

Improvement Notice

To: Suffolk County Council ('the council'),
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX

This Improvement Notice is issued to Suffolk County Council on 28 May 2024. It follows the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection of Suffolk Local Area Partnership, published on 30 January 2024 and is in response to the areas of priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.

1. This Notice is given to address the two areas for priority action and three areas for improvement identified in the Area SEND Inspection of Suffolk Local Area Partnership report published on 30 January 2024 (Annex 1).
2. To comply with this Notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and its other partner agencies ("partners"), as set out in section 28(2) of the Childrens and Families Act 2014.

Improvement Plan

3. The Council's improvement plans should improve the provision of SEND services, taking account of the views of parents, children and young people and education leaders where relevant. The improvement plans will be set out in the Priority Action Plan and updated Strategic Plan and must cover the areas of priority action and improvement areas (set out in Annex 1) identified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report published on 30 January 2024, as well as recommendations made by the Department, including:

- a) Leaders should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning to deliver systems with measurable impact that will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. There should be a particular focus on governance, quality assurance approaches to address weaknesses effectively, multi-agency working, transitions and planning for adulthood for children and young people.
- b) leaders should cooperate to take urgent action to improve the timeliness and quality of the statutory EHC plan processes, EHC plan needs assessments, and EHC plans and annual reviews, particularly using annual reviews to amend the quality of existing EHC plans where required. Plans should meaningfully capture the views and aspirations of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that they get the right support at the right time.
- c) Leaders should use performance data and information effectively to inform their evaluation, sufficiency planning and joint commissioning of SEND services.
- d) The partnership should engage effectively and widely with children and young people and their families, developing effective communications systems, and acting to address parents' and carers' concerns at an early stage, to reduce dissatisfaction and reduce the need for parents and carers to have to follow formal routes.
- e) Leaders should ensure that providers of services for children with social and emotional well-being, mental health and neurodiverse conditions work jointly to meet the needs of and improve outcomes in these areas for children with SEND.

4. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:

- a) the Council, **by 7 June 2024**, 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 LA and the ICBs, the statutory Director Children's Services, the Children Services Accountable Officer, the ICBs Accountable Officers, education leaders, representative from parent carer forum; and appropriate elected members of the council to a timetable agreed with the Department;

- b) the Improvement Board, **by the first stocktake meeting in September 2024**, 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, **by the first stocktake meeting in September 2024**, must demonstrate the systems in place to 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. Evidence of the systems being in place must be provided **by the first stocktake meeting in September 2024**;
- e) the Improvement Board, **by the first stocktake meeting in September 2024**, must create and continue to maintain an action and impact log which is updated at each meeting, highlighting where 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 SEND adviser, NHS England adviser and to the Department's case lead.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

6. The DfE SEND adviser and NHS England advisers will provide regular updates, including where specific requests are made, 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 deep dives into areas of priority action, 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.
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; and
 - 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 plans to be evidenced by the agreed target dates. The Council should also aim for actions included in the improvement plans to be implemented by the end of September 2024. However, the Improvement Notice will remain in place 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 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:

E. M. Williams

Date: Tuesday, 28 May 2024

Emily Williams A Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education

Annex 1: Ofsted/CQC Inspection Outcome: Areas for Priority Action and Areas for Improvement

Responsible body	APAs
<p>Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and North East Essex ICB and NHS Norfolk and Waveney area ICB</p>	<p>The LAP should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning. This needs to deliver systems with measurable impact that will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. In particular they should urgently improve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the robustness and impact of governance • the rigour of quality assurance approaches, so that these give the information leaders require to address weaknesses effectively • the frequency and quality of multi-agency working • the management of transitions and planning for adulthood for children and young people, starting in the earliest years, and across services in education, health and care, including putting steps in place to reduce NEET, so that they are better supported to lead fulfilling lives.
<p>Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and North East Essex ICB and NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB</p>	<p>Local area partnership leaders should cooperate to take urgent action to improve the timeliness and quality of the statutory EHC plan processes, EHC plan needs assessments, and EHC plans and annual reviews, particularly using annual reviews to amend the quality of existing EHC plans where required. This should ensure that plans meaningfully capture the views and aspirations of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that they get the right support at the right time.</p>
<p>Areas for improvement</p>	
<p>Leaders across the partnership should use performance data and information effectively to inform their evaluation, sufficiency planning and joint commissioning of SEND services</p>	
<p>The local area partnership should engage effectively and widely with children and young people and their families, developing effective communications systems, and acting to address parents' and carers' concerns at an early stage, to reduce dissatisfaction and reduce the need for parents and carers to have to follow formal routes.</p>	
<p>Leaders across the local area partnership should ensure that providers of services for children with social and emotional well-being, mental health and neurodiverse conditions work jointly to meet the needs of and improve outcomes in these areas for children with SEND.</p>	