

Findings from the peer review of SEND support for Thurrock Local Area

Overview

Thurrock Local Authority commissioned a peer review of SEND support from a team of colleagues from Cambridgeshire, Bedford Borough, Southend and Peterborough Local Authorities. The review was undertaken on 20th and 21st June 2017 and the findings are included in this report. The Local Authority identified an overarching focus for the review:

How effective are the SEN support arrangements for all children and young people aged 0-25 years in ensuring that their needs are identified and met so that they make sufficient progress within the expectations of the SEND reforms?

This report includes the following sections:

- A. Introduction including key questions and methodology for the review
- B. Current context and performance for Thurrock LA
- C. Emerging themes and questions from documentary evidence
- D. Findings against the key question, strengths and areas for development
- E. Recommendations
- F. The follow up offers of support from peer Local Authorities
- G. Effective practice from Thurrock to be shared with other LAs

On behalf of the peer review team, I would like to thank colleagues from the four Local Authorities, for their engagement in the process of the review and their openness to share documentation and developing practice.

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A. Introduction

The overarching focus for the review was:

How effective are the SEN support arrangements for all children and young people aged 0-25 years in ensuring that their needs are identified and met so that they make sufficient progress within the expectations of the SEND reforms?

The review involved:

A preview stage:

- the analysis of a range of performance data and an LA summary of performance;
- review and analysis of documentation including the Local Offer, the LA SEF, action plans and LG inform reports

2 days in the LA including:

- an initial discussion with senior leads focused on the themes and key questions emerging from the pre-review documentary analysis
- focus groups and interviews with stakeholders including representation from health, education, social care, parent carer groups and schools
- an interim feedback discussion with the LA at the end of day one to ensure further refining of evidence
- a final feedback meeting outlining key findings and discussing offers of future support from the peer review LAs

This report outlines:

- Headlines of current performance for Thurrock
- Themes and questions emerging from documentary analysis prior to the review
- Findings against the emerging themes
- Key recommendations
- The follow-up offers of support from peer Local Authorities
- Identified effective practice from Thurrock

B. Current context and performance for Thurrock LA

There are 52 schools in Thurrock covering the different phases as follows:

- 39 primary schools,
- 10 secondary schools;
- 2 special schools; and
- 1 Pupil Support Service which includes primary and secondary pupils referral units and a medical tuition service. This service converted to an academy in April 2015.

As of June 2017, 4 of the 52 schools were community schools maintained by the local authority. All of the local authority maintained schools are primary schools apart from one Catholic Girls School.

Eight of the 52 schools have a faith connection (five Catholic and three Church of England). Six of these schools are voluntary aided, one is voluntary controlled and

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one is a Church of England foundation school. There are two primary free schools in Thurrock and a secondary planned.

The rest of the schools have become either sponsored or converter academies. Many of these academies are part of multi or umbrella academy trusts. The academy chains are a mix of those led by educational sponsors embracing groups of academies that extend beyond Thurrock, and those that at this point just comprise schools in Thurrock.

The proportion of schools that have become academies is high relative to the rest of the country where around 60 per cent of secondary schools and 10 percent of primary schools have become academies. In part, this is because the local authority has supported and facilitated schools to convert to academy status. It has also been open in welcoming academy sponsors to play a significant role in school improvement and has been supportive of strong schools in the borough sponsoring other schools that need improvement support. However, freedom from the local authority was also often cited as the motivation for moving to academy status.

Of the schools and academies that currently have an inspection grade 97% of primary and 80% of secondary are good or better.

The percentage of 'good or better' settings overall has risen from 69.5% in 2012 to 100% . In May 2017, with 99% of child-minder's rated as good or better.

Currently 100% of special schools are 'good or better'. The Pupil Support Service Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) currently 'requires improvement'.

Thurrock has 7 Primary Resource Bases and 4 Secondary Resource Bases. Both special schools provide a range of outreach services to support mainstream schools in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.

In Thurrock 13.8% of pupils have a have a statutory plan of SEN (statement or EHC plan) or are receiving SEN support. This compares to an average of 14.9%% nationally.

Thurrock has 3.4% of its children and young people with statements or education, health and care (EHC) plans compared to an average of 2.8%% nationally.

Thurrock has 10.4% of its children and young people identified as SEN support in compared to an average of 11.9% nationally.

Children and young people at SEN support perform in line with national averages at Foundation stage , slightly below national averages at Key stage 2 and below average at Key Stage 4 .

Young people identified at SEN Support are broadly in line with national averages for being in Education, Employment or Training at age 17.

C. Themes and questions emerging from documentary analysis prior to the review

Four clear themes emerged at the documentary analysis stage which provided a key structure for the review

1. The prioritisation for improving the SEND cohort outcomes and improving schools' support for this cohort

- Given that SEN with a statement/EHCP achieve better than SEN support or no SEN at KS2 – is KS2 SEN support a key priority for the LA?
- Is there a mechanism for targeted intervention in schools RAG rated RED for SEN support achievement?
- How is analysis of headline data being used to inform further actions?
- How are schools being supported to deliver effective SEND support?
- How are the LA challenging schools and settings in terms of the graduated response to SEND?
- The Ed Settings core offer does not appear to extend to Early Years or post 16?
- The Ed Settings core offer is not based on the most up to date Code of practice and not clearly drawing on the assess, plan, do review model-
- Does the Ed Settings core offer provide sufficient information to class/subject teachers to know what to do/put in place?
- The highest primary need is identified as Social, Emotional and Mental Health with SpLD second, what has been put in place to support schools in these key areas?
- There appears to be little evidence of analysis of KS4 outcomes provided in LA documentation?
- Why is there a high incidence of secondary students with MLD in Thurrock (37% compared to the national average 24%)?
- Why is Special School demand high when the inclusion agenda is pushed so much?
- 20.7% of new EHC plans are issued in time vs. 48.3% for neighbours and 59.7% nationally what is the plan for improving this process?
- The analysis of outcomes of vulnerable groups is unclear
- The percentage of disadvantaged young people staying in education is below national what has been put in place to improve attainments and future outcomes for disadvantaged YP?

2. The effectiveness of evaluative analysis to ensure quality of provision

- The SEF has a range of actions, which are not defined in terms of measurable success criteria, or timescales – will this impact negatively on improving outcomes for pupils?
- What is the evidence to show how the LA is challenging ineffective practice?
- How is the LA using its identification of effective practice schools to support other schools?
- With more children remaining in mainstream schools what do schools and the LA know about the progress they are making and how does it compare with placement in special provision?
- Is there an analysis of how well Thurrock children are making progress to achieving the outcomes in their plans both statutory and non statutory – beyond attainment data?
- Published feedback on responses to the Local Offer is not obvious?
- How has the input/feedback of young people been captured in evaluating quality and impact?

3. The effectiveness of multi-agency working partnerships

- Have a range of services inputted into the SEF?
- What are the shared priorities with partners?
- Are Health and Social Care sufficiently engaged – given the evidence that joint arrangements are mostly red on action plans?
- How do all agencies contribute to the Local Offer action plan?
- What is Thurrock's governance and ownership of the Local Offer?
- How are services and partners working together to identify and support vulnerable groups with SEND?

4. Parental understanding and confidence in the system

- There is a high proportion request EHC Needs assessment from parents and 57% of parental requests do not proceed to needs assessment –do schools and parents have a clear understanding of what should be done at SEN support?
- How has the LA gauged parental confidence in the system?
- How do parents know how services can be accessed?
- Where is the parental feedback on the local offer?
- How representative is the local parent carer forum?

D. Findings against the four themes

Evidence in the review supported the following findings under the four themes

1.The clarity of prioritization and accountability for improving the SEND cohort outcomes

The Local Area has a strong commitment to working with parents moving towards greater co-production of strategic planning and has developed with parents a set of underpinning aspirations to support Thurrock's SEND strategy.

The overall impression from the pre-review documentation analysis and the peer review discussions is that the Local Authority, in its attempts to implement the SEND reforms, has been too broad in its approach and this is leading to a lack of strategic focus on key priorities. The current senior leadership structure in the LA does not provide sufficient capacity for the Heads of Service to prioritise strategic planning and evaluation. Too often the Heads of Service are involved in operational issues.

The LA has recognized that the current governance structures in the Local Authority are complex and lack coherence inhibiting effective reviewing and reporting of progress on SEND priorities. The LA needs to develop a board structure which will enable a more robust and regular review of progress.

The SEF has been developed through the Strategic Inclusion Board to involve all partners, however it does not sufficiently outline the key priorities for improvement. During the review colleagues across different agencies were unable to articulate a set of top 5 priorities for the Local Area. Currently the LA has a range of separate plans from different agencies, which do not sufficiently align to the SEF and the top priorities

The LA are keen to revisit the expectations of schools, settings and colleges for their accountability for the SEND cohort and to clarify the offers that can be commissioned through the new services. This would be welcomed by schools who feel this approach would improve consistency across the borough.

In the last year the LA has given greater focus to the context of those children with EHC plans to address the concerns over delays in the process, particularly with conversions from statements. Good progress has been made in improving the timeliness of new EHC plans within the 20-week deadline.

2.The effectiveness of evaluative analysis to ensure quality of provision

The Local Area would appear to be collecting a very large amount of data which needs to be more refined to support analysis. Current analysis is based on 2014 and 2015 data from LG inform reports and there is a need at local level to have a clearer presentation of current performance data. Health reported that CYP with SEN support cannot currently be identified within their data, compared to the easier identification of children with EHC plans. The headline analysis from different partners needs to be factored into the LA SEF and used to support the refining of key priorities for the LA.

School Improvement teams have identified the need to collect and analyse data annually on the outcomes for the SEND cohort to enable the identification of effective practice schools and for the targeting of challenge to those schools providing ineffective support to the SEND cohort.

Teaching schools work collaboratively with the LA to provide CPD offers linked to LA priorities and there is the potential for a greater focus in future CPD offers to support schools to improve SEND outcomes.

Officers and schools value the potential of the SENCo forums, which are well attended by schools, to identify effective practice and provide school-led support. Secondary SENCos who attended the peer review would welcome more regular termly meetings.

3.The effectiveness of multi-agency working partnerships

The Local Area has built on strong foundations of cross agency working in Early Years to implement the SEND reforms effectively. There is good evidence of effective multi-agency working in Early Years. Relationships between settings and the Local Area developed in early years would appear to be very responsive to need. There are also examples of strong working partnerships between School improvement, Early Years support and the Educational Psychologist Team. There is good representation of Health at Early Years panels.

The LA has historically prioritized support to Early Years to good effect with the majority of children with SEND in EYFS having their needs met through SEN support. There is a need to evaluate these effective working practices to support development of multi-agency working for all age groups.

At post-16 there are some good examples of multi-agency working for targeted work with students, particularly with South Essex College. These effective practice approaches should be shared more widely across the borough.

There are some examples of developing initiatives of multi-agency working, such as The Brighter Futures for the delivery of an integrated 0-19 Healthy Families Service, which seeks to integrate existing provision to create a single service from the user's points of view. Senior Strategic Leads in Health expressed strong commitment to the further development of multi-agency working.

There is an acknowledgement that there is a need to ensure all agencies have a clear understanding of the top priorities or improvement for the SEND cohort in Thurrock.

4.Parental understanding and confidence in the system

The LA has recently worked with parents to develop a set of overarching aspirations for a SEND strategy which is evidence of the LA's commitment to co-production with parents.

Early Years' Parents have a range of opportunities to provide feedback through Portage and Early Support which is impacting on the refining of services and support provided.

There is a high proportion of requests for EHC Needs assessment from parents and 57% of parental requests do not proceed to needs assessment which indicates a lack of clarity of understanding of expectations of the support for the SEND support cohort.

The parents who were interviewed were not entirely representative of the wider SEND cohort group, no primary or mainstream primary represented. However this

group voiced significant concerns about the following issues:

- the clarity of communication from the LA;
- the lack of understanding of the Local Offer;
- the lack of engagement of wider group parents in regular consultation feedback.

The CaPa group is established as the Parent/ Carer forum, however the Vice-Chair of CaPa is also employed as Parent Partnership Support by the LA. This is unusual practice and has the potential for some confusion in roles and messaging to parents. There would seem to be a need for wider representation of parents in CaPa and to consider the need for improving communication routes to all parents of children with SEND.

E. Recommendations

1. Improve the strategic focus to ensure the priority for improving the outcomes for the SEND cohort is met

- Review current staffing structures to provide more capacity for strategic leadership and planning
- Establish a coherent governance structure that ensures greater accountability for reviewing progress
- Refine the SEF to more clearly demonstrate the identification of strengths, areas for development and key priorities for the Local Area
- Develop a Local Area SEND plan aligned to the SEF
- Clarify accountabilities and responsibilities of all stakeholders for the SEND cohort
- Improve top level analysis of the range of data currently collected to inform strategic planning
- Agree with all schools, colleges and post-16 providers a revised approach to collecting SEND outcomes and progress data which will support greater challenge to those settings where outcomes for the SEND cohort are a concern
- Ensure parents and young peoples' voices are included in strategic planning

2 . Increase parental understanding and confidence in the system

- Improve parental understanding of the Local Offer
- Seek a broader representation of parents on the Parent Carer Forum (CaPa)
- Establish a culture where feedback from all parents with children with SEND is more frequently collected and is used to inform practice
- Clarify for parents the SEN support offer

3. Improve analysis of data to inform planning and practice

- Establish a clear framework for the collection and analysis of data
- Improve top level analysis of the range of data currently collected to inform strategic planning
- Agree with all schools and colleges, post-16 providers a revised approach to collecting SEND outcomes and progress data which will support greater challenge to those settings where outcomes for the SEND cohort are a concern

F. The follow up offers of support from peer Local Authorities

Cambridgeshire: Support for refining the SEF

Bedford Borough: Support for governance structures

Peterborough: Support with formal evaluation of feedback from parents

In addition Essex Local Authority have offered support focused on both data collection and analysis

G. Effective practice from Thurrock to be shared with other LAs

- The innovative practice in post 16 provision, particularly the joint working between the local authority and South Essex college and sharing of this practice with other providers.
- The focused and targeted multiagency work to support children 0 – 5 years with SEND and their families. This includes transition work with primary schools.
- Effective practice was noted in relation to outreach services that the borough has set up in Thurrock.