

Joint area SEND revisit in Kent

Visit and overall findings



Between 27 and 29 September 2022 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited Kent to decide whether sufficient progress has been made in addressing each of the areas of significant weakness detailed in the inspection report letter published on 22 March 2019.

The letter outlines the findings from the revisit and concludes that the area has not made sufficient progress in addressing any of the significant weaknesses.

How the Inspection Team came to their conclusion



Held discussions with key stakeholder groups

Looked at a range of performance information including the area's repositioning statement and self-evaluation

Scrutinised a sample of education, health and care plans (EHC Plans)

Read written submissions from and met with parents.

Concerning increase in EHCPs



- Parental perception is that the only way to get support for their child was through a direct appeal to their local member of parliament
- Requests for assessment, appeals to tribunal and demand for special school and independent special school places have continued to increase. Tribunals for academic year 21/22 were 554 and this academic year to date 135
- The Kent area now has a 20% higher rate of children and young people on EHC Plans than the England average. Kent have 19,194 active EHCPs
- The length of wait for diagnoses and the length of time taken for EHC plans at several stages of the process also causes extreme parental frustration
- Half of parents who contributed to the inspection consider that their children's views are not represented well, feel that the plans do not reflect need and believe that their child's needs are not met well within their current setting.

At the initial 2019 inspection, inspectors found the following:



A widely held concern of parents that the local area is not able, or in some cases not willing, to meet their children's needs.

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

Leaders acknowledge that parental confidence has continued to diminish

Recognition that we 'haven't got leadership right' yet and apology to families who have not received effective and timely help and support

We know that current systems have contributed to families' negative experiences

The inspection does acknowledge that local authority leaders demonstrate a sense of renewed vigor and determination, and this is recognised by school leaders and partners

At the initial 2019 inspection, inspectors found:



A variable quality of provision and commitment to inclusion in schools, and the lack of willingness of some schools to accommodate CYP with SEND.

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

Lack of willingness of some schools to accommodate children with SEND has continued

Concern that specialist places are not allocated rigorously according to need, but rather in response to the level of challenge from parents and politicians

Many schools' welcome children with SEND and ensure that they receive a high quality of education and care.

**Implementation the 'mainstream core standards (MCS)
Reviewing eligibility for maintained special schools**

New policy and diagnostic tool, Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education (CATIE)

Inclusive Leadership Programme

At the initial 2019 inspection,
inspectors found:



Parents and carers have a limited role in reviewing and designing services for children and young people with SEND.

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

PACT are working hard to reach as many parents and carers as possible, but their reach is still limited

The Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) and teamwork alongside PACT to quality assure anonymised plans.

Commissioning team for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) working with expert by experience

IASK workshops for parents and practitioners

At the initial 2019 inspection,
inspectors found:



An inability of current joint commissioning arrangements to address known gaps and eliminate longstanding weaknesses in the services for children and young people with SEND

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

The joint commissioning team has become more cohesive in its approach, and this represents a significant cultural change

The Keyworker Programme successes

Tripartite funding arrangements in place

At the initial 2019 inspection,
inspectors found:



Poor standards achieved, and progress made, by too many children and young people with SEND

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

The drive to improve standards and progress has been slow

High rates of absence and persistent absence of children with an EHC plan have continued

New county-wide strategies to improve academic standards achieved by children and young people with SEND are underway

Work with the attendance service and early help to remove barriers to, and facilitate, school attendance

At the initial 2019 inspection,
inspectors found:



The inconsistent quality of the EHC process; a lack of up-to-date assessments and limited contributions from health and care professionals; and poor processes to check and review the quality of EHC plans

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

Leaders' analysis and work to improve EHC plans are resulting in more precise and coherent targets on newly produced plans

Despite improvements still too much inconsistency across plans

The timeliness of EHC plans being issued and updated remains a challenge leaving parents and school leaders frustrated

Improvements include amendments to the template and easier understanding by CYP and their parents and carers and more inclusion of the CYPs voice

At the initial 2019 inspection,
inspectors found:



Weak governance of SEND arrangements across the EHC system at strategic and operational level and an absence of robust action plans to address known weaknesses

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

Leadership and governance is weak, the established SEND Improvement Board has been ineffective in driving improvement over time

More positively, oversight of children looked after who have SEND is comprehensive

Newly appointed Director of Children's Services has rapidly assessed the current situation and understands the enormity of the task ahead

New governance structures have been implemented as part of the SEN Transformation work with clear direct lines of accountability

At the initial 2019 inspection,
inspectors found:



Unacceptable waiting times for children and young people to be seen by some health services, particularly CAMHS, tier two services, SALT, the wheelchair service, and ASD and ADHD assessment and review.

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

Children, young people and their families continue to wait too long for assessments particularly for children on the neurodevelopmental pathway

There are a number of positive initiatives underway but some way still to go

CAMHS and Child Development Centre providers now have closer working relationships with a move the digital communication during the pandemic.

Adoption of the 'Balanced System' approach, an offer which will see multiple providers delivering the same outcomes

At the initial 2019 inspection,
inspectors found:



A lack of effective systems to review and improve outcomes for those children and young people whose progress to date has been limited by weaknesses in provision

2022 Joint area SEND revisit, inspectors found the following:

Little evidence to indicate that leaders had planned or implemented systems for identifying children and young people adversely affected by previous weaknesses in provision

Operational reports provide leaders with some detail about the academic progress of the children and young people who currently access the provision.