



Report of Councillor Fiona Baker Cabinet Member for Children Families, Education and Skills.

21st April, 2022

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE' CHILDRENS TRUST

In NCT, Senior leadership team are working hard to ensure workforce feel supported as the restrictions have been lifted and we maintain positive trajectory of the improvement work ensuring readiness for the full inspection due to take place later in the year.

Practice

Positive activities during the week of 14th March to promote excellence in practice, with opportunities for learning and development for all practitioners linked to World Social Work day on 15th March

Participation & Engagement Strategy 2022- 25 finalised to ensure voice of child is central to all we do

External scrutiny of services - a front door review completed by Lincolnshire Partners in Practice and a review of placements and commissioning completed by People Too, strengths identified in services alongside development areas, recommendations are implemented to ensure further improvement.

Sufficiency of placements remains a challenge- contract for 2 new emergency children's homes and planning application in process

Research commenced and will be completed over the coming year by Northampton University looking at the impact of using Signs of Safety (SofS) (practice model adopted by NCT) with children, young people and their families within NCT

Inspections

NCT Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) had its first inspection 31 January- 4 February 2022, the report has been published, overall experiences and progress of children judged to be Good. Inspection of Thornton House Children's home- report published in January 2022; the inspection took place on 14-15 December and concluded with a judgement of Require improvement to be good in all areas. Further interim inspection in March 2022 Ofsted judged that the home has improved effectiveness

First Inspection of Phoenix Children's home, positive outcome, the report is yet to be published. Preparation for a full ILACS inspection with a focus on improving the quality and consistency of practice. Self- evaluation has been completed and will be used in regional peer challenge events. Require improvement to be Good would be positive outcome on consideration of inadequate position prior to constitution of the Children's Trust.

HMIP inspection of the YOS is overdue and preparation for this is ongoing.

Leadership

100% Supporting Families Payment by Results target achieved. This is significant achievement, Northamptonshire in the previous years has not performed well both regionally and country wide ranking 3rd from the bottom in the reporting tables.

9-month Leadership Development Programme for all leaders in NCT has been completed. Impacting on practice and culture focusing on empowering staff.

Focus on recruitment and retention and achieving stability within the workforce, in particular social worker teams (in February 2022, 17.0% agency staff from 21.7% in November 2020)

Improved relationships and creative efforts to attract and retain staff have seen the partnership between NCT and Opus shortlisted in the Annual PPMA Excellence in People Management 2022 Awards. Winners will be announced on the 28 April 2022

National Offer Day - 1 March 2022

Applications for Year 7 places in secondary schools – September 2022

	WNC	NCC	
	2022	2021	2020
Total number of applications	4786	8931	8854
Online secondary applications	98.7 (4722)	98.8 (8820)	98 (8703)
1st preference %	79.4 (3798)	80.7 (7203)	79 (6999)
2nd preference %	12.8 (612)	11.7 (1049)	13.1 (1160)
3rd preference %	3.6 (175)	3.3 (294)	3.9 (344)
One of the three preferences %	95.8 (4585)	95.7 (8546)	96 (8503)
Alternative school offer %	4.2 (201)	4.3 (385)	4 (351)

EDUCATION

Introduction

This report outlines some key activities in the main statutory duty areas – school admissions, school standards, pupil place planning and school organisation, pupil attendance, special educational needs elective home education and safeguarding.

School admissions

In March, places in year 7 were co-ordinated by the council and the allocations sent to parents. The council is not an admissions authority for any WN secondary school, and therefore its sole role is to co-ordinate the admissions process according to the admissions policies of the 17 academy trusts with secondary schools in our area.

The process was successfully completed, with the allocations available to parents logging into the website at 12.00.1 am on 1 March. The sole – but important – It should be noted that, at present, WN council's admissions service is hosted by North Northants council, but that this will be disaggregated on 1 September 2022. The attached table shows the percentage of first to third d preferences this year.

School standards

The service is responsible for monitoring the performance of school in our area. It is, crucially, responsible for supporting and challenging 'schools of concern'. These are maintained schools that meet the criteria of 'concern' in the Department for Education's 'school causing concern' statutory guidance.

At present, there is only one maintained school causing concern although this school has not been issued with a formal warning notice. The school is working closely with school effectiveness manager but is due to become part of a MAT in September. There are three additional schools that are party to the local authority's informal schools causing concerns process. All schools are working positively with the school effectiveness team.

While having no legal role with academy schools that are 'of concern', the service is currently working with three. It is assisting with the development of the curriculum and assisting with safeguarding issues, alongside the safeguarding service (see below).

Pupil place planning and school organisation

As demographic growth means the need for expansions and new schools in the secondary sector, the school place planning service – currently hosted BY NNC, but due to transfer to WNC on 1 September, has planned.

First, "bulge" classes – that is, expansion of a single year group in year 7, which then runs through the school as an extra class or classes, and is bigger than the preceding and, usually, unless there are two classes, succeeding years. This has been the main mechanism by which WNC has been able to provide a sufficiency of secondary school places in the last three and the coming academic year, particularly in the wider Northampton area.

Between 200 and 265 'bulge' places (the equivalent of a medium sized secondary school) have been added across existing schools in the area between September 2019 and 2022 to ensure that WNC's statutory obligations were fulfilled in this regard.

This approach was adopted for two reasons; the level of capital funding available during this period was sufficient for the provision of bulge places only (as opposed to permanent extensions) and that the WNC have been awaiting the delivery of a new secondary free school in Northampton by the DfE (announced 2019). The provision of additional, permanent capacity would have resulted in an over-supply of secondary places once the new school opened.

Second, 'expansions' – that is, where an existing school expands by (usually) a class of 30, which means an extra year 7 class every year for five years, with the classes running through the school. WNC has delivered or has acted as the funding body for permanent extensions at three WNC secondary schools since 2020. These expansions have been undertaken at rural schools and have utilised S106 funding that was received by WNC as a result of new housing development being delivered in these areas.

Third, new schools – where a new school is commissioned by the council or provided by the DfE. WNC has worked with local MATs to stimulate free school bids (particularly across the secondary phase of education) in areas of basic need demand and been successful in the doing this.

At an average cost of £25m for a new secondary school this mechanism has been essential to WNC's ability to provide sufficient secondary school places. The new school that is planned to open at Wantage Farm, Moulton, in September 2023. Is an example of this.

WNC has also utilised S106 funding to fund and deliver new primary schools required to meet the pupil yield from new housing development across West Northants. Marie Weller Primary School opened on the Towcester South SUE in September 2021 is the most recent example of this delivery method.

In some areas of West Northants (largely in those where there is no large scale housing development planned), the impact of exit from the EU and the pandemic has resulted in an over-supply of primary capacity. Due to this issue's ability impact detrimentally on school budgets in an affected area, this situation must be carefully managed and capacity removed by the LA as and where required.

SEND

The main activity, aside from 'business as usual – assessments, annual reviews and pupil placements, for example, has been starting the process of SEN strategic development. Looking at all elements of the work required to achieve our overall aim in our self-evaluation, which is described as **working to improve the outcomes and life chances of all children and young people in our area who have special educational needs**, we have identified six key areas for development throughout the three-year planning period, for initial discussion with partners as the basis for our 2022/25 SEND strategy:

- priority one: working closely in partnership with parents and their children – in too many cases, parents feel and have felt a lack of engagement with service providers;
- priority two: improving integrated working between the key agencies – schools, the education service, social care, the NPCF and the information and advice service;
- priority three: the recognition of additional needs at the earliest possible stage, and swift intervention to meet identified needs – in too many cases, this has not been achieved, leading to progress and attainment at lower levels than could have been the case for some children;
- priority four: ensuring local provision is responsive to needs and improves outcomes, especially but not solely strengthening inclusion in mainstream settings and schools: this is

a key and significant challenge, especially in the secondary phase of education, with too many parents of children with SEN unable to access a mainstream place, and increasing demand for specialist places;

- priority five: ensuring sufficiency of good quality specialist state school places: this is a key and central priority as the self-assessment shows that this is an area of significant challenge;
- priority six: the fair and efficient allocation of resources – the present funding system is unfair and in some cases results in insufficient resources: at the same time, the high needs block (HNB) has a structural overspend, which must be eradicated within the planning period.

The development of the workforce is critical to the delivery of the priorities, and each agency will be responsible for an annual workforce development plan. The two key workforce areas within SEND for the council are the SEN assessment service, and the educational psychology service.

The SEN assessment service had 11 vacancies shortly after vesting day. The service manager has recruited to all the vacant posts, and the service has been completely staffed from the end of March.

The nationwide situation with educational psychologists (EPs) is chronic, however, and there is a little chance of fully-staffing the service.

The AEP will carry our future adverts to recruit. Over time, we are hoping that this will improve our much needed staffing levels in the council. Staff in the service are also pleased to hear of the planned move to Soulbury scales and we are working closely with HR to ensure this is in place over the coming months

Since the work with schools is crucial to supporting the learning of children with special educational needs, the head of service is looking to sourcing advice for education, health and care (EHC) assessments to a third party provider.

Children missing from / missing out on education and elective home education (EHE)

We have accurate and reliable data, and good knowledge of the number of children who are CME, and the length of their time out of education. In summary:

- at the end of term 2 there were 364 children who were missing from education (MFE), which was a decrease from the peak of 620 in October 2021;
- the number of CMFE reduced between the end of the 2018/19 and 2020/21 school years – 411 and 332 respectively;
- the latest figures show 9 children MFE for less than a month, 94 from 1-3, 141 between 3 and 6 months and 54 from 6-12 months – we have been unable to locate the 76 children missing for more than a year, and it is highly likely they are not in the UK now;
- Covid restrictions led to 20 families in the West getting stranded overseas and the children's cases being kept open until they returned to the United Kingdom, and other families caught out in this way have chosen not to return to the UK;
- The largest number of CMFE are in key stage 2, followed by key stages 3 and 1 (see table 5, which shows key stage data by time out of education)

With regard to pupils on part-time timetables, we have information from schools, which is. However, we know that this is not comprehensive.

The council has a register of all children whose parents have chosen to home educate. In October 2021, 740 children were home educated. This grew to 811 by the end of January 2022.

Generally, the council has good systems in place in all the above areas that are commensurate with the actual and potential vulnerability of the children (and their families) involved. At the same time, there are key priorities for action in the 2022/23 financial (and school) year that will be the subject of detailed action plans.

Safeguarding

The council is responsible for ensuring all safeguarding allegations / concerns sent in by Ofsted are appropriately investigated. We are also responsible for the support and challenge of all schools and academies in our area relating to safeguarding.

At present, the service is supporting three academy schools though an evaluation of action plans to improve safeguarding. This has been welcomed by the trusts concerned. The service has also responded to xx Ofsted requests for information and action relating to safeguarding concerns since the beginning of 2022.

WNC's safeguarding service is currently hosted by NNC. However, there is an option appraisal being undertaken, after which members of both councils' executives will determine whether WNC should run its own child safeguarding service. At present, it is likely that a decision will be made to do this, with the likely date if it is agreed of 1 September 2022.

Councillor Fiona Baker

Cabinet Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills