

Date: 12 March 2019
Our ref: AS
Your ref:



People and Place Directorate
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Dear Colleague

As you are aware, the joint Ofsted / Care Quality Commission (CQC) Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) inspection took place in October 2017. The inspection highlighted five key areas where improvements were required and these are set out below. On March 19 two local authority reviewers will critically assess the work we have carried out to date in improving each of the areas and we are also anticipating an Ofsted re-visit before the end of April 2019.

The purpose of this letter is to share with you an outline of work carried out to date in each of the areas and seek your support in ensuring that the reviewers and Ofsted appreciate the close joint working between the local partnership, including the parent forum POINT, and schools across a whole range of school improvement priorities linked to SEND.

The five areas are:

- Illegal practice that may be happening in the local area. This related to alleged illegal exclusions
- Lack of effective leadership and joint partnership in leading, developing and evaluating the SEND reforms
- Dysfunctional EHC process and inadequate quality of plans
- The defective transport arrangement for children and young people who have special education needs and/or disabilities
- The significant underachievement of children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including the high rates of fixed-term exclusions and persistent absenteeism

Areas one and five relate specifically to exclusions, absenteeism and any alleged inappropriate use of off-rolling, managed moves or disciplinary placements. The secondary head teacher review of exclusions, the revised policies on managed moves and disciplinary placements and the open discussion at secondary head teacher meetings on off-rolling have all given comfort that the practice does not reflect the 2017 findings. Exclusion and absenteeism figures for children and young people with SEND are slowly improving across the authority, although they

still lag-behind the non- SEND cohort. The changed practice at the secondary Fair Access Group has helped to reduce children missing from education, and the inclusion of SEND in school improvement visits has also raised the profile of this important cohort. In terms of attainment, 2018 figures indicate slight improvement across all key stages, although once again there is a distinct lag-behind the non-SEND cohort and this remains an area of priority for action in schools. We will share the data on the self-evaluation framework for SEND once it is finalised, but hopefully this gives a flavour of the theme that Ofsted will want to further investigate on their re-visit. The work of the Behaviour & Attendance groups and the SEN support group – led by senior school staff, will have a significant role to play in sharing the impact of their work with the inspectors and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all school leaders and SENCO's who have taken the time to lead and contribute to the outputs of these groups.

Another key area links to the use of the Local Offer www.oldham.gov.uk/localoffer . The site, as you will be aware, has been transformed and is now current with no broken links and includes a wide range of content and advice to help families with children and young people with SEND. The inspectors will also want to review a selection of school based Local Offer websites. I know that you have all reviewed your sites and linked them closely to the local authority one and thank you for prioritising this piece of work. Inspectors will be keen to know the impact of the revised local offer on the user community and any assistance you can give in gathering and sharing information on impact will be most helpful.

Another key area is the EHC planning process. You are aware the local authority has invested £500k to double the size of the team and we have now caught up with the backlog, and the quality and timeliness of plans has improved significantly. We are conscious that some older plans were not of the quality we now deliver and will ensure this is addressed during the annual review process and we have a clear strategy in place for this with additional resources to address this need. SENCO's are aware that we are also reviewing how to build-up additional support for children and young people who have SEN support needs and have worked collaboratively on a new SEN policy. New graduated response documents are now available on the Local Offer. The new inclusion strategy, soon to be launched, has a large section on this with a focus on the 'graduated response' developed in partnership with SENCOs. We are also considering how additional element 2 funding can be better utilised to help fund children with SEN support needs via our commissioned work on the review of high needs block to align needs with spend. We have delivered training to school governors on their SEND duties and responsibilities.

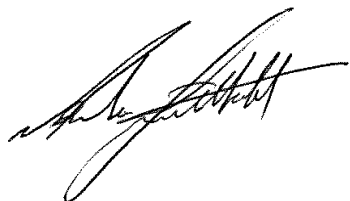
In terms of leadership of SEND across the local partnership, the SEND Partnership and Management Boards have senior school representation and act as scrutiny and operational fora respectively. There are close links with health and social care which is evidenced in the composition of the Boards. There is also very practical joint working across all elements of leading SEND and this can be seen, for example, in the fact that health now funds complex case transport across the authority. The work streams on transport, EHC plans, SEN support, joint commissioning all have representation from schools, the local authority education and

social care teams and health. This is a good example of how we are working together to support the SEND community in an integrated fashion.

In order to continue to develop our response to the areas for action, we would be delighted to receive any specific feedback about the work done so far, as well as how you think we can continue to improve supporting children and young people with SEND across Oldham. I would ask that we use the headteacher and SENCO fora for such discussion and contribution to further improvement. I would also like to thank all SENCOs and headteachers who have sent positive emails to our staff on SEND reforms, particularly since September 2018, on changes you have noted on quality of practice across the system.

I would also like to thank headteacher and SENCO colleagues for all the work that has been carried out in schools and for their support in working with the local partnership to address the priorities set out in the last inspection. It is by working collectively that we will make the biggest difference to the educational and life chances of young people in our community with SEND.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Sutherland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew Sutherland

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