Title:	Six-month review of 'Thematic Overview of Area SEND Inspections'
Date:	April 2024
Author:	NWADCS Policy and Improvement Officer
Report to:	North West SEND Leadership

Background

The new SEND Framework came into force in January 2023, representing a radical change in the approach to the inspection of SEND Area Partnerships, with a greater emphasis on the impacts and outcomes for children and young people (CYP).
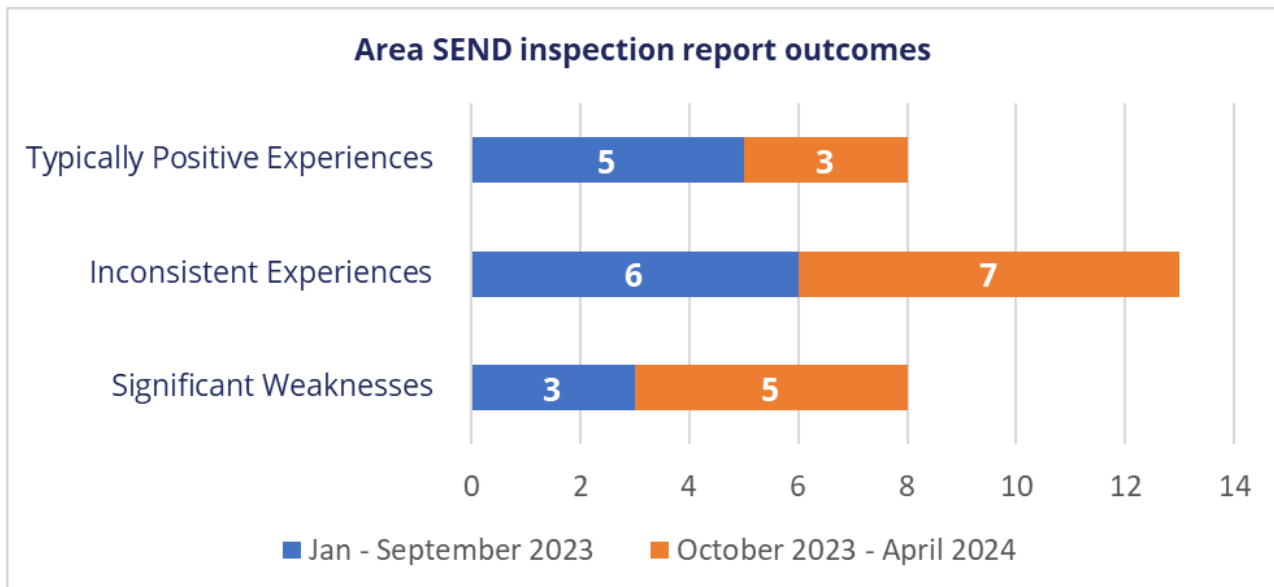
In September 2023, NWADCS published a Thematic Overview of Area SEND Inspections" analysing key issues emerging from the first 14 inspection reports. A further 15 Area SEND inspection reports have been published since with this report acting as a 6-month review. Judgements made under the same three possible inspection outcomes (see below, Figure 1).

Figure 1. Possible full inspection outcomes, and their subsequent inspection activity.

Inspection outcome	Follow-up and inspection activity
The local area partnership's SEND arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.	Engagement meetings Full inspection usually within 5 years
The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.	Engagement meetings Full inspection usually within 3 years
There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.	Engagement meeting Submission of priority action plan (area SEND) Monitoring inspection usually within 18 months of the publication of the full inspection report

The outcomes of all 29 published reports can be seen below in figure 2.

Figure 2. Area SEND inspection out comes of 29 published reports since January 2023.

Area SEND inspection report outcomes

Typically Positive Experiences	5	3
Inconsistent Experiences	6	7
Significant Weaknesses	3	5

■ Jan - September 2023   ■ October 2023 - April 2024

Purpose

This report will offer a thematic analysis of key issues emerging from the 15 Area SEND inspection reports published since September 2023. These will include key improvement areas, and examples of where local areas are illustrating good practice to address challenges.

This report also highlights the common themes of challenge/ improvement between the two tranches of Area SEND reports including:
- Timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans
- Waiting times for health assessment and therapies
- Impact of lack of multi-agency strategic planning
- Sufficiency of AP placements and specialist educational placements for CYP with SEND
- Early planning for Preparation for Adulthood

1. CO-PRODUCTION

1.1 Challenges/ improvement areas

Co-production remains a key issue, being identified as an area for improvement, or being inconsistent in its use, in over half of the second wave of reports. In some areas, there was a lack of authentic co-production, with some areas using late-stage consultation with CYP and their families, rather than true co-production from the outset. In some areas, education/ service providers' strong examples of co-production were not used to their full advantage by area leaders in strategic work.

1.2 How is good practice demonstrated?
- In Surrey, the ATLAS participation group of CYP has co-produced many of the recent positive changes across the local area e.g. the All Age Autism Strategy.

- Several examples of Parent Carer Forums inform the local area partnership's strategic work and improving outcomes e.g. Parent Carer Forums in Trafford and Hertfordshire.
- In Medway thoughtful, inclusive co-production, including lived experience work in mental health and engagement in forums, including Takeover Days.
- Haringey SEND Power is a valued partner in decision-making and commissioning transport, support for CYP waiting for autism assessments, short breaks, respite care, and resourced provision.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF NEED

2.1 Challenges/ improvement areas

Key themes around identification of need are consistent from the previous report. In some places CYP's needs are not identified quickly or accurately enough, assessments take too long with the right help being put in place only at the point of crisis. EHC plan timeliness was identified as an area for improvement in 10 of the 15 new reports.   Other common challenges included a lack of consistency, for example where CYP with profound and complex needs being assessed with the right provision put in place quickly, whereas the support for those with less complex needs was not sufficiently comprehensive and timely.

2.2 How is good practice demonstrated?

- Medway's early help hubs form part of a clear targeted offer, well-informed through detailed assessments, with plans created collaboratively with children and families.
- In West Sussex, CYP within the Children with Disabilities team receive timely assessment and advice, and are supported to share and include their views in plans and reviews.
- Health visitors in Bexley, Hull and West Sussex consistently identify needs through effective delivery of healthy child programme developmental checks.
- Stoke-on-Trent's Discovery Group uses a family-centred, holistic approach to offer early identification of needs, including autism, in the early years.
- Parents of under 5s in Bexley receive timely support through well-established Portage services, social prescribing, and for emerging mental health issues via the Under 5s Panel.

3. HEALTH PATHWAYS AND SUPPORT

3.1 Challenges/ improvement areas

Long waiting times for health services were identified in 14 of the 15 reports. Whilst local areas developed support for families awaiting assessment, these were not always communicated effectively and did not have the desired reach. Inequity for families was noted in some areas due to families having to navigate complex SEND systems. In some areas, gaps in the commissioning arrangements for health services, along with lack of review, meant that health services did not reflect current needs, including rising challenges around SEMH needs.

Needs were not met effectively where Dynamic Support Registers were fragmented or did not demonstrate multi-agency approaches.

3.2 How is good practice demonstrated?
Many local areas have developed online resources and guidance to support 'waiting well' for families awaiting assessment. Some areas offer access to short appropriate training programmes e.g. parenting, early language.

- #ActuallyHaringey Autism Hub has increased capacity for rapid assessment and specialist provision before EHC plans are agreed to ensure CYP get support quickly. Haringey has no waiting times for occupational therapy or physiotherapy.
- Hull Primary Care Networks have funded care coordinators/ navigators and the ICB have funded learning disabilities well-being nurses to support local GPs.
- Primary care practitioners in West Sussex complete robust annual health checks on 14- to 25-year-olds with a learning disability and ensure hey meet their health needs.
- Stoke's speech, language and communication therapy team pre-referral pathway ensures accuracy of referrals and that CYP are offered support including Stoke Speaks Out.
- Leaders in Surrey have been creative in addressing the rising mental health needs of CYP through the innovative Mindworks Alliance model.
- ICB leaders in Richmond have good oversight of CYP at risk of inpatient admission. Good multi-agency support, at the right time, prevents escalation.
- Trafford's Dynamic Support Database, strengthened by Greater Manchester Police involvement, supports CYP with complex needs, particularly at times of emerging crisis.

4. LOCAL AREA LEADERSHIP

4.1 Challenges/ improvement areas
In areas where leadership was highlighted as an area to improve, newly established leadership teams were at different stages of strategic planning with strategies and plans in their infancy and impact not yet demonstrated. Areas in which leadership was judged as weakest, demonstrated a lack of strategic planning to meet existing and emerging needs, with no clear, shared priorities and a lack of multi-agency approach to system challenges.

4.2 How is good practice demonstrated?
- Leaders across Trafford's partnership have committed, strategic relationships. The SEND strategy, the co-produced Ambitions Plan is being delivered by all stakeholders.
- Haringey's leaders demonstrate understanding of wider factors such as housing exacerbate the vulnerabilities of some families.
- Richmond's leaders have a comprehensive multi-agency SEND Futures Plan, which has been pivotal to the significant improvements made in the area.
- Local area partners work toward a shared vision that Middlesbrough children matter, which impacts all decision-making across the partnership.

5. EDUCATION AND INCLUSION

5.1 Challenges/ improvement areas

Increased non-attendance, suspensions, and permanent exclusions are noted in several areas, with reports that mainstream schools lack resources to meet the needs of some CYP with SEND. Several reports highlighted that families felt obligated to educate their child at home whilst awaiting assessments or suitable provision. Insufficient residential special schools, special schools, and alternative provision (AP) settings were reported frequently. Delays in assessment and providing suitable adjustments to CYP's needs, alongside rising SEMH needs, increases pressure on AP sufficiency. In some areas, leaders had not taken sufficient action to assure themselves of the number and quality of unregistered provision commissioned through schools. Due to lack of oversight, leaders were unable to accurately evaluate and respond to gaps in Alternative Provision.

Some areas had no/ not enough short break provision to meet the needs of families. Whilst most local areas have created some social provision in their communities to promote inclusion, this was less impactful where missing/ broken equipment limited access to recreational and sports activities for CYP with physical disabilities.

5.2 How is good practice demonstrated?

- West Sussex's schools and education provision evidences an inclusive culture, including through the autism-friendly classroom and the Tools for Schools online materials.
- Middlesborough leaders work closely with schools to track the numbers of CYP at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion and to identify their individual needs.
- Bexley's work around elective home education for children with SEND is well managed, and families supported.
- Leaders in Hertfordshire have responded to a shortage of specialist education through new school and specialist provision building, enabling commissioning of additional places.
- Trafford has embedded systems to commission and quality assure Alternative Provision and residential special schools locally and in out-of-area placements.
- Children in Halton feel supported to access a range of community-based activities to develop their interests and, in some cases, gain qualifications.
- Richmond has developed packages for residential short breaks and tailored community activities such as the TAG Youth Club which inclusively adapts activities.

6. ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

6.1 Challenges/ improvement areas

Some areas lack clarity in the planning and commissioning of services, leading to education and health services being unable to balance capacity and manifesting in long waiting times. Leaders need to use performance data and information effectively to inform their evaluation, sufficiency planning, and joint commissioning of SEND services. Lack of key performance

indicators at a governance level prevents joint evaluation of the progress and impact of services and provision.

Figure 3. Number of inspection reports published in the last 6 months identifying need to improve different stages of EHC plans.
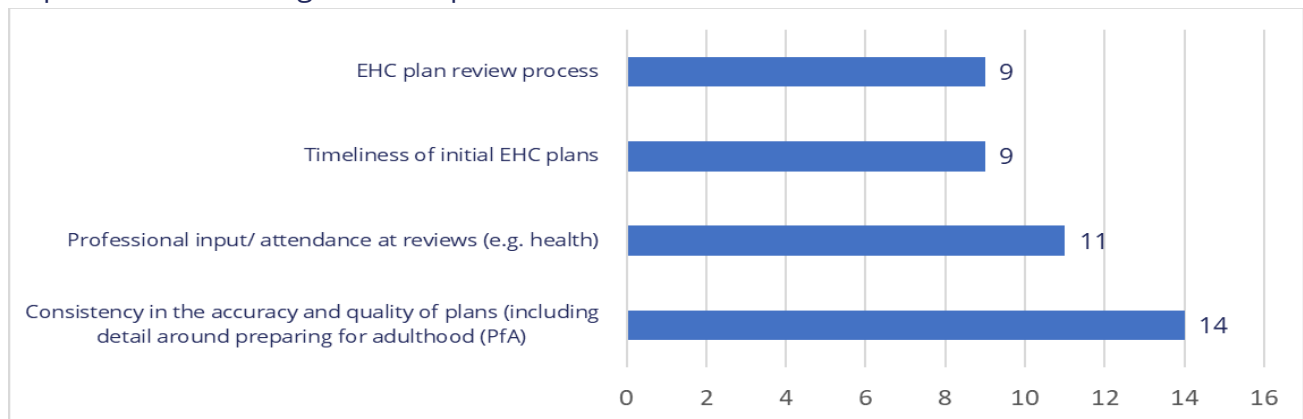
6.2 How is good practice demonstrated?

- Haringey's leaders use data from a range of sources to understand and plan for the needs of their community. This includes commissioning Resourced Provision for children with autism and SEMH needs due to increased need across primary and secondary phases.
- Gloucester have recently begun to sample and quality assure more recent EHC plans to ensure that they are of a consistent and high quality, and have recently commissioned a Local Government Association review to inform their strategic planning.
- Trafford has strengthened operational grip and increased the pace of change. The independently-chaired SEND strategic board has improved accountability and focus-demonstrating impact in the improved timeliness of EHC plans.

7. PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD (PfA)

7.1 Challenges/ improvement areas
The absence of early planning has a large impact on effectiveness of Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) in many local areas. EHC plans often had insufficient focus on young people's aspirations and developing skills. Several reports highlighted variability in the experiences of young people, depending on their social care involvement or the level of complexity of their SEND needs. Some areas lacked effective multi-agency approaches for transition to adult social care, health and mental health services; and some lacked support for housing needs, or those at risk of criminal exploitation.

7.2 How is good practice demonstrated?
- Halton's 14 to 19 Team provides targeted support to young people with SEND including impartial advice and guidance to help make choices around future learning and careers.

- Personal advisers in Suffolk ensure that care leavers' needs are considered holistically and that services are coordinated.
- In West Sussex further education providers are responsive to the individual needs of young people, improving employability skills and extending independence.
- Young people in Hertfordshire access work experience and develop skills and knowledge relevant to their needs and aspirations through proactive links with employers.
- Middlesbrough's 50 futures work experience programme increased the number of experience pathways and led to most participants gaining employment.