

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) News

August 2019

Issue 3

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) monthly newsletter. Working together we are committed to ensuring that our children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities have access to appropriate education, health and care services, as close to home as possible, so they can flourish.

As part of our Local offer, we will be working with children, their families and carers to design a system that works better and is sustainable.

This newsletter aims to keep you informed about the work taking place across our multi-agency partnership to make the very necessary and important improvements in the current service offer to our children and young people; as well as addressing the findings from the Ofsted and CQC inspection in June 2018.



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*Lead Officer, SEND / Assistant
Chief Executive for Birmingham
and Solihull Sustainability and
Transformation Partnership
(STP)*



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SEND Quality Assurance Framework and Action Plan

The multi-agency SEND Quality Assurance Group (QA) created by the SEND Board, have been working together to develop and implement a robust SEND quality assurance framework. This includes a number of elements:

- Multi-agency review and audit of EHC plans. The QA group have randomly identified and audited 50 plans over the last three months involving a multi-agency team including school, health, social care, and city council staff. Early lessons learned have been shared and an action plan created to address any identified shortcomings.
- The initial learning from this audit work includes the need to improve how the voice of children and young people is heard and responded to in the plan and the need to improve how health and social care advice and assessments are incorporated into the plan.

- A review of SEND related complaints/mediation/tribunals has been undertaken which included a review of individual agencies complaints related to SEND matters. Some mediation cases were also reviewed.
- One key message that came through reviewing complaints is that parents and carers feel unsupported and not involved enough in the development of their child's EHCP, and can often feel highly anxious about the process that is taking place.
- The development and implementation of internal SEND quality assurance mechanisms across all agencies, with the support of designate team - Designated Medical Officer (DMO) / Designated Clinical Officer (DCO).
- Ensuring that the lessons from this quality assurance work are linked to the SEND training that is being developed for all staff across the partnership and which will be rolled out over the coming months.
- Further audit days are scheduled as part of a rolling programme of quality assurance.
- Development of SEND dashboard for performance monitoring – to collect data from all key partners regarding SEND performance including key performance indicators. This will be reviewed at the SEND Improvement Board and will be one of the tools used to guide progress on the improvements needed to ensure children and their families have access to good quality services. Read more about this in the next newsletter.

Birmingham welcomes new Assistant Director for Inclusion and SEND

Nichola Jones who joined Birmingham City Council at the beginning of July, said: "I am delighted to have taken up the post of Assistant Director for SEND, in Birmingham, and Inclusion, and am really looking forward to leading and developing services and provision for some of our most vulnerable learners and their families."



"Appointed to address underperformance and a recovery plan in Pembrokeshire Local Authority for inclusion, wellbeing and disabilities, during a time when the authority had gone into special measures, I am now really looking forward to working with families, schools and support services here in Birmingham to address some of the challenges ahead.

My focus in the coming months will be working towards an effective early help offer, through the integration of teams, whilst at the same time having a real focus on developing local support and provision. I have always been passionate about the entitlement of all children and young people and I am really looking forward to working with schools, specialist teams and families to achieving excellence within the city of Birmingham.

Brought up in Wales, I trained and worked as a teacher, and gained a masters in SEN and the departmental prize for my research focusing on the role of the SENCO. Having a husband and three children in the teaching profession also keeps me well-grounded around the issues school face. During my time as president for the National Association for Special Educational Needs I worked with a wide range of UK experts in the field of SEND and I am looking forward to their support and input over the coming years.

As well as chairing national and regional boards in the development and implementation of the Welsh statutory reform for SEND, I was also seconded to advise Welsh Government officials as part of a multi-agency programme, 'Together 4 Children and Young People', established to improve emotional and mental health services across Wales.

Having relocated with my husband to start my new role as Assistant Director for Inclusion and SEND, I am really appreciative to the people of Birmingham for the friendly support we felt we have received since arriving.

I am really committed to ensuring the valuable contribution of families and the children and young people who are at the heart of the changes needing to take place and am looking forward to working with the forum for children and young people, as well as the parents' forum, to take forward the important SEND agenda."

Nichola Jones

Assistant Director Inclusion and SEND

Birmingham City Council's Education and Skills Directorate

Hearing the 'voice' of our children and young people

As part of the post inspection action plan, we need to work closely with both parents and carers and importantly with children and young people (CYP) to make sure we understand how things are working from their point of view.

With this in mind, as an initial start for this work, a number of informal focus groups led by educational psychologists took place in May, with children and young people in mainstream schools, to hear the 'voice' of CYP.

Amanda Daniels, Principal Educational Psychologist/Strategic Lead for SEND, Birmingham City Council, Education and Skills Directorate, says: "The focus groups were semi-structured with prompt questions agreed in advance to ensure that the groups covered the same topics but with enough flexibility to allow the conversation to flow. The psychologists who conducted the focus groups were very impressed with the young people who participated, saying they engaged well and had clear ideas on what works and what could be better."

Whilst this was an informal piece of research it has yielded some interesting and useful information, particularly:

- The need for adults to stand back sometimes and let young people have a go independently. Pupils talked positively about "Teachers that challenge you to do the harder questions and say don't give up."
- There was an over focus on English, maths and science when arranging support. One pupil said "Money goes into maths, English and science.... but we need new resources in the more popular creative/practical subjects."
- The pupils' views on mixed ability teaching versus setting. One group said "It's so hard to move up - the only way to move up is if someone is moved down. We would prefer to be in mixed ability sets."
- The overall positive experience of the pupils – whether or not they had an EHCP.

Amanda continued: “It was interesting to note that we need to make sure that professionals are taking every opportunity to help young people learn and work independently and not to assume they need help.”

“We aim to repeat the exercise with pupils in special schools to see if their experiences and views are similar or different and we are also looking at adapting the approach for use in primary schools.”

For more information about the focus groups or if you are interested in getting involved please contact Amanda Daniels: Amanda.Daniels@birmingham.gov.uk

‘Innovate to Save’ £1.4M Funding Update

Twenty-seven applications were received and reviewed by a small team of health, social care and educational professionals in July 2019. The purpose of the fund is to:

- Support Birmingham SEND Inspection Written Statement of Action (WSOA) objectives, priorities and targets;
- Ensure SEND service, provision and process costs are reduced or remain constant but quality of delivery improves;
- Support locality focused preventative working across schools, settings and consortia;
- Help support and develop SEND Local Offer infrastructure or sustainable capacity

Five applications did not meet the criteria and were rejected with 22 applications going forward. The roll out of the ‘innovate to save’ project work will begin in September 2019.

The application followed 9 themes:

- Early identification and intervention (7 applications)
- Building capacity across community hubs (6 applications)
- Developing a Birmingham forum for listening to the voice of the child
- Accessibility arrangements for examination
- Reducing exclusion (4 applications)
- Reviewing SEND provision in schools
- Mental health training
- Early Years SENCO training and hub working
- Transition

Next Steps

Project leads are coming together in September to share their aspirations and in particular the expected measurable impact of their ‘innovate to save’ bid. Lead Officers from health, social care and education will provide support and guidance and ensure that the projects link with Birmingham SEND Board objectives, in particular to build capacity in schools and settings to support the majority of learners with SEND.

Three review meetings have been set for November, January and March for the individual projects to share progress. The projects will be showcased at a SENCO conference, held in the summer term of 2020.

Building a bridge between parent carers and their service providers



Sabiha Aziz, who is the chair of the [Birmingham Parent and Carer Forum](#) has welcomed the new SEND newsletter and provides an update on the Forum's work saying: "We've had a busy period continuing the important work of the forum. The management committee has continued to work together with the authority on our work streams and there has been a noticeable increase in building our membership, which is open to any Birmingham family with a child with SEND aged 0-25, as well as out of borough families accessing Birmingham schools and/or services."

The Birmingham Parent and Carer Forum is a voluntary group of Birmingham parent carers whose purpose is to become the bridge between services and families and a collective voice representing all members and all disabilities. Its aim is to build strong and sustainable links between the local authority, the clinical commissioning group and the Children's Trust.

Sabiha continued: "As a strategic partner we are keen to bring the service user experience to the decision makers as well as report back to our membership on the changes taking place at a strategic level. We continue to adopt the 'you said, we did' ethos while fully understanding that galvanising the membership will be a slow process. The forum is making good progress and lots of work is happening around networking and joining up the silos of fantastic work which are happening across the city. Despite slowing down a little over summer, we are still available online and working to build the forum."

The forum is currently looking for parent representatives to get involved with its work.

To find out more about the forum or to get involved, please visit their website: www.birminghampcf.org and find them on social media at <https://twitter.com/birminghampcf> or <https://www.facebook.com/BirminghamPCF/>

Improving how SEND complaints are dealt with

A [parent and carer survey](#) took place in November 2018 and one of the issues identified was how complaints were dealt with. We know that it is in everyone's interest to try to resolve complaints at the earliest possible stage. Some issues can be resolved informally without the need to follow formal procedures. However, there are occasions when complaints have to be investigated formally, in accordance with the organisation's complaints procedure.

We want to learn from the complaints that we receive and use that learning to improve our services. For that reason, we have set up a multi-agency quality assurance group to review some of the recent complaints that we have received across education, health and care

services. In future editions of the newsletter, we will be sharing the common themes that emerge from the review and the actions that we intend to take to address them.

Families can provide feedback about Birmingham's local offer for children with special educational needs or disabilities using the [online feedback form](#) on Birmingham City Council's [website](#) or via the council's [comments, compliments and complaints](#) page. Concerns that are specific to [SEND statement, assessment or plan](#) can be registered [here](#)

SENCO Induction Pack

Funded by the Department of Education (DfE), Whole School SEND has developed the SENCO Induction Pack to support new SENCOs and leaders supporting SENCOs in their new role. The Leading Learning for Special Educational Needs and Disability CIC have developed and trialled this induction pack for SENCOs, with input from experienced and new SENCOs.

This useful resource can be downloaded for free by visiting the SEND gateway online, and visiting the [SENCOs area](#).

News in brief

- Improvements in [Birmingham's children's services](#) confirmed by Department of Education
- Council for Disabled Children (CDC), an umbrella body for the disabled children's sector, has issued a [new report on integrating services for disabled children](#). To find out more about the CDC and its work visit www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk
- The July 2019 edition of the Department for Education's 0-25 SEND newsletter has been published (see attachments). This edition focuses on: restraint guidance and consultation, Bercow: Ten Years On – first anniversary update, Further Education and Training Centres for Excellence in SEND, teaching online safety in schools' guidance, NHS Long Term Plan Implementation Framework. Previous issues can be found on the [CDC's website](#).
- Information about the [Birmingham Children's Partnership](#) (BCP) and its work, is now live on Birmingham City Council's website.

In the next issue

- *Performance scorecard for SEND*
- *You said, we did,*
- *Improving the local offer website*

**If you have any queries or would like to be kept up to date on the work of the BCP
please email: rob.willoughby@nhs.net**

Partner organisations:



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