

Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum

statement on status of SEND reforms

January 2020

Introduction

Bedford Borough parent carer forum has prepared this “state of the nation” document to highlight the lived experience of families with regards to the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014 SEND reforms.

This document also includes feedback on more generic areas of concern about the provision of local services to young people and families living with SEND.

This document has two main purposes:

- To inform and direct the work of the SEND Improvement Board
- To provide a summary of parent-carer views for any upcoming Ofsted / CQC local area revisit

Summary

In February 2018 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission undertook the local area SEND inspection in Bedford Borough. The result was a written statement of action (WSOA) that highlighted many of the issues in local SEND provision that had been identified by Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum (BBPCF) in its “State of the Nation” reports in September 2017 and December 2016.

Following the WSOA, the local area got off to a slow start. The local area did not immediately come together to embrace the findings of the inspection and launch a co-ordinated and urgent programme of work to address the shortcomings identified. This is evidenced by the delays in agreeing the funding for additional staff and in bringing them on board. The project manager, joint working lead and local offer lead were not in place until early 2019.

Since then, however, the collective understanding of the issues, prioritisation of actions and pace of change has improved dramatically. Meetings in the Borough now have a culture of collective responsibility, purpose and coproduction that was so evidently lacking in 2018.

Many critical changes have been made including:

- The agreement and implementation of a system-wide coproduction charter
- Hiring two new SEN advisers for mainstream schools
- Putting in place additional, jointly commissioned resources to address the gaps and backlog in speech and language therapy provision
- Significant improvements in the local offer
- A greater focus on quality assurance
- Universally agreed and Improved metrics and KPIs to track progress

These are all positive developments that families have welcomed.

However, families are not yet reporting a dramatic change in their lived experiences. There have been some more positive experiences but many families still express concerns with three critical areas:

- There are frustrated about their ability to access key medical services such as SALT, Occupational Therapy, community paediatricians and CAMHS.
- Moreover, when they are accepted by a service they have to wait too long to be seen and the time between appointments is too long.
- The experiences of children with SEND in mainstream schools are still too varied. They tell us that when they express concerns they are often not listened to, many report unlawful exclusion practices and too often provision that is agreed is not delivered.

Many of the building blocks to address these concerns have been put in place. We will continue to work with the local authority to ensure that these concerns remain a priority and the action to address them continues.

The Good News

Effective co-production – Coproduction between the Local Authority (LA) and BBPCF has always been a strength in the local area. In the last year we have seen a marked improvement in coproduction across all areas of the system between the LA, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and BBPCF. This is evidenced by the agreement of a new coproduction charter that has been adopted by the whole local area and has been heavily promoted by all parties.

Joint understanding of needs and joint priorities – the local area has undertaken a great deal of work to arrive at a mutual understanding of the needs of the local SEND population through a new joint strategic needs assessment, has agreed shared outcomes and has a shared priorities. This has led to meaningful joint commissioning to address the crisis in SALT provision locally. It needs to be extended to other areas such as SENDIAS and OT.

Addressing SALT issues – A key turning point for the local area was the analysis performed by the joint commissioning manager of SALT provision for children and young people with EHCPs. This analysis supported the anecdotal evidence from BBPCF that there were major issues with SALT provision particularly long gaps between appointments (often several years) and that the provision stipulated in EHCPs frequently not being delivered. This analysis was a turning point - the system collectively accepted that there was a major problem and jointly commissioned additional resources to address the crisis. Many families are reporting that they have now received SALT input for their children for the first time in two years.

New staff – the new resources brought in by the LA and CCG have made a significant difference to the pace of change in the local area. New staff have been brought in to support project management, joint commissioning, the local offer, SEN provision in mainstream schools and quality assurance.

Social care – families report an improvement in their interactions with the social care team in Bedford Borough. They tell us of greater satisfaction and with the team coproducing more effectively with individual families.

Local offer – the local offer has been significantly improved in the last year. More information is available to families and it is easier to access. The new tool was heavily coproduced with parents and

young people. In the summer the local area held a “local offer live” event that was well attended by families.

Bedford Inclusive Town – The local area has done some good work in raising the profile of disability in Bedford amongst the wider population and services. The “Bedford Inclusive Town” work is welcome and has been promoted by senior council staff. “Purple Tuesday” was welcomed by families and we look forward to the results of the survey currently being conducted.

Special Needs Schools -Parent-carers of children in Bedford’s special needs schools tell us how pleased they are with the provision their children get. They describe person centred practices, tailored curriculums, holistic care that wraps around the child and family.

Our major concerns

Access to and waiting times for community health services – This has been a consistent concern for parents since our first state of the nation report in December 2016. Although steps have been taken to address gaps in provision for SALT (see above) and the KPI reporting for the CAMHS service suggests improvements, we continue to hear concerns from parents about these services and OT and community paediatricians. They tell us that these services are difficult to access, that they are confused by referral pathways and services frequently try to discharge them. Moreover, when they are accepted by a service they have to wait too long to be seen and the time between appointments is too long.

The experience of children with SEND in mainstream schools is too varied – Parents tell us that when they express concerns about their children in mainstream schools they are often not listened to and that early intervention is frequently not put in place. Many report unlawful exclusion practices such as part time timetables, missing school trips and isolation. We hear that provision that is agreed is often not delivered. Parents also appreciate that schools are very stretched both for resources and staff. The LA is taking positive action to influence the culture in schools with clear messages from the Chief Education Officer, additional resources to support SEN in schools and new reports to focus on SEN data for individual schools.

Preparing for Adulthood – parent carers report that the support they receive when their children approach school leaving age is inconsistent and that there are still relatively limited options for young people with SEND when it comes to further education and employment. There are pockets of good practice with the Adult Social Care team and the local college being identified as providing good support at times. A PfA strategy has been developed but only limited progress has been made in implementing it to date.

Capacity of special needs schools – the special needs schools in Bedford Borough are either at capacity or approaching capacity. This shortage of places has been predicted and projected for a number of years. We are optimistic that the current process to open a new free school process will address this shortfall and look forward to co-producing this with the local authority. In particular SEMH provision is a constant concern for families.

Appendix: Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum

A parent carer forum is a group of parents and carers of disabled children who work with local authorities, education, health and other providers to make sure the services they plan and deliver meet the needs of disabled children and families

The Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum was formally launched in February 2014 but has functioned with a steering committee since May 2013. We have approximately 400 members covering all areas of SEND.

Our objectives are:

- to be the strategic, consultative and collaborative body within Bedford Borough representing families of children with special educational needs and disabilities, providing a liaison point for Statutory and Voluntary Agencies within Bedford Borough;
- to work co-operatively with local service providers and commissioners to enhance and develop the range and quality of services provided for all children in Bedford Borough with special educational needs and disabilities;
- to consult with, inform and train our membership in order to be an independent, parent carer-led body that determines and acts upon the priorities of its members.

We have compiled this report by gathering intelligence from our membership and working with our partners in the local area. We do this in many ways including:

- We have 667 members (up from 453 in 2018).
- We held countless 1:1 conversations with individual parent carers in the course of our work and our lives.
- We hosted or attended over 30 formal engagement events for parent carers in Bedford Borough in the 9 months between April and December 2019.
- We attended over 70 meetings led by the local authority, 50 led by the Clinical Commissioning Group or the NHS and 14 meetings that were jointly led.
- We conducted one major survey in October to November 2019 (our outcomes survey) and conducted informal surveys of our membership through social media.
- We attended 6 regional and national parent carer forum events and participated in 3 national surveys in 2019.
- We have 518 facebook followers, 671 twitter followers. Over the course of 2019 we had over 1000 interactions on our social media.