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26 September 2019

Ms Helen Watson
Executive Director of Children's Services
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Nicola Bailey, Chief Officer, County Durham and Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Groups
Caroline Cannon, Local Area Nominated Officer, Head of SEN/Vulnerable Learners

Dear Ms Watson, Ms Bailey and Ms Cannon

Joint local area SEND revisit in Middlesbrough

Between 8 and 10 July 2019, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) revisited Middlesbrough to decide whether the local area has made sufficient progress in addressing the areas of significant weakness detailed in the written statement of action (WSOA) issued on 19 May 2017.

As a result of the findings of the initial inspection and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) determined that a written statement of action was required because of significant areas of weakness in the local area's practice. HMCI determined that the local authority and the area's clinical commissioning group (CCG) were jointly responsible for submitting the written statement to Ofsted. The statement the responsible parties provided was declared fit for purpose on 22 September 2017.

Inspectors are of the opinion that the local area has made sufficient progress to improve each of the serious weaknesses identified at the initial inspection. This letter outlines our findings from the revisit.

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted and a Children's Services Inspector from CQC.

Inspectors spoke with children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), parents and carers, along with local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. Inspectors met with leaders and practitioners from the local area for education, health and social care. They considered 63 responses to the online survey for parents and carers and reviewed a range of evidence about the effectiveness of the local area's SEND arrangements.

Main findings

- The initial inspection found that:

There are fundamental weaknesses in the strategic leadership, governance and implementation of the disability and special educational needs reforms.

The partnership between local authority and CCG leaders has strengthened significantly since the initial inspection. There is now greater collective ambition for children and young people who have SEND. Crucially, local area leaders have secured the strong support of frontline staff who share their commitment to improving the outcomes achieved by this group of children and young people.

Local area leaders fully accepted the findings from the initial inspection in March 2017. They have used the findings to bring about improvement in education, health and care services for children and young people who have SEND and their families. Local area leaders have kept a close eye on the implementation and impact of their WSoA. They have worked hard to keep the actions in their plans on track. The fundamental weaknesses in the strategic leadership and governance of the SEND reforms are being tackled effectively.

Although the local area has made great strides in improving arrangements for identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people who have SEND, local authority and CCG leaders know that further, significant work is needed. They know, for example, that some services such as occupational therapy are not meeting the needs of children and young people who have SEND in an effective enough way.

The local area has made sufficient progress in addressing this area of significant weakness.

- The initial inspection found that:

Children, young people and their families have too little involvement in discussion and decision-making about the services and support they need. The local offer is poor and, as a result, children, young people and families have a weak understanding of the resources and support available in Middlesbrough.

There has been a marked improvement in education, health and care (EHC) assessment and planning. Families have greater involvement in discussion and decision-making about their children's needs and how best to support them. Summary assessment meetings (SAMs) are highly valued by families because they feel that their views and experiences are heard, understood and acted upon by local area leaders.

The quality of EHC plans has improved significantly since the initial inspection. Typically, plans are co-produced (a way of working where children and young people, families and those that provide services work together to make a decision or create a service which works for them all) well. Plans include helpful information about children and young people's needs. Importantly, local area

leaders have an accurate view of the quality of EHC plans. They know, for example, that the outcomes in plans, especially those relating to a child or young person's health, need further development.

Local area leaders have made a positive start to strengthening engagement and co-production with children, young people and their families. Improvements to the local offer are valued by parents and carers who, increasingly, say that it provides them with important information about where to get help and support. Individual families and groups of parents and carers, including 'Parents4Change', Middlesbrough's parent and carer forum, have contributed strongly to this improving picture. Crucially, however, local area leaders know that they have a long way to go to achieve the ambitions of the SEND reforms relating to individual and strategic co-production with children and young people who have SEND and their families.

Schools have contributed strongly to a programme of SEND peer reviews. A range of training focusing on improving provision and outcomes for pupils who have SEND has been developed and delivered in response to the findings from these reviews.

The local area has made sufficient progress in addressing this area of significant weakness.

- The initial inspection found that:

Leaders have an inaccurate view of the local area's effectiveness. They do not gather, analyse and use information and data to drive improvement in provision and outcomes for children and young people who have SEND.

The local area's self-evaluation provides a clear picture of the effectiveness of Middlesbrough's SEND arrangements. This is a notable improvement since the initial inspection in March 2017.

Local area leaders are now gathering information about the education, health and care outcomes achieved by children and young people who have SEND aged 0 to 25. They are beginning to analyse and use this information in a more systematic way. For example, information about educational outcomes is now being used to bring about improvement in SEND provision in schools and colleges.

Importantly, local area leaders understand the limitations of their current approach to measuring and evaluating the education, health and care outcomes achieved by children and young people who have SEND. Work on the development of a more integrated and holistic approach has started. The local area has a clear plan for strengthening this aspect of their work.

The local area has made sufficient progress in addressing this area of significant weakness.

- The initial inspection found that:

Strategic planning is weak and there is no strategy for jointly commissioning services across education, health and social care.

The local area’s strategic plan provides a strong starting point for sustaining improvement in Middlesbrough’s SEND arrangements. The partnership’s vision and strategy are clear and ambitious. Plans for each ‘workstream’ are detailed and local area leaders are checking whether the actions in these plans are on track. However, the evidence used to evaluate workstream plans does not provide enough insight into how actions have made a difference to the quality of services or the experience of children and young people who have SEND and their families.

The local area has a joint commissioning strategy and some services for children and young people who have SEND are being commissioned jointly by the local authority and CCG. There is a stronger partnership-wide commitment to jointly commissioning services in a way which is responsive to children and young people’s needs. At this stage, however, the voice of children and young people who have SEND and their families is not strong enough in commissioning decisions. Local area leaders have minimal evidence of the effectiveness or impact of services which have recently been jointly commissioned.

The local area has made sufficient progress in addressing this area of significant weakness.

As the local area has made sufficient progress against all the weaknesses identified in the written statement of action, HMCI recommends that the formal monitoring visits from Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England should cease. The decision about whether to continue the monitoring visits rests with the DfE and NHS England.

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Ofsted	Care Quality Commission
Emma Ing HMI Regional Director for NEYH	Ursula Gallagher Deputy Chief Inspector, Primary Medical Services, Children Health and Justice
Nick Whittaker HMI Lead Inspector	Lucy Harte CQC Inspector

cc: Department for Education
Clinical commissioning group(s)



Director Public Health for the local area
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NHS England