Evaluation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Pathfinder Programme

Thematic Report: Engagement of schools Research report

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Kathryn Hill, Graham Thom, Christopher Carr & Maya Agur – SQW

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Key learning points

This report was produced as part of SQW's evaluation of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability Pathfinder Programme for the Department for Education. It focuses on the engagement of schools in the SEN and disability reforms, based on evidence gathered from five pathfinder areas. The key learning points were that:

- There have been two main levels of engagement between local authorities and schools regarding the SEN and disability reform process to date – more in-depth work with a small number of schools, and lighter-touch engagement with a wider network of schools

- The majority of this engagement has been focused on the reforms broadly, rather than on the primary-secondary transition process *per se*, and has involved strategic engagement, piloting/developmental activity, and development of the Local Offer

- Awareness of the SEN and disability reforms was relatively high among the schools consulted, however there was a broad perception that many other schools were not as engaged as them. Awareness of particular aspects (e.g. Personal Budgets), and knowledge among staff further down the school (e.g. class teachers, learning and support assistants), was also more limited among the schools interviewed

- The key ingredients for an effective primary-secondary transition process were recognised as being strong relationships and communications, early assessment and planning, tailored and flexible provision, and exposure to the new school environment. Whilst the schools consulted were happy with their existing transition arrangements, it was recognised that the application of these ingredients was inconsistent, and dependent upon particular cultures, behaviours or relationships

- The opportunity to address these challenges through the SEN and disability reforms was recognised by both local authorities and schools. Perceived benefits included greater engagement of families, more proactive and coordinated transition planning, and greater consistency in provision

- However, a number of perceived challenges were also identified including potential time, staffing and workforce development implications

- The degree to which these changes impact on school activity will vary according to factors such as the existing level of provision and how the Education, Health and Care pathway is being delivered locally. Where schools are required to contribute to drafting or coordinating Education, Health and Care plans, there were expected to be additional resource requirements

- Going forwards, it will be crucial that local authorities and schools continue to work together to deliver the reforms. Strong communications, awareness-raising and training will play a significant role in this respect.

1. Introduction

Evaluation of the SEND Pathfinder Programme

SQW was commissioned by the Department for Education to lead a consortium of organisations to undertake the Evaluation of the SEN and Disability Pathfinder Programme. A series of reports from the study are available on the government publications website, including two previous thematic reports on key working and workforce development, and the Education, Health and Care (EHC) planning pathway[1]. This particular thematic report focuses on the *involvement of schools in the SEN and disability reforms.*

Rationale for the research

During the first 18 months of the evaluation, the impact of the SEN and disability reforms on schools was highlighted as an area of common interest, and one worthy of further examination. As a wide-ranging agenda, the decision was taken to focus specifically on the transition process for children with a Special Educational Needs (SEN) Statement moving from primary to secondary school. In focusing on the transition, the research would provide information of use to both primary and secondary schools, and be consistent with the wider transition plan, where it is expected that young people who already have an SEN Statement will transfer to an EHC plan at key transition points in their education.

Research focus

This thematic report provides further insight into five main areas, summarised in the diagram below and covering: models for transition (plus differences with existing models); resources and inputs required; support to young people; and the implications of the reforms on schools. The report is broadly structured around these themes and where possible aims to bring out key learning points, based on experience up to the point the consultations took place (March – April 2014).

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[1]https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/send-pathfinders#evaluation-of-the-send-pathfinders

Models for transition	What models are being adopted in schools to prepare young people with an SEN Statement for transition to secondary school? Who is involved from the primary and secondary school, plus which other agencies? What role do parents and young people play?
Differences in models	How are these models changing from previous years (e.g. different people/ organisations, timings, information, nature of the discussion)?
Resources and inputs	How are these inputs being resourced within the schools? What staff development issues have been raised? How have these been handled?
Support to young people	What support is in place to help young people move in to their new provision? Who is involved in this? How is information about the young person transferred? Is the process of supporting the young people to move in to the new provision different?
Implications	What have been the implications for secondary schools? Are they receiving more/fewer requests? Have they had to reshape their offer or how they promote it? How has any adjustment sat alongside changes related to the school funding reforms?

Our approach

Evidence was gathered from five pathfinder areas – Brighton, Hampshire, Northamptonshire, Rochdale and Solihull – via in-depth face-to-face interviews with pathfinder leads, and consultations with three to five primary and secondary schools engaged in the programme in each area (including a mix of mainstream and special schools - see Annex B for more detail on the research methods used). We would like to express our sincere thanks to the participating pathfinders and schools, and to the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen) for providing useful insights into the issues raised.

Intended audience

This report is intended to support those responsible for engaging with schools, and / or rolling out the SEN and disability reforms within schools from September 2014.

3. Engagement of schools in the reforms

Context of the reforms

Schools play an important role in the development of all children and young people, including those with SEN and disabilities. They are therefore an intrinsic part of the SEN and disability reform process.

The SEN and disability reforms will put pupils and families at the centre of the planning process, from initial identification of needs to the delivery of support. Schools are already involved in this process, but approaches and effectiveness vary. The reforms, and the greater emphasis on person-centred care underlying them, will have important implications for how the planning process is delivered in schools and what role schools will play. The Government's recommendation that SEN Statements are converted to EHC plans at key transition points in education[2] will also have implications, requiring sufficient resources to ensure that conversions are undertaken effectively.

The implications of these changes are discussed further below. Where possible, the discussion centres on the primary-secondary transition process, although it was clear during the research that this has not been the focus of school engagement by local authorities to date. Instead, engagement has centred on the wider aims and operational elements of the reforms (e.g. Education, Health and Care plans, Local Offer) in order to ensure that schools have the base knowledge required before specific issues can be worked through. Whilst this thematic therefore includes insights on the transition, wider perspectives on overall school engagement are also included.

Before working through the insights, it is important to note the wider backdrop. The reforms have come at a time when wide-scale changes in funding formulas, curriculum, assessment, and types of education provision (e.g. increase in academies and free schools, focus on localised provision) are also taking place. The impact of this evolving landscape may vary among schools, but it is important and should therefore be factored in carefully when working through how best to involve schools in the reform process.

Models of engagement with schools

Whilst the nature and scale of school engagement has varied across areas, our research has indicated two main levels of engagement – more in-depth work with a small number of schools, and lighter-touch engagement with a wider school network. The majority of this engagement has been focused on the reforms broadly (as mentioned above) and

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[2]https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304534/Code_of_Practice_Draft.pdf

has taken three main forms – 1) strategic engagement, 2) piloting/developmental activity, and 3) developing the Local Offer. These are summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Models of engagement with schools on the reforms
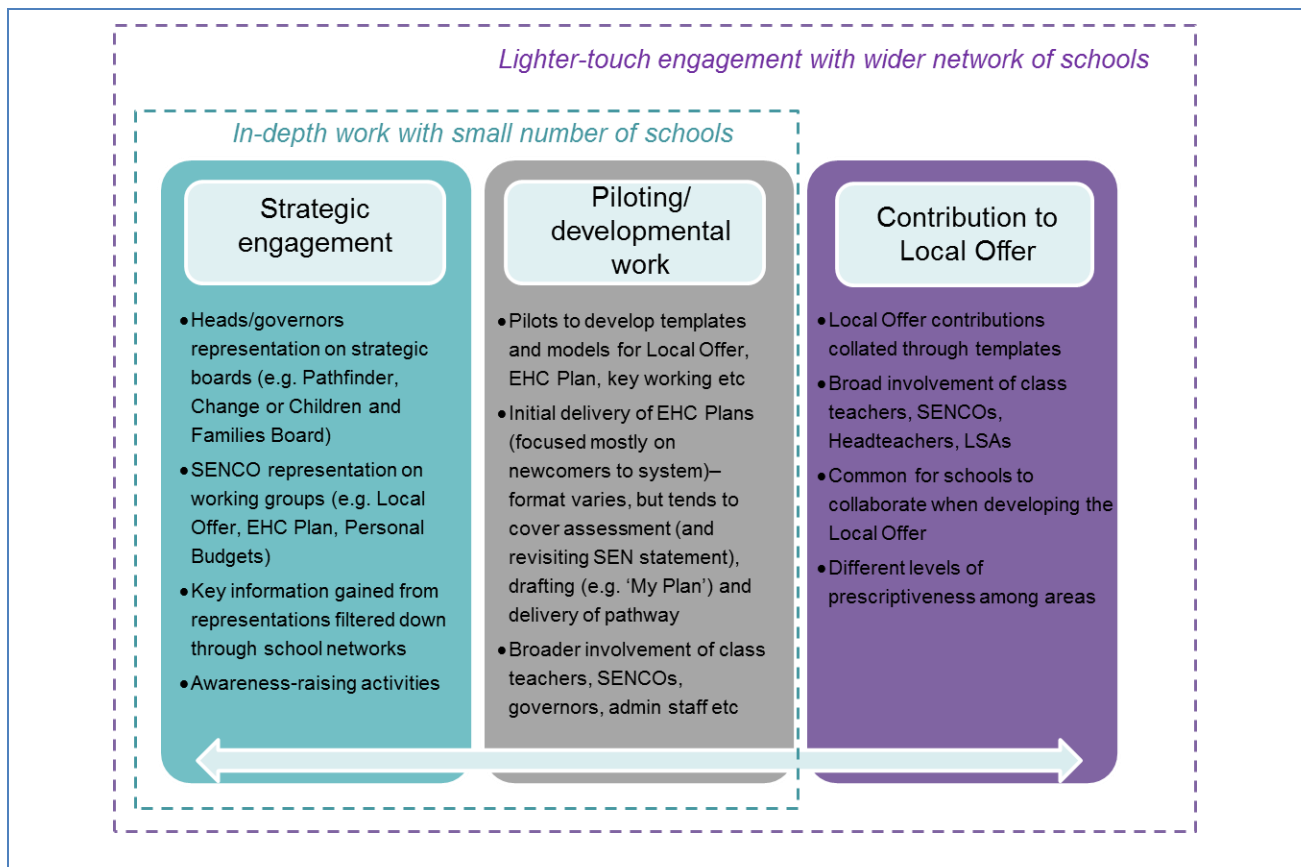
When local authorities have worked intensively with a small number of schools, the representation of Headteachers/governors on strategic boards has been commonplace, as has the involvement of SENCOs in working groups focused on the Local Offer, EHC plans, key working and other elements. Through this range of engagement, local areas have been able to both facilitate school input into the reforms, and encourage wider awareness-raising. Those attending meetings have seen information sharing across their networks as being one of their key mandates. The strategic engagement of Headteachers or SENCOs has offered valuable input, such as in assessing pilot activities prior to scale-up (through process-mapping exercises) or testing out EHC plan templates.

The awareness-raising undertaken through these strategic channels also seems to have been useful. Headteachers spoke of devoting significant time at Heads meetings to the reforms. SENCOs also reported that they had answered a number of inquiries from SENCOs in other schools, about the reform process and its implications. Still, it was widely recognised that local awareness-raising activity around specific aspects of the reforms had been quite conservative up to April 2014, with most local authorities waiting for the final legislation

> *"The support has been good, but we have been looking for it"*, SENCO

and Code of Practice to be published before rolling out wider activity. Where it had been undertaken, awareness-raising by local authorities had been targeted at three main audiences:

- *Bursars/governors* – via information sessions/bulletins
- *Headteachers* – via information briefings, electronic bulletins, presentations at Headteacher conferences, attendance at local Headteacher groups
- *SENCOs* – through representation on working groups, thematic workshops, information briefings, presentations at conferences, attendance at SENCO meetings.

Whilst the schools consulted tended to appreciate the measured manner in which information about the reforms had been disseminated, many consultees expressed concerns that many schools were still 'out of the loop'. A number of reasons were provided for why this may be so, including some schools being quite isolated (e.g. not engaged with other schools in the area) and / or lacking capacity to engage (including having other priorities (e.g. being in special measures). Commonly it was suggested that special schools were better placed because of their higher level of base knowledge, although in some areas a reported focus on mainstream schools in the reform process had led special schools to feel disengaged.

> *"The reforms have been set up around mainstream schools…the process isn't now meaningful to special schools",* Headteacher

Alongside variability across schools, awareness further down the school (e.g. class teachers, learning and support assistants (LSA)) was limited. At the time of interview (March – April 2014), only a handful of schools had delivered internal awareness-raising or training sessions, or set up working groups to develop their response to the reforms. However, plans were in place in several schools to provide training and guidance to staff in the summer term, ensuring they were not 'brought in cold' in September.

Awareness of particular aspects of the reforms was also generally lacking, with knowledge of resourcing and Personal Budgets (PBs) particularly limited among all schools consulted. This most certainly reflected the fact that resourcing arrangements had not been finalised by the local authority, or PBs were not expected to be taken up widely within the area. However, the limited knowledge of PBs appeared to be impacting upon the quality of EHC plans and the confidence of schools in the process, and was therefore identified as a key priority going forwards. There was also limited knowledge of the proposed conversion arrangements (from Statements to EHC plans), which was surprising given that three areas were developing plans to roll-out conversions at transition points.

Where schools had been engaged, experience suggested it had been a satisfactory process to date. Involvement through piloting work had been particularly beneficial, and creative in the sense that it had extended beyond developing EHC plan or Local Offer templates, to include developing key working, integrating the pupil voice in EHC planning,

and in one case, the wide-scale conversion of statements to EHC plans at the primary-secondary transition phase. Whilst time-consuming for the schools involved, piloting work had offered them significant foresight into the reforms. For local authorities, it had provided clear evidence of how they could work in practice, which given the competing priorities/pressures on schools, was important before engaging more widely.

Lighter touch engagement of schools through the Local Offer had also been effective, although more concerns were raised in this respect. The expectations placed on schools were reported to have been too high at times, particularly in terms of turning around Local Offer contributions. Local authorities also raised challenges in engaging some schools around the Local Offer, with delays to contributions in some cases. This was largely seen to relate to limited capacity or senior management buy-in, but it may also reflect limited knowledge of the Local Offer among schools, and how the Local Offer fits into the wider reform agenda.

4. Arrangements for transition

How does the primary-secondary transition process work at present?

The current process of primary-secondary transition varies across different types of school (special, mainstream, academies), levels of need, geographic areas (including demographic backgrounds), and institutional arrangements (e.g. use of Individual Education Plans (IEP)). Four main ingredients were commonly identified as critical to an effective transition however, driven in sequence through a school-led process.

Figure 2 Four elements required for an effective primary-secondary transition process

- Strong communications and information exchange between schools (e.g. through cross-school visits, attendance of Heads/SENCOS at reviews)
- Strong relationships between parents and schools, based on clear understanding of emotional and practical needs

Strong relationships & communication

- Supporting a multi-agency coordinated assessment process, through common templates
- Early statement reviews and early identification of needs
- Clear information on local provision

Early assessment & planning

Exposure to new school environment

- Providing opportunities for the young person and their family to visit the new school (e.g. open days, transition camps)
- Scaling up exposure as required

Tailored & flexible provision

- Responding to clear set of individual outcomes
- Tailoring the new school curriculum to individual need (e.g. Yr 7 and 8 following primary school curriculum)

Source: SQW

When in place, these four ingredients were identified by schools as helping to facilitate a smooth transition, but in practice their application is often inconsistent, depending on the behaviours / cultures of schools or individuals. These in turn impact upon the

relationships between schools, which were identified as being particularly important to the transition process, but highly variable. Typically, variation was attributed to historical practice or personal relationships, but it was also seen to reflect the differing levels of inclusivity in receiving schools. Local authorities and primary schools raised

> *"We will carry on as we do, because we already prepare our children well… because we have the support of our secondary schools",* Headteacher

concerns about the practice in some areas and the support available once some children and young people had transitioned. Whilst there were widespread reports that relationships were improving and that receiving schools were more engaged, the perceived willingness or ability of schools to fully adapt to children and young people with SEN and disability was still seen to differ substantially.

The differences in levels of inclusivity were costly from the perspective of local authorities as they reduced capacity to provide close to home. One local authority had sought to use the reforms to trigger a change in behaviour amongst some local secondaries, encouraging them to become more inclusive.

Whilst many schools suggested that the existing transition process from primary to secondary worked well (and hence did need to change), it was clear that it hinged upon particular relationships, behaviours or cultures, and hence varied considerably. Table 1 below provides an overview of some common issues identified through the consultations.

Table 1 Common issues characterising the current primary-secondary transition process

Local Authorities		Schools
• Lack of guidance and sharing of experiences to schools on what makes an effective transition • LA playing watchdog rather than offering support • Inadequate quality control by LAs of the transition process and subsequent provision	→ **Approach to transition** ←	• Variable ability/willingness to engage in transition planning, in terms of exposure to new environment, willingness to undertake early reviews and tailor provision - potentially linked to issues such as income levels, capacity and willingness to be inclusive
• Schools not sufficiently held to account by LAs in terms of completion of annual reviews, updating of statements, development of transition plans • Statement inadequately accounts for needs of CYP, not aligned to annual review process, become out of date • Too burdensome to complete – input often required "all at once" • Too education-focused	→ **Paperwork** ←	• Statements not updated, or completed in unsatisfactory manner • Statements too education-focused – due to limited engagement with health and social care • Statements not linked to annual review/transition process or shared across schools • Statements 'tick the box' rather than shape support
• Lack of input/engagement from health and social care (e.g. unable to access medical case history) • Lack of communication between LA and schools	→ **Comms & joint working** ←	• Lack of communication between LA and schools • Lack of communication among schools • Lack of engagement with health and social care

Source: SQW

How will the transition process change in the future?

Whilst it was commonly perceived by both schools and local authorities that the transition process would not differ substantially to what was already in place (either because good practice already existed or awareness of the reforms was low), our research highlighted three operational elements of the reforms that we expect to be influential - EHC plans, the Local Offer and PBs. Underlying these operational elements will be the greater focus on outcomes-led support, multi-agency working and person-centred planning, or as one Headteacher put it, *"the whole thing is about getting parents more involved and giving them a voice".*

Although many schools stressed that they were happy with their existing arrangements for transition, there was a keen interest in understanding how the reforms could further improve them, both on the part of schools and LAs. Some of the expected benefits are provided in the box below.
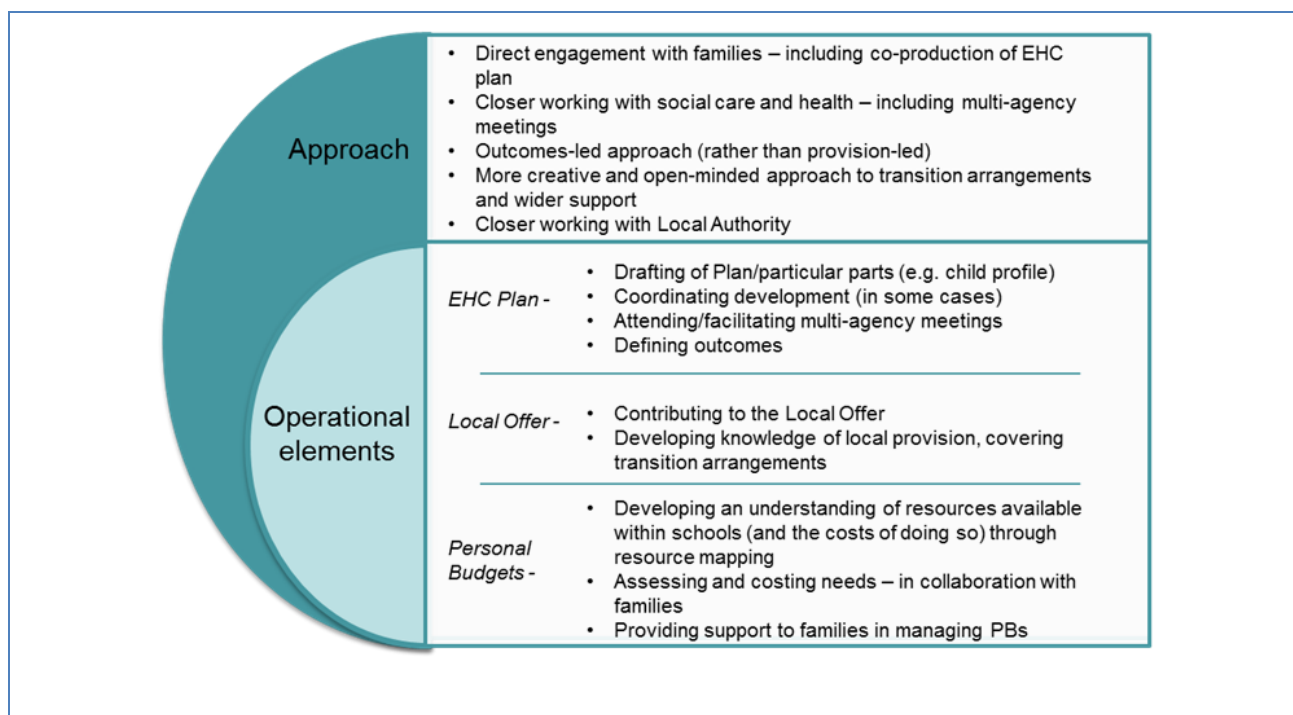
Perceived benefits of the reforms
- Greater engagement of families - including better sharing of information
- More consistent provision - facilitated in large part by the Local Offer
- More proactive and coordinated approach to transition planning
- More effective management of support (pre- and post-transition) – facilitated as the EHC plan will be a more 'dynamic' document

Implications for schools

Given that most of the work undertaken with schools to date has not focused on transition, it is perhaps too soon to be working through what the implications of the reforms will be in this area. Broadly speaking however, the requirements are expected to include those detailed in the diagram below.

Figure 3 Requirements for schools of the SEN and disability reforms on the transition

Approach	• Direct engagement with families – including co-production of EHC plan • Closer working with social care and health – including multi-agency meetings • Outcomes-led approach (rather than provision-led) • More creative and open-minded approach to transition arrangements and wider support • Closer working with Local Authority
Operational elements — *EHC Plan -*	• Drafting of Plan/particular parts (e.g. child profile) • Coordinating development (in some cases) • Attending/facilitating multi-agency meetings • Defining outcomes
Local Offer -	• Contributing to the Local Offer • Developing knowledge of local provision, covering transition arrangements
Personal Budgets -	• Developing an understanding of resources available within schools (and the costs of doing so) through resource mapping • Assessing and costing needs – in collaboration with families • Providing support to families in managing PBs

Source: SQW

Many of these requirements apply to schools' involvement in the reform process broadly, or to the delivery of support once the child has transitioned, but several will influence the transition process specifically. Key questions that are being worked through by schools and local authorities include: how can greater parental engagement / engagement of children and young people be achieved when a child is about to transition (particularly on the part of the receiving school)? How can the information taken from multi-agency meetings, and greater input from health and social care, be shared between schools? What regard should be paid to future resourcing arrangements when PBs are being calculated?

In terms of the impact that such requirements will have for schools, initial indications suggest that this will vary according to how the EHC pathway is being implemented locally, including how key working will be undertaken. As outlined in the key working and workforce development thematic[3], four key working functions are seen as important to effective delivery of the EHC process:

- *Emotional and practical support* – developing a trusting relationship with families, advocating on a family's behalf

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[3]https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275914/RR326A_Key_working_and_workforce_development_-_FINAL.pdf

- *Coordination* – of practitioners and services, through a single point of contact and multi-agency meetings
- *Planning and assessment* – supporting a joint assessment and planning process, drafting an EHC plan
- *Information and specialist support* – providing information and signposting to local policies and provision.

The role that schools are likely to play in delivering these functions is likely to differ. In one local area, for example, it was expected that schools would help to coordinate multi-agency meetings, whereas in another a school representative (e.g. SENCO) was simply expected to attend the meetings (which would be coordinated by the local authority). What is clear is that, irrespective of how key working is being implemented, the reforms are expected to have some implications on schools, including those highlighted in the box below.

Implications of the reforms on schools
- Time – at least in the short term
- Roles and responsibilities – including potential changes to roles and responsibilities, and the need for additional resources
- Workforce development – training and awareness-raising.

Based on experience to date, most schools believed that the amount of time required for each transition case would increase, at least in the interim. In practice, they were being asked to play more of a role (e.g. drafting EHC plans (or parts of plans), which previously had been done by the local authority or acting as key workers) or to carry out existing roles more thoroughly. This does not apply to all areas, depending on the pathway that has been developed, but for some schools could be a significant undertaking. Schools were not expecting to receive additional resources to fulfil these requirements, and whilst they saw the advantage of the reform process, it was expected to put pressure on other parts of the schools.

In terms of staffing implications, SENCOs are unsurprisingly expected to play a key role in the reform process (as with the Statement process), working with a mix of class teachers, LSAs, pastoral heads, school nurses and senior management. Some schools intended to recruit new/additional posts (e.g. provision co-ordinators) to cover these responsibilities, although this tended to be part of pre-existing plans towards more inclusive provision, rather than a response to the reform process *per se*.

> *"The concept of the EHC Plan is very powerful… but the practicalities will be challenging. It will be run by schools, on top of what we already have to do",* Headteacher

Generally, most schools planned to fold the work into existing responsibilities, and a few concerns were raised in this respect. In particular, it was clear that schools were still working through what this would mean in terms of staff workloads and responsibilities (e.g. school nurses having more administrative duties), whether budgets would be available, and whether staff would be adequately skilled to undertake their responsibilities. As one Headteacher also stated, *"schools don't have the leverage… they won't be able to bring people around the table",* suggesting they did not feel sufficiently empowered to play a more strategic key working role.

"We will have to manage the process with the child sitting there, without them feeling like a failure", SENCO

Clearly, the relationship between local authorities and schools will be important in facilitating this process, as was clearly recognised by the pathfinder areas. A number of instances were provided of where the pathfinders had supported schools by assigning a caseworker to provide support in converting EHC plans to statements, conducting joint meetings with families, circulating example EHC plans/Local Offer contributions. This indicated a broad appreciation for the importance of joint-working, and in some cases the need for new types of relationship (with a bigger emphasis on support, rather than perceived policing). There were also plenty of examples of schools supporting each other, organically or through a process facilitated by the local authority (e.g. development of 'SENCO circles'), and more often than not focused on the Local Offer. In one area for example, a cluster of schools had jointly populated a Local Offer template, which was being developed iteratively based on feedback from parents. It will be important to ensure that non-pathfinder areas draw on this good practice.

The need to ensure workforce development needs are met also came through clearly in the research, as set out in Table 2.

Table 2 Potential workforce development needs in schools

Priorities	Elements of training
Policy context	• Overview of legislation and Code of Practice (including role of SENCOs) • Operational elements – Local Offer and EHC Plans • Links between SEN and disability reforms and wider changes (e.g. funding reforms)
Person-centred planning	• Principles of effective key working – covering four key working functions • Coordination and facilitation of multi-agency meetings • Potential for negotiation/conflict mediation training
Personal budgets	• Overview of legislative background • Calculating resource requirements • Managing delivery of PBs (including providing support to parents if required)

Outcomes	• Defining outcomes

Where workforce development had been undertaken with schools, it had been useful to build on existing infrastructure (e.g. SENCO meetings, Headteachers groups) and to tailor training and awareness-raising activity to the three audiences identified previously (i.e. bursars/governors, Headteachers and SENCOs). It was seen as important by the schools involved in the research that training should balance theory (and particularly how legislation aligns with the school ethos) with practical considerations; that school staff should deliver training to their peers; and that training should be provided at an appropriate pace. On numerous occasions it was emphasised that training needed to be iterative, allowing staff time to trial new processes and templates, and to come back with questions as they arose. This point was also widely recognised by the local authorities, with evidence that consideration of the school timetable and resource capacity within schools had been factored into the reform process thus far.

5. Key enablers and challenges

The involvement of schools in the SEN and disability reforms has been fairly strong to date, although this has tended not to focus on the transition process *per se.* Where EHC plans have been developed for children and young people at transition points, both schools and local areas have found it positive, giving parents more reassurance that their child's needs will be met, providing school-based practitioners with a richer understanding of the child or young person, and enabling a more structured and accountable process.

A number of challenges were identified by the consultees:

- Increased requests for statutory assessments, which was perceived to be linked to families wanting to be eligible for an EHC Plan – which is putting pressure on the system and was seen as a particular concern among local authorities. How this would be resourced, alongside the translation of Statements to EHC plans was identified as an area of concern

- Reduction in specialist services (e.g. Educational Psychologists and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) – which was identified by local authorities in some areas as putting pressure on the system, as it was believed to have led to more requests for statutory assessments which were being sought to ensure access to services

- Other pressures on schools – including the continued drive to increase attainment, which was noted by schools as being difficult to balance with the need for inclusivity. Resource constraints were also highlighted by schools as a challenge, which may be alleviated by the changes in the school funding formula, although most schools were yet to understand what the implications of these changes would be.

In spite of these challenges, a number of enabling factors or lessons were identified, which may help to smooth the reform process going forwards. In addition, whilst the wider contextual changes were creating challenges, they were also seen by some to be allowing a different dialogue with schools, including an opportunity to revisit existing provision. Further details of some of the enabling factors and lessons are provided in the table below. Going forwards, it will be important that non-pathfinders draw on these lessons, and on the learning gained by pathfinders generally. In this respect, the insight provided by pathfinder champions should be drawn upon as effectively as possible.

Table 3 Enabling factors to facilitate involvement of schools in the reform process

Engagement of schools in the reform process	
Local Authorities	*Schools*
- Start with the Local Offer – to build a joint understanding of existing provision, specialities and areas for improvement - Work with a small group of schools to trial new processes, but ensure they cover different types of school, geographic area, etc. - Put in place a clear communications plan, linked closely to the legislation - Tailor communications to school needs, types and existing infrastructure - Get the local authority role right – take a no blame culture when assessing existing provision, provide support (including being a sounding board) and adequate monitoring of activity (but not policing) - Use example EHC plans to structure conversations with schools (including sharing of good and bad practice/experiences) - Promote collaboration between schools, informally (e.g. SENCO circles) and through data sharing - Gain in-school exposure – to understand the set-up, needs and challenges	- Build awareness around the practicalities of the reforms (e.g. EHC Plans, PBs), the legislative context, and the overall approach (e.g. person-centred, outcomes led – ideally including how it aligns with school policies) - Ensure buy-in by identifying champions within schools, ideally across a variety of different levels - Provide training to staff at all levels of the school, based on an iterative approach and dissemination of good practice – ensure this also incorporates how to better support children and young people with additional needs in mainstream schools - Ensure good leadership is in place to drive forward the reforms (Heads and governors/bursars) and promote culture change - Develop an open minded culture, in which staff feel comfortable sharing positive and negative lessons and challenging existing arrangements - Develop working arrangements to encourage collaboration and sharing of experiences (e.g. working groups around particular aspects)

Delivery of integrated approach to EHC planning and transition

Local Authorities	*Schools*
• Ensure that schools play a key role in the transition process – and that other agencies are well aware of this	• Ensure systems are in place to enable efficient exchange of information (e.g. online portals, pupil passport)
• Designate professionals across services to act as first contacts for queries (and ensure they are aware of their responsibilities)	• Strong governance and management systems in place, including clear roles and responsibilities
• Ensure systems are in place to enable efficient exchange of information and quality assurance	• Learn from other schools, by engaging in training and awareness sessions, collaborating around the Local Offer and getting involved in networking
• Develop common templates (e.g. Local Offer, EHC plan) and guidance on how to facilitate a smooth transition (e.g. process mapping)	• Consider collaborating with schools around the Local Offer (e.g. jointly populating a template, developing a schools-based standard for the local offer to ensure consistent quality)
• Provide sufficient support to all schools, ideally through designated leads (e.g. one lead per school)	• Ensure that resources are used creatively (e.g. potential for Pupil Premium to align well with EHC plans, and offer flexibility when developing provision arrangements)
• Consider providing additional support to schools at the early stages (e.g. use of an independent mediator when facilitating multi-agency meetings)	
• Provide training to schools in all key aspects of reforms (including key working and defining outcomes)	

Annex A: Glossary of terms

DfE   Department for Education

EHC   Education, Health and Social Care

EP   Educational Psychologist

IEP   Individual Education Plan

LSA   Learning Support Assistant

Nasen   National Association for Special Educational Needs

PB   Personal Budget

QA   Quality Assurance

SEN   Special Educational Needs

SENCO   Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SMART   Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely

Annex B: Research methods

Research was undertaken in five pathfinder areas, selected in discussion with the DfE and Pathfinder Support Team. The basis for selection of the areas included: areas that had been working strategically and/or operationally with schools during the reform process; areas that had engaged with the appropriate age group (10-12 years); a mix from across the regions; a mix of rural/urban and large/small areas; and at least one pathfinder champion. A scoping consultation was also undertaken with the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen) to ensure the feasibility, deliverability and usefulness of the research outputs, and identify emerging practice.

Once the five areas had agreed to participate, a scoping consultation was held with the pathfinder lead in each area to discuss the research focus and objectives, gain an overview of the transition system and the engagement of schools in the reform process, and identify schools to participate in fieldwork. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the consultations with schools covered a range of different types of schools, including state schools and academies, and mainstream and special schools.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted between March and April 2014, and consisted of two key elements:

- Area-based consultations with the pathfinder lead or manager in each area, and with other professionals involved in engaging with schools where relevant (including Heads of SEN and School Improvement Advisors)

- Face-to-face or telephone interviews in each area with the headteacher, SENCO and/or transition lead from three to five schools. These were designed to ensure a mix of mainstream and special schools, reflecting the focus of each pathfinder.

The interviews followed two topic guides designed by the research team (one topic guide for the local authority representatives; and the second for the schools), covering the five broad research questions outlined on page six of the report. Participants were asked to set aside approximately one hour for the consultations, and all interviews were recorded

Analysis and reporting

The analysis took place in two stages. Firstly, each area 'case study' was written up in alignment with the five research questions. Secondly, the research team looked across the five write-ups to explore commonalities and differences in responses across areas and the themes covered by the research questions. The report was drafted based on these findings, with an emphasis placed on developing a readable and pragmatic report, which drew on a range of experiences and would be useful to both those involved in engaging with schools, and those responsible for developing the reforms within schools.

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: angela.overington@education.gsi.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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