

Inspectors publish report on Surrey services for children with special educational needs

Surrey County Council, the six Surrey clinical commissioning groups* and Family Voice Surrey have welcomed an inspection report on special educational needs and disability services in the county.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission carried out a joint review of Surrey's progress in addressing weaknesses highlighted in a previous inspection in 2016.

After speaking to children, young people, parents and carers as well as school, health and council partners, the inspectors judged that whilst the local area hadn't made sufficient progress in all of the areas of weakness, they did find that sufficient progress had been made in four out of five of those areas.

The inspectors found improvements in:

- The timeliness and quality of statutory assessments and plans
- The involvement of children, parents and carers in the planning and evaluation of services, and the promotion of the local offer.
- The local area's management information and administration processes.—
- The early identification of special educational needs by schools.

However, inspectors identified a picture of increased school absence for pupils with SEND, often linked to mental health concerns, an issue that is reflected nationally. They found that actions taken since the last inspection to reduce absences from school have not had enough impact and therefore sufficient progress had not been made in this area.

Local area leads recognise the need for all parties to work together with young people and their families to uncover the causes of higher rates of absence among young people with SEND, to understand the impact of absence for the child and the whole family and to involve them in determining the range of solutions likely to work for them.

They also acknowledge that work must continue to ensure consistent quality of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans throughout the county and that the views of parents and young people must be routinely sought to establish the likely impact of any proposed changes to the SEND system.

Julie Iles, Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning, said: *"We're pleased the report recognises our progress, but we know we need to do more and are absolutely committed, along with our partners, to making sure support for children is the very best it can be. We're working with families and health and education partners on transforming our SEND services and the strengths highlighted in this report lay crucial foundations for that work."*

Dave Hill, Surrey County Council's Executive Director for Executive Director for Children, Families, Life Long Learning and Culture, added: *"There are some early signs of progress, which I am pleased to see. However, this is the beginning of the improvement journey and there is much to do in the future to become a good service. Children, young people and their families will be at the heart of all we do."*

Matthew Tait, Joint Accountable Officer across Surrey Heartlands Clinical Commissioning Groups, said: *"While it is clear from the revisit that progress has been made in addressing some areas of significant weakness, we know there is much more work to be done to improve services for children and young people with SEND, and the experiences of families. This will require collaboration with families, and close partnership working across health, schools and the council to deliver a step change. We are working as an integrated system to improve outcomes for children and families and we are committed*

to working together as health and care partners to ensure we continue to build on the conclusions in this report.”

To build on these early signs of progress and in response to concerns raised by families during the inspectors’ revisit, next steps will include:

- A multi-agency approach to quality assurance of EHC plans, including oversight by parents and carers
- Including parents and young people as Experts by Experience in the new Surrey Workforce Academy and showing how their involvement influences key decisions
- Creating a consistent information-sharing agreement between all agencies supporting children with SEND
- Trialling a graduated response to supporting the needs of children and young people in Surrey, tailoring support even more closely to their needs
- Starting with the lived experience of children and families in working out what support is needed when mental health concerns impact on school attendance

The partnership of county council, CCGs and schools are working together with families to transform services for children needing support to help them reach their potential and lead more independent lives. Further work is now underway with families and partners to develop a jointly-owned Surrey-wide SEND strategy and long-term action plan.

Hearing the views and experiences of a wide range of children, young people, parents, carers and practitioners will be part of this work. To share your views, please visit the [Surrey Local Offer](#) and complete the [POET survey](#), or contact [SEND Youth Advisers Surrey \(SYAS\)](#) or [Family Voice Surrey](#).

Benedicte Symcox, Operations Lead for Family Voice Surrey, said: *“Parents will welcome the inspectors’ focus on the issue of high absence and exclusion rates for children with SEND, as the lack of a coordinated plan to meet the needs of these ‘hidden children’ has been felt keenly by all those affected. Parents may feel that their other concerns are not so clearly reflected in the headline judgements of ‘sufficient progress’ in the inspectors’ report, but they will see many of these concerns recorded, alongside improvements identified, in the more detailed narrative verdict. Family Voice Surrey welcomes the clear acknowledgement by local area leads that the progress identified by the inspection team represents only the first rung on the ladder of recovery to a fully healthy SEND system and we look forward to increasingly open and transparent engagement with families as the work to transform SEND services continues. We would like to thank all those parents who provided evidence to the inspectors.”*

*Surrey’s six clinical commissioning groups are Guildford and Waverley CCG, North West Surrey CCG, Surrey Downs CCG, East Surrey CCG, Surrey Heath and Farnham and North East Hampshire CCG.

Link to the Surrey Local Offer for the full Local Area SEND revisit letter: <https://www.surreylocaloffer.org.uk/kb5/surrey/localoffer/site.page?id=M-vLdsWoF3Y>

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