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By email: david.shaw@shropshire.gov.uk

James McNeillie HMI
Regional Director, West Midlands and
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Dear David

Thank you to your colleagues, including colleagues from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Parent and Carer Council (PACC) for meeting with Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 8 December 2025. It was helpful to hear of the developments in the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision across Shropshire and how you and the ICB are working together to enhance the provision for children and young people with SEND and their families.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision in your local area and specifically:

- The content of the self-evaluation and your SEND action plan
- The action the local area is taking to address the areas for improvement in the full inspection report
- What the local area partnership is doing to maintain or improve good practice
- How local area leaders are monitoring the impact of their actions
- Emerging local and/or national SEND issues that affect delivery of services.

Thank you for updating us on the political changes in Shropshire which have led to some oversight changes in the partnership. You explained that a corporate peer review will be carried out. You confirmed that you have maintained on-going engagement with NHSE and the DfE. You are continuing to work through the NHS Reset programme and confirmed that the ICB is expanding to include Staffordshire and Stoke. You also told us how you are working alongside West Mercia Police following their review. You explained that there are continued financial challenges across Shropshire. However, you emphasised that there remains a strong commitment across the partnership to work together to improve and develop the provision for children and young people with SEND. The SEND and AP strategy was approved by council with seven areas of priority identified. You said there are

cohesive structures in place that link key aspects together. You recognised that there are still areas of challenge in the partnership including the long waits for education, health and care (EHC) plans. You stated that co-production has improved in the partnership.

We heard that there has been some improvement in health wait times for children and young people in Shropshire, although you recognise there is still more to do to reduce these times. You introduced a speech and language risk matrix tool in October 2025 which you feel is further assisting you in identifying need and the required focused input by practitioners. You said you listened to children and young people's and parental feedback and now offer therapy sessions in mainstream schools rather than routinely in a clinic setting. You said the introduction of link SaLT practitioners with schools has been well received. You are now more confident that health data is both qualitative and quantitative and will inform how you continue to improve the services and experiences for children and young people with SEND.

You talked through the challenges that remain in neurodiverse assessments, especially for 5- to 18-year-olds. Although you feel you have addressed issues with workforce capacity, the demand for assessments has also grown which is impacting on reducing wait times for the assessments. However, you explained how you have been proactive in taking steps to outsource the service to help address the wait times. You said you have commissioned a new CAMHS provider who you feel will be able to provide a more holistic service that will focus on a needs-led approach and will consider a number of services that could meet children and young people's needs alongside the specialist CAMHS input.

We heard how PACC feel they are a well-established and active forum through work such as the PINS project and the community support offer. They are involved with a wide range of families and use the 'navigation offer' to signpost parents and carers to support and services. The navigation offer is now an all-age service. PACC feels that a significant amount of work has been completed, and the partnership is in a better place in areas such as the EHC plan team and improved communication with families. They also confirmed that they have had a reduction in queries in relation to SaLT. However, they stated that neurodiverse waits are still a challenge. They also feel that further improvements are needed in coproduction and that sufficiency remains a major issue. They reported that an increasing number of families are saying specialist settings cannot meet the needs of their children and therefore there is an increasing number of children and young people not in education. PACC said that they have not been involved in hub development and are concerned that they do not align with the PINS project. They also feel that hubs are becoming more and more specialized which means schools are struggling to provide for children and young people with a lower level of need but who still need support. PACC stated that they have a strong relationship with the health SEND team but are concerned about strategic coproduction as they are not as involved as have previously been. However, PACC confirmed that there has been lots of really positive work across the

partnership overall and they maintain positive relationships with senior colleagues in the area.

You reflected on the positive work to develop the quality of EHC plans to ensure they accurately reflect the children and young people's needs and the required provisions. You explained how you are in the process of introducing multi-agency audits. There is an annual review recovery plan in place, and you have reviewed the data to identify workflows that have not been completed. You feel that this has made a significant difference to understanding the challenges in this area. You are in the process of putting further resource into the recovery plan to ensure that all plans are up to date by Easter 2026. To avoid a further bulge, you have fixed-term case officers working on the reviews of children and young people in independent specialist providers. Social care colleagues told us how they are checking that plans are not ceased inappropriately. There is a ceasing panel in place to provide oversight of whether any additional support is needed to ensure that the young person's needs continue to be met without an EHC plan. You said preparation for adulthood (PfA) sessions had low attendance in the hubs. You said you now hold two sessions per term at Severndale which has increased access to the sessions.

Shropshire presents some significant geographical challenges. You said there are now 835 specialist places across 15 mainstream and resource provision with plans in place to increase this by a further 358 places over next few years. You are aiming to expand specialist placements outside Shrewsbury to ensure there is an equitable model across Shropshire and to ensure there is reasonable travel requirements and high-quality practice.

We heard how you have been working on strengthening inclusive practice in schools. This has been supported by the use of the Inclusive Development Grant. You feel the work on alternative provision (AP) and inclusion has been instrumental in driving down exclusions and suspensions in Shropshire. You confirmed that there has been a 50% reduction in permanent exclusions over the last year and since September there have only been two. You explained how you are ensuring that additional resourcing in schools is not leading to cases of 'internal exclusion'. You highlighted the work of your education quality advisors (EQAs) since 2024. You explained how they are challenging and supporting schools to develop inclusive practice. There is also increased access to specialist support through outreach services, including 'outshine', where specialist staff can work with schools to prevent exclusions and suspensions. You told us how you have widened training opportunities in schools. There are regular events for SENCos and staff focusing on inclusive practice. Academy inclusion audits are also in place. You said that where challenges emerge in terms of inclusive practice you have robust discussions with CEOs to address this.

You told us about the significant expansion of the SEN hubs. However, you said you have been careful not to lose the cohesion across the hubs when growing the model. For schools developing their own provisions you said you maintain oversight of these through the work of the EQAs. You feel that there has been a successful

development of the hub networks. There is quality assurance of the hubs through the Education Excellence Strategy process. In terms of unregistered AP, you explained how routine quality assurance checks maintain oversight of the provisions, including identifying where there is poor provision. You also support schools who are commissioning AP to ensure that they carry out their own checks.

Thank you for your responses to the areas we discussed. I look forward to hearing about further developments in Shropshire.

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard
Senior His Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted

Elizabeth Fox
Care Quality Commission