

28 September 2023

Dear Parents/Carers

Re: Delivering Better Value and the suggestion of a 20% reduction in Education, Health and Care Plans.

Southampton Parent Carer Forum and Re: Minds have received queries from parents following a suggestion that one of the targets of the Governments DVB (Delivering Better Value) contract with Newton Europe, is a 20 % reduction in Education, Health and Care Plans.

Many of you will be aware that Southampton is one of the 55 Local Authorities that make up the DVB Programme nationally. The aim of this programme is to both improve the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families, and to support the development of a more financially sustainable model of support to enable these positive outcomes.

I wanted to write to give you absolute assurances that no such target or expectation has been passed to Southampton by either the Department for Education or Newton Europe.

The work that we did with Newton Europe included an in-depth look at the trends in the city, alongside a huge amount of feedback from parents and carers (at the time of our involvement in the programme, we held the record for the most parental responses to the survey). This data analysis and feedback told us that some families, particularly those who have children with neurodiverse profiles, feel that they must work too hard to have their child's needs met. In depth case studies suggested that had different support been available for some children earlier that this would likely avoid the need for EHC Plans for some, and special school placements for others.

My absolute aspiration is that overtime, we will deliver a quality of provision within our schools that does not rely on bureaucratic and drawn-out processes in order that parents trust that their child's needs are being met. As a city we are looking wider than the DBV programme to establish how we might be able to intervene earlier to prevent the escalation of need and the sense from parents that they are having to "go to battle" to ensure that their children's needs are met. Whilst this won't lead to reduced numbers of current EHCP's, we might in time start to see a reduction in the pace of increase in EHCP's. Currently we forecast an increase of 10% a year. With effective support in place, this may reduce overtime.

We're really excited about the work streams within the DVB Programme and the positive impact they will have on the experience of children and young people with SEND in the city. I've attached some further information about these workstreams for your information.

Very best wishes,

Tammy

Tammy Marks

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Southampton City Council – Delivering Better Value Funded Workstreams

Neurodiversity courses for parents – parents have consistently fed back that the “standard” parenting courses are not fit for purpose when you are parenting children with neurodiverse needs. We took this funding as an opportunity to commission Early Bird Plus and Cygnet. Re:Minds are our delivery partner for this element of the scheme. We’re really excited about this work stream and the impact it will have on families.

Autism in Schools roll out to all schools in the city – Southampton were one of the pilot areas for these courses that were funded by NHS England. Within the pilot we were able to deliver this project to approximately 15 schools in the City. The improved outcomes for children and young people were so positive, that we decided we’d use some of the DBV funds to deliver this training to every mainstream school in the city, by April 2025. This is to ensure that there is a strong offer of support for autism and neurodiversity in all of our schools, regardless of where you live.

Specialist Teacher – Social Emotional Mental Health – Schools are repeatedly feeding back that they are finding this area of need increasingly challenging since the pandemic. This post will sit alongside our Southampton Inclusion Partnership (SIP – you might know this service as SAOS or Springwell Outreach) and offer advice and support to schools specifically for children presenting with complex Social, Emotional, Mental Health Needs.

School Inclusion Audit Manager – We will shortly be launching a new audit tool that we will ask schools to complete to measure their inclusive practice inclusive of their strengths and areas for development. This includes needing to engage with children with SEND and their parents in that process. This role will be used to quality assure these audits and offer direct support to schools who may be feeling more challenged by certain aspects of inclusion. This is specifically in response to feedback from parents that suggests that there is an inconsistency of inclusive practice across schools in the city. It offers specialist support to school in a time when resources are incredibly stretched.

This audit tool will sit alongside the co-produced “Southampton Ordinarily Available Provision” document, which has been developed to support schools to understand what should ordinarily be available for children with SEND in their schools and give them helpful advice on how to best support specific presenting needs. It will also be a helpful document for parents in terms of what type of support to expect from mainstream schools. The Southampton Parent Carer Forum have shared a PDF of the word version of this on their Facebook page, and it has been sent to all schools in the city. It is currently sat with our inhouse design team – once we have a final version, we will do a formal launch and make this document available on our Local Offer Web Page and through parent groups in the City.