

Dear Parent/Carer

Tomorrow, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will publish its joint area special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inspection report.

The report, which will be available here <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80418> focuses on the area's effectiveness in implementing the 2014 disability and special educational needs reforms.

Like more than half of areas inspected, Ofsted and the CQC determined that Norfolk should prepare a Written Statement of Action to address areas in need of improvement.

This needs to cover three key areas: delays in Education Health and Care Plans; provision for young people as they move into adulthood, and communication with parents and carers.

This was expected – we know that we need to improve further in these areas and we are sorry that some children haven't been getting the help they need quickly enough. We have found it difficult to keep up with increased demand but we now have an ambitious strategy to address that, which inspectors recognised. We're also sorry that some parents in Norfolk don't feel like they have access to the information they need and don't feel listened to. We are listening, we understand your concerns and we will get better.

As parents, we understand the challenges you face supporting children with SEND and we want to help support you, as best we can. We are extremely grateful to Family Voice Norfolk, SENSational Families and SENDIASS for the challenge you give us and for working so tirelessly to champion the needs of children and families. We want to work even more closely with you, as we continue to improve services. We need your help to ensure that parents' and children's voices are heard, that they are kept up to date with what is happening and that they are involved in helping us shape services

There are many areas for improvement required but equally there are many areas where the work we have already undertaken jointly is beginning to improve services for children and their families. The report highlights that we have refused to adopt quick fixes to longstanding problems, and have worked systematically to create "a far-reaching, ambitious, well-planned and securely financed transformation plan to address the weaknesses in provision. However, this plan is very new in its implementation."

We are already investing £120m in special educational needs and disabilities to create more specialist places and we're increasing our support to schools, so that they can help their children earlier. We've also increased capacity in our specialist teams, which inspectors said, is starting to make a real difference to children and their families.

Every local authority and every school in the country is facing pressures in this area. Since the SEND reforms in 2014, Norfolk has seen a significant increase in demand for assessments and the complexity of children's needs has continued to increase. In 2015, the council received 645 requests for assessments. In 2019, this had almost doubled to 1,267 in a year. We have and will continue to raise this issue with government and ask for a national solution to what is a national challenge.

Although we know a national approach is needed to improve support for children with SEND, we absolutely cannot wait for this. In the coming weeks we will begin to hold some joint workshops and planning events, so that we can prepare our written statement and determine the next steps. We will be in touch with you when we have dates for these, as you will play an important role in helping us to get this right.

Inspectors found that the culture of joint working was now palpable and that the work of many professionals was of high quality. They said that leaders had "an insightful understanding of the weaknesses in their systems" and that joint strategic planning was now a reality. Importantly, they also said that Norfolk is filled with confident and articulate children and young people with SEND and that is down to you, their parents, and many of Norfolk's brilliant schools. We have every confidence that working together we can and will improve services for children and young people with SEND in Norfolk.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Tough', enclosed within a hand-drawn oval shape.

Sara Tough

Executive Director of Children's Services

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melanie Craig', written in a cursive style.

Melanie Craig

Chief Officer, NHS Norfolk and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group

Executive Lead, Norfolk and Waveney STP