



WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SEND Peer Review

4TH – 7TH December 2017

Feedback Report

Peer review

The fundamental aim of the review is to help councils and their partners reflect on the provision in the local area for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It is important to remember that the review is not an inspection, it provides a critical friend approach to challenge the council and their partners in assessing their strengths and identifying areas that could be improved. The approach involved reviewing Worcestershire's self- evaluation; documentation and data and sample reviews of education, health and care plans. It also involved interviews with a range of children, parents/carers and staff from early years settings, schools, colleges, other providers, council and health commissioners and provider organisations. In addition, a number of visits to early year's settings and schools were carried out alongside a range of focus group sessions. It is important to recognise that the findings are based on this range of activity and Worcestershire is encouraged to reflect on what the findings mean in relation to the area as a whole.

The peer team

Peer reviews are delivered by experienced officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer review. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and their participation was agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer review at Worcestershire were:

- **Alan Clifton**, Lead Peer, Associate, LGA
- **Chris Jones**, SEND Strategic Development Lead, Nottinghamshire CC
- **Jayne Franklin**, Head teacher, The Children's Hospital at GreatOrmond Street & University College Hospital.
- **Leila Francis**, Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children, Mid Essex CCG
- **Sheelagh Sullivan** Head of SEN and Inclusion services, Peterborough City Council.
- **Venita Kanwar**, Review Manager, LGA

Scope and Focus

Worcestershire County Council requested an LGA peer review to assess the effectiveness and impact of implementing the SEND reforms.

The peer team evaluated the overall progress in the implementation of the SEND reforms against the following five themes:

- Leadership and governance of SEND across the local area
- Capacity and resources (including Finance)
- The identification of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- Assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- Improving outcomes for children & young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

In addition, the council asked the review team to look at:

- Have the council got it right in terms of the challenges and strengths for children and young people with SEND?
- Are the priorities right, in this period of development?

In essence, the review will assess how it all works in practice and whether this improves outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

1 Executive Summary

There are 122,815 children and young people in Worcestershire aged 0-18 years. Of these, 5,859 primary school children and 4,614 secondary school children have special educational needs. 2911 have a statement of SEND or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in 2016/17 (aged 0-25 years) (Data Source: Office of National Statistics, June 17, School Census Jan 17).

The total number of children and young people with a statement or EHCP has increased from 2489 in 2014, to 2911 in 2016/2017 (an increase of 17%) (Data Source: ONE/ Capita).

There has been an increase in the numbers of children and young people with SEND who require specialist school provision and an increase in pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLC). For children and young people aged 4-19, speech, language and communication is the most common need/disability type followed by moderate learning disability. Multi-sensory impairment is the least common disability (Public Health Profile 2017).

There is a strong commitment in Worcestershire from both Elected Members and Senior Leaders to improving outcomes for children and young people who have SEND. Elected Members and Senior Leaders are self-aware and have a good understanding of the main issues. Collectively they are leading the direction of travel for the SEND agenda at pace.

There has been a significant change in the leadership of SEND at all levels in the County during the last five months which is providing considerable momentum to the changes in service delivery. There is an SEND strategy for the local area in place with agreed priorities. At the time of the SEND peer review it was possible to identify the immediate impact the relatively new SEND senior leadership team was having, however too early to measure any sustainable impact on outcomes. It is important to recognise that the pace of change requires increased levels of communication with staff who are delivering on the SEND agenda in Worcestershire and while there is a SEND strategy now in place, staff, do not yet know and understand the local area's vision and priorities. In addition, the lack of clarity about future SEND education and skills structure within the Council is having an impact on morale. Communication during this period of significant change requires further attention to enable the full engagement of staff and stakeholders.

Plans to address capacity issues in special schools in the short, medium and long term are currently being considered. The Council is aware that they need to further consult and implement a solution to meet the needs of children and young people with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) where the requirement for a specialist school has been identified.

The multi-agency SEND Strategic Board has been an important development for Worcestershire and provides both leadership and governance for SEND in the local area.

SEND staff are confident in their leaders and have been provided with opportunities for professional development and networking. This has improved joint working particularly with the Educational Psychologists and professional boundaries are now clearer.

The Council is also experiencing challenges with the recruitment of key staff and in particular SEND staff. This has resulted in considerable delays in the assessment of children and young people with SEND and their needs not being met early enough. The Council is aware of the issues and plans to address this problem in the short term but this is likely to be an ongoing challenge for the Council.

The Council's finance team are confident about meeting the short-term efficiencies identified for SEND activity but recognise that financial pressures remain. They would encourage the service to discuss future demand by providing real time data (i.e. in school placements) to facilitate the improved forecasting of need and to manage budgets more effectively.

There is further work to be done to re-focus the relationship with schools so that Worcestershire can begin to monitor support, challenge and intervene for the benefit of children and young people identified with SEND. The early signals from head teachers of Special Schools is very positive about the new approach to developing relationships between them and the Council. For example, the peer team saw a willingness from SEND Co-ordinators to work collaboratively in the co-production of key documents involved in the EHCP process. Head teachers articulated a desire to work with the Council to ensure that the provision for children and young people with SEND actually meets the appropriate need and demand. However, the Council will have to challenge schools further to support a more diverse range of children and young people and thereby facilitate a more inclusive approach in some schools. The Council recognises that this is an area for improvement.

When appropriate, the impact of learning services delivered by the Council, and those commissioned by the Council, should be reviewed. This should consider the learning outcomes for children and young people with SEND. We regularly heard schools commenting on the inconsistency of SEND training support. There are some areas within Babcock Prime, the commissioned school effectiveness and improvement service, that schools have a confidence in such as the Hearing Impairment Team. However schools would like to see a consistency of quality across all services delivered by Babcock Prime and it would be helpful for the SEND senior leadership team to have a stronger oversight of the quality of training that is available and delivered. It was also recognized that the Complex Communication Needs (CNN) team, commissioned/funded by the CCG's and provided by WH&CT was similarly respected.

There is a need to increase the parent/carers and children's voice across all aspects of SEND provision. Parents and carers are keen to be heard and are confident under the new leadership that things are changing and that their views are becoming known. Parents and carers should be engaged to co-produce services that take into account the aspirations of families and this should include the 'seldom heard' families. The engagement of these groups will raise the awareness of Council processes that are currently felt to be confusing by families. The recent stakeholder

reference group is a welcome development. There is also work to be done by the

Council to stimulate feedback from families that is thematic rather than individualised. The overall message was that families want to be more engaged.

The target to convert all remaining statements to EHCPs remains a challenge for the Council, however considerable resource has been provided and there is a confidence that the current pace will result in the March 2018 target being met.

The voice of the child/young person and parent/carer in the EHCP process was limited and not always personalised within the Plan. Within EHCP's the identification of educational needs and the provision was generally good but further work is required to bring health and social care elements to the same level. The commitment of case workers in developing the plans was evident and this was despite a heavy workload. The Council needs to develop a quality assurance framework for EHCP's and partners should also be engaged in this to ensure the consistency and a continuous improvement in the outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

The Council and its partners should consider giving a greater emphasis to attainment levels and progress based on prior attainment for pupils with SEN Support or an EHCP. This should also include including post 16 and 18 outcomes for children and young people. The data for the Early Years Foundation Stage is promising, but further work is required at Key Stages 2 and 4. We would suggest that the improvement of educational outcomes and attainment progress is given a greater prominence within the SEND Strategy. The increasing exclusion rate for pupils with SEN Support, though a national trend, also requires further attention.

2 Main Findings

2.1 Leadership and Governance of SEND Reforms

There is undoubtedly momentum and pace to deliver an improved SEND service in Worcestershire. A relatively new leadership team for SEND has reinvigorated activity and worked with strong political commitment to introduce and implement the first SEND strategy for the county and establish a SEND Strategic Board which includes a range of partners. The strategy provides clarity around the future planning of provision to address the changing needs of the cohort and identifies five clear priorities for action and delivery.

It was evident that the Senior Leadership Team and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills were self-aware and this is important given the challenges for SEND services in Worcestershire with reports of limited school capacity and considerably stretched resources. Head teachers, staff, stakeholders and partners commented several times that the focus on the SEND agenda had improved considerably since the recent arrival of three key staff: The Strategic Lead for Special Educational Needs and Group Manager for Children with Disabilities Services, the interim Assistant Director for Education and Skills and the Group Manager (SEND).

The leadership team has reduced the uncertainty of focus for SEND at the operational and stakeholder level, with the vast majority of people interviewed now believing that services will begin to improve and that they are being heard. Peers were confident that the present leadership capacity would facilitate change with pace but were less confident about the long-term and sustainable nature of the senior

team. The Director of Children's Services was aware of the fragility of the team at this early stage in the improvement journey.

The political lead for SEND is committed and understands the issues for the service. His priority is to ensure that a short, medium and long-term plan is developed to address the capacity issues in specialist school provision for the children and young people who require it.

Parents and carers have welcomed the establishment of a stakeholder reference group. This has now met twice and it is hoped that the parent/carer voice will strengthen and become more established in the future. However, there is further work to be done in moving this stakeholder group from a position that is personal and individual to a collective response that identifies needs for the majority of families accessing SEND services.

The vision for SEND needs to be owned by staff. There is more to be done to communicate the strategic direction and message of the vision to operational staff. The Council needs to consider the various ways in which you can share your message with others that are creative and inclusive and that could provide the service with quick wins. Staff and stakeholders want to work with you on this and are keen to be involved.

There is good work underway with schools. There is now an opportunity to re-align the way that the Council works in partnership with schools. Strong relationships between the Council and all schools, both those maintained and within multi-academy trusts, will potentially improve the identification of children and young people with SEND and the outcomes they then achieve. The Council recognises this and needs to work closely with schools to embed this approach. The peer team heard positive comments from head teachers at special schools about the changes in the last five months, saying "it was like working in a different local authority".

The operational partnership between the Council and Babcock Prime and the delivery of commissioning and outsourcing demonstrates some good work by staff. At a future date this may need to be reviewed to establish whether there is collective and shared oversight between partners and a clarity on the future direction for the delivery of SEND services and improved outcomes for children and young people.

Worcestershire's priorities for SEND are focused and you understand the direction you are taking. They are:

- A person-centred approach
- Integration and operational delivery
- Early intervention
- Preparation for adulthood
- Workforce development.

The peer team suggest you consider changing the final priority to read "leadership management, workforce development and capacity". The leadership demonstrated by the current SEND senior management team needs to be maintained and distributed through the workforce to build capacity. A priority around improving attainment, and progress from prior attainment for those identified with SEND, is also worthy of consideration.

2.2 Capacity and Resources including finance

Although financial pressures remain, the finance team are confident in the short term of meeting the financial challenges for SEND. Key areas of risk moving forward are identified as:

- Out of county placements
- Transport
- Post 16

Worcestershire's funding for SEND in 2017/18 is £78.9m. This includes High Needs DSG of £39.5m which is mainly allocated for provision and £4.3m of this forms part of the Babcock Prime contract. Worcestershire's Non-DSG budgets total £39.4m. This funding is split between Worcestershire County Council (£15.3m), Public Health Grant (£8.8m), Clinical Commissioning Groups (£14.9m) and a one-off SEND Reform Grant (£0.4m). The Council's contribution funds home to school transport, social care staffing and services, commissioned services, SEN staffing teams and an allocation to Babcock Prime for SEND services and in particular the Educational Psychology Service. The SEN Reform Grant has mainly funded staff to undertake the EHCP reviews, an online service for the local offer, training for staff and mediation support.

You now have processes and systems in place to identify children and young people with SEND and make commissioning decisions based on individual need. However, as highlighted by your own teams, there needs to be a review of school placements due to changes in demand. An Integrated Commissioning Officers Group work together to identify care needs and require timely information about individuals. The Placement and Resource Panel includes education and social care decisions to be made in one place. There are further plans to integrate health decision making for appropriate complex cases in order that decisions are made based on hearing health, social care and education needs in one place. This will result in more timely decisions and effective use of resources. Budgets are aligned with health, but are not pooled. There is a joint finance group which reports monthly and shares regular information and it is important that this group track the impact of growth in specialist placements on the high needs block.

Data is now being recorded accurately on the management system enabling an increased confidence in financial planning for current and future demand on SEND placements.

SEND Case Workers report that they are provided with training opportunities that enable them to develop better practice and improve their networks and relationships with key partner staff. For example, Educational Psychologists have been invited to team meetings to discuss their role and the interaction between practitioners has resulted in improved joint working, improved quality of EHCP's and an understanding of professional boundaries.

The Council has undertaken a review of High Needs commissioning during 2017 and this has resulted in a High Needs Commissioning Strategy for 2018-2022. Partners stated that they had been fully involved in the review. The Strategy is regarded as an important document to support future work across the partnership in meeting needs through joint assessments and by association joint commissioning.

The staff in the Vulnerable Learners Service are committed and focused on delivering improved outcomes for children and young people. Learning support for vulnerable learners is a real strength across the county both within schools themselves and through the services provided through Babcock Prime. The Vulnerable Learners Service generally agreed that the SEND Strategic Board was a positive step forward and that the culture of change that is being established is key to improved accountability. There was a clear message of aiming for outstanding and a golden thread of non-negotiables which is leading to a more coordinated approach. There was an ambition from the SEND Strategic Board to aim for outstanding provision.

There were good examples of bespoke training delivered by the Vulnerable Learner Service in schools, for example in meeting the needs of those with speech, language and communication challenges. There was also a recognition that schools now needed to identify and broker support and as a result there are some opportunities for cooperative work being missed. There was evidence of clear accountability and joint working in areas such as medical needs provision, the use of the Social, Emotional Mental Health audit and toolkit and very clear action planning for children missing education.

As a result of the severe pressure on providing specialist school places, the Council recognise the need to take a strategic position around place allocation. Consideration could be given to the review of school admission guidance and associated decision-making processes to promote greater robustness and transparency. This will be essential if the Council is to facilitate some of the changes required. The Council may also wish to review the advice given to special school head teachers concerning their response to requests for placements from neighbouring local authorities when schools are beyond capacity numbers.

A number of head teachers feel that there are adhoc decisions being made regarding SEND provision and places and that as a result there are clear capacity issues in many schools, including a view that some children are not in the right setting to meet their needs. According to head teachers this has resulted in an imbalance in schools prepared to 'open their doors' in comparison to other neighbouring schools. Consultations and clarification around the SEND admissions criteria may help to alleviate some of this tension between schools.

Visits to primary schools revealed anxiety from governors and head teachers about capacity to provide increased levels of placements next year. The peer team were told that the increasing housing provision in Worcestershire alongside an increase of children and young people with SEND was not being strategically managed. Some special schools did not have the space to increase their footprint to accommodate more children and some schools were converting existing Information Technology rooms into classrooms to accommodate the increasing numbers of children. Concerns were heard around the potential for increased health and safety implications if schools continue to utilise additional space for classrooms.

Co-production is one of your priorities within the person-centred approach, however the peer team would ask the Council to consider it being integral to all priorities. Opportunities for co-production need to be identified, including at an individual level in the writing of EHCP's and in future service developments. Co-production will require resourcing but the benefits in terms of improved trust and confidence of parents and carers will enhance the SEND offer.

The SEND Senior Leadership Team are aware of the SEND (education and skills) workforce issues which includes an over-reliance on agency staff, difficulties in recruitment and retention and the impact that this has on workloads and reducing the morale of a committed workforce. Work has started on a re-structure of the department which will also address some of these issues. The recent support from the Group Manager for SEND has been very much appreciated by case workers, however even more effective communication at this time of uncertainty is essential. The work to improve the staffing situation should be a short-term priority.

The Council do not have a Designated Medical Officer (DMO) / Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) and the appointment to this role is a priority. This is because the DMO/DCO should provide overall strategic direction for the local health service in meeting statutory requirements for SEND, identifying priorities for development and facilitating improvement in implementation as well as being a point of contact for schools, colleges and health providers. They should work closely with the paediatric multi-disciplinary team in supporting all activities necessary to ensure that the health provider services and CCG meet their responsibilities for children with SEND.

2.3 Identification of Children and Young People with SEN and/or Disabilities

Educational Psychology services are provided through the Council's partner, Babcock Prime. A shortage of Educational Psychologists (EP's) together with a growth in Education, Health and Care Needs assessments and the demands of the conversion programme has been challenging for Worcestershire. However, recent efforts to recruit to the EP service have been successful and have had a positive impact on the timeliness of reports to the statutory process. Work has also been undertaken to look at the content of EP advice and it is recommended that this work continues with a focus on person centred approaches and outcomes.

There is evidence arising from pre-school forums that there is good cross agency working in early years. A range of professionals come together across the county to discuss referrals to the pre-school forum including health, private and voluntary settings, special schools, SENDCos and the children's community nursing team. Multi agency relationships in the forum are very good, though they feel they are 'firefighting' at times because of the limited access to the right provision.

Worcestershire is fortunate to have a number of schools that appear to offer strong specialist training to support the identification of need. There is good expertise but it would benefit from being better coordinated so that all head teachers and SENDCos have a clear picture of who can offer support where, when and at what cost and where enquiries should be made.

2.4 Assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

Worcestershire are on track to carry out the conversions from Statements to EHCPs for March 2018. To enable this deadline to be met, resource has been moved within the service and the impact can be seen in the improved figures. In 2014/15 there were 1744, in 2015/6 there were 1136 and in 2016/17 a vast improvement to 471. This is impressive.

An audit of the EHCPs by the peer team identified the use of professional and therefore inaccessible language in the plans and in associated advice. It is always a challenge to provide advice in an accessible way but it is important that parents and carers understand what is being written. It is also important for professionals to understand what advice is being given and the multidisciplinary nature of the EHCP runs a risk that the unique professional language associated with individual professions may not be understood by all staff. Consideration should be given to a rolling programme of staff development with the aim of ensuring partners focus on a person-centred process, particularly the importance of working with families to agree outcomes. It may also be beneficial to establish regular multi-agency audits of the quality of EHCPs alongside methods for collecting regular parents/young people/children's feedback.

SENDCo networks should be reviewed to try to increase cohesiveness and provide opportunities for SENDCos to work with the Council to develop best inclusive practice in Worcestershire. Head teachers and SENDCos commented that they were unclear about the content and cost of traded packages. Head teachers lack of clarity also extended to expectations about what should be provided by schools from delegated funding. In general, there may be some disjointedness and confusion in what is offered by different services and providers.

There are clear examples of outstanding SENDCo practice throughout the county but some feel isolated and unable to share expertise in a more co-ordinated manner. There is also a varied understanding of SEND from head teachers across schools. Many SENDCo's suggested they would welcome a lead role from the Group Manager, SEND, as long as roles and responsibilities were clear. This would enable frustrations regarding issues such as finance and banding to be discussed in joint forums.

There is clear intent to improve the quality and timeliness of EHC needs assessments under the new leadership. As mentioned previously, increased resources, improved communications between staff and managers as well as training input has resulted in improvements within the SEND team performance. The ambition to create a single assessment through one plan is to be commended. This development would significantly improve the assessment experience for parents and carers and the process would speed up as a result. There are other local authorities who have gone down this route and it may benefit Worcestershire to seek them out to inform their way forward.

As previously mentioned, quality assurance (QA) of EHCPs requires further focus. It was unclear to the peer team, who took responsibility for QA of EHCPs - when was it done; what did the process involve; what were the key messages arising from QA; and what might be helpful in the future to enable you to sharpen your strategic focus for EHCPs.

There would be benefit in the co-production of guidance with health colleagues on the provision of advice in order to support identification and assessment. The DMO/DCO post could lead this development.

When requesting advice from health professionals, the Council should share the 'family story' obtained from their discussion and meeting with the child or young person and parents. This would enable health professionals to provide advice about

how the child or young person's health needs impact on their ability to make progress towards their identified outcomes and aspirations.

The process for requesting and delivering health advice needs to be clear and well understood. A request for health advice with agreed information should be sent to a clearly established contact point, which may be to a DCO, a CCG officer or specific email address. Where a number of relevant health professionals are identified there should be a process to coordinate their health advice. It should not be submitted as isolated individual professional reports.

Multi-agency meetings are a key opportunity to share views as part of the development of an EHCP. The Council, CCG and provider organisations should jointly develop criteria setting out when health professionals are required to attend face-to-face meetings to discuss their advice, with clear expectations as to the purpose and benefits of this. It should be clear that where a child or young person has significant health needs or the health input is crucial to the development of an EHCP then health professionals will attend.

2.4 Improving outcomes for children and young people who have SEN and/or disabilities

The county has worked hard to achieve having 90% of schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted which is above the national average and the median for statistical neighbours. The judgements of OFSTED with regard to special schools are equally as impressive. There are good examples of outstanding inclusive practice in Worcestershire's schools. For example, small schools managing a real range of SEND needs in large classrooms using excellent Quality First Teaching strategies and working alongside parents and families to ensure adaptations are being made as early as possible. There were, however, concerns voiced by head teachers of special schools and some parents/carers that there was a reluctance by a number of schools judged as 'good' or 'outstanding' to admit students with additional needs fuelled by a concern about performance ratings being brought down.

Using information and technology more effectively would support improving outcomes. Worcestershire could consider investing in digital solutions that support parents, carers, children and young people to contribute directly to the assessment of their needs. A digital solution could also result in efficiency savings for the Council and an improved service user experience. The benefits could result in more meaningful outcomes and improved engagement and ownership of the processes resulting in a clearer understanding of needs to which better targeting of valuable resources could be made.

There is evidence of a cultural and process change in progress. This is due to the commendable drive and commitment of the Strategic Lead for Special Educational Needs and Group Manager for Children with Disabilities Services; Interim Assistant Director for Education and Skills; and Group Manager, SEND. They are focusing at all levels to improve SEND activity. The agreed vision and associated priorities that have been agreed at the Health and Wellbeing Board during the week of the peer challenge will drive the culture and process change required to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people. It was noted at most focus groups and interviews, that senior leaders mentioned above were pivotal in facilitating the change process, and were respected for doing so.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) were clearly focused on children's outcomes and were working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners. For example, the work that had been developed with 'Our Way' an advocacy group, building relationships and gaining trust. It was evident that they were a valuable resource, working in a supportive and enabling way, intent on further developing their services so that they were relevant to children and young people, for example, working in schools to support children, and attending annual reviews to support parent and carers.

There was evidence from head teachers of relationships being built with key partners. Head teachers that we met with very much welcome the new SEND strategy and want to be part of the 'conversation'. They are keen to work with The Group Manager, SEND, and have been impressed with the speed at which the interim leadership arrangements have influenced change. Head teachers can see 'green shoots' of change but commented that they are still very recent. Head teachers are keen to help influence the change needed regarding planning places and the Review Team would suggest not losing the momentum following on from the peer review.

There was evidence of the impact of support that is provided for young people post 16. This included the dedicated housing officer linked to pathways and enabling independence for young adults. The early help and supportive aspect of this role is vital to the success of independent living for young people, preparing them during transition and are having an impact in preparing young people for adulthood. The careers enterprise company was also evidence of creative practice for post 16 learners. Increased partnership development with Further Education providers will be welcome.

EHCPs need to have a focus on the preparation for adulthood. There was evidence from interviews that there was good work in progress to prepare young people for adulthood but it needs to be identified in plans and their outcomes.

Ownership of SEND is required across all of Worcestershire's partners. You may wish to consider the opportunity to have a conference for head teachers and the Council's SEND team to launch the strategy to provide more clarity for next steps and a shared vision.

From a health perspective, the CCG should review its role in ensuring that there is sufficient oversight to provide assurance that the needs of children with SEND are being met in line with statutory requirements.

The improvement of educational outcomes, attainment and progress, is included within the Integration and Operational Delivery priority of the SEND Strategy. We would suggest that it is given a greater prominence within the SEND Strategy. There is an awareness in the Vulnerable Learners team that data suggests attainment outcomes are not as strong as they once were and that collaboration and communication between SEND services and School Improvement partners in Babcock Prime is essential so that the gap does not widen any further. We acknowledge that the Interim Assistant Director for Education and Skills understands that a review of the delivery of commissioning and outsourcing support for school attainment is required.

It may be helpful for the SEND team to further develop their children and young people 'dash board' to accurately monitor predicted performance for both progress, from prior attainment and actual attainment levels.

Developing a person-centred approach is a priority for Worcestershire and the peer team support this. This needs to be followed through and become more evident in all aspects of assessments. It was very difficult to identify the input of parents/carers or hear the voice of children and young people in EHCPs. Parents and carers felt that they needed to be better heard by the Council and they are keen to work with you. Working alongside stakeholders will improve all aspects of the service, including access to online and web activity.

We understand the difficulties in reaching the seldom heard groups. You have a lower than national average of BME groups in Worcestershire at 10.4% of all children living in the area compared with 25.5% nationally. The largest BME group of children and young people are of the White Other ethnic group, comprised of a large number of traveller groups that we did not hear from. To develop a truly person-centred approach requires resource and investment to hear those that are particularly hard to reach and to give them a voice. You know where your gaps are.

3. Review of EHC Plans

The peer team looked at only a small number of EHCPs (18 were provided) and the peer team interviewed some of the case officers involved in the writing of the plans. The quality was generally found to be consistent. The plans were compliant in the sense that they contained all of the required sections although personal budget details were underdeveloped. The quality of information and advice received to inform plans from wider agencies was generally poor and there was over reliance on reports from Educational Psychologists. There was little evidence that the principles of new ways of working had been embraced and the production of EHCPs appears largely to be a very administrative process. Consideration needs to be given to structural and cultural change within the service to ensure implementation of new expectations and clarity relating to roles.

The following specific observations were made:

- In section A of the plan (the voice of the child and the parent) the information was limited and not always personalised.

- In Section B (Identification of need), education need was generally of a good quality. The health needs section was generally limited in detail and sometimes included provision as well. Social care needs were not always recorded when relevant.
- The commitment of case workers writing the plans is excellent.
- Health sections require more detail and evidence of holistic assessment e.g. emotional wellbeing, psychological health and sexual health.
- The parent voice needs to be included alongside the views of the children and young people. There is currently ambiguity within the document as whether both the parental view or child view is articulated clearly.

4. Areas for consideration

From the peer team findings there are some key areas for Worcestershire County Council and the local area to consider going forward:

- Deliver on your SEND strategy, taking every opportunity to engage staff and stakeholders in the next steps.
- Re-focus your relationships with schools – how you monitor, support, challenge and intervene for the benefit of children and young people with SEND.
- Consult and implement on a solution to meet the needs of children and young people with EHCPs where the requirement for specialist provision has been identified.
- When appropriate, review the impact of learning services both within the Council and those it commissions, to benefit outcomes for children and young people.
- Increase the parent/carers, children and young people's voice across all aspects of SEND provision including co-production of services and taking into account the aspirations of children, young people and their parents and carers.

5. Next Steps

The Local Government Association would be happy to discuss how we could help you further through Helen Murray, the LGA's Principal Adviser, e-mail helen.murray@local.gov.uk Tel: 07884 312235 or Claire Burgess , Children's Improvement Adviser, e-mail Claire.burgess23@gmail.com Tel 07854407337

Thank-you to everyone involved for their participation. In particular, please pass on thanks from the review team to Alice Edmonson for help prior to the review and during the on-site phase.

6. Useful references

Developing support and services for children and young people with a learning disability, autism or both (NHS England, 2017 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/developing-support-services-children-young-people-with->

[learning-disability-1.pdf](#)) might be helpful in order to assess where health services are in relation to the nine principles (in particular principles 3, 6, 7 & 9) and to identify any developmental actions or work required with the council.

Securing good quality health advice for education, health and care (EHC) plans
(Council for Disabled Children, 2017)

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Health%20Advice.pdf>)