

Officer responses to questions raised at the Education and Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 16 November 2021 on SEND processes.

1) What insight and analysis from the 2015-2019 data can help us understand the reasons behind the large drop in achievements of children with SEND that are being admitted to specialist schools?

- 100% of special schools in Southwark are graded by Ofsted as good or better. This compares to 95.3% of all Southwark schools graded as good or better. (Nov 2021) We currently have 3 special schools and 2 hospital schools graded as outstanding and 4 special schools graded as good. Progress, outcomes and achievement therefore remain excellent in special schools.
- An increase in complex needs in Southwark has changed the cohort characteristics in special schools – so fewer are able to access national tests which may flag up as a drop in achievement.
- Over time the percentage of children in special schools eligible for national tests has reduced. This can look like schools are on a downward trajectory in terms of published achievement data. However, school assessments show progress across all key stages but the number of children on roll who can access national tests has significantly fallen.
- For many children at Special Schools they follow a different pathway to the mainstream national curriculum – working at a different pace. They are assessed regularly against their targets set in Reading, phonics, writing and maths. All schools are able to show progress that is at least good and above for all cohorts in these subject areas.
- In order to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum in special schools, achievements for pupils are not just academic. Pupils achievements are also measured against their EHCP targets.
- For example in many special schools the curriculum focuses on delivering core lessons that work towards meeting the longer term outcomes as set out in the EHCP. The curriculum is designed around securing outcomes in the following areas: communication, cognition, sensory and physical, personal and social development and preparation for adulthood. Learning intentions are short term targets that underpin the individual learning journey towards the longer term outcomes.
- Different special schools use different assessment systems to measure progress. This means comparisons and levels/grading between schools cannot always be compared like for like. These systems however, do show the learning journey of each individual child and the achievements that they have made against EHCP outcomes/curriculum targets.

2) What changes have there been in the method of assessments that could have possible impacted the achievements from 2015-2019? For e.g. heavily text-based thus disadvantaging children that are non-native English speakers. (English as an additional language, EAL)

- 2017 – new GCSE for English Language, English Literature and Maths and move to 9-1 scale

- 2018 – further 20 subjects move to 9-1 including sciences, history, MFL, Geography
- 2019 – 25 new GCSEs examined
- New GCSE's are more challenging. Coursework has gone or is as an additional endorsement only. AS material in maths is now included and in English Literature there is an emphasis on Victorian Literature. Reading paper is weighted towards the evaluative, whole text questions. One source is pre 1900 so vocabulary and context can be barriers to understanding.
- Children are actively encouraged to sit 8 GCSEs including EBACC – regardless of their ability or starting point in mainstream.
- With the elimination of coursework at GCSE the emphasis is on rote learning and subject content has grown.
- BTEC qualifications have also been reformed – with exam element worth 60% and controlled assessment 40%. You have to pass the exam in order to pass overall.
- GCSE/qualifications that count towards league tables have been reformed. Some of the softer qualifications no longer count like the ECDL so schools are reluctant to invest and run them. SEND students often sit a suite of GCSEs they will only achieve a 1 and 2 in.
- Some mainstream schools do offer ASDAN or functional skills but these are at the schools discretion and can be costly to run for a small number of pupils.
- Primary curriculum is 'knowledge based' and new SATS exams were introduced from 2016. The dip in reading can be seen in the SEND data from 2017. This is a borough wide issue and not particular to the SEND population.
- The reading framework came out July 2021 and sets out the teaching for the foundations of literacy including the new phonics guidance. This should support schools to improve reading outcomes. Schools are encouraged to use a DfE endorsed phonics programme – this applies to all Special Schools.

3) What process or systemic improvements led to the rise in school referrals up from 26% to 40% compared to 2018 audit at the Sunshine House, community paediatric services? pg. 3 of report.

The percentage data is from small numbers so that any change increases/decreases the percentage disproportionately. No overarching conclusions should be drawn from this increase – the analysis is on 4-weeks of referrals each time it has been completed, so it may just have been that in the 2018 audit there were an unusually high number of GP referrals, which made school referrals appear lower. In the 2016 audit, for example, school referrals were at 40%, the same as the 2020 audit, so the data is being over-interpreted to say there is a trend of any kind. In both instances, our health colleagues are confident that broadly referrals are coming from the right places, and they know from their day to day work that most referrals do come from schools/nurseries, so clinical experience backs up the impression.

These audits are used for internal purposes, to look at whether paediatric services are broadly getting referrals from the right places, how they are processed and managed, the reasons children are referred over time and whether referrals are

appropriate/accepted/rejected; so that health services can refine the messages given to referrers and to shape services.

After the 2018 audit, the referral form and the information on the website were updated, with clearer information on referral criteria, which may have helped referrers to refer appropriately.

4) How are EHC Plans managed with regards to refusal data, processing timelines and targets?

All requests for assessment are considered by the multi-agency SEND panel. Panel members read all the evidence presented for each case in preparation for discussion and decision making.

In the year 2021 the LA received just over 500 requests for assessment, of which one third were not agreed.

When deciding not to assess the panel ensure that information is shared with settings and parents to explain the reasons why the LA has made this decision, and guidance is offered regarding possible actions or next steps to better support the child or young person.

Through on-going monitoring the LA identified that parental requests for assessment had a higher refusal rate than we would like at around 50%. In many of these cases this was due to a lack of information and evidence to support our decision-making, e.g. the parent had requested by letter with no additional information, or the setting has not submitted the requested information in time.

The LA has worked with our local partner agencies to review and improve our information gathering processes to address this issue and the data will be reviewed regularly to identify if it is having the desired impact or if further changes are required.

As part of our on-going work with our parent carer forum, Southwark independent Voice (SIV), we will also look at how better to support parents to include appropriate information with their initial request.

The LA monitors the 20 week completion timelines for EHCPs on an on-going basis, to allow for issues impacting timeliness to be identified as early as possible and possible solutions considered. The LA reports on a quarterly and annual basis to the Council and to the DfE. The targets for EHCP timelines are set in line with (or just above) national targets (these are achieved) and we are generally above neighbouring London boroughs 20 week timelines. The national data indicates that nationally there has been an increase in the number of new plans issued, alongside a reduction generally in the % of plans issued on time. This increase in new EHCPs is apparent in Southwark, although we maintained our 20 week percentage well.

5) What are the issues and reasons behind the lack of admissions in secondary schools of children with SEND in Southwark's Schools and Academies?

Over all, Southwark has a higher % of pupils with EHCP's attending mainstream schools than the national average, although placement in academies is slightly lower than the national average.

When children with EHCPs are due to transfer to secondary school, parents are asked to indicate which schools they would like their child to attend. Many parents at this point choose to seek a specialist placement for their child. This is often due to the fact that they are aware that their child managed within a primary mainstream school but are concerned that the social and academic demands of a mainstream secondary may not be appropriate for their child.

The LA has a duty to follow the parental preference unless their choice is unsuitable for the needs of the child, incompatible with the provision of efficient education of others or with the efficient use of resources.

The draft SEND strategy has a focus on the inclusion of children with SEND in mainstream schools. This work will look at enabling schools to improve and sustain their inclusive practice, despite the budget and curriculum constraints they are under. Improving joint working between all agencies to support our children with SEND more effectively is also a priority.

Extending the offer and training opportunities for all secondary staff in SEND is ongoing and links to national programmes.

6) What is Southwark Council doing to encourage provision of more SEND places in the borough?

The previous SEND Capital strategy is in the process of being replaced by the SEND strategy for the next 3 years. This is in draft format and will be issued for wider consultation as soon as possible. The strategy is aligned to the SEND Capital grant and, alongside smaller projects in individual mainstream schools it seeks to:

- Enable 2 of the borough's nursery schools to support children with complex SEND needs
- Expand the number of places for children with ASD across the continuum of need for mainstream and special places
- Rebuild Beormund Special School to increase the places for primary aged children with social, emotional and mental health needs
- Consider options for expanding provision for 16-25 year olds with complex SEND needs.