

Improvement Notice

To: Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Council ('the council')
Civic Centre
Bourne Avenue
Bournemouth
BH2 6DY

This Improvement Notice is issued to Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Council on 15 April 2026 by the Department for Education as part of a step-down transition from the Council's SEND Statutory Direction. It recognises the progress made to date while noting that further assurance is required.

1. This Improvement Notice is issued as part of the step-down transition from your SEND Statutory Direction (Dated: 26 February 2024). During this period, the Department requires additional assurance that the improvements identified through the Local Area SEND inspection, published on 8 February 2026, are sustained and embedded. This will be achieved through your Local Area SEND Reform Plan, which we regard as a critical test of the durability of the progress made to date.
2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with NHS Dorset 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 steps to be taken

1. The Department expects the Council, working with its local area partners and NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board (ICB), to develop a high-quality Local SEND Reform Plan. The plan should set out how the local SEND system will be transformed to deliver a clear pathway towards an inclusive and sustainable system, meeting the core minimum requirements covering:
 - a. Experts at Hand Offer
 - b. Sufficiency and Place Planning
 - c. Effective Practice and Partnerships.
2. As part of this notice, the Council is expected to evidence that the progress achieved to date is both sustainable and embedded through the submission of a high-quality and ambitious Local SEND Reform Plan, which will serve as the vehicle for driving system-wide change.
3. The Local SEND Reform Plan / Strategic Plan must clearly reference the actions you, working alongside your partners will take to address the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report, including:

- a. The local area partnership should continue to improve the provision and impact on outcomes for children and young people with SEND, particularly those with SEMH needs. The partnership should ensure that the workforce has sufficient expertise and resources, and that parents, carers and children and young people are involved in these plans.
 - b. Local area leaders should ensure that children, young people and parents and carers are well informed about the partnership's provision through an effective local offer to support children and young people with SEND.
 - c. Partnership leaders should continue to accelerate recovery plans for children and young people with SEND awaiting assessment for neurodevelopmental needs. Leaders should further expand support for those children and young people on the waiting list and continue to embed a needs-led approach for BCP.
4. The Council's plans, working with the ICB and other partners, should together demonstrate the appropriate and sustainable improvement of services, taking account of the views of parents, children and young people, school and education leaders and putting co-production at the centre of improvement activity.
5. The Department will continue to provide a SEND Adviser and Finance Adviser to offer support and challenge to the Council and its local partners on identifying and delivering against the necessary improvements. The Council should collaborate with these advisers, and any other experts deployed, to provide support and challenge until such time as the Department is satisfied that this is no longer required.
6. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
 - a. the Council must ensure the existing Improvement Board takes equal responsibility for ensuring that they deliver against the core minimum requirements of the Local SEND Reform Plan and areas for improvement, that there is clear accountability through a named Senior Responsible Officer for the Local SEND Reform Plan and that improvement actions are progressed in alignment with the Local SEND Reform Plan;
 - b. the Improvement Board must have clearly assigned accountabilities for all actions agreed, along with clear and measurable targets covering the development of the Local SEND Reform Plan and any actions recommended by DfE.
 - c. those accountable for the actions in the plans must keep the content up to date, with a risk register and mitigations updated in line with the meeting cycle and provided to the Improvement Board in advance.
 - d. reports to the Improvement Board must include data, analysis, and evidence of the impact of improvements on the lived experience of children and families, and the Council ensures that they submit quarterly SEND Reform Plan data returns.

- 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.
7. Invitations to Improvement Board meetings must be sent on each occasion to the DfE appointed SEND adviser, NHS England adviser 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:

8. The DfE appointed SEND adviser and NHS advisers, working alongside DfE and NHSE officials, will provide regular updates to Ministers and the Department more generally of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice, and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey.

Department for Education Stocktake Reviews

9. Officials from the Department will undertake regular reviews measuring progress at least every three months and more regularly where appropriate.
10. Reviews against your progress and the development of a Local SEND Reform Plan 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.
11. 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 Strategic Plan and Local SEND Reform 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 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.
12. From time to time, the Department may require that a diagnostic review or assessment be undertaken by a party agreed with the Department.
13. 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 conduct the reviews; and
- d. access to minutes of meetings or any other relevant information.

Timescales:

14. The Council must ensure that the Local SEND Reform Plan is submitted in line with expected deadlines, and that delivery against the core minimum requirements is evidenced throughout this period.
15. DfE officials and Ministers will review the submitted Local SEND Reform Plan and assess, by September 2026, whether it meets the requirements set out in this notice.
16. If your plan is approved, and you have also continued to demonstrate ongoing sustained progress against improvement actions, then the Department will step down and close your Improvement Notice at that point and then continue engagement and monitoring with you outside of intervention.
17. If your plan does not meet all the minimum requirements stated in the guidance, the Department will work with you and support you in re-submitting a plan that does meet these requirements. During this period, your Improvement Notice will remain in place until an acceptable Reform Plan is produced and approved.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:

18. 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: 15 April 2026

Jessica Trahar

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education