



Bristol Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Local Area Written Statement of Action (WSoA)

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Background

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) carried out a joint inspection of Bristol Local Area in autumn 2019. The inspection was designed to check how well health, education and social care partners work together to identify and support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). [Our inspection letter](#) identified five ‘significant concerns’ that required us to produce a ‘Written Statement of Action’ (WSOA) that explains our plans to tackle all the areas of weakness set out in the inspection letter, and what we hope to have improved at the end of each four-month period.

The end of each of these periods is called a ‘milestone’. The last set of these milestones was July 2021.

Summary of progress against July 2021

Milestones

Bristol’s Written Statement of Action (WSOA) identified 36 milestones to be achieved by July 2021.

Of these:

- 18 (50%) have been achieved (Green)
- 14 (39%) have been partially achieved (Amber)
- 4 (11%) haven’t been achieved yet (Red)

All four of the red delayed milestones are underway and have new timeframes agreed by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Partnership Group and SEND Improvement Board.

Next Steps

July 2021 marked the final set of milestones in our WSOA, but it certainly doesn’t mark the end of the SEND improvement journey. Given the scale of the weaknesses identified in the inspection, and the difficulties of managing a significant piece of transformation work within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Local Area’s

Department for Education (DfE) and National Health Service England (NHSE) advisers confirmed that Bristol made considerable progress in addressing the areas of significant weakness identified by the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection in October 2019. DfE and NHSE advisers summarised their feedback in their July monitoring visit:

“Despite the disruption caused by COVID-19 restrictions (with the first lockdown coinciding with the approval of the WSoA), the local area continues to make good progress in implementing improvements to the local SEND system. It is evident that work associated with the WSoA has both stimulated and been supported by other improvements across the broader SEND system in Bristol.”

The data and positive feedback are evidence of this, but we are very aware that many more families are yet to experience real change and are still waiting too long for their children and young people’s needs to be met effectively.

As stated in the introduction to our [Written Statement of Action \(WSoA\)](#):

“This WSoA is the start of our improvement journey and describes what we believe is realistically achievable over the next 18 months. Our aspiration is far greater than many of the relatively short-term targets set out in this WSoA and subsequent plans will reflect that”.

We’re developing a new SEND Partnership Plan and will continue to tackle the areas of weakness identified in the inspection. The plan will include other areas that were not highlighted in the inspection findings, but that parent carers have told us are important to them.

[Bristol One City](#) partners recognise the need to come together to improve inclusion and reduce inequality for all children in the city. Partners have worked with children and young people in the city to develop the new ‘[Belonging Strategy for Children and Young People 2021-24](#)’ launched in autumn 2021.

The new SEND Partnership Plan will ensure SEND is firmly embedded in Bristol and is incorporated into all four pillars of the Belonging Strategy:

- Belonging from the Beginning
- Belonging in Families
- Belonging in Education
- Belonging in the Community

Priority One: The lack of accountability of leaders at all levels, including school leaders

Progress against July Milestones:

1.1a All governance arrangements are fit for purpose: GREEN

Evidence for clear and effective governance:

SEND Partnership Group, SEND Improvement Board, Performance Clinics, regular scrutiny

1.1b Performance data demonstrates significant improvement across all service providers and in line with agreed targets: AMBER

There has been significant improvement in all areas, but not all targets have been met. For example:

- By July 2021, 42% of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans were completed within 20 weeks. This is better than the end of 2019 (0%), but short of our target to be at least the average of similar local authorities
- 60 to 70% of children waiting to see a paediatrician saw one within 18 weeks. This is a good improvement on the previous year, but short of the 92% target

1.1c Families report increased satisfaction with Bristol's SEND processes and provision: GREEN

While many parents will not yet be experiencing improved provision, there is evidence of increasing satisfaction compared to last year, as shown by:

- the results from the [parent carer survey](#)
- the ongoing statutory processes survey
- feedback from parents during audit activity

1.1d Evidence of an improving culture is seen through a reduction in fixed term exclusions and improvement in attendance for children and young people with SEND: AMBER

COVID-19 has impacted the data, especially during the lockdowns when most pupils had to stay at home. We've developed data sets to help us understand the detail of attendance and suspensions, and these are being used to develop strategies and targeted interventions at a pupil and school level.

1.2 Top up funding criteria reviewed and refined in line with top up funding review: RED

High needs funding review completed. Full consultation of the new high needs funding framework expected to take place over the next year.

1.3 Performance is showing positive trends across all Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), particularly in EHC Plan timeliness and increasing parental confidence and satisfaction with the quality of EHC plans: GREEN

1.4a Evidence shows that providers are robustly held to account in relation to performance, quality and impact: GREEN

Bristol City Council's (BCC) commissioning team regularly review and monitor services. A Quality Assurance Framework details the quality assurance activities and the standard of delivery expected from commissioned providers.

1.4b Feedback from service users and performance measures demonstrate the impact of joint commissioned SEND services: RED

There have been delays to developing a Joint Commissioning Strategy (JCS), but this is now in co-production and on target for later this year.

1.4c Feedback from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) SEND service users and performance measures demonstrate the early impact of a culturally competent framework: RED

This work is underway within the developing JCS.

Key successes relating to Priority One

Since the Ofsted and QC inspection there has been continuity and stability of leadership across the partnership, and a genuine determination and will to work effectively together for positive change.

Leaders are held to account through strong governance arrangements and external scrutiny. The SEND Improvement Board meets every two months and has an independent chair. Board membership includes representation from the Bristol Parent Carer Forum.

A sustained focus and commitment to improving the accuracy and quality of SEND data has led to significant improvement across this area of weakness. Leaders and service area managers now have access to reliable data reports. Robust systems are also now in place for leaders and managers to effectively manage performance at a team and whole service level.

This data is also shared across the local area SEND partnership which is helping health, care and education services to work together to address emerging issues and plan more effectively.

Current EHC plan data is also made available publicly via our new [Open Data website](#).

Challenges and priorities to take forward in the new plan

COVID-19 has impacted on work with schools around accountability, due to repeated school closures and school leaders' attention being diverted to managing the rapidly changing COVID related situations in their schools.

Ongoing increased demand for health services and EHC needs assessments continues to impact on achieving timeliness targets.

Priority Two: Inconsistencies in the timeliness and effectiveness of the local area's arrangements for the identification and assessment of children and young people with SEND

Progress against July 2021 Milestones

2.1a Next cycle of school special educational needs co-ordinators (SENDCOs) briefing meetings planned and dates circulated: GREEN

These briefings are valued by SENDCOs and attendance is high, and this work has been expanded to also offer SENDCO surgeries and developing SENDCO clusters.

2.1b Feedback from parents and carers evidences improved practice (in schools): AMBER

60% of parents and carers responding in the [2021 annual parent carer survey](#) felt that the education setting their child with SEND attends is meeting their needs 'most or all of the time', an improvement in the past 12 months.

The proportion of parent carers advising that support is 'provided and sufficient' has increased in every category in the last year. Support in the classroom and support at lunch and break times has seen the greatest improvement (+14% and +15% respectively).

The 2021 survey also shows fewer children and young people frequently experiencing negative situations when compared to the 2020 spring term survey.

2.2 The quality of information supporting EHC plan requests from schools and Early Years settings are consistently assessed as good: AMBER

75% of requests from schools include a Bristol Support Plan. High quality Support Plans are identified at panel and a range of these anonymised and shared as good practice examples on the SENDCO resources site (by age and needs).

2.3 Evidence of more timely and accurate identification of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs: AMBER

SEMH identification tools piloted with schools and a wide range of SEMH related training delivered over the last year, to support earlier identification and improved assessment and interventions. Evaluation of this training and feedback from parents and carers is informing the programme for the next academic year.

2.4 Children and Young People's Outcomes Framework impact evaluated: RED

Framework launched, but not yet embedded, so is too early to evaluate impact for children and young people.

2.5 Uptake of 2 to 2.5-year health visitor reviews at April 2021 is 90%: GREEN (94%)

2.6a Embed new ways of working across community health: AMBER

Waiting List Initiative implemented between November 2020 and April 2021 resulted in 772 children waiting for initial appointment to see a Community Paediatrician. New processes and demand-capacity management will mitigate future backlogs.

2.6b Evaluate new models of care to inform full implementation: GREEN

Pilot underway and informing appreciative enquiry into whole system approach.

2.7 Service user feedback evidences positive impact of Families, Local Offer, Resources and Advice (FLORA) team: GREEN

Case studies and filmed interviews with parents, carers, children and young people who have been helped by FLORA are evidence of positive impact.

Key successes relating to Priority Two

Colleagues from health, education and care routinely work together to create and deliver training and support to improve the early identification of children and young people with SEND. Attendance at training and information sharing events is high, and feedback from participants is used to continually improve the training offers.

SENDCOs in Bristol's schools now have access to a comprehensive range of training and support, including SENDCO cluster groups and monthly SENDCO surgeries where they meet with other SENDCOs and SEND education professionals, to develop their expertise, share best practice, and discuss specific concerns.

Autism Education Trust (AET) training has been delivered to nearly two thousand educational practitioners across early years primary and secondary. Each setting has identified an area for development which they will complete within a given period and this will be monitored through advice clinics.

Bristol Education Psychologists (EPs) have developed a training programme for Learning Support Assistants. The goal of 'MeLSA' (Mediated Learning Support Assistant) training is for classroom staff to acquire new skills to assist a child or young person to be a more skilled and independent learner.

Challenges and priorities to take forward in the new plan

Parents' and carers' experiences of their children's needs being supported swiftly and effectively is still inconsistent. SEND partners across health, care and education settings are continuing to work with frontline staff, including school staff to ensure that children receive the right support at the right time.

Priority Three: The dysfunctional EHC plan process, and inadequate quality of EHC plans

Progress against July 2021 Milestones

3.1 Ongoing learning and development for statutory SEND staff to maintain skills and knowledge and aid staff retention: GREEN

There is a robust learning loop and training in place for existing and new staff. All new assessment co-ordinators undertake a training programme including:

- Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA) Level 1
- SEND Legal training
- Council for Disabled Children (CDC) Outcomes Training
- Person Centered Planning

Quality Assurance activity, such as audits, surveys, direct parent carer feedback and performance data inform learning and development at individual, team and service levels via supervision and team training.

3.2 New EHC plan template: Co-Review and refine as needed: GREEN
New, co-produced template has been designed and is being piloted.

3.3 Consistent format for professionals' contributions to assessment: GREEN
Consistent template agreed and the professional portal is in test phase.

3.4 Children, young people and families report improved timeliness and quality of health EHC plan advice: AMBER

Health advice is timely, however, methods to assess quality are limited until the professional portal is rolled out.

3.5 All Children's Community Health Partnership (CCHP) services consistently provide health advice to the EHC plan process within six weeks of request: GREEN

3.6 Full implementation of improved Annual Review process planned for new academic year in 2021: GREEN

3.7 Quality Assurance reports are informing and driving ongoing improvements, workforce development and self-assessment: GREEN

Key successes relating to Priority Three

The online spring 2021 parent carer survey (open to all parent carers) asked about their experiences of the EHC Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process in the last 12 months. 40% said they had a 'good' or 'excellent' experience and 23% said 'satisfactory'. This is a considerable improvement on last year's results when only 11% rated the service provided by the SEND team throughout the EHCNA process as 'good' or 'excellent' and 17% as 'satisfactory'.

Positive feedback included parents and carers saying that they felt it was an easy process and that they felt well supported throughout.

52% rated the quality of their child's EHC plan as 'good' or 'excellent' and 25% as 'satisfactory'. The proportion of parents and carers rating their child's plan as 'excellent' has increased significantly since the 2020 survey, rising from 5% to 26%.

The historic backlog of overdue EHC assessments and plans has been cleared and timeliness has improved significantly, although the timeliness target has not been achieved.

Challenges and priorities to take forward in the new plan

Like most councils in England, Bristol is experiencing unprecedented increases in requests for EHC needs assessments. In the first six months of 2021, 455 requests were received, which is a 50% increase on the same period in 2019. This means that, despite the investment in additional statutory SEND staff and improved ways of working, achieving agreed targets for timeliness will continue to be a significant challenge.

Priority Four: The underachievement and lack of inclusion of children and young people with SEND, including the high rates of persistent absenteeism and fixed-term exclusions

Progress against July 2021 Milestones

4.1a Feedback from children and young people with SEND evidences an improved sense of belonging to their school community: AMBER

The feedback from the 43 children and young people who completed the 2021 survey indicates that while some have very positive experiences at school, many still feel left out and have negative experiences at school.

4.1b Schools and settings have access to high quality specialist support and training: GREEN

A comprehensive training programme is being delivered and specialist support is available.

4.1c Feedback from school leaders demonstrates effectiveness of improved systems and structures: AMBER

Informal feedback from middle leaders is positive. A formal survey of leaders will be undertaken next year to provide a full picture of school leaders' views.

4.2 a Local data shows significant impact on the number of fixed-term exclusions and increased attendance: AMBER

COVID-19 has impacted on the data, especially during the lockdowns when most pupils had to stay at home. This means it is hard to compare current year exclusion rates to previous years. Data sets have been developed and are enabling identification of those pupils most at risk of exclusion. A strategic attendance plan is being developed to focus on the key areas aimed at reducing fixed term exclusions (now known as suspensions) and reducing persistent absence for all pupils.

4.2b Leading Edge guidance has been reviewed with settings and partners: GREEN

Guidance is published on the [SEND Local Offer](#). Relationships based training has been delivered to Early Years and school leaders.

4.3 Increased capacity across the local area to meet demand for 2021 to 2022 and beyond: AMBER

Over 80 new specialist places have been delivered for September 2021, but this is not sufficient to meet current demand. There is a significant programme of work in place to increase this further and meet future demand. In the meantime, additional support is in place to meet the needs of pupils who need specialist provision and are currently in mainstream settings.

4.4 Children transitioning to reception year from 2021 to 2022 academic year have a better continuity of support than previous academic years: GREEN

An action plan was developed with parents, carers, early years settings and schools. This has included model transition case studies and training for reception staff to provide strategies to support transition.

4.5 Young people in the 14+ cohort have a clear and positive experience of their pathway to independence: AMBER

Case studies and feedback are providing evidence of the positive impact for young people referred to the pathway to independence team. The team has worked with 279 young people with complex needs, providing a clear pathway into adult services.

Professionals are referring young people at a much earlier age so transitional planning can be timely and successful. Parents are also more aware of the service and referring to the team directly.

Key successes relating to Priority Four

A key part of improving inclusion in education settings is to ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of what is ordinarily available in mainstream settings to support pupils with SEND. Mainstream schools have been issued with [guidance](#) about what should be 'ordinarily available' and a co-produced version of this guidance will be made available for parents and carers.

Alongside this is Bristol's [Children and Young People's Outcomes Framework](#) which helps professionals working with children and their families to set outcomes. There is an [easy read version of the Framework](#) on the SEND Local Offer.

March 4 SEND replaced the usual SENDCO annual conference with a series of virtual events throughout March 2021. Topics ranged from 'person centred planning' to 'inclusion and belonging'. Hosting the conference virtually meant that the event could be accessed by a far larger audience of professionals from education, health and care, as well as school governors. The sessions were recorded and made available online. Feedback was very positive.

Challenges and priorities to take forward in the new plan

The engagement work to inform Bristol's '[Belonging Strategy for Children and Young People 2021 to 2024](#)' and the findings from the annual SEND surveys tell us that far too many children with SEND have poor experiences in education settings. Our data tells us that too many children with SEND are still being suspended or are persistently absent from school.

All children have experienced considerable disruption to their education since the start of the pandemic. The challenges and priorities for inclusion are set out in the [Belonging in Education](#) pillar of Bristol's Belonging Strategy.

Implementation of the inclusion agenda is back on track and has started with Excellence in Schools, Bristol's Education Standards Board who have broadened their remit to include data relating to attendance, exclusion and SEND. The board has representation from all sectors and is attended by Chief Executive Officers and headteachers and identifies where challenge and support are required across individual schools and settings.

Work is also underway to provide schools with monthly reports so they can compare their exclusion and attendance data with other settings. Alongside this, council officers will contact schools to discuss the issues relating to their exclusion rates and areas of concern, as well as outlining the support and help that is available to help reduce the risk of exclusion and the management of earlier intervention for pupils.

Priority Five: The fractured relationships with parents and carers, lack of co-production and variable engagement and collaboration

Progress against July 2021 Milestones

5.1 Evidence of consistent approach to participation and co-production with parents, carers and children and young people: AMBER

This is a work in progress. An engagement development officer took up post at the end of March 2021 and is working with Bristol's Parent Carer Forum and reaching out to other parent carer groups in Bristol communities as well as co-ordinating partnership engagement and co-production activity.

The aim is to link activity wherever possible to help teams across health, education and social care be more aware of each other's engagement activities, and to make

better use of parent carer insight across the partnership. It is also to help prevent parents and carers being asked similar questions by different services.

5.2 Annual report of survey results published as progress against WSoA and 'You said we did' format: GREEN

The [first survey report](#) was published in 2020 and includes the actions being undertaken to address the findings. The [second survey report](#) was published in September 2021 together with a response that explains how the findings will be included in the new SEND Partnership Plan.

5.3 The SEND Local Offer website development plan will have been delivered and a process of review has been developed in partnership with young people, parents, and carers: AMBER

The website development plan had been on hold due to COVID-19 and the difficulty in engaging parents, carers and young people during lockdowns. Promotion of the site has continued as a priority and the Facebook page, community newsletter and SENDCO termly bulletins are helping to support this.

Families' feedback has been used to review the layout and look of the SEND Local Offer website and over the next few months parents, carers and young people will be asked what they think about the different options before a final decision on the layout is made.

Key successes relating to Priority Five

A wealth of advice and guidance has been developed over the last year to support all parents during COVID-19 and specifically those with children and young people with SEND. This has all received positive feedback. During the summer parents were offered wellbeing webinars to support their own wellbeing.

The SEND Local Offer Facebook page has been successful with some posts reaching as many as 3,684 people in one month. SEND Local Offer Website 'hits' have increased by 90% since August 2020, directly linked to the newsletter and Facebook impact.

Many co-production activities have taken place since the inspection including shaping the new FLORA service, recruiting to key posts, redesigning the EHC plan template and the autism 'pathway'. Parents and carers continue to be involved in testing new processes and systems and their direct input and feedback is central to shaping services and ongoing improvement activity.

Challenges and priorities to take forward in the new plan

The WSoA reached its final milestone in July 2021 and much has been achieved since the SEND local area inspection in 2019. However, there is still a long way to go before Bristol's children and young people with SEND and their families have consistently good experiences of education, health and care.

Building trust with families will take time and we are working to repair fractured relationships by engaging and working closely with families, listening and responding to what they are telling us needs to change.