Area SEND inspection of Kingston upon Thames Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 22 to 26 June 2026

Dates of previous inspection: 4 to 6 October 2022

Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with 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 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

In 2014, the London Borough of Kingston upon Thames created a community interest company called Achieving for Children (AfC). AfC provides education and children's social care services on behalf of the local authority and works closely with adult social care services and the NHS South West London Integrated Care Board (ICB). There are two other local areas that are part of the AfC group.

Since the last full inspection, there have been changes across England in how the commissioning of health services operates. On 1 July 2022, the NHS South West London ICB, the local authority and AfC became jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of provision and services for children and young people with SEND within Kingston.

There are four registered providers within Kingston upon Thames who offer alternative provision (AP) to children and young people with SEND. AP settings provide an alternative approach to mainstream education for some children and young people with SEND.

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

Children and young people with SEND, including their families, are prioritised by the partnership. Typically, their interests are put first. Children and young people with SEND told inspectors that they felt valued and that their views were important, especially in shaping their next steps. For example, their voices are collected through several forums, including the 'SEND Young Voices'. Children and young people with SEND spoken with during the inspection felt happy, safe and included in the community through their involvement in various activities. Their views are considered thoroughly when devising new strategy, and they take an active role in the formulation of their education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Most children and young people's starting points are well understood. Professionals are committed to providing them with high-quality services and have high ambitions for these children and young people with SEND. The partnership is united in its vision for children and young people with SEND to be supported to live happy and fulfilled lives.

Professionals in education, health and social care collaborate and share information effectively. The partnership has further strengthened their approach to information-sharing at key transition points to enable children and young people with SEND to get the best care and guidance. This is combined with a dedication across the partnership to improve how quickly needs are identified and support put in place.

Most children and young people's needs are identified in a timely manner. For example, training provided to school and nursery staff has strengthened the early identification of needs, supported by the effective use of Family Hubs. There is also a comprehensive universal 0 to 19 service offer delivered through health visiting and school nursing. This offer is flexible, dedicated and responsive to the individual needs of children and young people with SEND in Kingston. These avenues make a significant difference in earlier identification and support. As a result, identification is notably a strength in the early years of children's development.

Children and young people with SEND benefit from EHC plans that are issued in a timely way to reflect accurately identified needs and intended outcomes. These provide clear information about children and young people's health and social care needs, alongside their educational requirements. Plans are informed by social care guidance when appropriate. Annual reviews are also mostly timely, enabling professionals to have a clear, updated understanding of the young person's needs, such as identifying those who may be at risk of not being in education, employment or training. These numbers have significantly decreased in recent years due to the preventative, proactive actions taken by professionals to support young people in their next steps.

Children and young people benefit from a wide range of effective early help across education, health and via social care. This includes the 'Non-Violent Resistance' programme delivered by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), family hubs and the 'aiming high initiative', which helps children and young people with SEND

access supported activities from water sports to road safety. These provide considered support and guidance, alongside more targeted early help services. When children's needs change or increase, they receive help swiftly and effectively.

Across all phases of education, most children and young people with SEND typically achieve well in Kingston. This success enables them to continue into further education or employment, wherever possible. Attendance is typically high, indicating a sense of belonging. Practitioners across education, health and social care work effectively to support children and young people to attend school and are quick to provide tailored support when absence arises, including emotionally based school avoidance. The use of part-time timetables is monitored carefully, with the aim that they are only used when necessary.

Children and young people with SEND supported by social care are provided with highly effective support into adulthood. The partnership supports children and young people with SEND with their 'access all areas' events, well-matched work experience and internship work through a thoughtfully designed pathway programme. The partnership has worked closely with local employers to enhance this offer. The virtual school remains highly supportive of 18- to 25-year-olds with SEND to help them fully engage with education, training and employment. However, there is some more to do in terms of ensuring a smooth transition into adult services for healthcare.

Children and young people with SEND who attend local authority commissioned AP are well supported as part of a considered graduated response. They benefit from personalised AP packages that are developed through meaningful consultation with the young person and their family. Providers have a clear understanding of individual needs and aspirations. Outreach work and training to other education providers, including from healthcare professionals, further supports young people with SEND re-engage with their education.

Although a small number of families report mixed experiences of accessing overnight short break provision, particularly in relation to understanding the available offer and pathways to support, many children and young people with SEND benefit from appropriate short break opportunities that meet their needs. Parents and carers have choice and control over how this is used to best suit them and their family.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Leaders and practitioners across the partnership are committed to delivering effective provision for children and young people with SEND and their families. They have accurately identified priorities and are proactive in addressing important issues that have arisen through their evaluation of multi-agency work. This is having a significantly positive impact. For example, the partnership has reduced absence from schools, and the number of children and young people with SEND educated at home and outside of education has markedly decreased. Packages, including for those who are educated other than at school (EOTAS), are thoroughly considered and reviewed. They include robust contributions from a range of professionals, including clinical

officers, therapists, social workers and educators.

- Most children and young people with SEND in Kingston can access a flexible speech and language therapy offer. Children and young people with SEND across mainstream, special schools and early years settings, can access specialist pathways, including the dysphagia service. Parents are offered support through workshops such as 'More Than Words' and 'iChatter', coupled with the dedicated advice line or referral to the specialist communication assessment team. There is largely effective multi-agency working and professional liaison across these services to provide the child or young person with SEND with a bespoke package of support to meet their identified needs. The flexible multi-agency approach enables plans and support to be coordinated based on a shared understanding of individual needs.
- The 'Education Inclusion Support Service' supports schools through a programme of events that promote collaboration, sharing good practice and training opportunities. Schools work closely together through panels and forums, as well as benefiting from outreach work that supports reintegration back into schools. The 'mental health support team in schools' is proactive in providing guidance to schools in which children and young people with SEND experience anxiety. In addition, the attachment training has been welcomed and has helped inform approaches to understanding behaviour. These initiatives help children and young people with SEND thrive in school.
- Education practitioners have active involvement in developing SEND provision and strategy across the partnership. These measures help children and young people with SEND not only attend school and achieve well but outperform their peers nationally. Some schools have been actively involved in further developing their inclusive practice through the SEND pilot project. This is having a real impact by supporting early intervention for children with emerging special needs who do not yet require more formal support. The pilot project brings teachers and specialists together earlier, ensuring that children and young people with SEND receive timely support that helps them feel confident, supported and secure in their learning.
- Children and young people with SEND who are known to core occupational therapy and physiotherapy services receive a strong offer. Professionals work well individually, and there are examples of when they also work well together to identify and meet individual need, for example conducting joint assessments to provide a coordinated approach to care. Training has been delivered to professionals across both services to improve the contributions that are made to EHC plans. This includes making sure that advice is clear, concise and measurable so that outcomes of children and young people with SEND can be monitored more easily.
- Disabled children receiving support through the disability service pathway for social care receive prompt and detailed assessment of their needs. Assessments are regularly reviewed, with updated information from an extensive professional network to ensure that support packages remain relevant. There is additional, effective support from the dedicated emotional wellbeing service, which provides advice, consultation and direct support to families.
- Most children and young people with SEND benefit from meaningful access to short breaks. These are needs based and include holiday activities and overnight stays in

residential settings, including for those who may have multiple disabilities, complex medical needs and challenging behaviour. Families can access direct payments and agency support, as required, to secure their participation.

- Following consultation with families, children and young people with SEND can be placed in carefully considered residential special schools when this is the best option for them. Placements are regularly reviewed to check children's progress and ensure that their needs are met and oversight is positive. There are excellent examples where children and young people have had extremely positive experiences, have achieved very well and have left these placements having secured strong qualifications.
- The SEND information, advice and support service is a jointly commissioned service offer. They provide informed advice that is well received by parent carers. Schools and practitioners are central in helping direct parents to the service, as well as to services such as portage, the pre- and post-diagnosis team and 'skylarks'.
- Children and young people with SEND who have a confirmed diagnosis of autism or a learning disability and who are known to the dynamic support register benefit from professionals across education, health and social care working effectively together. Practitioners identify any unmet needs and join up services to reduce the risk of placement breakdown or hospital admission. Care, education and treatment reviews, as well as Local Area Emergency Protocols, are used effectively to support children and young people. This enables safe discharge planning following hospital admission, supporting children and young people with SEND to return to community settings with the right care and support.
- There are examples of improvements across the Kingston Primary Care Network. For instance, there has been an increase in the uptake of annual health checks because of the sharing of effective practice and working together to identify and resolve challenges in this aspect of the local area's work.
- The joint disabled children's nursing team and the community nursing team have a strong multi-agency service offer for children and young people with complex health and SEND needs. For example, they offer a wide package of training for staff across all educational and early years settings, as well as for families and other provisions, such as short breaks for children with a range of health needs.
- There is an increasingly coordinated offer for children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs. This includes CAMHS responding more swiftly to risk through same day triage and assessment, and signposting to other services such as local sexual abuse charities and gender identity support.
- Leaders have strengthened oversight of EHC plan processes through careful review, structured quality audits and clearer accountability for timely, high-quality advice. Children and young people's social care needs are screened early during each EHC plan needs assessment, with proactive contact with families to discuss their children's needs. Many plans accurately reflect the needs of the child and young person with SEND, and the provision needed to meet these.
- The partnership has established strong working relationships with parents and carers. The parent carer forum, SEND parent champions and SEND consortium all provide

avenues for parents and carers to voice their opinions and challenge the local area partnership as appropriate. These groups are very active in providing an additional layer of guidance in navigating the local offer and utilise various mechanisms to take part in reviews and initiatives, although at times they wish their participation could be at an earlier stage.

- EOTAS packages and children and young people with SEND who are electively home educated are provided with substantial help and guidance. There is strong oversight of this provision, following robust 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) of EOTAS packages with the families. These children and young people make good progress and achieve well, both academically and socially.
- Children and young people with SEND, including those with more complex needs, are supported to take part in well-designed activities in their community. These include wheelchair tennis, various musical opportunities and social youth groups, such as the youth club for disabled young people 'TAG'. The partnership has been active in creating inclusive social spaces so that most children and young people with SEND know they are not only part of the community but active participants. They are expanding this offer to include leisure and sport.
- The Fair Access Panel protocols have been developed to enable professionals to challenge one another. As a result, children and young people with SEND benefit from an equitable SEND offer across schools. Their integration and transition into settings is effectively overseen to make this as seamless as possible.
- There is a comprehensive quality assurance process for AP, which includes careful oversight of safeguarding, health and safety, children's progress, achievement and attendance. Provision includes shorter bursts of intervention and specialist, longer-term care.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- A few health services are not commissioned in a way that fully meets the needs of some children and young people, for example community paediatrics, assessment for autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and continence services. At times, there has been an over-reliance on spot commissioning and too little oversight of how it is used. This means that currently the offer can be variable and can be limited to those children and young people with SEND who require an education health and care needs assessment.
- Aspects of transition from child to adult health services, including speech and language, are not managed swiftly and can be difficult to navigate. This sometimes leaves young people with SEND without the right support. The local area partnership is aware there are long wait times for some services, including home adaptations, and high numbers of children and young people with SEND waiting for an assessment of autism or ADHD. This is, in part, being managed through working with a new provider. However, there is more to be done to improve the oversight of these children and young people with SEND and the services they access.

- There is a range of support and advice available to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, along with their families, while waiting to access some services. However, the tracking and monitoring of what has been offered or accessed is not always clear.

Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
Partnership leaders should reduce the time that children and young people with SEND must wait to access a range of health services and ensure families benefit fully from the range of available support while waiting. These include assessment of autism and/or ADHD and community paediatrics.
Partnership leaders should ensure that the approach to commissioned services, particularly for occupational therapy and continence services, are implemented with consistent precision. This will better support families in receipt of these services to have their needs met in a more timely way.

Local area partnership details

Local authority	Integrated care board
London Borough of Kingston upon Thames	NHS Southwest London ICB
Ian Dodds, Executive Director of Children's Services	Andrew Bland, Chief Executive Officer
www.kingston.gov.uk	www.southwestlondon.icb.nhs.uk
Kingston Council, High St Kingston upon Thames KT1 1EU	120 The Broadway Greater London SW19 1RH

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: one Ofsted Inspector from education and an HMI from social care; 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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