

Children and Young People Committee
28th November 2023

Item 3: Petitions and Public Questions

	Question from:	Question/ comment:
1.	Ruberta Bisson, local resident	<p>I will discuss the case of a male teen in my family, whose school experience was negative in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No proper reviews of his SEN support were done until year 9 and, even then, nothing effective was put in place -He generally felt overwhelmed and stupid for his whole time there -He masked out of fear and so most teachers didn't recognise any struggles -The challenging behaviour displayed at home was blamed on his family -The few teachers who had noticed his struggles didn't go to the SENDCo and the SENDCo's effectiveness was hampered by the SLT and trust management <p>When he stopped attending partway through year 9 at his mainstream academy school, they were keen to tackle it. They made things worse by insisting on reintegration plans despite his crumbling mental health and accusing us of obstruction and abuse because we wouldn't force him in. Assessments and referrals were delayed due to the school gatekeeping the process and contradicting us in their evidence. An EHC needs assessment was denied due to a lack of evidence of support but the school maintained that they were the right place for him. They refused all evidence of mental health issues impacting attendance, including a private screening and a Paediatrician letter, so we as a family were crumbling. When we requested that the LA intervene to secure an education and give advice, the school refused this. They wouldn't consider reasonable adjustments given their opinion that 'he has no extra needs'. After 6 months of this, he said he'd rather jump out of a window than attend school, so we deregistered.</p>

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		<p>2 years later, there is still extensive trauma in us all. We have some diagnoses and are seeking others, but this vindication brings us no peace. He still struggles to trust and speak to the agencies we have involved and his future is uncertain.</p> <p>We are aware that the school, like the others in the same trust and others across the UK, has since further toughened up its behaviour policy and that many more students and families are reaching breaking point due to unmet needs. As in our situation, they seem to not understand that care and true collaboration is the way to go.</p> <p>I think that similar stories could be prevented in Cambridgeshire if the Local Authority (with support from the Regional Director where necessary) worked together with academies to direct them to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follow the SEND Code of Practice by working collaboratively with families and agencies to secure the best outcome for a student's wellbeing 2. Effectively identify and support SEND when a student a) is masking but struggling, b) displays challenging behaviour at home or at school, or c) has a spiky profile 3. Provide reasonable adjustments to policies, no matter the reason 4. Ensure that support and assessment pathways are open to all students, including those whose attendance is affected 5. Take an inclusive approach to attendance and behaviour instead of a punitive one, ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made and the cause of lowered attendance is investigated <p>What is the council's response to this proposal?</p>
	Response from:	
	Councillor B Goodliffe, Chair, Children and Young People Committee	<p>Thank you for your question and for attending the Children and Young People Committee meeting on 28th November 2023 to present this. I am sorry to hear of the sad position you outline.</p> <p>The council has strong relationships with its academy trusts and operates on a challenge and support basis around SEND where issues are known and shared. The early identification of SEND and a focus on inclusion is a critical part of our SEND Strategy. Identifying and supporting needs early often determine the requirements for further support. We agree that reasonable adjustments to policies are part of any response to SEND needs. We are strengthening our work with schools on 'Working Together', the government's attendance policy, to ensure that barriers to attendance are removed and partners work together in the best interest of children.</p>

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		<p>Where parents feel that schools are not engaging with their child’s special education needs, we would strong encourage parents to seek support from the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). Parents should also follow the schools complaints process if they feel their views are not heard or needs are not being met. Whilst we have no direct jurisdiction to require academy schools to follow the approach outlined, we do challenge schools directly and work closely with the Regional Director where we are aware of patterns of poor inclusion by schools or a lack of engagement with parents.</p>
2.	Liz Day, local resident	<p>I have taken a look at what the Regional director does from the information provided in agenda item 4 and that which is available from other sources. I have attempted to understand the value of the director within Cambridgeshire particularly, as one of 11 local authority areas.</p> <p>I am somewhat perplexed regarding reasonable use of public government funding when it comes to the function and scope of the Director’s responsibilities. There are clearly laws that set out responsibilities and rights when considering education, health and social care, with focus on safeguarding. It is noted there is some conflict between local authority areas and the Regional Director’s office and advisory board. Particularly challenges noted at 2.9 relating to complaints, safeguarding and outcomes. Outcomes are important given service users appear to be absent from any part of the Regional Director’s operation and are noted in 2.1 as ‘area-based programmes to improve outcomes for children, families and learners.’</p> <p>The main function appears to be found with multi academy trusts and free schools. Although at 2.3 it notes a list of main responsibilities. It is of particular interest to me on matters involved with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in education, health, and social care. I am a peer supporter and aspire to find amicable solutions that takes a person-centred approach working towards suitable outcomes.</p> <p>I am aware there are schools within Cambridgeshire that are failing children and young people with SEND. Yet an Ofsted inspection report reads like a bestselling fiction. There appears absolutely nothing that Officers and Councillors can do to address this matter. Worse, because there is a fiction produced that supports the way things are done for SEND, it hides the reality and therefore is complicit with the problem causing detriment and harm to the children and young people. Clearly pathing the way for ongoing evidence collection for potential tortious legal activity to address.</p> <p>The Regional Director’s role appears to be a glorified higher level of middle management function acting on</p>

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		<p>behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. At a time with purported financial pressures, funding appears directed towards transformation programmes, consultants and homogenising local authority areas into one of nine regions. That would suggest the function of a local authority is or has been taken over by a governmental restructure that has not been proposed to the public.</p> <p>My question is how are the Local Authority working with the Regional Director in reality, when looking at place planning for all children and young people, including those with SEND within Cambridgeshire, particularly in the knowledge that there are significant building programmes in play and planned, along with significant bio-tech being funded. Those children, Young People and their families are at significant disadvantage amongst this level of growth, when level of funding is at 136th out of 149 Local Authorities using an unfair funding formula. Bringing the Safety Valve Deal into sight with requirements to reduce SEND funding to overlay an ongoing insufficient funding scenario, how can the Local Authority and Regional Director remedy this inequality?</p>
	Response from:	
	<p>Councillor B Goodliffe Chair, Children and Young people Committee</p>	<p>Thank you for your question and for your time attending the Children and Young People Committee meeting on 28th November 2023.</p> <p>You quite rightly identify the challenges of growth, both in absolute terms with the house building programme across the county but also the national levels of increase in SEND which impact in Cambridgeshire. Our funding has not kept pace with this change and our education system is under significant strain.</p> <p>We have worked closely with Department for Education (DfE) officials around developing our safety valve agreement that seeks to invest in more early intervention services and local provision with a view to avoid more costly specialist provision. We expect the number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans to continue to increase during this period, but we hope more support will mean that the interventions required can be done at a lower level and delivered locally in our schools and settings.</p> <p>Our work with the Regional Director's office has been focused on the establishment of the two new free school special schools and the process to appoint a trust to operate the schools. We hope the government 'SEND and Alternative Provision review' will consider funding and the challenges unique to each local area and ensure sufficient funding is there to support every child's needs at the earliest stage.</p>