



Essex Family Forum response to OFSTED/CQC Revisit

The OFSTED/CQC SEND revisit took place in May 2022 and Inspectors were focused on measuring progress against the three Areas of Significant Weakness highlighted in the original SEND Inspection in October 2019:

Potential Over-Identification of Moderate Learning Difficulties	Quality of Education, Health and Care Plans	Joint Commissioning
<p>The reasons for, and accuracy of, the high proportions of children and young people identified with moderate learning difficulties are yet to be resolved. Potential over-identification could mask underlying difficulties in communication and language, and social, emotional and mental health development.</p>	<p>Too many EHC plans do not include the information needed to secure high-quality outcomes for children and young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The EHC plans do not consistently secure the right professional advice to meet children’s and young people’s needs, and do not have specific details of the provision that will be put in place. ▪ Strategic oversight is not effective in making sure that EHC plans are fit for purpose. 	<p>The joint commissioning arrangements between the local authority and the CCGs do not work well enough to provide children and young people with the services that they need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much variation between the CCGs leads to inequality, inconsistency and unacceptably long waiting times for services. • Joint commissioning is not sufficiently informed by what is already known about the gaps in services for health and education across the 0-25 age range, across the whole local area.

Following the revisit, Inspectors have concluded that the Local Area (which includes Essex County Council and the various NHS Integrated Care Systems (previously Clinical Commissioning Groups) have made sufficient progress against these 3 specific areas.

We are fully aware that many of you will not share that view and Inspectors have quite rightly, in our opinion, made it very clear that progress has yet to have any meaningful impact for many SEND families. Our [Impact Statement](#) outlines our views on the progress against the 3 Areas of Weakness. This statement was uploaded as part of our evidence for the Revisit.

We do acknowledge that there has been a considerable scope of work undertaken to address the Areas of Weakness and we have been significantly involved in the majority of the workstreams as outlined in the Local Area’s recent [update](#) on the ongoing improvement work. We feel the



Inspectors are right to highlight that there has been a palpable change in the approach to joint working within the system and the strategic oversight has been significantly strengthened.

There are some aspects of the report which do appear to contradict the overall outcome of the revisit. For example, the report refers to the ongoing variability in ASD/ADHD waiting times and this variation was a main contributing factor to the Area of Weakness relating to Joint Commissioning in the original Inspection. Whilst it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic hampered progress and extended waiting times, the recovery plans, to date, have not necessarily made a notable difference for those families waiting for assessment. This is one of the areas where we continue to advocate the views of families and provide robust challenge to services to improve the impact felt by parents.

There are a number of quality assurance measures that have been introduced to the EHC process through formalised panels that consider all needs assessment requests and issuing of plans as well as carry out quality assurance of plans at both quadrant and countywide level. However, these new processes are not yet positively affecting the annual review process for many families.

The measures that have been introduced and highlighted in the revisit report are rightly aiming for better outcomes for children and young people, but the overall lack of impact for our families, at the present time, is understandably disappointing. Essex Family Forum, as the Inspectors have also highlighted, has been tenacious in our challenge to SEND services during this period and we will continue to hold the system accountable, but we cannot do this without you!

To that end, we want to thank all the parents and carers who responded to the OFSTED/CQC survey that was open in the week prior to the revisit by Inspectors. We also want to thank the parents and carers who have responded to all our surveys, provided feedback to our Graffiti wall and participated in the various engagement events we have held, both virtually and in-person, since the original SEND Inspection in October 2019. We are very fortunate that the many fantastic support groups throughout Essex, who are a lifeline for many families, have been a key partner in championing families' experiences during this period. The valuable feedback provided from all avenues has been used to inform the beginning of the improvement journey in Essex. There is still a long way to go, but we hope you will continue to keep sharing your experiences to ensure our voices remain loud and continue to be heard.

We know that parents and carers will have many questions for senior leaders in Essex about the outcome of this revisit and have the right to hear details of ongoing improvements, and those planned for the future, directly from them. We are now working closely with senior leaders to arrange a date early in the Autumn term for this to happen. We will publish booking details on our Social Media at the beginning of September.