

Title of report: SEND Inspection Update

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 6 March 2025
Cabinet member:	Cabinet member children and young people
Report by:	Corporate Director, Childrens and Young People
Report author:	Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To share the feedback report from Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) following the SEND inspection of Herefordshire Local Area Partnership conducted in December 2024.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **Cabinet to receive and note the feedback from the published Ofsted report (Appendix 1).**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options. The local area partnership's arrangements have been judged by Ofsted and the CQC as leading to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements. The next full area SEND inspection will be within approximately three years.

Key considerations

2. Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND.
3. Herefordshire's local area partnership SEND inspection took place on 2 to 6 December 2024. The Ofsted and CQC findings can be found in full in Appendix 1.
4. The summary of findings is set out below with partner/service response where appropriate.
5. Ofsted and CQC found that, *'Families of children and young people with SEND have varying opinions about their experiences in Herefordshire... Key leaders across the partnership know the variable experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND across Herefordshire.'*

Partnership and Leadership

6. The report notes that leadership of the local area partnership has strengthened, both at strategic and operational level. Investment in workforce development and capacity is identified as a strength. The partnership has been highly responsive to adjusting the capacity of some teams to manage with increase in demand across services, such as in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS), the School's Well-Being and Emotional Support teams (WEST) and the health service therapists' teams.
7. Inspectors notes that investment in additional staffing and training across all partners has been effective in improving the identification, assessment and meeting of children and young people's needs.
8. Staff across the whole partnership are referenced strongly for building positive relationships with children and young people and listening to their views. The report notes *'Professionals know children and young people well.'*
9. A strong feature throughout the report is how well the local area partnership supports children and young people to prepare successfully for their next steps, including adulthood.
10. The report highlights the need for the local area to promote more widely how families can secure the help and support they need, including communicating the *'comprehensive short breaks offer'* more widely and *'...raising awareness of pathways to access assessment and support services.'*

Co Production

11. Co-Production across the local area partnership is described as *'strong.'* Inspectors cited the recent development of the Youth Employment Hub as, *'Already making a significant difference for the young people who access the service.'*
12. Our partnership is proud of its coordinated work with the Parent Carer Voice Herefordshire (PCV) group and our children and young people and our families. Inspectors noted, *'The development of the 'Herefordshire Helpers' has raised the profile of children and young people at the highest levels.'* Parent carer voice Herefordshire told inspectors that *'they feel heard and that their views are acted on by the partnership.'*

Education

13. The full complement of educational settings across Herefordshire are referred to positively throughout the report. Affirmative remarks about early years, schools, specialist settings,

alternative providers and residential special schools, including those located out-of-area, are referenced throughout the report.

14. It is pleasing that vulnerable groups are noted as well supported by our alternative providers, including Herefordshire Pupil Referral Service (HPRS). The report notes, '*For children and young people with SEND who might have faced exclusion, absence, or medical needs, the pupil referral unit (PRU), and other AP, provide timely intervention to reintegrate them into long-term, successful education, training and employment.*' It is important to note that the number of available places at HPRS is insufficient for the current level of demand and the buildings are in a poor state of repair. A business case to relocate the two HPRS centres on to one site in improved facilities, and to increase capacity is well underway.
15. The range of additional activities available to children and young people, beyond school and college was reported as a strength. Inspectors reported that early help services play a key role in directing and supporting families. The report notes, '*Children and young people with SEND spoken to during the inspection valued these opportunities to socialise with other children and young people with similar needs.*' The additional needs service notes that publicising the Local Offer more widely is a helpful next step.
16. Children and young people reported that they felt well supported and listened to by their school and college staff. The report notes that access to high-quality provision, including alternative provision, is preparing children and young people well for the next stage of education. Our specialist settings are praised for being, 'innovative in finding appropriate solutions for meeting the most complex learning and health needs.'
17. Ofsted found that, '*Across education, health and social care, there is variability in the timeliness of identification and assessment of SEND and issuing of EHC plans in the majority of cases.*' The additional needs service notes that the issuing of EHC plans is within statutory timescales in most cases. Herefordshire's performance against this measure is significantly above that seen nationally.
18. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) network is praised for its joint work between schools, social care and health providers.

Social Care

19. It is pleasing that inspectors found '*children and young people with SEND known to early help services access swift support from education, health and social care teams where appropriate.*' This is in line with ensuring that we understand the needs of children and their families, and that they have the right help at the right time.
20. The report identifies some real strengths in our social care teams including the quality of assessments that lead to appropriate support for children and young people. Inspectors commented, '*Disabled children and young people who receive a service from social care are well supported into adulthood.*'
21. The report recognises the strengths and continued commitment to children in care to ensure they understand their story. '*Some older children and young people with SEND in care are sensitively involved in developing their life stories, which aids their understanding and recollection of events and people that are important to them.*'
22. Inspectors describe effective and appropriate support for disabled young people who are leaving care. This includes receiving, '*Appropriate support to develop their independence skills for when they reach adulthood, and they are involved in preparing their pathway plan.*'

23. The Children with Disabilities Team is referenced as a strength in the partnership. Inspectors comment, *'Workers within the children with disabilities team understand children's needs. They are regularly visited; most disabled children establish strong relationships with their workers. Assessments are detailed and give a clear understanding of the child's world and the family context.'*
24. The inspectors identified that, *'Most disabled children and young people known to social care have plans that fully identify their needs. Plans are reviewed through regular multi-agency meetings, ensuring that most children and young people's plans progress and their needs are met. However, for some children and young people with SEND subject to child protection plans, changes in social workers can lead to them experiencing delays in having their needs met because records are not transferred effectively enough.'* The local authority is conscious and committed to the need for a permanent and stable workforce for children and families, and this is an ever improving picture.
25. The inspectors highlighted the, *'Comprehensive offer for short breaks, and currently, there is no waiting list for specialist short breaks for those children with the most complex learning and health needs. Much work has also been completed recently to increase the range of providers for short breaks. However, this offer is not consistently well communicated to children, young people and their families.'* The partnership is committed to making sure that children and families are informed about the available services and how to access them.

Health

26. Inspectors note, *'There are no extended waits for the core child and adolescent mental health services (CAHMS) team, meaning that children and young people are seen quickly. This is a timely and supportive service in identifying and supporting mental health.'*
27. The inspectorate recognised the positive impact of new ways of working, including drop-in clinics for speech and language therapy and physiotherapy and access to early years 'while you wait' groups.
28. Inspectors reported, *'Variability with access to health services in Herefordshire depending on age and need.'*
29. It was reported that there are comprehensive services for young children with a diagnosis of autism but limited for older children.
30. Health services transformation plans for therapies and neurodevelopment services were shared with inspectors noting these are *'at an early stage'* and have not yet significantly reduced waiting times. The local area partnership is committed to developing these at pace to bring about a stronger service offer to families.

Summary

31. Four areas of improvement are identified focused on:
 - Reducing waiting times across health services
 - Keeping families well informed about support while waiting for assessment and diagnosis of neurodevelopment conditions
 - Ensure sufficient staffing capacity and stability across health services
 - Promoting more widely the Local Offer to families.

32. The report makes four recommendations for improvement. This feedback and the priorities will inform the work of the area partnership to improve the experiences and outcomes for all children and young people with additional needs and disabilities in Herefordshire.
33. The local area partnership will receive its next full inspection within the next three years.

Community impact

35. The Council Plan 2024–2028 includes the ambition to ‘enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and benefit from communities that help people to feel safe and supported’ and more specifically, the council aims to:
- a) We want to support children and young people to thrive, be safe, and for families to be supported.
 - b) We believe that children and young people are best supported in their family networks and within highly effective schools and flourishing communities. Our children are the future. Sometimes children and families need our help.
 - c) We are committed to improving children’s services and providing support to families who need it. Acting on Ofsted inspection reports are part of our drive to improve our services to children and families.
 - d) We will support all children to have the best start in life.

Environmental Impact

36. There are no specific environmental impacts arising from this report.

Equality duty

37. There are no equality issues arising from this report.

Resource implications

38. There are no resource implications as a result of this report.

Legal implications

39. Section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004 requires local authorities to make arrangements that promote cooperation between local area partners to improve the well-being of children in the area. The purpose of the local area SEND inspection is to hold the local authority to account by evaluating how effectively it meets its responsibilities for children and young people aged 0-25 with additional needs and disabilities.
40. The inspection also assesses how local areas are fulfilling their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. It is crucial that the local authority develops and implements an action plan to address any inconsistencies or deficiencies identified during the inspection. This plan must detail specific actions to enhance the experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, ensuring they have the opportunity to thrive, reach their potential, and live fulfilling lives.

41. Failure to address the identified issues could result in legal challenges, as the local authority would be at risk of breaching its statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 and other relevant legislation.

Risk management

42. There are no new or additional risks arising from this inspection. Risks associated with SEND are monitored through the SEND Assurance Board.

Consultees

43. None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Area SEND Inspection Report.

Background papers

None identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 25/02/2025
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Pooja Nahar	Date 17/02/2025
Communications	Michala Lee	Date 21/02/2025
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Claire Powell	Date 15/02/2025
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by	Tina Russell	Date 26/02/2025
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