

Readiness for Special Educational Needs and Disability Reform External Assurance

Summary of findings of external advisers

The review was carried out by Donald Rae and John Freeman. Both are experienced in working in local government children's services and both have worked closely with the Department for Education to inform the development of the SEND reform agenda.

The aim of this review was to support the County Council to prepare for and implement the national reforms of special educational needs and disability. The review gathered evidence from a range of sources including documentation, and data analysis. However, the main source of evidence was a series of workshops and discussions with local authority officers, school, Post 16 and FE representatives, Parent Carers Council, Parent Partnership, Menphys, Early Years providers, CCGs, Lead Member for Children and Family Services. The evidence base was gathered between February and June 2014.

Main Findings

The priority themes which have emerged from this process are:

- The need to ensure that all partners are fully engaged in the process of transformation
- The need to develop a broad and strategic policy framework whilst allowing local solutions to emerge

The review recognised that the broader changes within Leicestershire County Council may have had an impact on partners' perceptions of this particular piece of work. It was also noted that the review began before the Children and Families Bill was enacted and was completed just before the new Code of Practice was published.

A number of recommendations have been made. These include:

- Refreshing the accountability strategy for SEND reforms so that there is clarity about reporting arrangements to the Health and Wellbeing Board, the CCGs and Cabinet.
- Ensuring that there is an effective communication strategy which involves all partners spreading the message through their networks
- Developing a robust workforce development programme
- Focusing on the long term outcomes when developing the SEND pathway
- Ensuring that the local offer is available in a range of formats and that there is a mechanism for users to give feedback

Next Steps

These recommendations are being addressed by the project team. A workstream lead has been appointed to lead workforce development and training. There is increased capacity to develop engagement and involvement through the communications team. The long term planning for the SEND pathway needs to be developed as the assessment and planning processes are reviewed and as closer, integrated working between education, health and social care partners is embedded.

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