

## **Improvement Notice**

**To: Oxfordshire County Council**

County Hall  
New Road  
Oxfordshire  
OX1 1ND

**This Improvement Notice is issued to Oxfordshire County Council on 09 November 2023 following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 15 September 2023 and in response to the areas of priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.**

1. This Notice is given to address the five areas of priority action and four areas of improvement identified in the report of the Ofsted/CQC local area SEND inspection dated 15 September 2023.
2. To comply with this Notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with the Integrated Care Board and its other partner agencies (“partners”), as set out in section 11 (1) of the Children’s Act 2004.

### **Improvement plans**

3. The Council’s improvement plans should deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement, taking account of the views of parents, children and young people, school and education leaders and wherever possible, putting co-production at the centre of improvement activity. Plans must cover the areas of priority action and improvement areas identified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report of 15 September 2023, listed below, as well as any recommendations made by the Department.
  - Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should urgently prioritise systems to gather the views of children and young people with SEND effectively. Leaders should use these views to inform their strategic planning for, and evaluation of SEND services that improve the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.
  - Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should develop communication systems across the partnership to improve the efficiency and quality of their information-gathering processes to ensure that children’s and young people’s needs are understood and met effectively through coordinated approaches.
  - Leaders across the partnership should establish rigorous processes to help ensure the improved timeliness and quality assurance of EHC plans. Leaders should use this learning to improve the quality of new and existing EHC plans.
  - Leaders across education, health and care should improve the commissioning of services to ensure that children, young people and their families receive sufficient support to better meet their needs and improve parental confidence in the SEND system.

- Leaders, including education, health and care providers, should identify the steps that they will take to collectively monitor and measure the impact of their strategy and actions. These plans should be co-produced with and communicated clearly to children, young people and their families so that their experiences and outcomes improve.
  - The local area partnership should evaluate the quality and impact of services and joint working more effectively in order to inform improvements that lead to better outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND.
  - Leaders should improve their strategic approach to transition planning at all ages so that children and young people receive the right help and support they need to lead successful lives.
  - Leaders must continue to develop their oversight, strategy and commissioning arrangements of suitable alternative provision so that there is sufficient suitable provision that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND.
  - Leaders across the partnership should continue to address the long waiting times for children and young people requesting support from health services. The local area partnership should ensure that support is in place from health services for children and young people who are awaiting assessments.
4. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
- a. the Council must ensure there is an improvement board, with the chair agreed by the Department and attended by key leaders across education, health and care services, including the Chief Executives of the LA and ICB, the Children Services Accountable Officer, the ICB Accountable Officer and appropriate elected members of the council to a timetable agreed with the Department;
  - b. the improvement board must assign accountabilities for all actions agreed, along with clear and measurable targets covering the areas of priority action and improvement areas identified in the Ofsted and CQC report;
  - c. those accountable for the actions in the improvement plans must keep the content up to date with a risk register and mitigation plan updated in line with the board meeting cycle and provided to the board in advance;
  - d. reports to the improvement board should include data analysis and evidence of the impact of improvements on the lived experience of children and families;
  - e. the board should maintain an action and impact log which is updated at each meeting, highlighting which objectives are slow to progress and where contributions need to be strengthened;
5. Invitations to improvement board meetings must be sent on each occasion to the appointed DfE adviser, NHS England adviser and to the Department's case lead.

## **Department for Education Stocktake reviews**

6. Reviews, including areas of priority action deep dives, may cover, but are not exclusive to: leadership; governance; co-production; quality of workforce training and support; multi-agency arrangements including joint commissioning, education, health and social care provision; the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans and engagement with children, young people, families and carers.
7. Prior to any reviews, the Council should provide to the Department its own assessment of improvement. This may include, but is not limited to:
  - a. Progress against improvement plan objectives;
  - b. Feedback from parents and carers;
  - c. Clear information about local accountability and governance structure;
  - d. The documentary evidence used to plan, track and evaluate the impact of actions.

This may include:

- i. a progress update against each area of priority action and improvement area;
  - ii. a dashboard of performance measures showing whether targets and milestones are being met in a timely manner; any slippage; evidence of impact and whether the local area is on track to meet the next set of milestones;
  - iii. evidence that key partners, including children and young people, families and schools are playing an active role in improving services.
8. From time to time, the Department may require that a diagnostic review or assessment is undertaken by a party agreed with the Department.
9. For any review or assessment, the Council must provide the person(s) conducting it with:
  - a) access to, and time with, staff and leadership;
  - b) accurate and up to date data on performance and quality;
  - c) facilities to carry out the reviews; and
  - d) access to minutes of meetings or any other relevant information.

## **Timescales**

10. The Council should aim for the impact measures set out in the improvement plans to be evidenced by the agreed target dates. The Council should also aim for actions included in the improvement plans to be delivered by the end of February 2025 or sooner. The Improvement Notice will not be stepped down until sufficient progress has been evidenced, and the Secretary of State agrees.

**Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:**

11. Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Improvement Notice or should the Secretary of State not be satisfied with the council's progress at any stage, they may choose to invoke their statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to take any further actions deemed necessary to secure the improvements required in SEND services.

Signed:

Date: 09 November 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Schofield'.

Paul Schofield

A Senior Civil Servant in the Department for Education