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Lesley Young-Murphy, Chief Officer, Clinical Commissioning Group

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Dear Ms Old and Dr Young-Murphy

Joint area SEND inspection in North Tyneside

Between 15 and 19 November 2021, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the local area of North Tyneside to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014.

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors including an Ofsted Inspector and a Children's Services Inspector from the CQC.

Inspectors spoke with children and young people with SEND, parents and carers, and local authority and National Health Service (NHS) officers. They visited a range of providers and spoke to leaders, staff and governors about how they were implementing the SEND reforms. Inspectors looked at a range of information about the performance of the area, including the area's self-evaluation. Inspectors met with leaders for health, social care and education. They reviewed performance data and evidence about the local offer and joint commissioning.

In reaching their judgements, inspectors took account of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SEND arrangements in the area. Inspectors considered a range of information about the impact of the pandemic and explored how the area's plans and actions had been adapted as a result.

This letter outlines our findings from the inspection, including some strengths and areas for further improvement.

Main findings

- In North Tyneside, leaders of education, health and social care are united in their mission to improve the experience and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. Leaders acted quickly to implement essential reforms required by the Children and Families Act 2014. By 2015, leaders had merged key decision-making groups, worked with parents and carers to establish the North Tyneside parent carer forum (NTPCF) and set up the special educational needs and disabilities information, advice and support service. Strategic decisions about the commissioning of services and provision for children and young people with SEND are owned by all partners.
- Over time, new systems and services have evolved. New leaders joined the area bringing fresh perspectives on what was working and what needed to be improved. Leaders are not complacent. They recognise they do not always get things right and that they are on a journey of continuous improvement.
- Leaders have set up forums where the views of children, young people and their families can be heard. The NTPCF has a strong voice and feeds into strategic governance across the area. The SEND youth forum was established in 2019. It is an influential group and integrated fully into North Tyneside's youth council.
- Leaders have a robust process of self-evaluation. They are determined to know what is working and what needs changing. Leaders' current self-assessment is accurate. It shows that leaders are looking at detailed information and identifying priorities that chime with the issues raised by children and young people with SEND and their families. Leaders have demonstrated they have the capacity and understanding to continue to improve provision for children and young people with SEND in North Tyneside.
- Joint commissioning processes are well established. There is an increased demand for specialist provision and health services. Leaders have agreed plans for long-term investment in places and people. Some of these plans will take several years to complete as they are linked to new buildings. However, leaders have systems that are flexible enough to respond quickly in an emergency. For example, some children and young people with SEND had to be relocated from an out-of-area placement at short notice and leaders agreed contingency plans without delay. Providers confirm that leaders are open to finding creative solutions to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

- Leaders have remodelled the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) to improve the time it takes for children and young people with mental health needs to be seen. Leaders recognise that the waiting times for children and young people to get onto an assessment pathway for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are too long. Leaders have put more early help support into children's services and CAMHS to help families who are waiting to get onto these assessment pathways. Parents and carers have found this additional support helpful. However, a small number said it was at too basic a level for the needs of their child.
- Parents and carers have mixed views of the services and provision open to their children. While many are full of praise for North Tyneside, a small number are unhappy with what is on offer. For example, some parents and carers of children and young people with ASD and complex social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs said their child's needs had not been met in their local school and that they had struggled to find an appropriate specialist setting. Leaders in North Tyneside have recognised this issue. They have recently published a new autism strategy which shows what is already in place and what more is to be done.
- Leaders have improved the time it takes to complete statutory assessments for education, health and care (EHC) plans. Many parents whose children had recently been issued with an EHC plan spoke of how the process is efficient and takes less time than they expected. However, a small number of parents and carers are frustrated with the time it takes for updated plans to be sent out following an annual review. Leaders do not want this to be the case. They have changed the way staff in the SEND support teamwork and have provided effective training for SEND case workers.
- The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are happy with the educational provision their child attends. However, some spoke of it being a battle to get to this point. They were frustrated that their child's initial EHC plan did not fully explain their child's needs or what provision was required. These parents and carers were particularly anxious about how therapies such as speech and language therapy (SALT) or occupational therapy (OT) were described in the EHC plan. Leaders have worked with practitioners to improve the standard of the advice they contribute to the EHC plan process. Leaders have a system in place for quality assuring EHC plans. This is leading to better written plans.
- The online local offer is full of useful information. Since May 2018, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of visits to the local offer website, but there are still some parents and carers who are not using it. Leaders analyse information about usage of the local offer in great detail and are constantly remodelling the website to make it even easier to use.
- Outcomes for children and young people with SEND in North Tyneside are generally strong. There is a positive picture for attendance, exclusions from school and the number of young people with SEND who progress to further education, employment or training. Leaders are working with schools on improving reading outcomes for children and young people with EHC plans. There

is still work to be done on increasing opportunities for social participation, particularly for children and young people with SEND who are under 16.

The effectiveness of the local area in identifying children and young people's special educational needs and/or disabilities

Strengths

- Leaders have rolled out a programme of training to increase awareness of SEND in mainstream schools and across universal services. This has improved how staff in schools identify and provide for a range of additional needs. School leaders said this training has changed practice in their schools for the better.
- Specialist education and health practitioners work together in the health, information and advice, virtual school and emotional well-being (HIVE) team. The HIVE team runs training for practitioners in schools, health and social care roles. This increases practitioners' understanding of how traumatic experiences in childhood affect an individual's capacity to learn.
- Leaders have established close working relationships with local charities. For example, Barnardo's are working with North Tyneside's HIVE team to run youth groups for children and young people with SEMH needs.
- Partners across North Tyneside have developed a local area support plan. This document was designed by a multi-agency group from across education, health and social care. It helps staff in school support a child or young person with SEND when they are at the SEND support stage, before an EHC plan is required.
- North Tyneside's early help team works with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND who are referred into CAMHS but do not meet the threshold for direct work. Early help workers support families who are struggling with their child's behaviour. Leaders recognise that this approach does not work for all families, but they do know that it works for many. They have evaluated the work since it began in 2019. Very few families have had to seek an additional CAMHS referral.
- Early years providers receive highly effective specialist support. Providers praise the training and guidance they receive. They are confident in using a graduated response to help identify emerging needs and support the children and young people in their care. Providers know how to apply for early years inclusion funding. They have regular network meetings which give them a chance to influence decisions around early years support.
- Health visitors work alongside North Tyneside's early help teams. They liaise with midwifery to identify families who will require additional support with physical needs and/or learning difficulties. When babies are born prematurely or have additional health needs, the members of the children's community nursing team become involved before the child leaves the neonatal unit. They

attend 'team around the family' meetings to offer early help support. This means that babies and families with SEND are identified early and have the right support from the earliest opportunity.

- There is a responsive speech and language therapy offer in the area. Therapists attend 'team around the family' meetings, support children and young people with SEND in schools and train providers. Children and young people with SEND receive the speech and language support they need promptly.
- North Tyneside's youth justice service has a clinical psychologist and a speech and language therapist seconded into their team. These practitioners complete immediate therapeutic work if it is needed. They also support the assessment of undiagnosed conditions such as ASD or ADHD. This work contributes to the identification of additional needs and improves the advocacy provided by the youth justice service.

Areas for development

- There is a mixed picture in relation to the knowledge and understanding of SEND in mainstream schools. This is more of an issue for children and young people with with ASD and complex SEMH than for children and young people with learning difficulties. This is resulting in the needs of some children and young people with SEND going unrecognised and unmet.
- Communication with parents and carers is of variable quality. Where it works well, parents and carers receive regular and proactive communication from practitioners and local authority officers. When this does not occur, parents and carers are not well informed.

The effectiveness of the local area in meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

Strengths

- Provision for language and communication needs is strong in North Tyneside. The Dene Communication Centre provides a highly effective service to children with communication needs. There is targeted support for nursery-aged children who have identified speech, language and communication needs. This may be provided by attendance at the centre's nursery classroom or as outreach support delivered in the child's early years setting. School staff, parents and carers speak highly of the level of support provided to older children with identified or emerging speech, language and communication needs.
- The waiting time for mental health referrals to CAMHS is manageable. CAMHS leaders found there was an exponential rise in children and young people presenting with eating disorders, tics and features of obsessive-compulsive disorder. CAMHS has developed a risk-management system to ensure that

children and young people with additional vulnerabilities are seen more quickly.

- Leaders have increased the capacity of the SALT team in two special schools. This has led to more school-based training than was available previously. School staff are now better able to provide communication-friendly classrooms and support therapy work. Occupational therapists have close working relationships with staff in North Tyneside's specialist settings. Therapists assess the learning environments in schools thoroughly to ensure that they match the child's or young person's physical needs.
- The physiotherapy and occupational therapy teams have managed a return to pre-pandemic waiting times well. Seven out of the eight physiotherapists were redeployed to support the NHS's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therapists developed a new blended approach, with virtual and face-to-face sessions, and have found that this has met needs well.
- The special school nursing team is based in two schools and offers outreach support to two other schools. The special school nursing team has an innovative service with one school nurse offering support for transition into nursery provision for children with complex needs. This reassures parents and carers and gives them confidence in their choices. For older children and young people with SEND, the special school nursing team provides drop-in and group teaching sessions. This means that children and young people with SEND have more choice about how they get support from their school nurses.
- The children's continuing care team, alongside the community nursing team, assess children and young people with complex care needs. They source provision of care and support parents and carers in the use of personal budgets to meet specific needs effectively.
- Leaders have responded quickly to the growth in the number of children and young people with ASD and SEMH needs. Leaders have secured government funding for capital investment. They have also agreed plans to remodel health services to meet anticipated needs in any expanded school provision. Area partners have acted on school leaders' ideas for potential solutions to develop provision to meet emerging and escalating needs.
- Leaders have overhauled their services and provision for children and young people with ASD. This work led to a revised autism strategy. Some of the work is at an early stage of development. For example, the 'autism-in-school' pilot and the expanded provision at Benton Dene School. The post-16 'Ignite your Potential' programme has been running since 2017. Leaders have recently grown this into a three-year course to support young people with ASD and moderate learning difficulties. There is strong progression from this course into employment and/or training.
- The designated clinical officer (DCO) worked with partners from education, health and care to co-produce a multi-agency SEND e-learning package. This

training, coupled with stricter quality control measures, has led to improved contributions from health practitioners to EHC plans.

- The DCO and the NTPCF identified a gap in provision of continence services for children and young people with SEND. The DCO worked with health leaders to set up a new service for continence in North Tyneside. Now, children and young people with SEND have their continence needs met locally and promptly.
- Leaders created North Tyneside's Whole Life Disability Service in 2016. This service developed the transition enablement team to support transition between a range of services and provisions. There is now a smoother transition for young people with complex needs and learning disabilities between children's and adults' services.

Areas for development

- The waiting time for a diagnosis of ASD is too long. Leaders recognise the impact that waiting for assessment has on children, young people and their families. Leaders have tried several times to increase the number of clinical psychologists in the assessment team. However, they have struggled to recruit. Leaders have adapted their delivery plans and have recruited specialist teachers and other health practitioners to support the diagnostic process. Leaders have expanded the early help offer in children's services and CAMHS to support children and young people who are awaiting assessment decisions.
- CAMHS leaders have successfully recruited new staff, including non-medical prescribers in order to reduce waiting times. However, the full impact of these appointments has not yet been seen. The waiting list for the ADHD pathway is still too long. Leaders have provided pre-diagnosis support for families in the form of strategies, support groups and support workers. This is a new development provided by leaders in recognition of the needs of these children and young people and their families.
- Leaders are aware that there is a gap in provision for children and young people who have a diagnosis of ASD and complex SEMH needs. There are examples of children and young people with this profile being settled in productive and ambitious provision. However, there are a small number of children and young people with SEND who are struggling to find the personalised provision that they need.
- Some parents and carers remain unhappy with their child's EHC plan because of how their child's needs are described. Parents and carers understand that EHC plans are updated and amended at annual review meetings. However, North Tyneside is slow at publishing these amended plans.
- North Tyneside's local offer is full of helpful information but is not used by all parents and carers.

The effectiveness of the local area in improving outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

Strengths

- Leaders have a clear picture of the outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Leaders use data well to inform the training they provide to schools and to inform their commissioning of services.
- Leaders have improved the uptake of annual health checks by children and young people aged 14 to 25 with a learning disability. The DCO worked with the SEND youth forum to get a greater understanding of the barriers to these health checks. Using information and learning from the youth forum, health and social care partners made changes to their practice. As a result, the uptake of the annual checks increased from 35% to 68% in a year.
- Recently, leaders of the portage service have reduced waiting lists for families from one year to six months. They have achieved this through increasing capacity and improving training to early years settings and childminders.
- The SALT team has developed a bespoke approach to setting targets and measuring outcomes. Physiotherapy and OT practitioners take a similar approach. They have goals that measure how practitioners meet the needs of the child or young person. This means that the success of therapeutic support is measured against meaningful steps agreed with the child or young person and their parents and carers.
- The number of young people with SEND who are in education, employment or training is high. The Connexions service is well-established in the area. Connexions advisers work closely with children and young people with SEND from Year 9. Also, leaders have commissioned a wide range of post-16 programmes, including supported internships. These programmes help prepare young people with SEND for employment.
- Rates of attendance at school are high for children and young people with SEND in North Tyneside. This is the same picture regardless of whether the child or young person has an EHC plan or is at SEND support level. A smaller proportion of children and young people with SEND has been suspended from schools in North Tyneside than their peers nationally.
- The range of GCSE subjects available to pupils with EHC plans in North Tyneside had been narrow. There is now a broader subject offer for pupils with EHC plans who are capable of studying for GCSEs.

Areas for development

- There are many social activities available to young people with SEND in the 16 to 25 age range. There are not as many available for younger children with SEND. The provision of some activities has been affected by COVID-19. However, it is important that social opportunities for children and young

people with SEND are monitored by leaders in North Tyneside so that any gaps in provision are identified and addressed promptly.

- There is a need to improve reading outcomes for children and young people with EHC plans. Leaders in North Tyneside are working with schools on this issue, but it is too early to see evidence of impact.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Head
Her Majesty's Inspector

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