

# Area SEND inspection of Wiltshire Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 October 2024

Dates of previous inspection: 29 January 2018 to 2 February 2018

## Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.

The next full area SEND inspection will be within five years.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission ask the local area partnership to update and publish its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

## Information about the local area partnership

Wiltshire Council and NHS Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board (NHS BSW ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Wiltshire.

There has been stability in the senior leadership of Wiltshire's SEND services since the last inspection. This means that, although a new director of children's services has recently been appointed, the partnership is well established.

The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. On 1 July 2022, NHS BSW ICB became responsible for the commissioning of health services in Wiltshire.

Wiltshire Council commissions a range of alternative provision (AP). AP provides education for children or young people who cannot attend school due to their needs, or for those who have been or are at risk of being permanently excluded from school. The local authority maintains a directory of registered and unregistered alternative providers. They ensure that the quality of AP is checked regularly so they can review how well they meet the commissioning needs of the area. From this, the partnership can make informed commissioning decisions about AP rapidly when improvements are needed.

## **What is it like to be a child or young person with SEND in this area?**

Children and young people with SEND typically benefit from personalised provision delivered by dedicated staff from across education, health and social care. They often experience early help and support from front line services, who work together very effectively to meet children and young people's needs and improve outcomes. Children and young people with SEND are valued and prioritised in Wiltshire. The local area partnership is looking to continually develop and improve how it engages with children and young people with SEND. This includes ensuring that children and young people with SEND can contribute to their own planning.

When children and young people transition into school, practitioners have a shared vision and commitment to inclusion. Schools work proactively with council staff, health professionals and social workers to find ways to meet the need they see in front of them. Where there are challenges, such as long waiting times for health assessments or shortages in specialist placements, services work together to find appropriate solutions. This includes the considered use of well-commissioned AP, which is consistently understood by practitioners and families across the local area partnership as never being a 'final destination'.

For children and young people with more complex needs, the special school and enhanced provision in Wiltshire, although stretched, is very effective. Typically, children and young people's needs are continually assessed, and provision adapted. They benefit from the strong advocacy of school staff from across the area. As a result, these children and young people with SEND typically achieve well and secure positive outcomes. Furthermore, children with SEND achieve positive outcomes more widely in Wiltshire. For example, SEND pupils typically attain well. The permanent exclusion of pupils with SEND is very low and suspensions are reducing. Most attend school regularly, reflected in the attendance of pupils with SEND being above the national average in Wiltshire.

Some children and young people can wait too long to be seen and assessed when referred to health services. This means that some children and young people must wait for as much as two years between referral and a diagnosis. For others, their plans lack up-to-date health information. And although the impact of all of this is lessened by effective partnership working and some targeted support from care navigators, developed with Wiltshire Parent Carer Council (WPCC, Wiltshire's parent carer forum), the wait can cause great anxiety for families.

Opportunities for young people with SEND post-16, although improving, are more varied. The local area partnership recognises that choice and opportunity for young people when they leave school in Wiltshire are limited for some. This includes opportunities to access paid employment, the range of post-16 educational opportunities, such as supported internships, and support packages to help young people access their communities. Nevertheless, where improvements are needed, progress is being made. For example, the proportion of young people with SEND going into sustained education, employment or training is increasing.

## What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Ambitious leadership across Wiltshire’s local area partnership has secured effective joint working. An established culture to innovate and share responsibility has put children at the centre of strategy, effective commissioning and joint working. For example, school leaders work in partnership within localities, utilising expertise and support from services within the local area partnership to meet the needs of children as soon as they present. These services have successfully worked together to improve attendance, reduce exclusions and strengthen the outcomes for children and young people with SEND in the area.
- Leaders know the area’s strengths and weaknesses well. This helps services to be agile, responsive and deliver intervention early. Leaders consider the diversity of the population of the local area carefully. For example, refugees, those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and ministry of defence families benefit from tailored approaches to ensure that needs are identified and met early. As a result, children and young people with SEND typically have positive experiences and achieve well.
- Parents and carers are equal partners in co-producing and implementing strategy. WPCC have ensured that action is taken where family’s experiences have been the most challenged. For example, the ICB and WPCC have worked together to support improvements to the neurodevelopmental pathway. Care navigators, who are parents, carers or young people with lived experience, are available to support children and young people and their families effectively. This has helped families to understand the process and where to find help quickly.
- Successful joint working is a great benefit to those involved in the early identification and meeting of children’s needs. The healthy child programme is implemented diligently. Health visitors and engagement leads identify need early. They make timely referrals for further assessment and support. Specialist leads ensure that families receive appropriate help from health and social care practitioners. Similarly, the commissioning of district specialist centres in key localities ensure young children with SEND get rapid access to highly skilled multi-disciplinary teams, including health therapists and the commissioned specialist education home-visiting team. As a result, many children with SEND get targeted help and support from the very get go.
- The local area partnership has developed strong systems and processes to maintain oversight of children and young people with SEND in residential provisions, including those who use residential short breaks. For example, service leaders regularly check the suitability and quality of provision for children in residential special schools. This helps to ensure that placements meet need effectively, as well as that children and young people are being safeguarded. Families speak positively about the short breaks offer in the area, which has been co-produced with WPCC. This includes families whose children access residential short breaks. These families say the offer is ‘excellent’ and a ‘real lifeline’. The local area rightly acknowledges that the residential short breaks offer is limited in its reach and there are more families who could benefit from the excellent service.
- The local area partnership has developed clear criteria for the assessment of need

within SEND early help. These are understood and applied appropriately. Early help assessments consider the extra vulnerabilities of children with SEND in order to inform child and family focused multi-agency support plans that meet need. This helps children and families to get the right help at the right time. Plans strongly focus on promoting children's independence, aspirations and confidence in addition to ensuring that support for education and health are prioritised. As a result, children and young people with SEND often receive useful support to improve their social outcomes and access to their communities.

- The local area partnership has an established and effective dynamic support register (DSR). Once referrals are received, timely assessments are undertaken. This allows the right professionals to provide holistic assessments and prevent unplanned hospital admission as much as possible. Furthermore, keyworkers work closely with children and young people and their families on the DSR, which helps coordinate individual care and support. Professionals liaise with children and young people regularly, including with key workers, to make sure that individual need is met effectively.
- Wiltshire children benefit from an inclusive education system. The development of the 'ordinarily available provision for all learners' strategy has helped secure a system-wide commitment to inclusive practice in schools. When pupils are at risk of exclusion, services work together to find solutions. This includes the creative and effective use of AP. The AP strategy, co-produced with WPCC, addresses gaps in the area for children and young people. As a result, exclusions are low and reintegration to school increasingly successful.
- The quality of education, health and care (EHC) plans is improving. For example, plans increasingly reflect children's aspirations and often now have well-planned outcomes across education, health and care. Effective processes include input from designated clinical officers and the designated social care officer. This has been key in improving the overall quality of the plans. Useful developments in co-production with children and young people mean that EHC plans are increasingly child centred. For example, the partnership co-produced with young people how they wanted their views to be collected for EHC plan assessments and reviews.

## **What does the area partnership need to do better?**

- Some children and young people with SEND wait too long to be seen and assessed when referred to health provision. This is particularly the case in community paediatrics, occupational health and physiotherapy services, as well as the neurodevelopmental pathway. As a result, contributions from health to EHC plan reviews remains inconsistent. The variability in experience for families is difficult for the partnership to address due to a lack of robust information about exactly how long children and young people must wait. This means that where children and young people could benefit from more timely intervention, strategic leaders are not well placed to really address where the issues are.
- Some services are at capacity. The proportion of children and young people with an EHC plan is high compared to national averages. This contributes to a shortage of specialist school placements within the local area. As a result, the partnership must

rely on independent specialist schools, many of which are out of area. The local area partnership knows this and, although their checks on the quality of this provision is robust, they rightly plan to strengthen capacity in the area, particularly through the development of secondary resource bases. However, this remains in its infancy and so the experience for families is yet to feel the impact, particularly for those who cannot get a place in the appropriate type of special school near to home.

- Strategies to improve the work of the partnership in preparing children and young people for adulthood are new and need embedding. And although the overall quality of EHC plans is improving, many do not consider children and young people’s long-term aspirations and needs soon enough. This means that, for some young people with SEND, the provision is not ready for them when they move into adult services. Instead, they have to wait for the provision to be built around them at the point they need it.
- Provision and opportunities for young people with SEND are more variable at post-16 and, for those who need it, in their transition to adult services and their preparation for adulthood. Some young people say that the packages they have to support them post-16 don’t consistently allow them to be as independent, or near to home as they think they should be. Similarly, the range of choice in education post-16 and in employment post-18 diminishes significantly for the most complex children and young people. Overall, this means that some young people have negative experiences of the system between the ages of 19 and 25.

## Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement
Some children and young people wait too long for assessment and diagnosis across several health services. The local area partnership’s records lack robust information about how long some children are waiting. The local area partnership should improve how they utilise information and data for health services and work on reducing the delays that some children, young people and families currently face.
Young people’s experiences are more variable post-16 and up to 25 in the area. This is because the opportunities to follow their aspirations are inhibited by limited choice, late transition planning or restrictions in support packages. The local area should continue to work in partnership to improve the education, work, health services and social integration opportunities for young people in their preparation for adulthood.

## Local area partnership details

Local authority	Integrated care board
Wiltshire Council	NHS BSW ICB
Darryl Freeman	Sue Harriman
<a href="http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk">www.wiltshire.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://bsw.icb.nhs.uk">bsw.icb.nhs.uk</a>
County Hall Bythesea Road Trowbridge Wiltshire BA14 8JN	Jenner House Avon Way Langley Park Chippenham SN15 1GG

## Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

The inspection was led by one of His Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors, including one of His Majesty's Inspectors and Ofsted Inspectors from Education and Social Care, a lead Children's Services Inspector and a team of Children's Services Inspectors from the CQC.

## Inspection team

### Ofsted

Matthew Barnes, Ofsted HMI, Lead inspector  
Sarah Canto, Ofsted HMI  
Paul Bagnall, Ofsted HMI

### Care Quality Commission

David Roberts, CQC Lead inspector  
Dan Carrick, CQC inspector  
Jess Taylor-Beirne, CQC inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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