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Area SEND monitoring inspection to Nottinghamshire Partnership

Between 14 and 16 July 2025, Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited Nottinghamshire, to decide whether effective action has been made in relation to each of the areas for priority action detailed in the inspection report published on 16 May 2023. The inspection was conducted under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. The inspection was paused in line with [Ofsted inspections and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#) policy on 16 July 2025. Inspectors resumed and completed the inspection on 22 July 2025.

I write on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) of Education, Children's Services and Skills and the Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services and Integrated Care of CQC.

As a result of the findings of the initial inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, HMCI required the local area partnership to prepare and submit a priority action plan (area SEND) to address the two identified areas for priority action.

The local area has taken effective action as it has taken reasonable steps to address all the areas for priority action identified at the initial inspection. This letter outlines our findings from the monitoring inspection.

The inspection was led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, accompanied by an HMI from social care; and two Children's Services Inspectors from CQC.

During the inspection, we spoke to local area leaders, parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and education, health and social care professionals. We also met with representatives of the parent carer forum (PCF), the Department for Education (DfE) and regional NHS England. We examined relevant documents and correspondence about the performance of the area in addressing the areas for priority action identified at the initial inspection, including the area's priority action plan and self-evaluation.

Findings

Area for priority action 1

Leaders, NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire ICB and education, health and care providers should cooperate to urgently identify, assess and provide for the needs of children and young people with SEND. This includes assessment of needs, timely issuing of education, health and care (EHC) plans and holistic oversight of these plans through annual reviews.

Outcome: Effective action

The partnership has redesigned its governance arrangements and strategic approach to improving services for children and young people with SEND across education, health and social care. The parent carer forum (PCF) is listened to and valued. They contribute as members of workstreams relating to the ongoing SEND improvement programme. This, and the oversight of the SEND partnership improvement board, has enhanced the way that leaders are held to account.

The partnership uses a range of data and performance information effectively. The introduction of a data dashboard now collates ICB and local authority data well. Leaders use governance and oversight structures to interrogate this data closely. Practitioners are working increasingly in a district model across Nottinghamshire. This allows professionals, such as district and family special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and early help workers, to develop an accurate understanding of children and young people's needs.

Partnership leaders have recognised the need to review and improve the structure and capacity of the team responsible for education, health and care (EHC) plan processes in Nottinghamshire, the integrated children's disability service (ICDS). Improvements in ways of working in the ICDS since the 2023 area SEND inspection, coupled with a successful 'grow-your-own' model to recruit and retain educational psychologists, has helped to increase the proportion of EHC plans completed within the 20-week statutory timescale. Some schools, and the SEND information, advice and support service (SENDIASS), reported an improvement in both the timeliness and quality of recent EHC plans.

Children and young people's EHC plans sampled during this inspection were timely, but their quality was variable. A new multi-agency quality assurance process provides useful learning to help improve the quality of EHC plans. Newer EHC plans are typically of a better quality. However, the advice provided by education, health and social care professionals about children and young people's needs that should inform

their EHC plans, is too variable. At times, this advice is useful in identifying and meeting the child or young person's needs but is not fully reflected in their EHC plan. Conversely, some advice is either not available or is not sufficiently specific about children and young people's needs. This hinders the ICDS's ability to draft an effective EHC plan.

The annual reviews of EHC plans for most children and young people are not timely. The partnership has identified this as a concern and have planned to improve this as part of the ICDS review. Some EHC plans sampled during this inspection had not been updated for a significant length of time, despite children and young people's needs, educational placements or living arrangements changing. This limits the usefulness of these EHC plans.

The partnership uses an online platform to support EHC plan processes. Some parents, carers and professionals welcome the transparency and efficiency that the platform provides. However, others reported problems with the platform and not having sufficient guidance to use it effectively.

The partnership has established several workstreams as part of their SEND improvement journey. The partnership's vision is increasingly well understood by education, social care and health partners. However, actions and progress towards milestones are not communicated to professionals, parents and carers consistently well. Consequently, some do not know about the successes and planned next steps in relation to the partnership's work on improving children and young people's outcomes and experiences. Some parents and carers reported better communication from dedicated professionals in the ICDS. However, others reported a lack of communication and continued frustration with the system.

Area for priority action 2

Leaders, including commissioners and providers, should act urgently to identify and address the delays and gaps in access to some health services, particularly speech and language therapy, neuro-developmental pathways and equipment services. They should also ensure that they use available performance data to identify where gaps exist and whether actions taken to address these are effective.

Outcome: Effective action

The partnership has established governance structures and workstreams to identify and address gaps in health services across Nottinghamshire. These are co-chaired by leaders in health and education. By using improved data and information, health

leaders have worked with stakeholders, including the PCF, to identify joint commissioning priorities. The new joint commissioning strategy has a focus on improving the support for children and young people's speech, language and communication; sensory; neurodivergent; sleep and/or occupational therapy needs.

Since the previous inspection, health leaders and partners have established an offer of support for children and young people waiting for their neurodevelopmental (ND) assessment. Children, young people and their families can access a range of online resources, workshops and face-to-face support sessions in district family hubs. A monthly newsletter outlines current wait times as well as signposting families to further support. Health leaders have ensured that once referred onto the ND pathway, parents and carers are notified promptly that their child has been placed on the waiting list. Previously, some families were waiting up to a year to hear if they had been accepted. Despite this work to improve the ND pathway, children and young people are waiting too long for their assessment. Recognising this, health leaders and partners are at the start of redesigning the ND service.

The partnership maintains oversight of the equipment needs of children and young people with SEND. Some school leaders reported that equipment used in schools that is no longer used, such as specialist seating and standing frames, is not recycled appropriately. Since the last inspection, improved cataloguing of equipment used by children and young people in the community, and refreshed protocols, help to ensure that children and young people get the equipment that they need.

There has been a slow pace of action to improve waiting times for speech and language therapy services. There has been some upskilling of staff to support children and young people with eating and drinking difficulties. However, some children and young people with speech, language and communication needs wait too long for assessment and support. Over the past 12 months, a pilot project which consists of an advice line and drop-in service to support children and young people who are waiting for a speech and language assessment has been launched. However, while the advice line is available for all, the drop-in clinics are only available for children who are under four years old. The impact of this pilot is yet to be fully evaluated. Furthermore, some parents, carers and professionals told us that they were unclear how to refer to and access speech and language therapy.

Next steps

Inspectors will reach an effective action outcome if, having gathered and evaluated evidence, they find that the local area partnership has taken reasonable steps to

address the area for priority action since the full inspection, based on the relevant evaluation criteria.

Effective action does not mean that the area for priority action is no longer a concern or that the local area can stop taking action to address it. Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation. Areas for priority action that receive an effective action outcome may still be identified as areas for priority action in future inspections. This can happen if the local area does not continue to take action and/or the action has not continued to have a positive impact on the experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Ofsted and CQC ask the local area partnership to update their priority action plan (area SEND) as a result of this inspection.

I am copying this letter to the DfE and regional NHS England.

Yours sincerely

Adam Sproston
His Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted, Lead inspector

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His Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted

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Children's Services Inspector, CQC

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