assessments of their needs. As a result, most children get the support that they need at the right time.
- Some children and young people with SEND, such as those who are electively home educated, educated other than at school or not in education, employment or training, are monitored and supported effectively. Practitioners create bespoke packages of support which meet children and young people's individual needs and support them to return to education, where appropriate.

## What does the area partnership need to do better?

- Leaders have recently completed a range of activities with families and stakeholders to identify and understand the needs of children and young people with SEND in the area. They are starting to bring these together as a shared, accurate and timely understanding of need. Leaders recognise the need to ensure careful oversight of this work to continue to assess the impact of recently implemented changes on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND and their families.
- Leaders acknowledge that stakeholders' voices and views are not always sought or used effectively in plans and developments. They have recently reviewed and implemented the co-production (a way of working where children, families and those that provide the services work together to create a decision or a service that works for them all) charter and are developing a revised plan. Further work is needed to ensure the views of parents, carers, children and young peoples are systematically embedded across all aspects of the partnership's work.
- Children and young people with SEND wait too long for EHC needs assessments

and plans. Leaders have an ambitious recovery plan that is scheduled to be fully implemented from January 2026, when the workforce is in place and trained to support this. However, practitioners are concerned about the quality of assessments when timescales are short. Leaders are aware of this and the importance of issuing high-quality, meaningful EHC plans in a timely way.

- Families and stakeholders have experienced longstanding challenges with communication around the support and provision available. Some parents have found it difficult to ensure their children are seen, heard and have their needs met. While education leaders and staff appreciate the recent swift changes, they are frustrated that these have not always been communicated effectively. This includes how decisions are made regarding the EHC needs assessment process.
- The SENDIASS service in Buckinghamshire is not currently jointly funded by all multi-agency partners. This is despite evidence of the service experiencing a growing number of requests for support across education, health and social care. This restricts the service's ability to meet the needs of families as effectively as they would hope to. Leaders have immediate plans to address these concerns, recognising the importance of supporting this service for families.
- Although the neurodevelopmental pathway to assessment and diagnosis for children and young people aged 5 to 25 has recently undergone transformation, families still experience long waits. Practitioners are focused on providing useful support for children and young people with SEND while they wait to have their needs assessed and diagnosed. However, not all families are aware of, or able to engage with, support offers while they wait. Children and young people with SEND can also wait too long to receive support in school for their emotional health and wellbeing. Others can also wait too long for enuresis assessment.
- Some children and young people with SEND have extended periods out of school. Often, they become electively home educated or educated other than at school as their needs were not identified or supported well enough previously. This is disruptive for children and young people and makes transitions from phase to phase or setting to setting an unnecessary challenge and can have a negative impact on their progress, experiences and outcomes. Leaders have started to address the sufficiency of local education provision.
- A range of short break services are commissioned to meet children's individual needs, including group activities to promote inclusion, support through care agencies, and direct payments offering flexibility and choice to families. However, some parents would like more support to access these activities. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen this offer to support more children, young people and their families with community involvement.
- Leaders are in the early stages of improving support and preparation for young people as they transition to adulthood. They have suitable plans in place, which are being implemented swiftly. However, transition at all stages, but particularly preparing for adulthood, requires further improvement to ensure timely and appropriate support.
- Actions to support children and young people moving into the transitions team

does not always happen early enough so that care act assessments inform preparation for adulthood effectively. As a result, children, young people and their families do not always feel confident about their futures.

## Areas for improvement

<b>Areas for improvement</b>
The local area partnership should ensure that the voices of children and young people with SEND and their families are central to strategic improvements and the EHC planning process, through improved co-production, to more widely influence the work of the partnership.
<p>Leaders across health, social care and education should ensure that improvements continue in line with their recovery plans in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ increasing timeliness and quality of needs assessments and EHC plans</li> <li>▪ strengthening the quality of annual reviews and their contribution to revising EHC plans</li> <li>▪ expediting an embedded and sustainable needs-led approach to neurodevelopmental pathways and so reduce waiting times</li> <li>▪ addressing the waiting times for mental health support in schools and enuresis assessment</li> </ul>
The local area partnership should improve their strategic approach to transition planning at all stages to ensure children and young people with SEND receive the right help and support they need and in preparation for adulthood.
The local area partnership should further develop the SENDIASS offer. This should include joint funding with health to ensure children and young people with SEND, and their families, get the right guidance and support at the right time.

## Local area partnership details

Local authority	Integrated care board
Buckinghamshire County Council	Buckinghamshire, Oxford and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board
Sarah Ashmead, Director of Children's Services	Nick Broughton, Chief Executive Officer
<a href="http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk">www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.bucksoxonberks.west.nhs.uk">www.bucksoxonberks.west.nhs.uk</a>
The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 8FF	First Floor, Unipart House, Garsington Road, Cowley OX4 2PG

## 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 and Ofsted Inspector from social care and education; a lead Children's Services Inspector from the Care Quality Commission (CQC); and another Children's Services Inspector from the CQC.

## Inspection team

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