



Department
for Education

South West Regions Group

Second Floor

3 Glass Wharf

By Email

Claire Winter, Director of Children's Services, Somerset County Council
Andrew Keefe, Deputy Director of Commissioning - Mental Health, Autism, &
Learning Disabilities, NHS Somerset

22 January 2024

Dear Claire and Andrew,

Thank you for meeting with the DfE SEND and NHS England officials on 4th January 2024 to review the progress that you have made against your Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) since we last met on 10th July 2023.

The Areas of Significant Weakness (ASWs) that the APP has been designed to address, based on the issues highlighted in your January 2023 Ofsted and Care Quality Commission revisit report, are:

1. Poor assessment and meeting of need caused by inconsistent practice leading to poor outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
2. Too many children and young people not accessing education because of the disproportionate use of exclusion and poor inclusive practices across the area.

In addition to the insightful discussions that we were able to have at the review meeting, we were grateful to receive and consider the additional documents and data that you provided in preparation for the meeting. The evidence showed that there was a focus from the Local Area in improving each area of weakness, with some significant development being made towards Area of Significant Weakness 1.

We are especially grateful for the contribution of Ruth Hobbs and Rachel Saunders, on behalf of the Parent Carer Forum (PCF). Through their contributions, and other stakeholder engagement, it was clear to see that there was a collaborative approach to the improvement work in Somerset. To increase this work further, the Local Area should continue to engage with schools and head teachers, including those working in mainstream schools.

ASW1: Poor assessment and meeting of need caused by inconsistent practice leading to poor outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

There has been progress made against the Area of Significant Weakness 1, especially demonstrated by the increasing use of the Graduated Response Tool in

schools. This has worked on developing consistency of practice and enabling clarity in terms of assessment of need. Although further work is needed to ensure its usage is widespread, there is a plan of how to do this.

Additionally, you explained that there had been improvements in the delivery of new EHCPs, reflected in the KPI data you shared. Although these improvements are positive developments, it was noted that there remained variations in the quality of these plans and so further consistency is needed within this area.

At your next review meeting, for ASW1, we would like to see further evidence of:

- Clear examples of what is being done to meet the need of children and young people with SEND.
- Further information on what is being done to improve the quality of annual reviews, including whether health and social care are being included in the annual review process.
- An update on how the Graduated Response Tool is being embedded and more evidence of whether schools are owning and utilising it.

We ask for this information to be shared at the next review meeting, plus expect to see continued work within this area, with the view of stepping down ASW1 when we next meet.

ASW2: Too many children and young people not accessing education because of the disproportionate use of exclusion and poor inclusive practices across the area.

Although you expressed challenges with the work being done in this area, it was clear that there was a collaborative approach to trying to solve the problems. Where attempts had been made to improve exclusions, such as through intervening where CYP had three suspensions, the LA was reflective, keen to learn lessons and to continue making progress.

In regard to ASW2, it is clear that there are further improvements that need to be made and, at the next meeting, we would like to see:

- Regarding the Area Inclusion Discussions, how you are working together with schools and what has been done to improve the number of children that are being picked up within that process.
- You highlighted the variation of exclusion rates between schools and so it would be helpful to hear how schools are engaging together and sharing good practice.
- Further reflections based around data and practice on what approaches are being taken to reduce exclusions within Somerset.

Further to ASW1 and ASW2 improvements, issues with the workforce came up as a significant area of concern in your documentation and within the review. At the next meeting, it would be useful to hear what has been done to improve workforce retention and capacity in these instances. It is also important that when we receive your KPIs, that these are updated with the most recent data and that we are presented with the most up to date governance structure.

The next review meeting will be scheduled in August 2024. We will be looking at the actions the local area has taken between now and then and will expect the Local Area to provide clear evidence of impact. Information will be requested at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting.

In the meantime, Dan Carey as your DfE Case Lead, and Mark Tucker as your NHSE Advisor, will continue to provide you with support and challenge. If you have any questions or need any further support, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Salam', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Salam Katbi

South West Head of VCU

Department for Education