

12 October 2021		ITEM: 11
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
SEND Inspection Outcome - Written Statement of Action Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key	
Report of: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director, Education and Skills		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director, Education and Skills		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report outlines the progress on the work identified within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Written Statement of Action, which was agreed by Ofsted in October 2019. It includes an update against the key areas identified in Appendix One.

The reporting period for this report is July 2021 to September 2021.

This report will outline the progress between July 2021 and September 2021. As reported at the July Children's O&S meeting we continue to work to address the areas identified within the Written Statement of Action.

Outlined below are the Ofsted WSoA areas for development:-

- Action 1: Inaccurate and incomplete records and ineffective oversight means that leaders did not know the whereabouts of some children and young people and what provision they have.
- Action 2: Quality assurance is not rigorous enough to ensure effective governance and oversight across the provision and services for 0 to 25-year-olds with SEND. Leaders are reliant on working relationships rather than processes. Leaders are over reliant on the limited information given to them by educational providers about the quality of the provision they purchase.
- Action 3, is about the quality of Education and Health Care (EHC) plans and Annual Reviews and is broken down into the following strands:

- Strand 1: EHC plans and the annual review process are of poor quality. The local authority has no system in place to make sure that relevant professionals and services are notified when EHC plans need reviewing or updating.
- Strand 2: Professionals are not routinely informed of requests to submit written information within specified timescales.
- Strand 3: Too often, EHC plans are out of date and do not accurately reflect the needs or views of children and young people, or the views of the families.
- Strand 4: The information from EHC plans and annual reviews is not used to inform the commissioning of services, particularly, but not exclusively, for young people between the ages of 19 and 25 years.

1. Recommendation

1.1 O&S to scrutinise the work that has been undertaken during the period outlined in the report and offer support and challenge.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides an update to the committee identifying the work that has been undertaken during the reporting period outlined above. Detailed progress against the WSoA's action plan is outlined in Appendix One.
- 2.2 The SEND Improvement Board, chaired by the Corporate Director of Children's Services, continues to ensure that we address the areas identified in the written statement of action as well as the wider system change related to our services to SEND children & young people. The SEND Improvement Board has a range of key stakeholders who are working to ensure our SEND children and young people make good progress with focussed work around key educational transition phases.
- 2.3 The SEND Operational Group chaired by the Assistant Director of Education & Skills meets on a monthly basis and provides regular updates to the SEND Improvement Board which, in turn, reports back to our Brighter Futures Partnership Board and Children's Overview & Scrutiny.
- 2.4 As reported in the July update, Ofsted have commenced the SEND re-inspection programme and we have received feedback from other LA's who have recently been re-inspected.
- 2.5 Over the summer break we have been working on our impact statement which will form part of the suite of documents that we will provide to Ofsted forming part of our evidence base when our re-inspection of SEND services is undertaken.

- 2.6 The holiday activities programme has provided a range of opportunities for children with SEND and a report around these activities will be available in spring 2022, the final activities in this round of funding will take place in December 2021.
- 2.7 A new travel training video has been produced and this will support our post 16 young people with SEND to become independent travellers. The Preparing for Adulthood team have worked with both parents/carers and young people to promote this. We have seen a number of parents request this training and at the time of writing this report we have 20 students signed up for the programme.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to support children and young people with additional needs and, as such, we are working with a range of partners including health, social care and schools/colleges to ensure that we use a whole system approach to ensure smooth transition pathways. Transitions remains a key focus and this is imbedded in our Brighter Futures Strategy refresh and includes our commitment to support SEND children and young people through key transition points.
- 3.2 We continue to gain feedback relating to our newly refreshed local offer. The Family Information Service (FIS) have hosted multiple Ask Thurrock – Local Offer drop in sessions during the day, evenings and weekends. Some of the feedback provided was to use smaller titles for key pages. This was actioned during the meeting resulting in positive feedback. FIS will be hosting some further sessions during the autumn school term. The FIS Team have met with the Parent/Carer forum and PATT Team in dedicated feedback sessions. Part of this feedback was to add more videos and images to the site which has also been actioned.
- 3.3 The voice of the child/young person remains a key priority as reported previously. We have opened a youth provision for SEND young people called the 'Hang Out' and, as a result of feedback, we are launching a junior 'hang out' for the younger age range. This new junior youth provision will enable children with SEND to access a range of activities and provide a space for them to socialise with others and express their views on what is working for them and suggest new developments. A new programme of digital engagement activities is in development to allow children to feedback on all aspects of services through an online portal to complement the existing pupil's voice project activities.
- 3.4 The Annual Review Process – as reported in the July O&S meeting we have identified additional capacity to support with the completion of annual reviews this has seen an increase in the number of annual reviews completed in the academic year 20/21. The latest data available shows us at 74% of annual reviews due in this academic year having been completed this is significantly increased from previous years.

3.5 As reported in the July meeting the service continue to strengthen its governance and oversight on quality assurance across the service. The Quality Assurance (QA) Lead has refreshed the QA Framework and has implemented an audit programme which continues to include a range of partners. Audits focus on a sample of plans, including finalised, new and those subject to annual review, to ensure they are of high quality and in line with the code of practice and regulations. Some audits now include direct feedback from parents and carers and this has resulted in positive feedback of the SEND service. All learning feeds into an action plan and the QA Lead monitors progress in the improvement of the quality of plans. Learning also feeds into the training, guidance and support programme as part of continuous development for our staff and those in schools and other partner agencies.

4. Reason for Recommendation

4.1 Children's Overview and Scrutiny have a clear and accountable governance and responsibility around supporting children with additional needs – the standing agenda item will enable committee members to be reassured of the progress and provide scrutiny in ensuring we are meeting the objectives outlined in the WSoA. We would ask committee members to consider how they would like us to report back on progress.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:

Create a great place for learning and opportunity.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

Further additional resources have been identified to ensure that we implement the change programme that is being developed to support children and young people with SEND. This will be monitored alongside the Written Statement of Action to ensure that they have been targeted in the appropriate place to see improved outcomes for children and young people.

In addition, the Dedicated Schools Grant has prioritised resources to support the improvement plan and respond to the increased demand in EHC plans.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal

The Council is subject to various duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 in relation to children with special educational needs. These duties are set out in more detail in The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 SI 2014/1530. The regulations set out various timescales for particular steps such as decisions to make and review EHC plans.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

Supporting our children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities is a key strategic priority for Thurrock Council. The service continues to promote practice to achieve equality, inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. We have recently redesigned our work around how we engage with children young people and parents/carers who require additional support. To support with this work we have recruited an Inclusion Support Officer who will be working with local stakeholders to enable us to gain feedback on service delivery and how we can ensure it is linked to service transformation.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

8.1 Appendix 1 - Written Statement of Action – progress update – July 2021 – September 2021

Report Author:

Michele Lucas

Assistant Director, Education and Skills