



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services
Lisa Stalley-Green, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Nursing Officer

6 February 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Re: 24-MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW AGAINST YOUR ACCELERATED PROGRESS PLAN (APP)

Thank you for meeting with the Department for Education (DfE) SEND and NHS England officials on 6 December 2023 to review the progress you have made against your APP over the last 24 months.

We are particularly grateful for contributions from the representatives of the Parent Carer Forum (PCF), Birmingham Children's Trust, and schools who attended the meeting.

The presentation and evidence provided demonstrated the journey from intention to actions that has taken place since the last review meeting. This included:

- The continuation of actions to strengthen governance structures, which will enable the local area to progress and monitor the impact of the strategic SEND strategies.
- Your statement that the partnership approach is strengthening; the local area is more integrated and joined up. For example, an Inclusive City Steering Group consisting of school leaders is now in place.
- That through the restructure of the SENAR service, you are now embedding a culture of quality and systemic practice by implementing a robust quality assurance system which is enabling you to prioritise where improvements need to be made and actioned.
- Quality assurance reviews of EHC Plans. You shared that currently the quality and advice to inform EHCP's remains variable. To address this, you provided a number of actions you are going to take to develop existing processes and support the workforce to strengthen this area of work.
- Evidence of parental feedback demonstrated developments in how SEND Advisory services are collaborating more effectively with the SEND locality therapists, both in terms of co-ordinating assessments and working to build the capacity of settings around Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), Occupational Therapy and sensory processing.

- Through hearing examples of activities being undertaken to promote the Birmingham SEND Co-Production Charter, which is the SEND Local Area Partnership pledge to families about working more closely together, and a tool for holding the SEND System to account going forward. Next steps are to exemplify co-production at all levels.
- Further actions being undertaken to ensure that information is more easily available on the Local Offer with a focus on accessibility and relevance.
- Sharing that the area has worked to embed a partnership approach and that you feel you are in a good position to take forward actions to establish a place-based joint commissioning model.
- Building on the Developing Local Provision (DLP) project, schools and settings in localities are continuing to work together to identify needs, resource, and provision to improve mainstream provision and improve pupil attendance, progress and outcomes.
- Launch of a Supported Internship Programme with placements commencing in November 2023. We heard a commitment to cultivate more opportunities for young people to allow them access to employment.

Between 24 and 27 May 2021, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited the local area of Birmingham to decide whether sufficient progress had been made in addressing each of the areas of significant weakness detailed in the written statement of action (WSOA) issued on 3 September 2018. It was determined that the area has made sufficient progress in addressing one of the 13 significant weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. The area had not made sufficient progress in addressing 12 significant weaknesses.

Both in your documentation and during this recent progress review, it is the view of the DfE and NHS England that you have now been able to demonstrate clear and sustained progress in the following area: *'Lack of an overarching approach or joined-up strategy for improving provision and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)'*. This means that we no longer need to continue with formal monitoring of this area.

The Birmingham SEND Partnership have stated they are better placed now, working better together, and are delivering the commitments made in their strategic plans.

There have been many changes in the senior leadership team at Birmingham City Council over the last five years. There is now a stable leadership team in place with the majority of key senior leadership roles having permanent appointments. This is bringing stability to the service.

In July 2023, you launched three strategic plans: SEND Strategy, Inclusion Strategy and a five-year Children and Young People's Plan. These strategies are the partnerships roadmap to enable the transformation of the local area SEND system in Birmingham.

The local authority and the NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (ICB) have shared your commitment to developing and delivering a framework for

strategic engagements with school leaders. Projects are being developed to increase attainment, attendance and promote inclusion.

Proposals are in place for a new 'School Relationship Model.' The model focuses on developing an education strategy across the city, ensuring work continues to engage with schools, and strengthen relationships. In addition to this, the local authority has committed to establishing an Education Board with a focus on achievement and attendance strategies for the city as a whole to supplement schools' individual work.

In relation to children, young people and their families accessing SEND provision, you have taken action to restructure the SENAR service. The local authority has commenced recruitment to permanent roles whilst maintaining capacity to deliver the service.

The local authority reported having completed an internal review of the SEND Information and Advisory Support Service (SENDIASS) and finalised the operating model moving forward. SENDIASS are clear in their aims to consistently encourage co-working with the Birmingham Parent Carer Forum (BPFC), the SENAR team, schools, and other professionals, towards positive engagement around SEND inclusive practice.

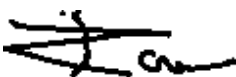
I know that this positive result comes as the result of a great deal of commitment and hard work on the part of the local authority, the ICB, families and front-line staff across education, health and social care. I would like to thank you for all that you are doing to support some of the most vulnerable children and young people in society, and to congratulate you on the progress you have made. Please do continue with these efforts and build on the successes you have already achieved.

Your 30-month APP review to look at the eleven remaining areas will take place in July 2024. At this meeting, we would like to see further evidence on co-production, partnership working along with evidence of impact and the felt experience of children, young people, and their families.

In the meantime, your SEND Adviser-Pat Tate, NHS England Adviser-Debbie Ward, along with Katie Moore as your DfE Case Lead, will continue to provide you with support and challenge. If you have any questions or need any further support, please contact either party in the first instance.

We are copying this letter to Helen Ellis (Director of SEND and Inclusion, BCC), Bob Harrison (SEND Improvement Project Manager, BCC), John Coughlan (SEND Commissioner), Andre Imich (DfE Lead Professional Adviser), Pat Tate (DfE Adviser), Lorraine Mulrone (National Specialist Advisor-SEND, NHS England), Nick Harrison (Senior Programme Manager – CYP, NHS England) and Deborah Ward (NHS England Adviser).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Pat Tate', written in a cursive style.

Richard Coneron

Head of Vulnerable Children's Unit
West Midlands Regions Group