

8 October 2020

Mr Colin Pettigrew  
Corporate Director, Children, Families and Cultural Services  
Nottinghamshire County Council  
County Hall  
West Bridgford  
Nottingham  
NG2 7QP

Michelle Sherlock, Designated Clinical Officer, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire  
County Clinical Commissioning Groups  
Terry Hayes, Head of Children's Nursing, NHS Bassetlaw County Clinical  
Commissioning Group  
Christopher Jones, SEND Strategic Development Lead, Integrated Children's  
Disability Service, Children and Families

Dear Mr Pettigrew

### **Ofsted and CQC visit to Nottinghamshire local area**

Following the Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) joint visit to Nottinghamshire, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills and the Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services and Integrated Care of the CQC, to summarise the visit findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic on children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Ofsted carried out this visit under a section 118(2) request from the Department for Education. CQC provided assistance to Ofsted under paragraph 9(1) of schedule 4 to the Health and Social Care Act 2008. The visit was carried out remotely. It was not an inspection and local areas are not required to publish or share this letter. This visit was carried out as part of a series, the findings of which will be aggregated into three national reports to support whole-system learning. The national reports will be published on Ofsted's and CQC's websites.

Thank you for contributing valuable information. During the visit, we spoke to local area leaders, parents and carers of children and young people with SEND who were chosen to be part of case studies and the education, health and care professionals who work with them. We also surveyed parents and carers, as well as children and young people with SEND over the age of 16 years.

## Context

The purpose of this series of visits is to support local areas to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people with SEND and their families, learn from what has happened and identify opportunities for improvement.

You can find more information about how inspectors carried out the visit at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-phase-area-send>

Inspectors were told that:

- At the beginning of the pandemic, leaders moved rapidly to set up systems to help professionals across education, health and care services communicate and work remotely. This enabled professionals to keep in touch with each other and to prioritise support and services for children and young people with SEND and their families.
- Service managers and practitioners experienced considerable stress and additional workload as a result of responding to the frequent changes in national guidance. This was often at short notice. They know that some families of children and young people with SEND may not feel that they received the support they needed during this difficult and worrying time.
- The vast majority of schools remained open during the pandemic, including during holiday periods. Leaders and education practitioners worked together to create school hubs. Parents and multi-agency service practitioners described staff in schools as being the 'mainstay' of support for children and young people with SEND during this time.
- Some parents and carers considered that remote and blending learning suited their children's needs very well. Professionals working in schools agreed that this was a positive approach for some children and young people. Some expressed a desire for this approach to continue for some pupils after the pandemic.
- During COVID-19 restrictions, risk assessments were completed for all children and young people with EHC plans as well as those with additional needs who practitioners deemed may need extra help. Risk assessments were used to plan individual packages of provision and advice for families. However, they were not always multi-agency in content and not all parents were aware that the risk assessment had taken place.
- Professionals working in the Integrated Children's Disability Service Assessment Team, completed structured telephone calls with families. This was to make sure children and young people's needs were being met and to identify when it was safe for them to return to school.
- The provision of some health services was reduced due to the redeployment of health professionals to focus on the national response to the pandemic. Where possible, health teams devised new ways of continuing to support children and

young people. For example, community paediatricians carried out virtual consultations instead of meeting children and young people in hospital clinics.

- Social care professionals continued their work with families using technology to support communication. They checked regularly on those who had a designated social worker before the pandemic. However, the care needs of some children and young people who did not have a social worker changed as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. The parents and carers of these children described feeling like they had reached 'crisis point' before getting help and support from social care professionals.
- Some parents and carers felt abandoned due to the restrictions imposed on services. Parents and professionals felt that the needs of children and young people with SEND had not been correctly prioritised in national guidance. For example, some families experienced the sudden withdrawal of essential health and care support for their children.
- Leaders are aware that the impact of the pandemic on parents and practitioners is ongoing. They are keen to reflect and learn from the way professionals have worked together in new and innovative ways to meet the needs of families during this difficult time.
- Leaders and professionals are positive about the approaches that they have adopted to work together to meet children and young people's needs. Some parents commented that their children preferred meeting professionals using technology. Professionals were also positive about this approach continuing in the future and being combined with face-to-face meetings.
- A number of parents benefitted from the hard work and support of individual professionals who went out of their way to help them cope in challenging circumstances. Some parents gave examples of professionals visiting food banks and delivering shopping for them. Others appreciated receiving resources to aid home learning such as laptops and standing frames. Most valued the availability of school staff for advice and support, which often went beyond learning and behaviour management techniques.

Leaders told inspectors that their emerging priorities for supporting children and young people with SEND include the following:

- Using their experiences of the pandemic to support improvement in services in education, health and care and to inform the implementation of the area's new SEND policy and action plan.
- Ensuring that the needs of children and young people with SEND, including those with EHC plans, are prioritised by all leaders across the local area.
- Developing a collaborative, multi-agency action plan for any future pandemic. Area leaders aim to set out clearly what arrangements will look like for children and young people with SEND.

- Working with education, health and social care professionals to develop a 'recovery curriculum programme' to support children and young people with SEND with their personal development, well-being and education during and after the pandemic.

Ofsted and CQC will not publish this letter and will keep it confidential as far as possible. This letter will be shared with Department for Education SEND advisers and NHS England SEND advisers. These advisers may then choose to offer further support to the local area based on the findings.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted**

Margaret Burke  
**Her Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted**

Rebecca Hogan  
**Children's Services Inspector, CQC**