



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Tina Russell, Director of Children's Services, Worcestershire Children First

Simon Trickett, Chief Executive, Integrated Care System (ICS) Lead Herefordshire & Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB)

1 November 2023

Dear Tina and Simon,

Re: EIGHTEEN MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW AGAINST YOUR ACCELERATED PROGRESS PLAN (APP)

Thank you for meeting with the Department for Education (DfE) SEND and NHS England officials on 27 September 2023 to review the progress you have made against your APP over the last eighteen months.

We are particularly grateful for the contributions from Families in Partnership (FiP), your Parent Carer Forum (PCF), along with school representatives. The local area partnership is committed and willing to establish more inclusive cultures to improve SEND services for the children and young people in Worcestershire.

The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to continue and accelerate improvement.

These included:

- The new processes which have been developed for pre-school children.
- Staff attendance at the Independent Provider for Special Education Advice (IPSEA) training to ensure understanding of the law relevant to their role.
- The establishment of a commissioning cycle to review sufficiency in Worcestershire which is now mature and complete. In your evaluation you recognised and acknowledged that, due to the need for further capital development, it will take time for the full impact of those changes to be felt by families in Worcestershire.
- The establishment of Community Resource Centres which provide holistic support to families.

- The Internship Programme, launched in September 2023, which is currently supporting eight young people and will support a further two Internships in 2024.
- FIP have demonstrated they now have clear actions that will support and enable parents and carers of SEND children to actively engage in strategic decision making, planning, commissioning, and service evaluation.

The Local Authority has clearly demonstrated its ongoing willingness to engage in offers of support.

These include:

- The Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme.
- Support through the RISE consortium.

Worcestershire Children First has also been identified as one of the Local Authorities in the West Midlands Change Programme Partnership (CPP), to develop, test and refine the flagship reforms set out in the SEND Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan.

Both in your documentation and during this progress review, it is the view of the DfE and NHSE that you have now been able to demonstrate clear and sustained progress for Workstream 1: *'The variation in the skills and commitment of some mainstream schools to provide effective support for children with SEND'*.

This means that we no longer need to continue with formal monitoring of this Workstream, for the following reasons:

- The launch of two programmes to promote inclusive practice, the active monitoring of "cold spots" and schools causing concern.
- The establishment of a robust framework to evaluate and monitor inclusive practice in Worcestershire schools, ensuring action is taken when concerns are raised. There is now a strong leadership team in place across the partnership who work closely with the wider community to ensure children and young people are receiving effective support in mainstream schools.
- There is now a toolkit in place to support schools to engage with parents and carers which has been co-produced by FiP.
- Clearer communication and engagement with the SENCo network is supporting inclusion in mainstream schools.
- There is training and support being provided in all schools. There are implementation plans with schools explaining how their inclusion offer can be improved, focusing on the use of teaching assistants and continuing professional development for mainstream teachers to improve pedagogy.
- The initial outcomes of assessments and the quality of education is showing an upward trajectory.

- We heard from the school representative, about cultural change in schools, and the openness of schools to participate, particularly with the Change Programme agenda, complimenting some of the work already being undertaken.
- Representations from the ICB have stated that there is support in place to enable schools to feel confident about inclusion and the management of familiar conditions.

I know that this positive result comes as the result of a great deal of commitment and hard work on the part of the Local Authority, the ICB, families and front-line staff across education, health, and social care. Please do continue with these efforts and build on the successes you have already achieved.

Your 24-month APP review to look at the three remaining workstreams will take place in April 2024. The workstreams are:

- *The lack of suitable specialist provision to meet the identified needs of children and young people.*
- *Improving the fragile relationships with parents and carers and a lack of meaningful engagement and co-production and collaboration.*
- *Improving the quality of EHC plans and increasing contributions from health and social care. The initial visit noted that the processes to check and review the quality of EHC plans were also ineffective.*

At this meeting, we would like to see further evidence of:

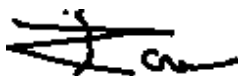
- The development of your capital plans to strengthen the range of specialist provision to meet the identified needs of children and young people. We note that you have stated this is a longer-term plan in your overall improvement journey.
- The development of FiP, and ongoing work with other parental groups to support parent carer participation.
- That the local area partnership can evidence that children and young people are engaged operationally and strategically in co-production and multi-agency working.
- That continued improvement of the assess and review function (that links with health and social care) can be evidenced to demonstrate oversight, actions, and impact on the experience of children and young people who receive SEN support or have an Education, Health, and Care plans (EHCP).
- Continued improvement on pre-school processes through the Joint Assessment meetings to support the transition from nursery to primary school.

In the meantime, the NHS England Adviser, Debbie Ward, along with Deanne Brownley as your DfE Case Lead, will continue to provide you with support and challenge. If you have any questions or need any further support, please contact either party in the first

instance.

We are copying this letter to Simon Geraghty (Leader of the Council), Mel Barnett (Director of All Age Disabilities 0-25), Andre Imich (DfE Lead Professional Adviser), Lorraine Mulronev (National Specialist Advisor-SEND, NHS England), Nick Harrison (NHSE), Deborah Ward (NHSE Adviser), and Deanne Brownley (DfE Case Lead).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Coneron', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard Coneron

Head of Vulnerable Children's Unit
West Midlands Regions Group