



To All Headteachers and Chairs of
Governors

**Children, Young People and
Education**

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Dear Colleagues

Welcome to our first joint education and SEND letter. As you are aware, we are on a transformation journey of the SEND system in Kent. This was triggered by the outcomes of the SEND inspection, which identified areas for improvement across the education, care and health system. But the journey is also being driven by a shared professional commitment to improving the experiences and outcomes for children, young people, young adults and their families. Mark Walker, Director of SEND and Christine McInnes, Director of Education will be writing a joint letter to you all every half term so you are aware of developments. We would like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves.

Director of Education



'It feels very strange to take up a new post while still sitting at the same table I have been sitting at for the last year, with just the cat for company for most of the day. It has been quite a contrast from the whirl of activity that this type of role normally entails. I have particularly missed visiting schools, early years and other education settings, which is by far the most inspirational part of the job, although I'm pleased to report I have managed my first school visit.

Although the last year has been difficult, I have been inspired by the way that leaders of education, governors, staff and officers have risen to every challenge, seeking to minimise the impact of the pandemic on children, young people and their families. The successful wider opening of schools and settings last month went smoothly because of the extensive planning and background work, a big well done to all involved. I know from my own extended family and friends that many children and young people were really looking forward to school, but possibly not as much as their parents were! Inevitably, for some more vulnerable youngsters, who have lost the habit of attending school and engaging in

learning, there are significant challenges in getting them to re-engage; there are too particular concerns about the impact on critical areas of development for children in the early years. Addressing these concerns, alongside the lost opportunities for development and learning for all and the impact on mental well-being for some, means we are looking at working under extraordinary circumstances for the foreseeable future.

I am sure we all welcomed the appointment of a former teacher, Sir Kevan Collins, as the education recovery commissioner and it is encouraging to see Sir Kevan making the case for additional resources to support this work. Locally, I have been really impressed with the development of our Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme, which recognises that academic catch up will be most successful when delivered in a context of wider opportunities that draw on a range of community resources.

I was thrilled and honoured to be appointed as Director of Education in Kent and I am very appreciative of the warm welcome I have been given. I do know Kent, having moved here with my family as a teenager and through my work as the South East Region National Advisor for the Department of Health and Department for Education Healthy Schools Programme. So, I come with some understanding of the diversity of the county and its implications. It is the challenges arising from that diversity, together with some of the exciting work that is already being delivered which piqued my interest in working with you. But of course, getting to know a place is akin to onion peeling, and I am working through the layers at a county, area, borough, and school community level to really understand what is at the core, in order to plan for and achieve improvement.

Much of the county headline data paints a positive picture but achieving our aspiration of a Kent that works for all children and young people, as well as providing effective pathways and opportunities for adult learning, is what interests me. Comparing the aspiration with the reality and asking the tough question – is the system working as well as it could for this child, for this family? I believe we can improve through a shared moral purpose, professional curiosity and joint enterprise, by bringing together the cognitive resources of the LA with those of educational and community leaders, to tackle entrenched and complex issues more effectively.

Whilst my last job as Director of Education and Partnerships in Tower Hamlets, a borough which covers just 7.6 square miles with approximately 100 schools, may seem very different to Kent, the wicked issues we were working on are actually very similar. Pupil place planning, early years and school sufficiency, early years and school standards, fair access, SEND inclusion, closing the attainment gap, 14-19, and of course managing budget pressures. This Kent role also includes the leadership of Adult and Community Education, which caters for over 22 000 learners. For me, this presents an exciting opportunity to consider how we can create a smoother continuum as young people transition from school, where they have been prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life, into adulthood and for many parenthood. The relationship between the level of parental education, family income and the educational achievement of children is well documented, and we know enabling adults to gain qualifications can play a critical role in lifting families out of poverty and raising aspirations.

With regard to SEND, I have taught and led in Severe Learning Difficulties, Moderate Learning Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Condition schools as well as leading the SEND services in Bracknell Forest and Tower Hamlets. I was really impressed to find out about some of the great work already going on in Kent, for example, the practice in special

schools, the commitment to managing pupils with challenging behaviours within groups of secondary schools as an alternative to exclusion and about the 12 schools which have achieved Flagship or Centre of Excellence status under the national Quality Inclusion Mark. My focus in Kent on SEND is on ensuring sufficiency of school places so that over time children and families have access to a continuum of high-quality provision from mainstream schools through to special schools, supporting schools to better meet their statutory duties (I have appended a summary of responsibilities under the SEND Code of Practice to this letter) and developing more inclusive practice.

I am really fortunate to be working with an experienced and skilled leadership team in the Education division. This means I can spend time meeting with leaders and staff, seeing effective practice in action and play a role in disseminating it, as well as developing a deeper insight into how the LA can better fulfil its public service role as champion for children and families and improve LA services.

Later this term, there will be an opportunity to meet virtually and ask me questions – I am very much looking forward to getting to know you, so do look out for the invitation.

Director of SEND

‘As many of you will already know I have been in post for exactly one year now. I became the Interim Director for SEND at exactly the same time as the country went into lockdown. Following an extensive recruitment process I was successful in gaining the permanent position as Director SEND in November 2020.



It is such an honour to be in this role at a time when as a system we are undertaking a transformational change for SEND families in Kent. The opportunity to make such a significant impact for families across the county is perhaps a once in a career occurrence. I know that as a service the SEN and Disabled Childrens teams are totally committed to making a difference and improving the experiences for our children in the county. The last 12 months have really underlined that belief for me with some truly inspirational stories of many individuals going that extra mile to help the most vulnerable families, as a system we stepped up to the challenge and showed how effective we can be when it truly mattered. The last 12 months tested us all, whether we worked in a health service, a school, an early year setting, a college, a social care team or in an SEN team.

Today the new Children’s Commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza, quite rightly focussed on the voice of our children post lockdown as the next period of our work. What she was sharing was the fact that children have so much to catch up on, but perhaps the most important aspect is the chance to play, enjoy making friends again and to reconnect with their childhood. This absolutely underpins the development of our Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme. The Children’s Commissioner was very clear in her assessment that academic catch up will be most successful when delivered with the ‘essential experiences of childhood as well’, that is the challenge and one that will require all our community resources to become engaged. It promises to be an exciting programme of activity across the county that is being developed.

When stepping into this leadership role I was of course very conscious of the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and all the work that is required to turn the SEN service around. The last year has seen us make significant progress across many areas of that work, this is starting to feed through in the feedback that families are sharing and the reducing numbers of complaints that the service is dealing with. There are obviously still key areas that need significant work to address, in Kent we have a much higher percentage of EHCP's than any of our statistical neighbours (current number 15783) and yet we have significantly less having SEN additional support than our statistical neighbours, to name just a couple. Through discussions with schools, settings, parents/carers, young people and other key stakeholders, we have agreed the underpinning standards and expectations for Inclusive Education provision. These have been set out in the Inclusion Statement, Mainstream core standards for schools, Early Years Best Practice and Mainstream Core Standards, Inclusion Framework and the Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education. This delivery plan draws together a range of activity which focuses specifically on strategies to support inclusive practices within our education settings, as part of the wider SEND strategy. Activity within the plan has been developed over several months through co-production, research, pilot activity, discussion and consultation. There is a long way to go but I am confident that our foundations are getting stronger to address one of the key issues, a fully inclusive education for all our children in Kent, it is what they deserve.'

Our vision for children and young people with SEND in Kent is that: -

- Children and young people with SEND in Kent feel healthy, happy, safe, supported and as healthy as they can be while they learn and grow.*
- Families can reach the right people at the right time to support their children.*
- Services will work with families to improve outcomes and achievements for children and young people with SEND.*

To achieve these ambitions requires strong collaboration between all partners. The Education and SEND teams continue to work closely together, and with you, to achieve these aims. Improving the systems and structures that support children, promoting Inclusive Education and developing skills and knowledge through high quality training and development. The recent agreement of the [SEND strategy](#) and the publication of the draft [Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education](#) (CATIE) , are key documents outlining our collective aims and efforts for this agenda.

We are acutely aware that this has been a challenging year and as we drew to the end of last term, your staff were exhausted. We had strong feedback, particularly through SENCO forums, that the publication of the CATIE at this stage caused additional work for them. We are keen that all school leadership engage with the CATIE, the proposals have implications reaching further than the role of the SENCO. To enable more time for school leadership to engage in the discussions we have extended the feedback date for the CATIE to the 14th May.

Parents and Carers Together (PACT)

Recognising the importance of parental involvements, we would also like to remind you of Kent Parents and Carers Together (PACT). PACT provide a voice for parents and carers of children and young people with SEND aged 0-25 living in Kent. As a member of the

National Network for Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) and recognised by the Department of Education as the strategic voice of parents and carers within Kent, they work with parents and carers to:

- Enable them to make their views known at a strategic level while working in cohesively with KCC, CCG and other agencies.
- Provide feedback to parent carers on progress of SEND work and other issues.
- Represent parent/ carer views locally and nationally.
- Host information days focus groups and workshops.
- Help shape better services and outcomes for children and young people.

For more information on PACT, please visit:

www.kentpact.org.uk

info@kentpact.org.uk

We are pleased to announce that PACT is recruiting quadrant representatives who are going to be working with KAH to identify how PACT can work more closely with schools and settings on this agenda.

Moving forward, we will write to you jointly updating you on progress, outlining key developments and receiving your feedback. It remains for us to wish you well for the coming term and looking forward to being able to meet with you in person, as lockdown lifts.

Yours sincerely



Christine McInnes
Director of Education



Mark Walker
Director of SEND

Appendix A

Roles and responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2015

Respective Responsibilities of the LA, Settings, Governing Bodies and Proprietor or Management Committees:

It is the responsibility of all settings to provide for pupils/students with SEND from within their own resources including core and delegated budgets.

It is not expected that these resources will usually be delivered on a 1:1 basis with an individual pupil/student but rather there will be effective and flexible use of resources.

Decisions on how best to support children/young people will always take into account the context within which the child/young person is educated.

The Local Authority must:

- Ensure a sufficiency of provision for pupils with SEND and review it annually
- Make arrangements for the Education, Health and Care Needs assessments of pupils/students and maintain and review Statements of SEND and Education, Health and Care Plans
- Publish information on SEND funding and provision
- Monitor the progress of children with SEND
- Provide a statutory information, advice and support (IAS) service to parents of pupils/students with SEND
- Provide a mediation service to parents of pupils/students with SEND.

Schools must:

- Publish a School SEND Information report
- Identify children with SEND and ensure provision is made in accordance with the SEND Code of Practice (2015)
- Appoint a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo)
- Invest in whole school and targeted training for staff
- Ensure inclusive teaching and support practice is embedded throughout the school and that all teachers understand that they are Teachers of SEND
- Provide information on school arrangements for SEN to parents and governors
- Consider pre-emptive arrangements for pupils present and future with a disability

Governors must:

- Appoint an SEND Governor to have oversight of the arrangements for SEND
- Know how many pupils in the school have SEND
- Know how much money the school gets for SEND and ensure an appropriate budget arrangement is in place to discharge its duties to arrange provision for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities
- Review and approve the SEND policy and any other relevant policies
- Monitor the expenditure on SEND
- Monitor the progress of SEND and ensure that the provisions specified in statements of SEND or Education, Health and Care plans are made
- Ensure that SEND provision is integrated into the school improvement plan
- Publish on a school website the school SEND policy and The SEND Information Report which provides a description of the arrangements and specialist provisions made for children with SEND