



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
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Sally Rowe, Director of Children's Services
Sally Roberts, Chief Nursing Officer and SRO for SEND, Black Country ICB

15th May 2023

SIX MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW AGAINST YOUR ACCELERATED PROGRESS PLAN (APP)

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for meeting with DfE SEND and NHS England officials on 27th April to review the progress you have made against your APP over the last six months. We are particularly grateful for the contributions from your parent carer forum (PCF) and SENCOs. It was clear that the local area is making sustainable improvements to SEND services and to the lives of children and young people.

The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to accelerate improvement. These included updates on the two workstreams linked to the APP, which support continued improvements, along with the presentation shared at the review meeting.

We are grateful to parent representatives for confirming they feel good foundations are being built. There is evidence that the PCF is embedded in the work being undertaken in the APP along with other SEND developments and the PCF has representation in the improvements you are making.

We are also grateful to your SENCOs for their insight and it is reassuring to learn that they feel informed and have an opportunity to participate in developments regarding the annual review process.

Progress is being made across the actions set out in your APP and it is encouraging that:

- You have redeveloped and embedded a new structure within the EHC team which is now permanent and continues to be invested in through quality training and support. We note the challenges you faced following high staff turnover and the impact this had on timeliness. We commend efforts to clear the backlog of assessments.
- The quality of EHCPs is improving and a new, co-produced template is being used which has increased personalisation and improved the quality of content.
- A tiered quality assurance framework has been implemented.

- Relationships with parents and carers is vastly improved and is leading to improvements being made in a truly co-produced way.
- The Development Day on the 2nd March was successful in bringing together colleagues, partners and parents/carers together to share Walsall's ambitions for SEND improvement and promote co-production.
- Although in the early stages, work on the Local Offer is progressing and a Local Offer Co-ordinator has been employed to help lead the work to completion.
- There is evidence of strong foundations of partnership working.

We will continue to monitor the APP and meet with you in 6 months for an update on:

- Progress with development of your Local Offer both from a content and technical perspective. We note that progress in this area has been slower than you would have liked.
- The continued development of the EHCP QA framework and EHCP timeliness data.
- Social care's approach to adopting and building upon the health EHCP panel/gateway that supports a co-ordinated approach for health advice requests.
- Engagement with schools regarding the new annual review process and how the work of the Inclusion Development Partner has promoted better management of assessments.
- Your move from a locum-based way of working for your educational psychologist team.

In addition to the above, DfE and NHS England look forward to hearing and seeing impact of the improvements you are making.

Your next six-month review meeting will take place in October 2023.

In the meantime, SEND and NHS England Advisers, Pat Tate, Deborah Ward, 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 Pat, Debbie or Kirsty in the first instance.

We are copying this letter to Mike Bird (Leader of the Council), Sharon Kelly (Director of Access and Inclusion) Judith Nash (Head of Service SEND and Inclusion), Andre Imich (DfE Lead Professional Adviser), Pat Tate (DfE Adviser), Kirsty Perry (DfE Case Lead), Katrina McCormick (Senior Programme Manager: SEND for Black Country ICB), Deborah Ward (NHS England Adviser).

Yours sincerely,



Jason Henderson
West Midlands Regional Lead

Vulnerable Children's Unit- West Midlands Regions Group
Department for Education (DfE)