

Improvement Notice

To: Lancashire County Council ('the council')
County Hall
Fishergate
Preston
Lancashire
PR1 8XJ

This Improvement Notice is issued to Lancashire County Council on 5 June 2025 following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 12 February 2025 and in response to the areas for priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.

1. This notice is given to address the three areas for priority action and two areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection published on 12 February 2025.
2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria 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 12 February 2025, and the recommendations made by the Department for Education (DfE), including:
 - a. Leaders from the local authority and ICB should urgently work together to improve their shared strategic governance, oversight, commissioning, support, challenge and planning of services for children and young people with SEND. They should implement and monitor effective strategies to improve the experiences for children and young people with SEND in education, health and social care across Lancashire.
 - b. Leaders from the local authority and ICB should significantly improve the process, timeliness, quality and oversight of EHC plans and annual reviews.

- c. Leaders from the ICB and local authority should continue to work together with urgency to address the delays and gaps in service provision within the current neurodivergent pathway. This is to meet the full range of needs of children and young people with SEND across Lancashire.
 - d. Leaders across the partnership should continue to improve their communication strategies at all levels. This includes communicating with children and young people with SEND and their families so that they are kept better informed about the support that they receive, plans in place to improve their outcomes and where to access support and guidance while waiting for assessment.
 - e. Leaders across the partnership should continue to work collaboratively to ensure that young people with SEND from across the whole of Lancashire are well prepared for adulthood and transition.
- 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, Parent/Carer Forum and appropriate Elected Members of the Council, to a timetable agreed with the Department. It is expected that the Chief Executives of the Council and the ICB, and the Children's Services and ICB Accountable Officers are held to account for the improvements required to be made through effective engagement with the Board and escalation/resolution of matters arising as the Board identifies;
 - 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 DfE;
 - 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 DfE 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 DfE 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 DfE 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 June 2026 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: 5 June 2025.....

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mark Taylor', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Taylor

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education