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Catherine McEvoy-Carr, Director of Children's Services, Newcastle City Council

Sam Allen, Chief Executive, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Dear Ms McEvoy-Carr and Ms Allen

Ofsted and CQC visit to Newcastle Council local area partnership

Following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) joint visit to Newcastle Council Partnership, I write on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills and the Chief Inspector of Primary Medical Services and Integrated Care of CQC to summarise the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to participate in this thematic visit on preparation for adulthood.

Ofsted carried out this visit under a section 118(2) request from the Department for Education. The CQC provided assistance to Ofsted under paragraph 9(1) of schedule 4 to the Health and Social Care Act 2008.

The visit was carried out as part of a thematic review, the outcome of which will be aggregated into a national report to support whole-system improvement. This national report will be published on Ofsted's and CQC's websites. It was not a graded inspection.

Thank you for contributing valuable information. During the visit, we spoke to local area leaders, children and young people with SEND, their families, and the education, health and care professionals who work with them. We examined relevant documents and visited a sample of settings.

Context

The purpose of this series of visits is to aggregate insights about preparation for adulthood arrangements, to learn from existing practice and to identify opportunities for improvement.

You can find more information about how inspectors carried out the visit at:
[Thematic reviews of preparation for adulthood arrangements in local areas - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thematic-reviews-of-preparation-for-adulthood-arrangements-in-local-areas)
(www.gov.uk)

Strategic planning

We were told:

- The partnership is aspirational for children and young people with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to achieve and live a healthy, independent life. The voice of the child and young person underpins and informs the partnership's work. We heard how the preparation for adulthood (PFA) strategy, 'Preparation for next steps', reflects the partnership's commitment.
- The partnership members know each other well. It regularly shares information, and understands the pressures and priorities across the city. We were told that there is an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for improvement.
- There are two newly appointed dedicated SEND PFA leads. They have worked with partners, children, young people and families to co-produce an education, health and care (EHC) plan template that has PFA as a core theme running throughout. Practitioners told us that this new format helps them to focus on what is important for the child and young person in the future.
- Within EHC plans, there is a real sense of the child and young person's needs, personality and strengths that includes their wishes, hopes and aspirations. However, you recognise that not all plans accurately reflect children and young people's current circumstances and views. Practitioners told us that outcomes and targets within the EHC plans do not always reflect what children and young people want, or the support that they have received, to help them successfully transition to their next steps. Some practitioners told us that they do not receive EHC plans or that they are out of date.
- Parents and carers lack information about transition. You are working with partners and families to develop a 'getting ready for next steps' document that sets out what is on offer at every stage of a child and young person's life.

Employment

We were told:

- Children and young people with SEND access a range of careers advice and guidance from within their education settings and from the local authority Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) team. Schools, including specialist schools, told us that they use innovative ways to create a range of employment opportunities for young people with SEND. For example, one specialist school creates and sells crafts, generating income while another has opened a café on site that employs young people with SEND. However, education leaders told us that there is a lack of employment opportunities for young people with complex needs beyond the age of 18.
- We heard that families and their children value the annual careers fair, 'My future, my choice'. This enables young people with SEND to consider the

range of options available to them such as apprenticeships and further education courses.

- The CIAG team work in partnership with a range of services such as the Youth Justice Service and educational establishments to identify and support those young people who are at risk, or are, not in employment, education or training (NEET). For example, partners know a high proportion of young people who are at risk of becoming NEET due to lack of engagement and poor attendance, have social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). Partners work with Newcastle City Learning to design a bespoke, flexible provision for individuals, incorporating other elements such as travel training to reduce barriers to accessing employment or further education.
- The local area partnership actively seeks employment and supported internship opportunities for young people. It was reported that there has been a steady increase over the years in the number of supported internships available.

Independent living

We were told:

- There is a focus across the partnership on ensuring children have opportunities to develop their independence skills from early years to young adults moving into independent living.
- The travel training offer to support young people to travel safely, access information and free travel passes is a strength. This increases young people's confidence, independence and life skills.
- Some parents find accessing specialist teams in children's and adult services difficult without a diagnosis. However, once in these services, families reported that they receive effective support.
- Transition planning and preparation between adult and children's social care is effective. This supports young people with SEND to become independent.
- There is a range of supported accommodation options available for young people with SEND. These options help to support young people into independent living, such as by staying close, supporting living arrangements and securing their own tenancies.

Community and inclusion

We were told:

- A range of community-based family support is available, including specific intervention groups, such as the family club, The Tree House and early years hub for children with additional needs. This empowers families to support their child with SEND.

- Education providers across the partnership provide opportunities for children and young people with SEND to form friendships. For example, through linking activities for students with the same interest.
- Parents and carers find access to short break provision difficult. The partnership is undertaking a review to broaden this offer.
- The concierge and enhanced supported living schemes are helping young people with SEND to form peer and friendship groups. These help young people in the transition into independent living.
- Children in care and care leavers with SEND are supported through an extension of the Family Group Conferencing model to bring professionals and, more importantly, informal supports from family members and friends, to attend My Support Meetings. This is establishing robust support networks for young people moving into adulthood. This is creating sustainable support for young people outside of statutory interventions.

Health

We were told:

- There is a dedicated speech and language therapist team who work with 16 to 25 year olds in education to develop a range of skills. The service supports young people to prepare for employment, develop independent living skills, social skills and recognise safe and healthy relationships.
- Where pathways are 'all age', such as the regional communication aid service, young people with SEND do not experience any change to their provision. When provision is designed as a 'lifespan service', young people benefit from a smooth transition.
- For some young people there is no equivalent adult service once they reach their 18th birthday. For example, there is no service to support young people who do not have a diagnosis of a learning disability or a mental health condition with behaviour or sleep difficulties. Parents told us that accessing health care after 16 is a challenge.
- There is variation in the local therapies offer depending on which type of school a child attends and whether they have a learning disability or not. There is work in progress to redesign the therapies offer to improve this.
- Parents and GPs told us that reasonable adjustments are not always provided to young people who access adult provision in hospital. The local hospital has made the provision of reasonable adjustments a priority in their current action plan.

Next steps

We will use the information we have gathered when writing the national report that sets out our findings. We plan to publish this in Autumn 2024.

Yours sincerely

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His Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted

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His Majesty's Inspector, Ofsted

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Children's Services Inspector, CQC