

Ofsted
Agora
6 Cumberland Place
Nottingham
NG1 6HJ

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted
lasend.support@ofsted.gov.uk



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Tim Aldridge
Corporate Director of Children's Services, Newham
1000 Dock Side Road
Newham
E16 2QU

John Rooke - Director of Delivery, Newham Health and Care Partnership, NHS North East London Clinical Commissioning Group
Stephanie Connelly, Local Area Nominated Officer

Dear Mr Aldridge and Mr Rooke

Joint area SEND inspection in Newham

Between 6 and 10 December 2021, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Newham to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors including an HMI and two children's services inspectors from the CQC.

Inspectors spoke with children and young people with SEND, parents and carers, and local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. They visited a range of providers and spoke to leaders, staff and governors about how they were implementing the SEND reforms. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the area, including the area's self-evaluation. Inspectors met with leaders for health, social care and education. They reviewed performance data and evidence about the local offer and joint commissioning.

As a result of the findings of this inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) has determined that a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) is required because of significant areas of weakness in the area's practice. HMCI has also determined that the local authority and the area's clinical commissioning group (CCG) are jointly responsible for submitting the written statement to Ofsted.

In reaching their judgements, inspectors took account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SEND arrangements in the area. Inspectors considered a range of

information about the impact of the pandemic and explored how the area's plans and actions had been adapted as a result.

This letter outlines our findings from the inspection, including some strengths and areas for further improvement.

Main Findings

- Implementation of the 2014 reforms has been too slow. Until recently, leaders have not prioritised the reforms sufficiently or consistently. However, area leaders demonstrate a renewed commitment to providing the best for children and young people with SEND. Across Newham, there is drive and enthusiasm to tackle weaknesses. Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate; they know what needs to improve. Parents and carers, who have lost faith in the system, are keen to be part of the improvement programme.
- The area's arrangements for joint commissioning are underdeveloped. Systems do not support the sharing of information between services in a timely way or determine what difference services are making to the experiences of children and young people. This is acknowledged by leaders who are beginning to re-design their local offer of services, including short breaks.
- Leaders have not embedded a culture of 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). There is a great deal of dissatisfaction among parents and carers. During the inspection, parents raised concerns about how well the area meets the needs of children and young people with SEND. Procedures to involve parents, carers and young people in shaping policy and practice or in designing services are not well developed. Parents, carers and children and young people, are not involved enough in the production of education, health and care plans (EHC plan).
- The quality and timeliness of EHC plans are variable. These plans tend to focus on short-term education outcomes for children and young people. They often do not include information about health and social care needs and provision. The area has recently increased staffing capacity to complete EHC plan assessments and undertake annual reviews within statutory timescales.
- The designated medical officer (DMO) post currently has one day each week allocated to SEND. Given the amount of work that is required to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Newham, this is insufficient.
- Until recently, leaders had not checked the quality of EHC plans or whether plans were meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. This means that leaders do not have key information that would help them to improve EHC plans and check that they are making a difference to children and young people.

- Children and young people are not seen quickly enough by some therapists. Waiting times are too long. Children and young people do not have timely access to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) assessments.
- Parents and carers who receive support and guidance from the area's special educational needs and disabilities information, advice and support service (SENDIAS) find it effective and helpful. Representatives of the parent and carer forum and SENDIAS are included in decision-making and consultation groups.
- The local offer website is not effective in helping parents and carers to find the services and guidance they need. It does not give them sufficient information about what is available to them in Newham. The local offer contains very little information about health services. This means that parents do not have the information they need to make decisions about their children's futures which can cause feelings of anxiety or isolation.
- Procedures across education, health and care for young people's transition to adult services are weak. There are too few opportunities for children and young people with complex needs to prepare for adulthood, for example through work experience or apprenticeships.

The effectiveness of the local area in identifying children and young people's special educational needs and/or disabilities

Strengths

- Procedures to triage and manage initial concerns when these are raised by schools and/or parents and carers are consistent. Early years services bring together professionals from all sectors so that young children's needs are assessed and understood. Some parents commented that services in the early years are joined up and of high quality.
- Many nurses across Newham have been involved in providing children and young people with COVID-19 vaccinations outside of their day-to-day roles. This work has enabled them to identify previously unmet needs and make referrals to the appropriate services.
- Recently, the educational psychology team has strengthened and improved valuable support to special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and leaders in schools and settings. Educational psychologists help to assess and identify the needs of children and young people. They provide appropriate advice for assessments and contributions to EHC plans.
- Schools in the area welcome children and young people with SEND. They identify emerging needs swiftly and put programmes and resources in place to meet the needs of children and young people.
- Children and young people with SEND who have other vulnerabilities are very well supported. Their care needs are well understood. The work of the virtual

school makes a real difference for these children and young people. Children looked after with SEND are well supported to have their needs identified in a timely manner.

- The healthy child programme is implemented well across the area. Health visiting teams and early years settings work together to carry out the developmental checks at age two. This ensures that children's needs can be identified at the earliest opportunity.
- Parents and carers can complete their own referrals for their children to access therapy services across Newham. This helps parents to seek help and support when they feel that their children might need it.
- Some families have benefited from support and guidance while their children wait for a diagnosis of ASD, or while they wait to access therapies. Those who have accessed this support feel positive about the difference it has made to their children's development.
- Specialist settings provide high-quality provision for children and young people with a range of needs. Leaders in these settings are creative in compensating for the weaknesses identified in the area partnership. Parents and carers feel well supported, and young people speak positively about what they are doing and achieving. However, there is a shortage of specialist provision to meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs.

Areas for development

- Waiting times are too long for assessments and interventions for speech and language therapies (SLT) and occupational therapies (OT). In OT, for example, almost three quarters of children and young people wait between 18 and 52 weeks to receive treatment following an initial assessment. In SLT, some children in the early years can wait up to eight months for an assessment and intervention. Leaders are aware of the impact these waiting times have on children and young people and their families.
- Children and young people wait too long for a diagnostic ASD assessment. Those between two and 12 years of age wait approximately two years for these assessments. Parents, carers and school leaders find this situation very difficult, particularly as they are not able to plan effectively for children and young people's next steps or their future lives.
- Too many parents and carers are not aware of the support available to their children while they wait for an ASD assessment or therapeutic treatments. The lack of an up-to-date and easily accessible local offer website exacerbates this issue.

- Leaders' work with colleges and post-16 providers is not effective. These settings do not have the information they need when young people with EHC plans transfer between settings. Children and young people in Newham move to college without their needs being clearly identified or assessed. Therefore, despite innovative programmes such as the Newham Supported Employment Programme, many young people are not placed on suitable pathways or courses.

The effectiveness of the local area in meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

Strengths

- Babies and children with additional needs can access nursery provision from six months of age as part of the 'early learning opportunities' scheme. Settings that offer this service employ staff with specialist expertise in SEND. Children that access this provision benefit from early intervention to meet their needs.
- Early years settings offer support to children with a range of needs. This means that children can access support in a timely way in a community setting that best supports their family circumstances.
- Area SENCOs for schools and early years settings work with leaders to coordinate their work and develop their understanding of how to meet children and young people's needs. Network meetings for SENCOs are well attended. Representatives from education, health and care attend these meetings demonstrating good multi-agency involvement.
- Leaders make sure that young people known to the Youth Offending Service (YOS), those out of school and those at risk of harm are well monitored. Dedicated therapists and specialists for the YOS provide support to meet young people's needs, including those with speech, language and communication needs.
- The virtual school and child in need teams make sure that children and young people with SEND in care are well supported. Leaders from these teams track the progress of these children and young people and measure the impact of their interventions.
- Parents, carers, young people and schools who know of SENDIAS say that the advice and guidance they receive from this service is helpful. However, too many families are not aware of the service and what it offers.
- Children looked after have their annual health assessments aligned to their EHC plan review meetings. This ensures that, where possible, children and young people do not have to repeat their experiences to a multitude of

different professionals. These meetings ensure that the additional vulnerabilities of these children and young people are well understood.

- There is a dedicated child and adolescent mental health service pathway in place for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, many of whom are children looked after. This ensures that this particularly vulnerable cohort of children and young people can have their mental health needs assessed at the earliest opportunity.

Areas for development

- Although a minority of parents and carers value the local offer, many others have not used it or heard about it. Many use the settings that their children attend to find the information they need. But some parents report that they do not know what is on offer to them because they are not given clear enough guidance.
- Parents, carers and children and young people are not sufficiently involved in reviewing EHC plans or setting targets. This means that EHC plans are not always accurate or realistic because they do not capture the views of parents, carers or children and young people well enough.
- The quality and timeliness of EHC plans are inconsistent. Schools, including out-of-borough independent schools, find mistakes, inaccuracies and a lack of quality frustrating. The outcomes in some plans are not suitable. In too many EHC plans, identified outcomes do not match well with the child or young person's current circumstances. Relevant health and social care information is not always integrated into EHC plans. Short breaks provision and transition arrangements are rarely included in children and young people's plans.
- Transitions from secondary to further education and from further education to post-18 and post-25 services are not consistently well planned or implemented. Practitioners do not routinely consider early enough how targets and provision should take into account the potential future pathways for children and young people.
- Leaders, until recently, did not have a clear oversight of the EHC plan annual review process. Although reports from professionals are incorporated at annual reviews, the area does not make sure that plans are updated at transition points following annual reviews.
- Procedures for requesting information from different professionals as part of an EHC plan assessment are not well established. The forms that are used to seek information are not clear. This means that the information provided is inconsistent and often difficult to understand.
- Leaders recognise that the extended waiting times for ASD diagnostic assessments and SLT and OT assessments affect how quickly health

professionals provide reports to inform the EHC plan process. This means that EHC plans are not always issued in a timely way and children and young people wait too long to get the support they need.

- A significant number of children and young people with SEND who have a high level of need do not have an EHC plan in Newham. This affects those children and young people who move out of Newham because their needs will not be fully understood.
- Commissioned services for social care, particularly short breaks, are limited and not well advertised. Therefore, children and young people have few opportunities to broaden their interests and experience greater independence. Leaders are in the process of reconfiguring this service.
- Although the area's 'joint commissioning strategy for SEND' sets out several examples of effective work that are currently underway, there remain too few examples where the impact of this work can be accurately measured. Many jointly commissioned projects are in the early stages of development, such as the redesign of the local offer.

The effectiveness of the local area in improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

Strengths

- Leaders are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. They are ambitious for children and young people to reach their potential and achieve academically and personally.
- Most children and young people with SEND in Newham attend good or better settings. Most achieve well. Outcomes information over time demonstrates that children and young people achieve well in primary schools. They are well prepared for secondary school.
- Outcomes in the early years are strong. Services work together and intervene at an early stage so that no time is wasted in improving children's outcomes.
- Professionals from the area have worked closely with secondary school leaders to help them manage children and young people's behaviour more effectively. This has led to a reduction in permanent exclusions of pupils with SEND, including those with EHC plans.
- Pupils who are supported through the pupil referral unit or special schools achieve highly. Those that receive support from outreach teams are well supported in mainstream schools.

- Newham's emotional health and well-being offer in secondary schools is well embedded. It has contributed to improving outcomes for children and young people with mental health needs.
- The 18-week 'your time' programme, as provided by the HeadStart service, aims to reduce the escalation of mental health challenges for Newham's young people. It has been particularly useful in addressing issues raised by the pandemic, such as anxieties at not being able to attend school or meet with friends.

Areas for improvement

- Although there have been some improvements, the number of fixed-term exclusions for children and young people with SEND is too high in secondary schools. Area leaders have not considered well enough strategies to improve attendance and reduce the rate of fixed-term exclusions in these settings. In some cases, an inconsistent approach to understanding and meeting pupils' needs leads to a higher-than-average number of fixed-term exclusions at key stage 4.
- The options for young people with the most complex needs over the age of 16 are limited. Individual schools and training providers do what they can to find future pathways for these young people as they move into adulthood. But there is no systemic and coordinated approach to extending the variety and quality of placements available.
- There is no coordinated approach to support children and young people post-16 in developing their independence so that they can access local amenities in their social and leisure time. Parents, carers and young people feel they are not helped well enough to access what is offered in the community.
- The DMO does not have sufficient capacity to undertake the work required to improve the outcomes of children and young people with SEND. Although some changes have been implemented in a short space of time, there is still insufficient capacity to drive forward the important changes.
- Leaders acknowledge parents' and carers' frustration at the limited amount of support OT practitioners provide to children in Newham due to limited resources within the service. Although the support provided is highly regarded, too many parents feel that the number of sessions given is not enough. Along with the excessive waiting times, this means that parents do not feel well supported.

The inspection raises significant concerns about the effectiveness of the area

The area is required to produce and submit a Written Statement of Action to Ofsted that explains how it will tackle the following areas of significant weakness:

- Poor timeliness and quality of EHC plan assessments and plans.
- Underdeveloped arrangements for joint commissioning. Agencies do not work together well enough to provide services that children, young people and their families need.
- Children and young people and their parents and carers are not involved sufficiently in reviewing their needs or setting targets for the future. Co-production is underdeveloped.
- Transition to post-16 and adult services across education, health and care provision is weak. There is a lack of specialist provision for young people with the most complex needs.
- The online local offer is not helpful to parents and carers. Too many parents do not use or understand the support they are entitled to.
- Waiting times for SLT and OT assessments and interventions are too long.

Yours sincerely

Phil Garnham
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Ofsted	Care Quality Commission
Mike Sheridan Regional Director	Manir Hussain Deputy Chief Inspector, Primary Medical Services, Children Health and Justice
Phil Garnham HMI Lead Inspector	Marsha Newton CQC Inspector
Kim Hall HMI	Daniel Carrick CQC Inspector

Cc: Department for Education
Clinical Commissioning Group(s)
Director Public Health for the local area
Department of Health
NHS England