

Consultant Report – SEND

Key Messages

Forum members are asked to:

- Consider the findings of the report and provide insight/feedback on the reports and any follow-up they require.

1. Introduction/background

- Despite significant improvements in the compliance of Statutory SEND Assessment and Annual Reviews, as well as positive feedback from parents in the 20-week process, there has been a significant rise in the number of Tribunals, particularly regarding special school placements and a rise in schools raising concern about the children they have with EHC Plans and placements made after consultation.
- As a result of this, in May 2023 a commission was established for consultant Michelle Allison to undertake a review of the SEND statutory assessment and review the service which quickly expanded to consider how the SEND partnership of Education, health, and care work together to make recommendations we could then act upon.
- After five months' work with partners – schools and Integrated Care Board colleagues, as well as sessions with the Inclusion Officers and Managers within SENDSARS, two reports were completed which outline information that had been gathered and contain recommendations.

2. Key Findings and action

The partnership works together, and despite the Inclusion Strategy, it was felt there was a lack of shared strategic vision across the partnership.

Actions:

1. Children & Young People Delivery Group has been formed to bring the shared vision and priorities for the partnership.
2. Action 2 – working with IMPOWER, key areas of transformation have been identified and Inclusive Ambition workshops across strategic leaders are building the shared vision.

The SEND System is complex, there is pressure on the statutory assessment and review, for local authority staff and out in education.

Actions:

1. Further recruitment into SENDSARS is underway to alleviate the pressures internally to the Local Authority.
2. Work with IMPOWER is focusing on collaboration with schools linked to the annual review process.

Young People were ambitious for their futures, they wanted to work, participate, be independent and feel valued with a sense of belonging.

Actions:

1. The Belonging Framework is being developed with the partnership and working with children, young people, and families.
2. Further opportunities are being developed across the post-16 landscape to increase supported work opportunities and supported internships as well as the expansion of college placements.
3. SENDing Voices is an established young person's group who are helping the partnership shape vision and approach.

Parents reported the SEND system feels adversarial and they must fight and battle to get the provision and placement their children need. Parental confidence in mainstream schools being able to meet their children's special educational needs was low, but there is a shared view that most children with SEN should be in their mainstream local school.

Actions:

1. SENDSARS is working on their relational approach, most parents report positively about their experience of working with SENDSARS through the 20-weeks statutory assessment process, but relationships start to falter when entering the annual review cycle.
2. Targeted work is being undertaken around tribunals with a senior officer working with families and schools to build relationships and seek solutions.
3. Further work is planned with Inclusion colleagues to bring a shared approach across Inclusion and SEND to resolving challenges and working in collaboration across service, parents, and education.
4. Funding Review work continues (as outlined to Schools Forum previously) which focuses on ensuring children with EHC Plans have the right funding to enable mainstream education providers to deliver the provision. (Further partnership collaboration work is planned to consider funding before EHC Plan – this will be coming through the Schools Forum as/when/if changes are made).
5. Mainstream education providers are adapting their approach at pace to be able to meet the needs of children with complex SEN, including working with commissioners on the integrated resource expansion and developing their own SEN Hubs which provides a smaller learning environment for children who struggle in their larger classroom.

The Local Offer doesn't provide all the information that would be helpful to professionals and parents, particularly in relation to school/education providers across the city.

Actions:

1. A Local Offer Engagement Officer has been appointed; the Local Offer has moved to a new platform.
2. The Local Offer has been reviewed and updated, all pages have been reviewed and a feedback system is now in place, when users identify mistakes/missing information/obsolete pages etc. This can be reported and is picked up and rectified within days.
3. Use of the Local Offer has increased and shows at least four times as many hits as this time last year. The DfE has provided positive feedback on the Local Offer development through the Accelerated Progress Plan.

Building on the success of the family hubs, earlier help for SEN could be incorporated into this offer.

Actions:

1. 0-5 SEND are working with commissioning colleagues to offer support within Family Hubs, this could be through a Portage Plus offer and Assessment Nursery Placements (subject to funding agreement).

Priority areas identified, include:

1. Developing the graduated approach to incorporate integrated education, health, and care at a locality level.
The Inclusion Model group is meeting as a partnership to develop and move this forward.
2. Improving access to health services with a particular focus on neuro-disability pathways, access to CAMHS and access to speech and language therapy.
Working through the Neuro Disability workstream, actions are being taken to improve earlier access to support linked to Autism and ADHD.
Support for children with Neuro Diversity and Speech Language Communication Needs are a priority set by the Children, Young People Delivery Group.
3. Improving the inclusive capacity of mainstream settings including an improved PfA and post-16 offer.
(This has been covered above).
4. Improving the resilience, capability and capacity of the SEND workforce and developing common language and common purpose.
There is an assigned workstream developing training opportunities. Training is also a large part of the Inclusion Taskforce and Learn Sheffield is also supporting in this space. Specific training and CPD opportunities are continually developing, and specific targeted training has been developed for SENDSARS.

3. Further findings, analysis, and action

The review evidenced that there is national picture of increasing demand for statutory assessment: since 2019/20 there has been a 158% increase in the number of initial requests

for statutory assessment, a 108% increase in the number of assessments being completed and a 148% increase in the number of new EHC Plans issued each year.

In 2023 the national rate for the percentage of initial requests for assessment of an EHCP that were refused stood at 21.9% in comparison to a 5.4% refusal rate in Sheffield (as of 2024 the refusal rate in Sheffield is 24%). It was also interesting to note through the review that over 50% of initial requests for assessment for an EHCP in 2022/23 were received from parents (as of 2024, the parental request is around 54%), which is higher than the national trend.

Actions:

- The Education, Health and Care Panel has been strengthened with the addition of management capacity from Education, Health, and Care – this includes attendance of Citywide SENCOs and Family Intervention Service. This allows the panel to consider beyond the Needs Assessment request and understand the holistic support needed for the child and family. The panel members take away actions to support child/family/education despite the outcome of statutory decision-making.

Sheffield doesn't have a named 'Ordinarily Available document' and this was described as leading to confusion and discrepancy in what would be provided before an EHC Needs Assessment.

Sheffield does have the Sheffield Support Grid which outlined the needs and support that should be provided for children from the earliest stages of need through to the most complex. Although the Support Grid isn't named as ordinarily available, this can be used as such.

Actions:

- Toolkits have been developed to help personalise the curriculum approach for children in their settings. These are to support quality first teaching, adaptive teaching, and personalised learning within the classroom.
- The review of the Sheffield Support Grid is to commence in March 2024 expanding and updating the current version. This will be a detailed document of need, support, provision, and services.

4. Recommendations

Forum members are asked to:

- Consider the report findings and actions/next steps that have been identified, and whether there are gaps/additions that are required.