

Councillor Neil Gethin
Vice-Chair
Schools, Children and Young People
Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Floor 2
Council House

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Dear Neil

Thank you for providing your Panel's findings of the recent Scrutiny review into Children with Disabilities. I note that Councillors had the opportunity to meet with young people who have a disability, their parents, officers and providers of respite care. My responses to each of your Panel's recommendations are below.

Recommendation 1

Consider actively promoting that parents of children with disabilities can contact their local councillors, to assist with directing them to appropriate support within the local authority and provide continued support to ensure they continue to receive the most appropriate cost effective support package.

Response:

Parents of children with disabilities are encouraged to seek support and contact their local councillors. The Cabinet member for Children's Services is a key member of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategic Partnership Board, which informs on all of the developments and gives regular service specific updates. Members of Doncaster Parents Voice have time allocated on the agenda of every meeting, and we seek to support co-production across all areas of SEND. Although services are being reconfigured to accommodate budget restrictions, engaging with parents and seeking to support by informing them via the Local Offer remains a priority.

Recommendation 2

Continue to support the need for an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) high functioning with sensory need resource and the work being undertaken to provide a pool of, or an increase in, respite providers who can be brokered by the Council and parents.

Response:

Respite care provides essential support to the families we have through commissioning activities and increasing our range of providers, thus reducing the time parents are waiting for support. After a great deal of activity, our respite care resource, Oaklands, is much improved. Parents now regularly meet to support and inform developments and recent Ofsted inspection evidenced improvement to achieve overall GOOD across the service.

Recommendation 3

Continue to support the work being undertaken to seek appropriate school placements for children and young people with ASD high functioning social communication difficulties (academically mainstream).

Response:

We continue to support the need for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) high functioning resource. Numerous options have been explored and we are implementing proposals which will support the opening of a resource, specific to meet needs. Parenting support services were commissioned via CAMHS. The commissioning for this has transferred to the local authority, and although the budget for this has reduced, we have plans agreed by the ASD Group to appoint to two vacant positions for Parent Advisors for September 2016.

Recommendation 4

Ensure mechanisms and statutory guidance are in place to make sure Education Health Care Plans to enable correct interpretation, for example, by schools and transport providers.

Response:

Education Health and Care Plans: Legislation for the changes across SEND was embryonic during the review. Since that time, we have progressed across all areas, developing Person Centred Planning. Parents report the new process has greatly improved the comprehensive assessment process. Ofsted Inspection has issued their framework for inspection for SEND, and we are preparing for this imminent inspection. A weekly inspection preparation group is currently working across all stakeholders to prepare. We can evidence much improvement.

Recommendation 5

Investigate whether Council transport could be used/hired to take groups of young people out in evenings, using their personal budgets.

Response:

The availability of additional transport provided by the local authority is extremely unlikely, given current financial constraints. We are supporting young people accessing a range of activities through their short break and personal assistants.

Recommendation 6

Support the POET Pilot and an evaluation be provided to a future Scrutiny Panel meeting.

Response:

Doncaster has piloted the first year of the Education Health and Care plan implementation through Personal Outcome Evaluation Tool (POET). As response to this was voluntary, we have had very low numbers respond in the first year. However, the parents who have responded report great improvements in the process and outcomes for their children. We wish to follow this up this year, by telephoning each parent after their EHC review and encourage them, where possible, to go on line and complete the evaluation.

Recommendation 7

Ensure continued work and commitment providing the best deals being procured for children where there is need to be placed out of authority.

Response:

The NEXT project, 16+ and post-19 developments to support young people into active employment continue to make sound progress. Special School Head Teachers are

supporting this development across the borough, and have been instrumental in seeking to both improve the range of opportunities available, but have assisted local authority officers in challenging post-16 providers to improve their offer. The Hub have plans to increase their High Melton site offer as this site is more suited to meet sensory needs, compared to the busy modern Hub location.

Recommendation 8

- a) Consider writing to the Secretary of State for Education asking if thought could be given to the development of interactive examinations and other support aimed at young people with disabilities to help them overcome barriers forced through the formal examination processes.
- b) Support the current project with NEXT and investigate the possibility of such schemes being ro

Response:

Across the borough, employment for all post-16 learners remains challenging. Our priority is to try and eliminate the barriers to full time employment that young people with SEND experience, so they have equality of access to employment opportunities. Northridge School continues to progress and champion this work, supporting increased numbers of pupils to experience work settings in preparation for full time work.

Across the span of SEND services, the local authority continues to make good progress. We have sustained our 100% targets for the transfer of Statements to Education Health and Care Plans, continuing to meet the twenty week deadline for issuing the new plan. Neighbouring boroughs are not meeting this target, and have seen an increase in the number of parents seeking recourse via the SEND's Tribunal process. To date, Doncaster has experienced very few appeals - one in the past 18 months – and the expertise and quality of our SEND support services have greatly contributed to this success. However, we will continue to support negotiation and mediation to achieve agreed outcomes with our parents and carers.

Preparation with all stakeholders for the area SEND inspection is a current priority. The framework for the inspection was released at the beginning of May, with the first area being inspected the week beginning 9th May. Our preparation is going well. We have many things to be proud of, and we seek to present the inspectors with a realistic account of our achievements and challenges.

I trust the above is helpful, and thank you for your Panel's input into this review.

Yours sincerely

Ros Jones
Mayor of Doncaster