

Improvement Notice

To: North Northamptonshire Council ('the Council')
The Cube
George Street
Corby
NN17 1QG

This Improvement Notice is issued to North Northamptonshire Council on 30 April 2024 following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 25 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 four areas for priority action and six areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection published on 25 March 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 cover the following areas of priority action and improvement areas identified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report of 25 March 2024:
 - a. ensure there is a clear and cohesive strategic direction for the local partnership which demonstrates how improvements will be made for key areas such as transitions, working with health on waiting times and support available while waiting, and the accurate identification of children's and young people's needs
 - b. ensure that there is a shared understanding and approach to joint commissioning in a way that meets the needs and improves the lived experience of children and young people with SEND and their families.
 - c. put in place the appropriate governance arrangements to deliver and monitor their SEND and AP strategy, including strengthening information available to all partners and using this information to hold each other accountable
 - d. jointly and accurately identify, assess and provide for the needs of children and young people with SEND including multi-agency assessment of needs, timely issuing of high quality EHC plans and a holistic oversight of these

- e. continue to work with health partners to address long waiting times for children and young people with SEND requesting support from health services, ensuring support is in place during wait times
 - f. work with health partners to improve access to specialist equipment in a timely manner for children and young people with SEND
 - g. coordinate partnership approach to supporting children with SEND in the early years, ensuring needs are assessed as early as possible and that processes support children in their setting and through transition to their next placement
 - h. strengthen relationships with mainstream schools and support to ensure that attendance improves, and rates of suspensions and exclusion decrease
 - i. develop a strategic approach to commissioning sufficient quality alternative provision and accelerate initial discussions with other local areas to ensure that children and young people with SEND can access suitable education
 - j. improve timeliness of support and guidance for children and young people with SEND and their families during transitional periods, allowing them to make fully informed decisions about next steps and support
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 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:

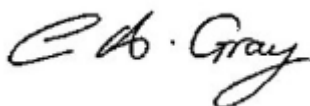
- a. access to, and time with, staff and leadership
- b. accurate and up to date data on performance and quality
- c. facilities to carry out the reviews
- d. access to minutes of meetings or any other relevant information

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 September 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: 30 April 2024

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education