

Improvement Notice

To: London Borough of Bexley ('the Council')
Civic Offices
2 Watling Street
Bexleyheath
Kent
DA6 7AT

This Improvement Notice is issued to London Borough of Bexley on 1 May 2024 following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 23 February 2024 and in response to the areas of priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.

1. This notice is given to address the three areas for priority action and two areas of improvement identified in the report of the inspection published on 23 February 2024.
2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and its other local partners as set out in section 28(2) of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Improvement plan

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 23 February 2024, as well as any recommendations made by the Department, including:
 - leaders should work together at pace to ensure children and young people are being prepared effectively for adulthood; particularly focusing on ensuring that annual reviews from Year 9 and any subsequent amendments to EHC plans include a clear focus on how the child or young person will be supported to achieve the best outcomes in adult life; and identifying and going on to plan how to meet the child or young person's preparation for adulthood (PfA) outcomes;
 - leaders should urgently improve arrangements for ensuring that amended EHC plans are completed and issued in a timely way, and better reflect the current needs and provision for the child or young person particularly as they move through phases of education. Processes for the quality assurance of

EHC plans and annual reviews should be improved and embedded;

- leaders should quickly address the delays and gaps in the commissioning and provision of speech and language and occupational therapies to ensure equity of provision across Bexley for children and young people to access speech and language and occupational therapies in order to meet their needs;
- leaders should work together to improve how the voices of children and young people are used to make improvements to services and their experiences including how children and young people are actively involved in co-production;
- leaders should improve how data and information about children and young people with SEND and their families are used, so that practitioners have access to up-to-date and accurate information and everyone works in a more joined-up and effective way.

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 Council and the 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 have clearly assigned 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 improvement 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 improvement board should maintain an action and impact log which is updated at each meeting, highlighting objectives which 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 EHC 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 plan to be evidenced by the agreed target dates. The Council should also aim for actions included in the improvement plan to be delivered by the end of August 2025 or sooner. However, the Improvement Notice will not be stepped down until sufficient progress has been evidenced, and the Minister 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: 01/05/2024

Anna Barker

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education