

18th July 2024

EDUCATION

The Local Area SEND inspection report has now been published. This is not an inspection of the Council but an inspection of all organisations and partners that work with children and young people with SEND. The report highlights several areas that are failing children with SEND and their families – all of which were recognised by the Council and partners and included within our SEND & AP Strategy.

The report recognised that too many children with SEND and the families must reach crisis points before they receive the appropriate support. The report also recognised the significant improvements made in the last 12 months, including how *'parent voices and the views of children and young people with SEND, are now heard much more effectively'*, especially during the co-production of the new, ambitious SEND & AP Strategy that was approved through Cabinet last July. Although the recent improvements are noticed, all partners accept that too few families have not experienced improvements and remain in need of additional support.

The local SEND partnership has already submitted a detailed action plan to OFSTED, and this has been approved by OFSTED, DfE and NHS England. The local SEND partnership will continue to meet with DfE and NHSE throughout the next 18 months to ensure the progress needed is on track.

As you know, the Council has already agreed to invest an additional £1.35m to recruit additional staff to help accelerate our improvement journey. This is on top of the £450k additional investment in Educational Psychologists who are already improving the timeliness and accuracy of our assessments for children with an EHCP. We have already appointed 22 new members of staff and are continuing to recruit an additional 13 new officers as part of this Transformation Programme.

Last Tuesday, members of the West Northants Schools Forum agreed to support an additional investment of £2.8m in local schools to support improvements in provision for children with SEND and those with additional vulnerabilities. This approach will support our local education system to keep more children in their local schools, and within the communities they live in.

On Wednesday 10th July, we held our second conference for all maintained schools. These sessions have been very useful to help improve working relationships with our school leaders and to provide clarity over the priorities for the Council – not just in education, but also with the wider developments of Family Helps, our Early Help offer and the new 0-19 re-commissioning activity that is underway. From September, we will introduce a new way of working with schools, based on national good practice, to provide opportunity for all local education leaders to work with the Council and partners to tackle some of the wicked issues affecting children across West Northants.

As the end of the school term nears, many schools and providers have celebrated the amazing achievements of their pupils this year. There have been several notable outstanding achievements this year, and I am sure we will celebrate pupils' exam results in the summer. One specific success story, the Council have supported this year has been the expansions of the Northampton Saints Foundation who work with children and young people who have been excluded from mainstream school, and often who are on the edge of the care or who are at risk of abuse or exploitation. Last Wednesday evening, we joined the Foundation and the pupils to celebrate their successes – a number of young people who were disengaged from education, and pupils who were involved in County Lines have been supported to remain in education or training and are progressing on to Apprenticeship or work placements from September.

I would also like to highlight that one of our outstanding Headteachers, Shez Webb from Northgate has been recognised for her ongoing commitment to children with SEND and has been awarded an MBE. Everyone who works with Shez and her school will know that this accolade is very well deserved – a huge congratulations to Shez and everyone at the school.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust

NCT continue to make good progress in achieving and sustaining key performance and quality indicators. Of the 4 system inspections NCT is commissioned for, the following three are now graded 'good': Fostering, Adoption and Youth Offending Service, with the fourth inspection (Children's Services) expected late 2025 or early 2026.

The Transformation and Efficiencies Board (West and North) continues to work alongside our Trust to consider how we improve practice further and improve outcomes as well consider efficiencies as we prepare for the contract sum negotiations for 2025/26 that will begin in August.

Demand into the service continues to be high and very complex, we continue to work as a system to find ways of addressing this further. Development into the Early Help process will assist with this, and we have proposed disaggregating the current county wide Early Help Board so that a West Northants Early Help Board, focusing on our challenges and geography, will drive improved processes. This will allow us to link Family Hubs, 0-19 arrangements through a Section 75 arrangement with NHFT and our Youth Offer together to allow preventative work and reduce demand on children's social care.

The procurement of a new case management system for children's social care was completed in June and this will enable practitioners to record their work more effectively and efficiently.

Councillor Fiona Baker

Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education