

Worcestershire Improvement Notice

To: Worcestershire County Council ('the Council'),
County Hall,
Spetchley Road,
Worcester.
WR5 2NP

This Improvement Notice is issued to Worcestershire County Council on 23 September 2024 following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 15 July 2024 and in response to the areas for 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 report of the inspection published on 15 July 2024.
2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and its other local partners ("partners"), as set out in section 28 (2) of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Improvement plan

3. The Council's improvement plans working with the ICB, 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. The improvement plans will be set out in the Priority Action Plan and the updated Strategic Plan and must cover the areas for priority action and areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report published on 15 July 2024, and the recommendations made by the Department for Education, including:
 - a. The Council, working with the ICB should urgently address the long waiting times for:
 - community paediatrics;
 - the neurodevelopmental assessment pathway;
 - occupational therapy; and
 - physiotherapy.Leaders should also improve the support available while children and young people wait.
 - b. The Council, working with the ICB should urgently develop genuine co-production with children and young people with SEND at a strategic level. Children and young people should feel they have fully participated in the process of developing services, improvement strategies and plans that meet their needs.
 - c. The Council, working with the ICB should work at pace to implement the action plans that underpin the SEND strategy and seek to address the areas identified as priorities. This includes ensuring that:
 - all services gather accurate data and use this to effectively identify where there are gaps in provision and commission appropriate services to address those gaps;

- existing processes in place for tracking attendance are more rigorous in ensuring that no child or young person is missing education for prolonged periods of time;
 - the time children and young people wait for a specialist place is reduced so that AP provision is available to those children and young people who need it; and
 - the planned increases in specialist places does not compromise the quality of existing places and enables valuable outreach to mainstream settings to continue.
- d. The Council, working with the ICB should work at pace to continue to improve the timeliness and quality of new EHC plans and the quality of existing plans. This includes:
- Ensuring new EHC plans are issued within the statutory timeframe;
 - ensuring that new EHC plans accurately reflect the child or young persons' needs through appropriate contributions from all relevant professionals across education, health and care; and
 - ensuring that the annual review process takes place within the appropriate timescales and amendments to plans include updated views from children and young people and their families.
- e. The Council, working with the ICB should continue to address the long waiting times for children and young people requesting support from CAHMS.
4. The improvement plans should also include any further recommendations from the Department 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, which is 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 areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted and CQC report and any actions recommended by the Department for Education;
 - 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 Department for Education appointed SEND advisor, NHS England advisor and to the Department's case lead as external attendees, rather than members of the board.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

7. The Department for Education appointed SEND advisor and NHS advisors 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 from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the improvement plans 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, carers, children and young people;
 - c. clear information about local accountability and governance structures;
 - 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, each area for improvement and Department for Education recommendations;
 - 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 Plan 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 October 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: 23/09/2024

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education