

Report of the Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools

I will be reporting as follows for Full Council on 29 April 2021:

1. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

Concerned parents and carers in Exwick and St Thomas have contacted me recently about the very poor quality of school meals and snacks offered to their children. Including West Exe School.

I understand that a number of schools have recently changed their contractors and suppliers.

Can the Cabinet Member please report to council on these specific matters, and more generally across the county. Including any current issues around sub standard cuisine, unhealthy ingredients and inadequate portion sizes.

Also can he please confirm what proactive work we do to monitor these important matters as corporate parents, and the process to rectify operational performance when required.

2. By Councillor Aves as follows:

Please could I have an update on how transitions are going for our children and young people having to change schools or go to college who have EHCPs in the age range of 0-25. Including:

- What is the average waiting time for getting the statutory changes made on the EHCP ready in time for any transition?*
- Are all the ECHPs that need to be updated completed for transition in Sept 2021? If not how many are left to do for this July/September 2021?*
- Transition is best when planned for with time for visits and good planning for the children and young people with EHCPs transitioning, because this is a very stressful time for them and their family if not done in a timely manner. What support is there in place for these families?*
- The online hub was supposed to provide up to date information for families and staff to know what is happening but I am getting emails that say the information is not updated often enough which causes anxiety for families and school staff when EHCP updates are not completed by the Easter holidays. Is there a problem with the online hub being updated appropriately? Do we need to give DCC staff more time to do this?*
- How does Devon compare with other comparable Local Authorities with how well we complete our EHCPs?*
- I appreciate how hard our staff work and how difficult it has been to complete this work during the pandemic so I ask: Do we have enough resources to keep up with demand?*

Response

1. School Meals

School Governing bodies and Academy Trusts are responsible for the provision of school meals and it is for them to choose their catering provider and ensure that the lunches, and other food or drink served, meets the Standards for school food in England. DCC do not take a role in this and direct parents to the school leadership or governing body if there are concerns raised. We will only discuss the issue with the school if there seems to be a wider concern regarding quality or provision.

It should however be noted that a large number of Devon schools are contracted with Devon Norse to provide their school meals. As Devon Norse is Joint Venture with Devon County Council, we have more control over the meals provided and pick up any concerns at monthly management meetings.

In regard the specific query there are 6 PFI (Private Finance Initiative) schools in Exeter and the contract for the provision of Facilities Management (including catering) changed to a new provider on 1st April 2021.

It is understood that food served, in a school, on one of the days in the first week of delivery did not meet the new providers, the school's or parental expectations and a complaint was received. The provider has apologised to the school concerned and has put a plan together which includes further training in regard to quality and portion control. The schools working with the new provider will continue to monitor the standard of meals provided.

2. Transitions for pupils with EHCP's

Since this question was submitted members of Children's Scrutiny will have received a briefing paper which covers many of the areas outlined above in detail.

I can further clarify that timeliness for transition plans are based on a completion date which is the same regardless of when the review date was due. In some cases, this means that the plan is completed before it's annual due date.

While there is work between primary and secondary phases from the end of year 5, the majority of transition work for all pupils takes place in the summer term when secondary schools and colleges have completed the exam season and then start to work in more depth with their feeder primary schools.

In Devon, secondary schools and FE Colleges normally organise open days and open evenings, and many now do virtual tours when onsite visits are not possible. When permitted, they also organise welcome days before the end of term so young people can meet their new tutors. Many FE Colleges set up virtual groups for young people to discuss any areas of concerns. For transition to secondary school the new tutor may also meet the children at their primary school.

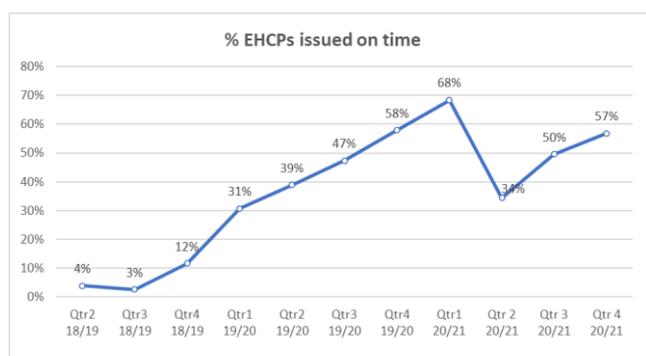
There is specific advice and guidance offered to children with SEND who are moving to secondary school and packages of support have also been put in place for children who are particularly anxious and this may involve support from an Educational Psychologist or other specialist advisor. SENDCO's at both schools will work closely together and when necessary the family to help ensure the transition is as smooth as possible

Specifically, for children with special education needs who are moving to FE, there is a partnership reference group which meets fortnightly to discuss issues and raise and concerns about the provision and transition planning.

Prior to any transition work however, Colleges and our Careers services will have supported young people to make their applications, prepare them for moving and discussed with them the options and choices they have. This work needs to take place before the Education Health and Care plan is finalised as their work will inform the content of the plan.

The EHC Hub is a case management system introduced about 12 months ago. It provides access to the child's parents and appropriate professionals to information as it is submitted. However, before information can be put onto Hub the case work and health or care assessments still have to be completed and a report then has to be provided by the relevant professions. This can mean that there is a delay before the information is submitted. We are also aware that some parents are HUB are not finding as helpful as anticipated and there is a meeting planned with parents to discuss their technical issues or access problems.

The last National published data for the timeliness of education health and care plans was for the year ending Jan 2020. The National Data for the year ending Jan 2021 will be published in May. Devon's performance in relation to timeliness is shown below. The dip in quarter 2 of 2020/21 reflects the impact of the first lock down when many assessments could not take place, and this led to less plans meeting the 20 week deadline.



There is currently no national data collection for Annual Reviews although we understand this is planned for Jan 2023.

The additional capacity in the SEND team was agreed on a temporary basis until the SEND Hub had become embedded. The pandemic has added a significant amount of complexity to the work of the SEND team and the demand for Education Health and Care plans is currently unsustainable. We are planning to evaluate the capacity of our staff alongside the impact of the pandemic and implementation of the SEND transformation work.

James McInnes
Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools