



Department
for Education

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

Daniela Carson, Worcestershire County Council
Maria Hardy, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB),

28 February 2025

Dear Daniella and Maria,

Thank you for meeting with DfE SEND and NHS England officials on 16 December 2024. We reviewed the operational progress you have made against your two Areas of Priority Actions (APA), as detailed in your Priority Action Plan (PAP), along with governance and leadership.

We would like to thank all colleagues that contributed to the deep dive activity; for their engagement to improving outcomes for Worcestershire's children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the commitment to improve the two APAs.

Below is the evidence demonstrated, along with next steps.

Governance and Leadership – Progress to date

- We were pleased to learn of the appointment of Jane Friswell as your Independent Chair.
- The establishment of the weekly core group meeting is positive. There is a focus on co-production and enables a consistency in approach. It allows the partnership to identify and address barriers regularly, as well as enabling the partnership to regularly review the improvement journey.
- A clear escalation route is established, following the integrated governance arrangements. Weekly meetings are held with leads and staff, culminating in a weekly report and subsequent fortnightly reviews.
- There is a plan to provide training to elected members to better understand the needs of young people with SEND.

Next Steps

- Maintain and enhance clear communication channels across all partnerships and workstreams. Develop and implement effective communication strategies to engage the workforce, including schools and broader stakeholders.

- Maintain comprehensive oversight across all programmes (Change Programme, Delivering Better Value, PAP, and Improvement Plan) to ensure they are well co-ordinated and collectively achieve a positive impact.
- Further engagement from social care in the Improvement Plan is recommended. Consideration should be given to including a social care representative (e.g., a Designated Social Care Officer) in both weekly core group meetings and relevant boards to ensure comprehensive input and collaboration.
- It was noted that data issues have presented a barrier. The Local Area Partnership is aware of this and has taken steps to address the problem. We look forward to hearing about the progress made.

APA One – Progress to date

- Fortnightly meetings are convened to review progress and analyse data, thereby facilitating continuous monitoring and timely adjustments.
- Additional support offers have been implemented, along with outsourcing and insourcing of some services, and effectively managing waiting lists. This includes investment in three band 6 nurses for triage and support, to improve patient flow and reduce waiting times.
- 250 CYP have been given the option to transfer to private providers.
- Effective communication with parents, achieved through the implementation of workshops, the dissemination of bulletins, and the maintenance of a comprehensive website including child friendly animated versions of communications, ensures that families remain well-informed and receive adequate support.
- The proactive approach to children's health by using school nurses to roll out screening programmes in reception, year 6 and year 9, to support early identification of health issues.

Next Steps

- Tackling the workforce and funding shortages is essential for the partnership's success. As highlighted in the meeting, the current budget of £800,000 is inadequate. A comprehensive stocktake is imperative to reassess and address resource needs effectively.
- Whilst communication is improving, there is a need for a more comprehensive communication plan that reaches all children using both tangible and digital methods. Ensuring that information is accessible and understandable for all stakeholders is essential.
- It was clear that a large amount of work has been undertaken over the last few months across the partnership, and we look forward to hearing about the continued progress in the next meeting.

APA 2 – Progress to date

- The recruitment of a Co-production Co-ordinator, alongside an Emotional Mental Health role will strengthen the work of co-production across the partnership

- The Youth Cabinet has demonstrated high levels of engagement, with their manifesto prioritising mental health and SEND. Key aims include fostering strong relationships with the SEND Co-production Co-ordinator upon their appointment and maintaining active links with the SEND and AP partnership committee.
- The Youth Cabinet aims to expand its representation. To achieve this, they will attend the Committee Meeting with the goal of producing a film and a newsletter article to disseminate information to the wider community.
- The Parent Carer Forum (PCF) plans to conduct training sessions in the new year to educate parents on the key elements of a successful Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) review, with a particular focus on the principles of co-production.

Next Steps

- We appreciate that there have been delays in hiring a Co-production Co-ordinator, but we would recommend consideration is given to how to capture the metrics around co-production at a strategic, operational and individual level. Additionally, it is important to measure these metrics across key elements of the collaborative processes, such as co-production, co-design, co-assessment, co-commissioning, cp-delivery, and co-evaluation
- Enhance the understanding of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) among CYP with SEND, particularly those attending special schools, while carefully considering their non-verbal and cognitive abilities.
- Develop strategies to re-engage disengaged CYP, that focus on meaningful engagement. These strategies will ensure that CYP voices are heard and that the actions outlined in their annual reviews are consistently followed through on with the support of the CYP voice.
- Produce a visual plan of how the Youth Cabinet links to SEND and AP focus groups of young people in Worcestershire.

Your next stocktake will take place on 6 March 2025, and will involve meeting senior representatives from the local area to review progress at a strategic level.

In the meantime, SEND and NHS England Advisers, and Kirsty Perry 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 Kirsty Perry (Kirsty.perry@education.gov.uk) in the first instance.

I am copying this letter Mari Gay, Adam Johnston, Sarah Wilkins, your SEND / NHSE Advisers, and to your new DfE Case Lead and would ask you to disseminate to stakeholders as appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

Deanne Brownley

Worcestershire SEND Case Lead