



Department
for Education

**Department for Education
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Kevin Gordon, Director of Children's Services
Louise Patten, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Hayley Good, Deputy Director, Education

11 March 2021

Dear Kevin, Louise & Hayley,

ACTIONS FOLLOWING OXFORDSHIRE'S 6 MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW MEETING FOR SEND WITH THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND NHS ENGLAND ON 25 FEBRUARY 2021.

Thank you to you and your colleagues for meeting with senior Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England (NHSE) advisers and officials on 25 February to review the progress you have made against your SEND Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) over the past twelve months.

In your APP, agreed with the Department and NHS England, there were two key areas of focus, based on the issues highlighted in your Ofsted and Care Quality Commission revisit report dated December 2019. From the evidence you have recently submitted in writing, and further evidence presented during the APP review meeting, we have noted that:

There is a commitment at senior level to ensure communication with families continues to improve, and action is being taken in response to families' feedback. The Oxfordshire SEND strategy has been co-produced, and due to Covid related delays will now be published in January 2022. In the meantime, reassurance was given that you are continuing your work on key priorities, and your improving working practices between health, social care and education were evident.

You demonstrated how self-evaluation is now part of the remit of your governance structure, with the reconstituted improvement board having a more focussed agenda, enabling senior leaders to hold each other to account. However, we felt that there is currently limited evidence about the long-term effect this is having on driving and securing improvement. We therefore ask that we continue to receive progress

updates over the next few months, particularly relating to the launch of the SEND strategy, how this will help you maintain the rigour of your self-evaluation and monitoring processes, and some impact measures that demonstrate sustained improvement.

In relation to the quality of the EHCPs, you demonstrated that there are a range of quality assurance systems now in place. The revised format of your EHCPs has been well received. You are seeing the impact of internal training for both advice writers and plan writers, and you will continue to focus on improving the quality of both new EHCPs and those being amended following an annual review.

Satisfactory progress has been made in relation to improving the quality and consistency of EHC plans, and to establishing a strong quality assurance system. In addition, you have maintained timeliness in completing assessments, and the percentage of new EHC plans finalised within the required 20 weeks remains broadly in line with the national average. We agreed that following an independent audit and with a support offer from NHS England & NHS Improvement; we do not feel that this area requires continued monitoring through an APP.

In summary, going forward, we do feel that we need to see longer-term evidence that the improvements in relation to the quality and rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring and its effect on driving and securing improvement are firmly embedded, and also that the SEND strategy is fully implemented. To this end, we are now asking that you continue to focus on this area through the APP, and we will wish to hold another review in October.

In the meantime, your DfE and NHS England advisers Liz Flaherty, Natalie Warman and Jacqui Stillwell, will continue to offer support. I am copying this letter to Yvonne Rees (Chief Executive); Ian Hudspeth (Leader of the Council); Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale (Cabinet Member for Children & Family Services), Jules Francis-Sinclair & Stephanie Harrison (Parent Carer Forum); and your DfE and NHS England advisers and case leads.

Yours sincerely,



Sidrah Chowdry
Department for Education