



Department  
for Education

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

Councillor Mike Bird - Leader of the Council  
Colleen Male - Director of Children's Services  
Sally Roberts, Chief Nursing Officer and SRO for SEND, Black Country ICB

14 December 2023

### **Area SEND Revisit: Ceasing Formal APP Reviews**

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you following the most recent review of progress against your Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) which took place on 21 November 2023.

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

We are particularly grateful for the contributions from Families and Carers Empowered (FACE), your Parent Carer Forum (PCF), along with school representatives. The local area partnership is committed and willing to establish an inclusive culture to improve SEND services for the children and young people in Walsall. Feedback from FACE, school, health and social care representatives included that coproduction has improved significantly and is now a strength in Walsall.

I was very pleased to hear that you have made clear and sustained progress against the activity in your APP and that there is evidence that your work is having a positive impact.

In your APP, agreed with the department and NHS England, the key areas of focus, based on the issues highlighted in your Ofsted and Care Quality Commission revisit report, included:

- *The poor-quality EHC plans, which do not accurately reflect children's and young people's special educational needs, and do not adhere to the statutory timescales for completion.*
- *The poor quality of the local offer, which does not meet the requirements of the code of practice.*

The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to continue and accelerate improvement. These included:

- The local area redesigned processes which has resulted in improved EHCP timeliness.
- You have developed a new Quality Assurance (QA) framework which has been embedded into practice. Monitoring and reporting of QA outcomes has been strengthened with key stakeholders, reporting having been involved in the process.

- You now have a plan in place to monitor and improve the quality of annual reviews. Parent representatives told us that the quality of annual reviews has improved since the SEND revisit in June 2022 and have felt heard and valued throughout the process.
- A Walsall-focused Local Offer which has been co-produced with children, young people and their families. You now have mechanisms in place to continually review and develop the content and information available.
- FACE representatives reported that parents and carers find the Local Offer accessible, easy to navigate and appreciate the use of jargon free language.
- The local area partnership feels that the Local Offer now includes information that will help and support children, young people, parents, carers, education providers and service professionals in their day-to-day lives.

Based on the evidence provided, it is the view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress. This means that we no longer need to continue with formal monitoring of the APP.

I know that this positive outcome is as a result, of a great deal of commitment and hard work on the part of the local authority, the Integrated Care Board, 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.

As with all local areas that were required to produce an APP, both my team and NHS England will keep in touch with you on an ongoing basis to be assured that you are managing to sustain the progress made. The Department will also keep your situation under review and retains the right to request updates on strands of activity in the APP or to reinstate more regular and formal reviews should the need arise.

Please contact your DfE case lead Kirsty Perry ([kirsty.perry@education.gov.uk](mailto:kirsty.perry@education.gov.uk)) or me if you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further.

I am copying this email to Emma Bennett (Chief Executive), Councillor Mark Statham (Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills), Sharon Kelly (Director of Access and Inclusion), Judith Nash, (Head of Service - SEND and Inclusion), Claire Palmer (Chair of the Parent Carer Forum), Katrina McCormick (Senior SEND Programme Manager: SEND, Black Country ICB), Pat Tate (SEND Adviser, DfE Commissioned), Deborah Ward (NHSE Adviser), Katie Moore (DfE Regional Lead), and Kirsty Perry (DfE Case Lead).

Yours sincerely,



Richard Coneron  
Head of West Midlands Vulnerable Children's Unit  
Department for Education