

Committee(s)	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub-Committee	8 February 2021
Subject: Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Update	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1-4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
What is the source of Funding?	The Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

- The duties on local areas regarding provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) are contained in the Children and Families Act 2014. The Ofsted/Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection Framework sets out the legal basis and the principles of inspection.
- The SEND Strategy 2020–24 sets out the City of London Corporation's ambitious vision for children and young people with SEND from birth to 25 years and details what we will do to achieve this vision. It builds on the previous SEND Joint Strategy 2017–2020.
- Staff in the Education and Early Years team have maintained the capacity to provide services during the COVID-19 lockdown. In May 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) made modifications to the law on Education, Health and Care needs assessments and plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has recently published three reports on the situation in schools and Local Areas during the first ten months of the Covid 19 pandemic, known as the COVID-19 series. This report will consider the findings from the Ofsted interim visits on SEND, '*Briefing on local areas' special educational needs and disabilities provision*', October 2020. The report will update on SEND services in the City of London in the context of the Ofsted report.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the Education and Early Years team have maintained the capacity to provide services. We have continued to meet our statutory deadlines throughout. Children and young people have continued their access education and their studies during lockdown and since schools reopened in September 2020. The SEND team have regularly maintained contact with all children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) to ensure they are able to access their education and other essential services. This is regularly monitored by the SEND, education and children social care teams via the Vulnerable Children's Register.
2. The January 2021 lockdown guidance means that schools should remain open for vulnerable children and young people with EHCPs. We have actively encouraged attendance at school, but for some children on EHCPs this is not appropriate due to underlying health issues. The SEND Team has contacted those children and young people engaging in remote learning and confirmed that they have access to their studies. Remote learning is secure in these cases and all of those with EHCPs have IT and technology to support their learning where appropriate. Home-to-school transport has also continued to enable those with EHCPs to attend school where required.

Update

3. In September 2020 Schools fully re-opened to all pupils following the Lockdown in March 2020. From September to December 2020, as part of a phased return following the COVID-19 suspension of routine inspections, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a programme of 'interim visits' to social care providers and education settings in England. These were not full inspections, but visits aiming to understand how organisations have responded to the challenges presented by the pandemic.
4. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) summarised the findings from the interim visits undertaken in the autumn term, including how the first national lockdown affected children and young people, in a series of monthly briefings. They undertook 'interim visits' to six local areas to hear from children and young people with SEND, their families and practitioners and leaders. This report will consider the findings from the SEND visits and provide an update in the context of the findings on the impact in the City of London.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) findings from interim visits on SEND

5. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has recently published three reports on the situation in schools and Local Areas during the first ten months of the Covid 19 pandemic, known as the COVID-19 series. These reports are:
 1. Covid-19 briefing on school interim visits: *October 2020*
 2. Briefing on local areas' special educational needs and disabilities provision, October 2020
 3. The Ofsted Annual Report 2019-20, '*A Year of Two Halves*'.

This report will focus on the SEND report from November 2020, however, there are common findings from across the three reports relating to how the Covid 19 pandemic affected children and young people with SEND and their families, and the quality and effectiveness of SEND provision in schools and local areas (a local area includes all education, health and social care agencies).

5. The main findings which are based on the national picture indicate that many of the families in the survey found the first national COVID-19 restrictions challenging and said coping got harder as time went on. *'Parents and carers who normally relied on established routines, informal and family support networks and specialist services for their children struggled without them.'* The challenges of explaining restrictions to their children, or real concerns about the risks the virus posed to their child's health. In the City of London, the recent feedback and consultation with parents reflects these same concerns.

6. The Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) report also notes that closing schools took vulnerable children and families out of sight of those who could help them. The low numbers of children who attended school during the first national lockdown, combined with disruption to community health services, directly affected the ability of local safeguarding partners to identify children and families in need of early help and protection. The picture in the City of London does not reflect these findings. The ambition to put children and young people with SEND and their families at their heart of strategic planning, is a priority of the SEND Strategy. In the City of London children and young people with EHCPs, have experienced:
- High uptake of attendance in schools, particularly for those on SEN support and with EHCPs at The Aldgate School.
 - Many with EHCPs attending out of borough schools returned to school during the summer term.
 - Education, Early Years and children social care teams have maintained regular contact with all families, schools/colleges and early years settings since March and throughout but particularly during the previous lockdowns.
 - Strong and robust systems for safeguarding are in place, and reflect the trusted relationships the City staff have with children, young people with SEND, their families and the wider agencies and organisations that re part of the SEND support provided in the City.
 - The SEND Local Offer, Family and Young People's Information (FYI) website and our social media has been continuously updated throughout with useful information for families.
7. There were concerns that pupils with SEND have fallen further behind their peers both in learning and health. While children's engagement with remote learning activities was monitored well by schools, monitoring and assessment of children's learning proved more difficult. Ofsted Local Area SEND inspections had identified that in many cases, the goal of creating a child centred system was not being fully met. Their access to additional support and healthcare was sharply reduced during the lockdown, and early identification and assessment suffered when they were not in school. In the

City of London there are some children that have fallen behind, however, interventions to support these children include:

- The Education Welfare Service and Education Psychology Service have worked closely with all City based educational settings to support them where concerns have arisen.
- The close partnership with settings and Children Social Care has ensured that there are early interventions and support for children who may have fallen behind. These interventions have included additional tuition, provision of IT, early help support and support and advice from the education psychologist, notably for children at School.
- Healthcare services continued throughout lockdown and were provided in a virtual manner. Including access to online therapies and other support services.
- A rise in the number of referrals for funding, EHC Needs Assessments and the SEND Early Years Inclusion Fund. Drop-in sessions have been arranged for SENCO's to receive advice and guidance from the SEND Team.
- The SEND Team have attended all virtual EHC review meetings and Child in Need (CIN) meetings, where required, and have been able to support and advise schools and families at these meetings where there are concerns.

8. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) found that children who remained in education throughout the first lockdown benefitted from the experience and often flourished with smaller class sizes and more support. This has been evident in the City, but there have also been children that have continued to flourish receiving their education remotely at home. Whilst Ofsted found that the quality and quantity of online teaching and work provided varied considerably during the period when schools were closed, or pupils were absent. The quality of remote learning in the City has been good quality and a positive experience for those with EHCPs.
9. The role of the parent carer forum featured prominently in the most successful areas and, and leaders had understood that co-production meant working with families as equal partners. In the City of London, the development of the SEND strategy 2020-24 was co-produced with parents and young people. At the heart of the strategy is the move to person centred planning, this is a collaborative approach built on the values of inclusion and empowerment. It considers what support a person needs to be included and involved in their community. This process incorporates the importance of support services and practitioners ensuring close collaboration with young people and their families. The planning meetings fully capture the child's views, wishes and aspirations and enables us to produce a very child centred plan for their future. Parents and professionals have said that they have found these meetings to be very beneficial having family, friends and key professionals all together and have found it to be an enjoyable process for the child.
10. The finding also noted that the state of relationships between families, services and practitioners before March 2020 impacted on the effectiveness of the support that families received during the restrictions. In the City of London, there are reliable, effective communications and working relationships across education, health, social care, the City Parent Carer

Forum, SEND programme board, SEND panel. The strength of these relationships was strong in March 2020 and was fortified during the period of the first lockdown and continues to be sustained. Feedback from parents indicates that they felt they were supported while schools were closed. They valued the support services and the close collaboration between staff with young people and their families.

11. The findings of the Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) report also found that the move to predominantly online communication and delivery of services did have some benefits. This was the case in the City of London, most notably with multi agency meetings such as the SEND panel and SEND Programme Board. These meetings were more consistently attended by all agencies, particularly colleagues from health services that are mostly based in Hackney and the Homerton Hospital. These sessions were greatly improved.
12. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) report concerns about the number of children who have not returned to school after lockdown and who are ostensibly being home educated. Many parents have considered removing their children because of fears about COVID, rather than a genuine desire to home school. The majority of these were BAME groups, whose vulnerability to COVID has been recognised. Whilst we have seen this in the City of London, along with an increase in the number of parents opting for elected home education, the Education Welfare Service and schools have worked with families to ensure they are fully aware of the undertaking and their responsibilities.

Conclusion

13. Many of the trends and issues Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) found in the report on local areas SEND provision are relevant to the City of London local area. The strength of the existing provision in the City of London across Childrens Services and partners has, however, been robust and families have felt supported. Children have had access to their education and schools are continuing to monitor progress and attainment. Interventions to support children that need support continue to be provided. The Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) report concludes by highlighting three issues that the local areas visited by Ofsted are seeking to address moving forward. For the City of London, the key area for development will be planning for the transition to adulthood for children and young people with SEND.

Appendices

- Appendix 1. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) COVID-19 series: *briefing on local areas' special educational needs and disabilities provision, October 2020*

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