

Ofsted
Clive House
70 Petty France
London, SW1H 9EX

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 October 2020

Mr Chris Munday
Executive Director for Children and Young People
Building 4, North London Business Park
Oakleigh Road South
London
N11 1NP

Dr Helen Phelan, Director SEND and Inclusion, Barnet Education and Learning Service
Ms Mav Ghalley, Designated Clinical Officer, Barnet Clinical Commissioning Group

Dear Mr Munday

Ofsted and CQC visit to Barnet local area

Following the Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) joint visit to Barnet, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills and the Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services and Integrated Care of the CQC to summarise the visit findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic on children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Ofsted carried out this visit under a section 118(2) request from the Department for Education. CQC provided assistance to Ofsted under paragraph 9(1) of schedule 4 to the Health and Social Care Act 2008.

The visit was not an inspection. Local areas are not required to publish or share this letter. This visit was carried out as part of a series, the findings of which will be aggregated into national reports to support whole-system learning. These reports will be published on Ofsted's and CQC's websites.

Thank you for contributing valuable information. During the visit, we spoke to local area leaders, children and young people with SEND who were chosen to be part of case studies, their families, and the education, health and care professionals who work with them. We also surveyed parents and carers, as well as children and young people with SEND over the age of 16 years.

Context

The purpose of this series of visits is to support local areas to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people with SEND and their families, learn from what has happened and identify opportunities for improvement.

You can find more information about how inspectors carried out the visit at:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-phase-area-send>

Inspectors were told that:

- Area leaders from education, health and social care quickly recognised the importance of understanding the impact of the pandemic on children and young people with SEND and their families. They have reached out, listened and given real weight to their views and experiences. This partnership approach builds on the existing collaborative culture in the area and has fully involved the local parent and carer forum (PCF). Representatives from the forum told inspectors that they have been included as equal partners in all the conversations.
- Leaders and practitioners from education, health and social care have a deep understanding of the issues that children and young people with SEND and their families have faced. They have changed and adapted important ways of working in recent months. Regular communication and contact with trusted practitioners has been a 'lifeline' for families at a time when they have felt anxious about their children's health and well-being.
- Strong partnership working has enabled leaders and practitioners to respond in an agile way to children and young people's existing and emerging needs, such as their social, emotional and mental health. They recognised that COVID-19 restrictions would adversely affect some of the most vulnerable families who have children with significant and complex needs. As a result, a multi-agency group was established and an 'open spaces' scheme for targeted families was developed. This scheme enabled parents and carers to take their children to these self-contained, child-friendly spaces providing them with a highly valued break from the home environment.
- Area leaders took a 'business as usual' approach from the outset. This was to ensure that children and young people with SEND had the support they needed in place on their return to education. The quality and timeliness of education, health and care (EHC) plans have been maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- While communicating and working online has many benefits, area leaders and practitioners understand that it has some limitations when used for teaching, assessment and treatment. They also know that not all families have the same access to digital technologies. Specialist support services have worked with schools on a number of initiatives including 'home learning' resources and planning for children and young people's transition back to education. Most services are using a 'blended' approach, combining virtual assessments with face-to-face working, according to the needs of the child or young person and in line with COVID-19 safety protocols.
- Area leaders are aware that some children and young people with SEND, especially those with more severe, profound and complex needs, have lost learning and some may have regressed in important areas of development such as cognition and learning, physical development and communication and interaction. Local area partners are actively working on addressing these

challenges, recognising that in many cases, it will require considerable effort from all partners in the local SEND system. Area leaders have made best endeavours to keep in touch with families during the pandemic, using a range of methods including telephone calls and surveys. They know that it has not been possible to involve some families in decision making about how best to meet their children's needs during the pandemic. Further strengthening co-production and person-centred planning are important priorities for area leaders.

- The delivery of essential health and social care services for children and young people with SEND and their families has been disrupted by COVID-19. Area leaders are actively working on restoring services in a timely way following national guidance. Some of these services face multiple challenges such as having a pre-existing waiting list and several are expecting a significant increase in the demand for their services in the coming months.

Leaders told inspectors that their emerging priorities for supporting children and young people with SEND include the following:

- Build on the area's performance in timeliness and quality of EHC plans by making sure that where advice for a new plan has been provided virtually, a review is undertaken so that content of the plan accurately reflects the needs of the child or young person and the provision required to meet their needs.
- Formalise arrangements for using blended approaches, including face-to-face contacts, for assessment and intervention across education, health and social care services and to provide better support for families who are digitally or otherwise isolated.
- Build on the culture of partnership working, making sure that frontline practitioners utilise the opportunities created by digital technologies to enhance information-sharing and co-production.
- Use the findings and recommendations in the 'lost learning report', commissioned by local authorities in North London, to help early years settings and schools to support the learning and development of children and young people who have difficulties accessing online learning, including those with significant and complex needs.
- Extend the innovative 'open spaces' project to provide families with safe access to swimming and leisure facilities to support their children's physical and emotional well-being.
- Co-produce new approaches to support learning and development of children and young people with significant and complex needs, who are unable to attend education provision.
- Build on the existing strong engagement with parents and carers to formalise the area's approach to 'outreach' for families, especially those who are most isolated, so that there is effective communication and a dedicated 'link contact' for families of children and young people who have significant and complex needs.

- Continue to support families so that they feel confident about their children returning to school and, in doing so, to reduce the likelihood of parents and carers opting for home education when this is not a positive choice.
- Build on the existing approaches to co-production and person-centred planning to further strengthen the voice of children and young people with SEND and their families and make sure that their views and experiences are central to planning and decision-making at all levels.

Ofsted and CQC will not publish this letter and will keep it confidential as far as possible. This letter will be shared with Department for Education SEND Advisers and NHS England SEND Advisers. These advisers may then choose to offer further support to the local area based on the findings.

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted

Emmy Tomsett
Her Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted

Louise Holland
Children's Services Inspector, CQC