



Department  
for Education

Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 0370 0012345

Ms Sue Cook, Executive Director of People Services

Dr Ed Garratt, Clinical Commissioning Group Accountable Officer, Ipswich and East Suffolk, and West Suffolk

Melanie Craig, Clinical Commissioning Group Accountable Officer, Great Yarmouth and Waveney

Judith Mobbs, Local Area Nominated Officer

19 December 2019

Dear Sue, Ed, Melanie and Judith

## **SIX MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW AGAINST SUFFOLK'S SEND ACTION PLAN**

Many thanks to you and your colleagues for attending a meeting with DfE and NHS England officials on Tuesday 26 November to review the progress you have made against your SEND action plan.

It is clear from the evidence you have provided, and the feedback from partners, that you are taking a wide range of actions to accelerate improvement in SEND services. We are particularly grateful for the contributions from your parent carer forum and school representatives.

With dedicated project management support now in place, you are in a good position to ensure your plans are delivered and communicated effectively, and that relevant boards and governing bodies are regularly updated on progress and performance. Your performance dashboard should also prove invaluable in helping you to evaluate your performance, identify emerging issues and improve services for children and young people with SEND.

We were reassured by the strong sense of partnership working in Suffolk and pleased to hear about the high rate of response to your 2019 parents' survey, which will inform your work to improve services. We note the improvements you have made to your local offer, and the increase in the number of users and return visitors to the site. You have also had a positive response to your e newsletters, Facebook page and Twitter feed and have strengthened your engagement with young people, including through your young ambassadors group. We look forward to hearing about how you have extended this approach to work with younger children in the future.

We are pleased to hear that your work to improve therapies has resulted in a reduction in waiting times for most services. Your new referral pathways will enable speech and language therapist and specialist teachers to offer advice and support

according to the child's needs and your integrated service model for neurodevelopment services provides a very sound basis for developing future provision. We note your intention to develop more detailed and funded plans to ensure its implementation.

You also have plans for redesigning mental health and wellbeing services in Suffolk, with a view to building resilience in schools and increasing wellbeing among the wider pupil population. We share your assessment that Suffolk must ensure that the redesign of mental health services is funded and put into operational practice within planned timescales so that families can experience the positive change envisaged. In that context, we are encouraged by your commitment to investing £2.1m in a new all-age crisis response service, which will be in place by March 2020 and will include a 24/7 telephone assessment and brief intervention response

While there is further to go, we note the progress you are making in supporting and challenging all Suffolk schools to improve the experiences and progress of children with SEND. It was encouraging to hear about schools' commitment to improving levels of consistency around SEN support and about the positive impacts of the revised funding system for SEN across Suffolk schools; the improved access to speech and language support; and the wellbeing hub. Your work to strengthen the County Inclusion and Support Service and the SENCo network - and the links you are developing with the Regional Schools Commissioner - can only help with this. Your programme for increasing specialist placements is also on track and the increase in the number of Supported Internships is a very positive result.

We note the promising progress you have made in establishing multi-agency assessment centres for Suffolk and their role in the earlier identification of need and provision of support. We share your expectation that this holistic and family-centred approach will have a positive impact on your ability to deliver the right services at the right time, and will watch with interest as work progresses.

It is encouraging that performance on completing Education, Health and Care plans within 20 weeks has improved since 2018, although it is disappointing that you will be unable to hit the target on EHC plan timeliness in your action plan for 2019. We note however, that this was as a result of prioritising work on a backlog of overdue plans and we expect to see an improvement in your timeliness figures in the new year. You have rightly identified the importance of continuing to improve the quality of advice provided for EHC plans and annual reviews. Your initial audit shows that you are already achieving an improvement in quality and provides a baseline from which to measure further improvements.

Whilst it was encouraging to hear that joint working between NSFT, the CCG and local authority has improved, there remain a number of outstanding concerns from parents regarding the time it takes to secure improvements, particularly in the areas of mental health services and support for children with ASD and ADHD.

Our primary concern at this stage is around how you are measuring the impact of the actions you are taking and we ask that you focus on this issue as a key driver for work over the next 6 months, to help accelerate your progress and impact. It would be helpful if your work is accompanied by a clear narrative for parents which explains what your actions will mean for them and their children in practice, and when they are likely to happen. It is also critical that, as you develop your services, you build

on your work with frontline professionals in education, health and care, so that you can fully embed the listening culture that you and parents want to see.

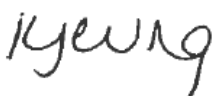
By the time we are due to meet again, in approximately six months' time, you will have completed a peer review and will have further evidence to share of the progress you are making. We look forward to hearing about the results. In the meantime, we ask that you maintain the momentum you are building and continue actively engaging with Brian Gale and Gabby Irwin regarding your progress, concerns and support needs.

We are copying this letter to Nicola Beach (Chief Executive), Matthew Hicks (Leader of the Council), Mia Spreadbury, your new case lead at the Department and your DfE and NHS England Advisers. Please do share it locally with all those who attended the meeting.

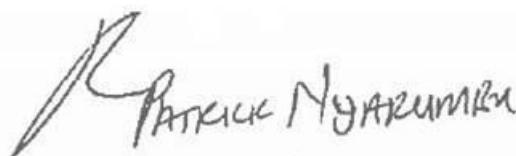
Yours sincerely,



Laura Bond  
Assistant Director  
Special Educational  
Needs and Disability  
Unit  
Department for  
Education



Kate Yeung  
Assistant Director  
Special Educational  
Needs and Disability  
Unit  
Department for  
Education



Patrick Nyarumbu  
Director of Nursing Leadership and  
Quality  
NHS England and NHS Improvement –  
East of England