

West Northamptonshire Improvement Notice

To: West Northamptonshire Council ('the Council')
Angel St
Northampton
NN1 1ED

This Improvement Notice is issued to West Northamptonshire Council on 14 June 2024 following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, 18 March 2024 and in response to the areas for priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.

1. This notice is given to address the five areas for priority action and five areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection published on 12 July 2024.
2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with Northamptonshire Integrated Care Board ("ICB"), Northamptonshire's Children's Trust ("NCT") and its other partner agencies ("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 address the following areas of priority action and areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report:
 - a. ensure that there is a partnership commissioning agreement in place based on a thorough joint strategic needs assessment
 - b. urgently to address the length of time families have to wait for EHC needs assessments. Leaders should ensure that plans are completed in a timely manner so that children and young people start to receive the support they need at the earliest opportunity
 - c. ensure that when they are issued, EHC plans are accurate and contain key information from all partners. They must check that children and young people's needs have been fully identified in these plans to enable appropriate provision to be put in place based on accurate assessments of needs. Area leaders need to assure themselves that contributions from all partners at annual reviews ensure that EHC plans remain accurate and reflect children and young people's current needs
 - d. address the current waiting times for speech and language therapy, mental health services and neurodevelopmental assessment. Children and young people's needs should be identified at the earliest opportunity for plans to be developed to support them. Health leaders

must ensure that there is sufficient support for families across all services while they wait for an assessment or support

- e. improve the joint approach to speech, communication and language needs. They should work swiftly to embed the recommendations from phase one of the improvement model so that children and young people with SEND benefit from this approach
 - f. accelerate their plans to improve transitions and support more effective preparation for adulthood. They need to ensure that all settings understand the statutory guidance on preparation for adulthood set out in the SEND code of practice. There needs to be more timely and effective communication so that transitions to different settings and services are managed in a way that reduces the stress and anxiety for families
 - g. develop a partnership approach to working with mainstream schools to ensure that rates of suspensions and exclusion decrease for children and young people with SEND
 - h. provide clarity on exactly how Alternative Provision (AP) will be used as part of the partnership's SEND and AP strategy. This will then enable strategic commissioning of AP to ensure that these placements adequately meet the needs of children and young people with SEND
 - i. continue their work with mainstream schools and partner agencies so that the 'SEND ranges' are used to ensure that all children and young people with SEND benefit from a consistently applied graduated response
 - j. ensure that improvements made to services will be fully effective in addressing area-wide issues and contribute towards key priorities in the partnership's SEND and AP strategy
4. The improvement plans should also include any further recommendations from the Department for Education as a result of ongoing support and intervention.
 5. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
 - a. the Council must ensure there is an improvement board, with an independent chair agreed by the Department and attended by key leaders across Education, Health and Care services, including the Chief Executives of the Council, the ICB and the Children's Trust, 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 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
6. 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.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

7. The DfE adviser and NHS advisers will provide regular updates to the Department of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice; improvement against the Ofsted and CQC requirements; and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey.

Department for Education Stocktake Reviews

8. Officials or advisers from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement agenda at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate.
9. 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.
10. 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

11. From time to time, the Department may require that a diagnostic review or assessment is undertaken by a party agreed with the Department.

12. 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
- d. access to minutes of meetings or any other relevant information


Timescales:

13. 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 November 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:

14. 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, she may choose to invoke her 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:

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education