

Appendix A1 - Findings of the SEND function Review & Local area assessment

The local area has had the benefit of a Local Government Peer Review (January 2018) (“LGA18”) and an internal review in January 2019; these show considerable crossover in their themes and recommendations, with many of the proposed preliminary tasks (for example: writing a strategy, strengthening leadership, joined up approach to improvement work) now established or in progress through the Local Area SEND Strategic Partnership Group.

The Partnership Group is currently in the process of finalising the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment SEND chapter (“JSNAS”) and Self-Evaluation (“SEF”) which add depth and detail to areas of weakness highlighted in the LGA report, as well as identifying other areas for attention; however, a relevant summary is included below. The recommendations of the JSNAS correlate to those of LGA18 and internal thinking.

The LGA18 noted that “it was difficult to see where the lines of accountability for SEND are to the Health and Wellbeing Board and ... that a SEN Chapter of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is in production but this is yet to be finalised.” It goes on to state that “the local area leadership needs to be ambitious for children in Bristol by focussing on outcomes and increasing the pace of change – the values underpinning the SEND reforms are vital in translating the SEND vision into action with the needs of the child at the centre of everything” and that “in order to achieve the cultural change needed across all partners in the local area the values underpinning the SEND reforms need to be fully understood and embedded in practice.”

On issues outside of the authority, the LGA18 found that “schools reported that there was a lack of challenge around poor inclusion practice between schools themselves and from the local authority [and that] expectations of best practice and the application of the Graduated Response needs to be clearer. LGA18 found “a great deal of evidence pointed to the fact that schools and services were focused [and that] there is a mixed understanding of graduated response and how Top-up Funding should be used by schools and settings”, also noting “there are concerns that there is a lack of effective identification of SEN in Bristol at an early stage. This means that not all children with SEN are receiving timely support especially those with less ‘visible’ needs.” The team were told that ‘top ups are depriving pupils of their statutory right to a plan, they aren’t working.’ This is particularly the case around SEN Support.” Internally it was noted that “the volume of requests for assessments and then the high ratio of assessments becoming plans is putting an unsustainable pressure on the team dedicated to processing these.”

The SEF finds that in 2018 0.7% of children in primary schools had an EHCP (or SEN Statement previously), a figure which has reduced significantly over the last 9 years and is half the England and SN average of 1.4%. Across all phases the percentage of all pupils with EHCPs in 2018 has decreased and was 2.4% in 2018. This is against a national increase in the numbers of pupils with EHCPs and is below the SN and England average of 2.9% pupils with EHCPs. However, the percentage of all pupils with SEN support is above the England average and in line with SN average. The percentage of requests to assess, which were agreed, increased by 10 % in 2017 and 19% 2019. The number of assessments resulting in an EHC plan rose from 46% in 2016 to 75% in 2018. Across a similar timeframe, the JSNAS records that 19% of children and young people with SEND do not feel listened to at school, suggesting a link with the 15% who also report they do not intend to stay in full time education.

There are concerns about the identification of SEN through to placement in independent settings identifying a clear nexus between practice, inclusion and placement and advises that the authority should “consider how further investment or a realignment of resources could be made to enable the Educational Psychology Team to take more of a formal lead on a SEN Advisory and Improvement

function with schools. This would increase the skills base of schools in respect of SEND, supporting the drive to make them more inclusive, increasing parental / pupil confidence in the mainstream, and reducing the need in some cases for more formal assessment. In turn, this will start to reduce the pressure on special school resources by educating more pupils with lower level needs in mainstream schools, leaving special schools to focus more on those with more complex needs. This will then leave placing a pupil in the independent sector as an exception.”

The LGA18 reports notes a highly mixed picture in the quality of education, health and care plans and suggests the review process should be utilised to capture the quality of EHC plans and make improvements to them, and “continue to improve the quality of the EHC assessment process and [EHC] plans, in particular health and social care input which needs to be stronger, timely and more visible.”