

Top 10 tips for Directors of Children's Services for building an effective system of SEND and alternative provision

1. Clear governance and accountability for SEND and alternative provision

- Are the governance arrangements for the local area partnership clear and well understood?
- Does the partnership have both strategic and operational delivery oversight through well serviced and impactful Boards?
- How does the SEND board link with other Council, Integrated Care Board (ICB) and partnership boards?
- As the key statutory leaders how are the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Nurse of the ICB involved in this partnership?
- How are parent/carers involved?
- How are the voices and lived experiences of children and young people heard by this partnership, how do their experiences shape the priorities and actions of the partnership?
- How does this partnership know it is making a sustainable and positive difference, driving change and being ambitious for all children and young people?
- Is your self-evaluation jointly developed and accurately describes where your system is now, the impact on children and young people's lives and what you are all doing to make improvements?
- How is your Lead Member for children's services involved in this partnership?
- Do you have regular meetings/discussions with the Chief Nurse outside any Boards and do the Council and ICB chief executives meet regularly to discuss SEND issues?

2. Know who your children are

- Do you have clear systems for early identification of SEND needs?
- Does the local area partnership know who the children with potential or identified SEND needs are, working together as a single system?
- Is there one agreed data set that you use across the partnership to understand the effectiveness of the SEND system?
- Is this agreed data set informing and driving commissioning decisions?
- How are health colleagues sharing information from birth to early years to identify SEND needs and ensure support is built into to commissioning plans?
- Is the Healthy Child Programme prominent in early identification of SEND needs and how are these needs then shared/communicated?
- Do early years settings and schools identify children who have SEN needs and provide focused support through a graduated response?
- Have you got robust systems for identifying children moving into the area, who do not engage with universal services and that may not be being seen?

3. Understand the needs of the more vulnerable cohorts of children with SEND and ensure that these needs are shared and understood across the system.

- Do you champion the needs of children who are looked after with SEN /SEND and ensure provision is in place to meet their needs? Are the child's SEN needs or EHCP held on the core social work record and are they discussed in review meetings?
- Do foster carers/family and friends/adopters have copies of the EHCPs?
- Do you have in place processes to ensure there is screening for children involved in the youth justice system to identify any SEN/SEND needs and ensure they are being met?
- How are the SEN/SEND needs of children in EOTAS considered?
- Have you considered the recommendations from the Hesley Review for children who have complex and profound needs? How do you ensure the safety and well-being of children placed at a distance, especially if they are non-verbal in their communication?
- How does the Integrated Care System (ICS) share information from Dynamic Support Register about children who are in Tier 4 provision or those considered to be at risk of Tier 4 hospital admission? How is this shared as a local system to prevent escalation of need and to ensure the right community support is put in place?
- Have you ensured that the ICS provides data and information for your local authority footprint? (NB Most will cover more than one local authority area.)

4. Understand the difference you are making for children and young people with SEND and where there are gaps in provision or outcomes that need focused attention.

- Does the local area partnership have a robust and effective outcomes framework in place?
- Does this outcomes framework tell you how local area partnership is making a difference for the children and young people who live in their area?
- Is there a multi-agency data set in place that feeds into your outcomes framework and can identify cohorts of children that may not be achieving good outcomes.?
- Does the local area partnership regularly scrutinise the data set and outcomes framework and use this to drive actions to improve outcomes?
- Do you include information about complaints and tribunals within the data dashboard?
- Are you clear about how the needs of all the children in your area are being met? Are there particular groups that are either over or under represented?
- Are there clearly understood processes for all partnership staff about how to contribute and complete an effective and easily understood EHCP and annual review? Do staff know and understand the sections of the Code of Practice that are relevant to them?
- Have you developed a joint commission strategy that meets your ambitions and desired outcomes for children and young people with SEN and SEND?

5. The voices and views of parents/carers, children and young people are shaping individuals plans and support and the strategic ambition for the local area.

- Do you have an effective Parent Carer Forum (PCF) with good representation and strong links to other key strategic partnership boards?
- How do you ensure the views of parents and carers who are not linked to the PCF are heard and considered?
- Are you confident that the views and hopes of children and young people are shaping the services they are receiving on a day-to-day basis and is also shaping their futures? 'Nothing about us without us.'
- How do ensure that engagement teams/staff ensure they are inclusive and support children and young people with SEND to join in?
- Do you participate in focused engagement, on a regular basis, with cohorts of children and young people with SEND needs?

- How do you ensure that the voices and views of children, young people and parents, expressed in relation to their own circumstances, are shaping the strategic direction of the local area partnership?
- Does every child or young person with complex needs have a communication plan that is developed with them and their parents/carers and shared with the network around them?

6. Build on best practice to support schools in supporting children with SEN and SEND.

- Do you know about the best practice that can be found in your special schools and special provision within mainstream schools? Do these settings offer advice and guidance to other schools in the area?
- Do you have a local inclusion plan and is this co-owned and co-produced?
- Do you understand the SENCO workforce in your area, the training they are getting and if there are networks of support for SENCOs to support them in their role? Is there a commitment in the SEND Improvement Plan to introduce new leadership level SENCO training?
- Is there mental health guidance for staff in schools (some areas run mental health sessions in schools for teenagers)?
- Do you know how well special school nurses, health visitors and therapists are supporting children in settings and schools, how do they work across home and school and how effective are they in enabling children to attend school?
- Is your graduated offer up to date, does it meet the identified needs of your population, is it well known and used across all the schools in your local area?

7. Understanding the quality of delivery and outcomes for children in alternative provision

- Does the local area partnership know which children are in alternative provision (AP)?
- Is every child receiving their statutory entitlement to education including those in more than one setting? How do you maintain oversight of this?
- Do all the children with SEN or SEND who are in AP have a personalised plan? Why they are in that provision, when and how it will be reviewed and how the provision is meeting their needs?
- Is the local area partnership clear about the AP that is being used? Is there a differing pattern across schools about the use of AP? Is it Ofsted registered? Does it provide a quality education? Do children return from AP back into mainstream school?

8. Transition to adulthood

- Do you plan early to ensure a smooth transition to adult social care and health services?
- How are children with SEN and SEND supported to build their self-esteem, establish friendships, be visible and engaged in their local community? These will be key skills to support them into a successful transition to adult life.
- How do services work with adult colleagues in social care and health to develop a holistic person-centred approach to support successful transitions?
- The majority of children with a SEN need and those with an EHCP will not transfer to adult services. Do you know how many children in your Local Area transfer to adult services? And what the offer is for them? Is there an effective Preparing for Adulthood approach across the partnership?
- What do you do to ensure young people have the skills and ambitions to move on to employment of FE/HE? What offer do you have in place to support young people with SEN or SEND into employment or into FE or HE? Are you making good use of supported internships?

9. A quality assurance framework that supports the whole system to understand their roles and what 'good' looks like

- Do you have a robust and embedded quality assurance framework that has been developed jointly across the local area partnership?
- Do you have a multiagency approach to auditing samples of EHCP's? How do you embed the learning from this approach across the local area? Do you undertake deep dives to identified thematic areas, again to inform wider learning and understanding? The SEND & AP inspection framework uses a multi-agency audit approach.
- Do your QA processes function at different tiers i.e., practitioner level, manager level, multi-agency audit?
- How are parent and carers views gathered and feedback into the system?
- How does your QA processes lead to change and improvements for children's lived experiences?
- Many local areas are experiencing waiting lists or delays in accessing assessments/ treatment - how does your QA framework address these issues? Do you have a triage process? Do you set clear timeframes for recovery of timeliness?
- How does the QA processes that already exist in different agencies feed into this SEND QA Framework – 'do once use many times'?
- DCO/DMO and DSCO roles both have a key contribution to quality assurance - are you making the most of these roles? Do you understand their priorities, areas of challenge and areas that are strengths in your local system?

10. Communication across and within your local system is key

- Have you reviewed your local offer? Is it accurate and up to date and compliant with the SEND Code of Practice? Is it multiagency or rather local authority focused?
- Have parents and carers given you honest feedback on your local offer website and how it can be improved? And have you made these improvements?
- Some local offer sites are starting to use video clips of young people talking about their experiences of services or activities. Is there a way to develop the focus for children and young people?
- All areas will have a SENDIAS service, they are a rich source of broad information about areas parents and carers are contacting them for advice on. Is there a mechanism for this information to be discussed and shared with the DCS and system leaders? SENDIAS is also a valuable source of disseminating information to parents and carers too.
- Co-production with parents/carers and children and young people should run as a golden thread through all the work of the local area partnerships as is the communication of your SEND Strategy and ambition for your all your children and young people.

Please contact Deborah Glassbrook, LGA SEND Improvement Advisor, Deborah@optimisingpotential.co.uk if you have any questions or would like to discuss support options.