

# Schools Forum Briefing

From the meeting held on 13 March 2024

This Briefing provides a summary of key discussions and decisions taken by Forum at their most recent meeting. If you want to find more detail, the minutes and papers from all meetings are in the public domain and can be found on the Norfolk Schools website [here](#), along with contact details for Forum representatives.

## Annual Engagement with Ofsted and CQC: Area SEND Inspection

Schools Forum received an update from LA leads following the regular engagement meeting with Ofsted and Care Quality Commission which tests progress in local areas in response to the expectations in SEN and Alternative Provision Inspection.

As expected that SEND and AP inspection framework sets a high bar from local areas to demonstrate effectiveness against, several local authority areas have already received the lowest grading and no large shire county area has yet achieved the highest grading of consistently good outcomes for children.

The LA team had provided Ofsted leads with an overview of the position in Norfolk highlighting existing strengths but also the areas identified for transformation and improvement.

The session yielded positive feedback, with Ofsted being able to see progress made and the energy evident behind work undertaken with it being clear to inspectors that SEND and AP are genuine priorities in Norfolk with a real collective focus. Schools Forum also commented on the progress that had been seen, and their positive view of the Local Inclusion Partnership, recognising that although there is clearly a lot to be done, the scale of work underway is evident to all.

## System leadership: achieving our shared ambitions.

Schools Forum were asked to consider how they collectively could perform a larger strategic role feeding back into the education system and shaping future actions. Schools Forum as a statutory group has a strategic responsibility to consider the wider system and already has representation from all bodies within the education sector in Norfolk. A working party was proposed to take this concept further, and this was agreed.

## Final Pupil Variations

The Schools Forum heard an update to the total final pupil variations for mainstream schools in 2024-25, along with options for retrospective pupil number variations.

Schools Forum responded that considering pupil variation data against actual pupil numbers for the previous 3 years was a valuable exercise and it was agreed that Schools Forum would review figures from the previous year on an annual basis.

## Shared Parental Leave

Schools Forum heard a paper outlining the impacts and issues surrounding Shared Parental Leave and agreed to set up a time-limited Task and Finish group to consider the budgetary impact and potential mitigation solutions available.



## LFI Update to Schools Forum

Schools Forum heard an update to the Local First Inclusion programme.

### School and Community Teams

Schools Forum received an update on the work of School and Community Teams over the last term, particularly around the scope and remit of their work. Schools Forum commented that the quantitative data provided was useful to understand the impact School and Community Teams were having. The Forum received an overview of current impact, including where the service supported transition from Early Years to Reception, which saw 84% of parents reporting confidence in provision meeting their children's needs, alongside 96% of children remaining in the school that they were due to start in. Feedback received from parents and professionals about the impact of School & Community Teams averaged 8/10 with regards to making a difference. Anecdotal feedback was also shared with schools forum, with examples including:

*"I felt supported by Craig - he listened to me and helped me in school meetings. Craig took time out to engage with [child]". "I have a better understanding about Autism, how it affects him and how we can all support him". (Parent)*

*"Children talked about the session positively. Positive comments from parents who have come away with practical resources. We've extended what we are doing in class and found some new skills to transfer into class" (Teacher)*

Forum members questioned how far secondary schools were being engaged with and heard that in terms of cohort size and demand, Reception, Year 5 and Year 6 were the areas where the Teams felt they would have most impact, being mindful that a focus on transition work in Year 6 would yield benefits for secondary schools. They also heard that that engagement was planned with a range of school leaders in zones to better understand the need across schools. It was agreed that data on secondary engagement would be provided, along with a cost-benefit analysis.

### Earlier Help for Send and Inclusion

Schools Forum received an update on the proposed 'Teams Around' model as a way of working moving forward, with a request for ongoing feedback and experience sharing. This is proposed to be a further enhancement to the way schools and settings are supported to work with children with SEN with local authority and health teams meetings schools regularly to identify need and discussion solutions early and quickly. Members commented that the proposed model would be significant for schools, particularly where children were unable to access alternative provision.

Members heard that the next areas of focus for the model would be to undertake further engagement, understand what additional resource would be required and to develop an implementation plan. Schools Forum members expressed that they were encouraged by the model and saw it as a positive way forward, and reassured that the plan was to start interventions earlier.

Schools Forum asked what support was being given to children and families prior to entry into mainstream school, in order to minimise issues on entry. They heard that this was being considered, and the goal was to expand current work in mainstream schools to younger children, via the opportunities offered by multi-agency, zone-based working. There is also work underway with health colleagues to speed up access to mental health services, particularly through the Integrated Front Door.

Members commented that the move to start looking at those younger than school-age was positive. They highlighted the importance of consistency, ensuring the availability and quality of provision across the county; this was reported to be a key part of the multi-disciplinary approach being adopted.

## **Stocktake and DSG re-modelling**

As advised previously Forum heard an update on the dialogue with the DFE around the programme and the refresh of the financial modelling. Norfolk has deviated from the original trajectories as demand for SEN support and provision has been far higher than previous trends.

In terms of impact to date of the LFI programme, Schools forum heard that there was a need for revisions to the current plan, as although there has recently been a formal expression of interest for an ASD centre in the west of the county there have been no formal expressions of interest for Secondary Complex Needs Specialist Resource Bases. Schools Forum offered support with further engagement in the sector, highlighting that SEMH and ASD were higher priorities for secondary school heads but that support for leaders to understand what secondary complex needs looks like would be helpful. Schools Forum also highlighted issues surrounding funding, in particular around the costs for 1:1 TA support and potential opportunities to align funding bands to the principles of Local First Inclusion.