

Draft recommendations on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

1. The Commission notes the increased acuteness of need of children in Southwark being diagnosed with SEND needs. The Commission supports the Council's plans to continue to increase the levels of provision available within borough to improve both the quality of experience for children with SEND needs, and the cost effectiveness of provision.
2. The Commission recommends that the Council explore routes to supporting mainstream schools in improving the quality of training plans for their SEND provision, including Continuous Professional Development for staff. The Commission identified varying levels of confidence and competence in schools across Southwark which will likely affect the ability of schools to identify and provide the necessary support to children who may have limited SEND needs that would greatly benefit from early identification and support.
3. The Commission recommends that the Council works more closely with health colleagues to provide earlier diagnoses of relevant SEND needs where assessment is health and mental health led. From the Commission's early work we identified some concern amongst schools and Council officers that the Council's strong record of early diagnosis and information provision applies unequally across SEND needs that may require more specialist health and mental health led diagnoses. Similarly, the Commission identified concerns that conditions such as ADHD were not seeing as much success in early diagnosis and early support as recent gains in autism-related provision.
4. The Commission recommends that Council's information and guidance makes it clearer to parents and carers when an EHC Plan assessment may be necessary. This will give a better indication of the likelihood that a child with certain characteristics is going to be eligible. The Commission is concerned that current guidance risks giving parents and carers misleading guidance regarding their child's likely eligibility and limited information about support available in the absence of an EHC Plan.
5. The Commission strongly supports the Council's commitment to providing early stage support and information, advice and guidance for parents and carers who are concerned that their child may have SEND needs.
6. The Commission recommends that the Council explores shortening the average timescale for SEND diagnosis from the current, statutorily required, 20 week target. Whilst the Commission appreciates that there can be some support for children during the assessment period, the Commission notes the impact of this lengthy period on parents and carers and on the ability to provide the best possible early support and schools to fund appropriate support before EHC Plan funding is forthcoming.