



Department
for Education

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

Neelam Bhardwaja, Director for Children and Families, Staffordshire County Council
Chris Bird, Chief Transformation Officer, Staffordshire, and Stoke on Trent ICB

9 May 2023

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

Dear Neelam and Chris,

Thank you for meeting with DfE SEND and NHS England officials on 20 April 2023, 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) who confirmed that they felt co-production was evident through, for example, its inclusion at an early stage in the production of the Specialist Provision Strategy and gap analysis to develop enhanced provision. We are also grateful to your schools' representatives for their insight, and it is reassuring to learn that they also feel that they are being consulted and part of the process.

The evidence provided, alongside feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to accelerate improvement. The APP priorities are embedded in work that has a wider remit also taking in specialist sufficiency, transport, and workforce developments.

The local area's collective determination to making sustainable improvements to SEND services and to the lives of children and young people continues to be clear. Evidence was also available to demonstrate that progress is being made to improve co-production, the Education Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment pathway and special provision. This was demonstrated through:

- The feedback given from partners confirming improved relationships and co-production.
- The focus given to the understanding and use of data.
- The ongoing increase in workforce capacity through the addition of Educational Psychologists and Case Workers.
- The established leadership, governance, and programme oversight, which enables the area to understand itself and to monitor and evaluate its ambitious improvement programme.

We agreed that the next steps to evidence continued improvements were that:

- Schools and the PCF can feedback that improvements are becoming consistent and being felt by the wider community.
- Parents and carers are feeling the impact of changes in their lived experiences.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of the district hubs are rectified.
- Communications to inform the wider community of the work being undertaken and improvements being made are improved.
- The new EHC needs assessment pathway is resulting in positive change in parental confidence and the quality of EHC plans where these are issued.

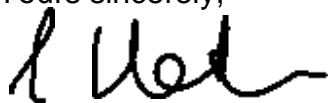
The overall progress made to date is reassuring. At your next review meeting, I would also like to see:

- Evidence of the impact of additional workforce capacity being felt by parents and carers.
- Progress of the 16 proposals, co-produced with special schools and parents, to address current gaps in specialist provision.
- Continued improvement in relationships between the LA, schools, and the PCF.
- Progress in the work being undertaken surrounding the implementation of digital solutions between Capita and the Hub.

Your next six-month review meeting should take place in October 2023. In the meantime, SEND and NHS England Advisers, Pat Tate and Debbie Ward, and Deanne Michie 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 either party in the first instance.

We are copying this letter to Alan White, Leader of the Council, I am also copying this letter to Andre Imich (DfE Lead Professional Adviser), Pat Tate (DfE Adviser), Lorraine Mulrone (National Specialist Advisor-SEND, NHS England), Deborah Ward (NHS England Adviser), Nicole Wesley (Children, Young People and SEND Manager NHS England) and Deanne Michie (DfE Case Lead).

Yours sincerely,



Jason Henderson

Regional Lead, West Midlands Vulnerable Childrens Unit,
Department for Education (DfE)