Improvement Notice

To: Leeds City Council ('the Council')
Civic Hall
Calverley Street
Leeds
LS1 1UR

This Improvement Notice is issued to Leeds City Council on 18 November 2026 by the Department for Education, following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection, published on 18 June 2026 and in response to the areas for priority action and improvement highlighted in the report

1. This notice is given to address the 3 areas for priority action and 4 areas for improvement identified in the report of the inspection published on 18 June 2026.
2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with West Yorkshire 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

3. The Department is in receipt of your Priority Action Plan and updated Strategic Plan, which set out how the Council will address the areas of concern identified as a matter of urgency.

4. These improvement plans must cover the areas for priority action and areas for improvement as specified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection report published on 18 June 2026:

    a. Leaders across the partnership must continue to act with urgency to:
        i. ensure that EHC plans are completed and issued in a timely way,
        ii. ensure that EHC plans better reflect the current needs and provision for the child or young person across health, education and social care, particularly as they move through different phases of education
        iii. improve and embed processes for the quality assurance of EHC plans and annual reviews.
    b. The local area partnership must urgently assure itself that:
        i. all children and young people who are waiting for an neurodevelopmental (ND) assessment are receiving the continued communication and support that they need while they wait
        ii. an effective plan and process is in place to monitor children and young people who are experiencing long waiting times for health

services such as ND assessments to minimise adverse impact on their health and wellbeing

c. The local area partnership must urgently improve leadership and governance systems to drive whole-system improvement:
    i. to make best use of collective resources and joint commissioning to respond to immediate needs and deliver more long-term strategy to ensure a coordinated and equitable approach; and
    ii. strengthen multi-agency data-sharing across health, education and social care and ensure a better overview of provision, including Alternative Provision (AP), and resources, and improve accountability and help measure impact so that children and young people with SEND are well known to services and monitored effectively.
d. Leaders across the partnership should improve the transition for children and young people between children's and adults' services in health, education and social care, and improve their strategy in relation to preparing children and young people with SEND for adulthood from the earliest years.
e. The local area partnership should ensure that there is equitable health provision across schools in the city and have assurance of the quality and effectiveness of these services.
f. The local area partnership should strengthen its oversight and quality assurance of all Alternative Provision to ensure that:
    i. it has clear oversight of which children and young people are attending AP, including those on part-time, flexible or bespoke arrangements, so that timely intervention can take place when needed; and
    ii. systems are in place to independently quality assure all AP, providing a reliable understanding of its availability, effectiveness and impact across Leeds.
g. Leaders across the partnership should improve communication with parents, carers and professionals to ensure that:
    i. there is meaningful co-production of services and ways of working
    ii. stakeholders are well informed about service developments and how their contributions have influenced change and improvements; and
    iii. they have the knowledge of and can navigate the local offer effectively and can access the range of support services and resources available in their communities.

The Council worked with partners to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan, which is reflected within the Strategic Plan. During the period in which the partnership is delivering necessary improvements against the specific areas set out in this Improvement Notice, the Council and its partners must demonstrate the ability to also show progress against its Local SEND Reform Plan.

5. The Council's 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 put co-production at the centre of improvement activity.

6. The Department has provided a SEND adviser and a finance adviser to offer support and challenge to the Council on identifying and delivering against the necessary improvements. The Council should work with these advisers, and any other experts deployed to provide support and challenge, until such a time that the Department is satisfied this is no longer required.

7. 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 the DfE;
    c. the Improvement Board takes equal responsibility for ensuring that they also deliver against the core minimum requirements of the Local SEND Reform Plan, and that improvement actions are progressed in alignment with the Local SEND Reform Plan;
    d. those accountable for the actions in the 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;
    e. reports to the Improvement Board should 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;
    f. 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.

8. 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 as members of the board.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

9. The DfE-appointed SEND adviser and NHS advisers, working alongside regional representatives from the respective departments, will provide regular updates to Ministers and the Department more generally 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. This includes the quality, ambition and implementation of the Local SEND Reform Plan by the Council and its partners.

Department for Education Stocktake Reviews

10. Officials from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the Priority Action Plan and the Strategic Plan at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate. We will also discuss delivery of your local SEND reform plan at least every three months, as part of the ongoing monitoring of these reforms. Where possible, we will seek to align timings so that stocktake review meetings can also cover that quarter's monitoring of your reform plan.

11. 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; alternative provision commissioning; and engagement with children, young people, families and carers.

12. Prior to reviews, the Council should provide to the Department its own assessment of improvement. This may include, but is not limited to:

    a. progress against the Priority Action Plan, the 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 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.

13. From time to time, the Department may require that a diagnostic review or assessment is undertaken by a party agreed with the Department.

14. 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:

15. The Council should aim for actions included in the Priority Action Plan and updated Strategic Plan to be delivered by the end of October 2027 or sooner, and for the impact measures set out in those plans to be evidenced by the agreed target dates. The Council should also ensure that delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan is evidenced.

16. This Improvement Notice will not be stepped down until the Minister agrees that there is sufficient evidence of improvement against all of the areas for improvement. The Council should continue to deliver its local SEND reform plan alongside this improvement activity – if implementation of the reform plan is not line with expectations, the Department may consider a revised or new Improvement Notice to address this.

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

17. 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: 18 November 2026**

Alison Wilson OBE

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education