

**INDEPENDENT EXPERT REPORT ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE
LONDON BOROUGH OF SUTTON**

SHARON SCOTT

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1. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS ON DELIVERY OF THE LOCAL AREA'S IMPROVEMENT PLANS AND PROGRESS

- 1.1. From the non-compliant baseline in January 2018 and as evidenced by a WSOA, the quarterly monitoring visits from the Department for Education and NHS England and the work of the independent expert which is set out in section 8 of this report, rapid and significant progress has been made. The Stocktake Day evidenced that 63% of local areas who had had their local area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC 2018/19 had a WSOA and 50% retained the WSOA after their first re-inspection. This shows the local area is a typical local area when it relates to SEND issues and not non-typical as some groups believe. However, the local authority acknowledges, as does the CCG, given the inspection was of both parties, there is still a way to go on the local area's improvement journey especially in bringing about the necessary cultural changes that are required throughout the local area and providing training opportunities for further professional development. Notwithstanding the journey still left to travel there is strong evidence to support the view that the local area has made sound progress in implementing and delivering on its improvement plans.
- 1.2. It is good that local area partners now have stronger working relationships with one another and it is positive that Sutton Parents Carers Forum works closely with other interest groups. To ensure all views are represented and voiced this will need to be a continuing area of development.
- 1.3. From all the work undertaken to date as part of this independent review there is evidence to show that the working practices within the Cognus SEN team are compliant with SEND statutory duties.
- 1.4. There is much stronger leadership and management within the local authority which is able to support the work and direction of travel for Cognus.
- 1.5. There is evidence of improved working arrangements between the Local Authority and Cognus. This is because strategic leadership meetings are in place, the number of contract and performance meetings have increased and the recent development of the Local Authority being represented on the Cognus Board of Directors in a non-executive capacity and the appointment of the Assistant Director for Education and SEND to the post of Acting Managing Director in Cognus have all supported a greater clarity and understanding of the issues on both sides.
- 1.6. There is also strong evidence from the independent review to demonstrate that lessons have been learnt from the past. Attention should now be focused on the present and going forward in order to continue to develop both excellent services for the local area and an excellent experience for the children, young people and their families in the London Borough of Sutton.

2. PART 1 - EVIDENCE OF THE PROGRESS ON THE DELIVERY OF LOCAL AREA IMPROVEMENT PLANS

- 2.1. Using the methodology set in section 8 of this report the early findings report supported the view that progress had been made in improving coherence, joint working and communication between the local area leaders. This continues to be the case and feedback from SENCOs is reporting that multi-agency initiatives are starting to have a positive impact in schools.
- 2.2. The triangulation of evidence demonstrated that from what was a non-compliant system across the local area at the time of the inspection in January 2018 significant progress has been made in putting building blocks in place to ensure that within the three year period allowed for improvement the local area will achieve good outcomes for the children and young people in Sutton who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is not saying that the systems that have been put in place are perfect; given any system operated by people is subject to human error, no system will be perfect. However, the clear message is on the whole, systems are much improved. Notwithstanding this it is acknowledged that in the past systems were non-compliant against the Code of Practice. There are still some examples where cases have not been dealt with as effectively and efficiently as they should have been but learning is taking place from this across the local area which is striving to become a learning partnership.
- 2.3. The 'stocktake day' which was held a year on from the agreed Written Statement Of Action (WSOA) demonstrated that a comprehensive approach was being taken to address all twenty seven actions within the WSOA. There were presentations provided by all partners giving examples of initiatives and projects that are addressing and responding to the WSOA. All the actions are recorded in the WSOA Tracker to monitor progress and to ensure that all the actions and initiatives compliment one another. All the activity recorded in the WSOA Tracker is reported to the Children and Family Executive Board (that oversees the delivery of the WSOA) to ensure that all local area partners are aware of all the activity that is taking place. In addition a WSOA report is submitted to every People Committee and progress is noted and challenged by all Members. This will continue to be the case until the local area is judged to be making sufficient progress by CQC and Ofsted.
- 2.4. Regular monitoring visits by the DfE and NHS England continue to note the local areas progress in addressing the WSOA and its self assessment.
- 2.5. The publication of Sutton's Local Health and Care Plan for 2019/20 for the people of Sutton gives a strong message that children and young people within Sutton are and remain a priority.
- 2.6. Evidence to support progress in this key area is the publication of the Graduated Response to schools. This is a multi-agency document and was produced by Headteachers, SENCo/Inclusion managers and key stakeholders in the local area. The Graduated Response is a toolkit of resources for schools to enable them to be more inclusive; support emerging social, emotional and

mental health (SEMH) needs sooner, more effectively and with a range of creative solutions for meeting SEMH needs and to prevent avoidable exclusions. There is now a growing body of evidence that the Graduated Response is being used more widely and as a matter of routine.

- 2.7. The Early Help 'Change Up' programme has been shared with schools. This consolidates a range of bespoke interventions for children and young people who are beginning to experience issues that might be exacerbated without appropriate intervention and/or lead to exclusion. The 'Change Up' programme is being used with the Graduated Response which is good practice.
- 2.8. There is a new Service Level Agreement with the Pupil Referral Unit (The Limes College) which will refocus the way it works in order to support more pupils having their SEMH needs met in schools. Since the last report to People Committee there is evidence, although early days, to show that the new ways of working are having a positive effect. The Limes College are able to use their expertise flexibly, offering bespoke packages to schools to address identified needs within a specific school community. Not only does this support address root causes of behaviour, but also supports schools to develop skills and capacity build within their own setting, developing onsite experts.
- 2.9. The Sutton Education Partnership has now been constituted and a meeting was held in August to start to plan the three work streams as they relate to the High Need Block Review (HNBR). The first full meeting of the Sutton Education Partnership took place in September. Workstream leads have now been identified with a timetable for the work to be progressed and recommendations to be made. Initial reports indicate that the first workstream has seen an enthusiastic response from SENCOs and headteachers wanting to engage in this work. The other two work streams will be rolled out in the new year.
- 2.10. The Education Bulletin continues to be well received by schools and the local area which has now risen to over 650 recipients and provides, for example, updates on a variety of educational issues including the WSOA, feedback from the national SEND conference, the promotion of revised EHC documentation, joint working protocols and key events including the "stocktake day".
- 2.11. The WSOA evidence tracker and self assessment continues to be used effectively along with a programme to share with the wider local area to ensure an opportunity for feedback/joint ownership of the assessment and to provide evidence of progress. This is an ongoing process.
- 2.12. As noted above, a year on from the agreed WSOA a 'Stocktake Day' took place with partners across the local area. It was an opportunity to reflect on what progress had been made against the WSOA and what needed to happen next. The reflections concluded that many actions had taken place but it was still too early to see evidence of impact from the actions. Whilst this remains the case there is greater evidence of schools and SENCOs speaking more openly about the initiatives and how they are starting to have a positive impact on the children and young people in their settings.

- 2.13. The SEND Learning and Development Strategy has been completed and a sum of money has been set aside to implement the programme of work set out in the strategy in tandem with the input from the Council for Disabled Children for dedicated health and social care training with a further focus where possible on multi-agency approaches.
- 2.14. The use of the graduated approach referred to in the Code of Practice is referred to in SEN panel meetings when discussing cases that have come to the panel for a decision on whether to assess or issue a plan. There is now a growing body of evidence that the graduated approach is also being used more widely and as a matter of routine in schools and settings.

3. PART 1 - RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1. There is clear evidence to show that the actions identified and taken in the WSOA have had and are having a positive impact on the local area's improvement journey. The issues identified in the WSOA are very similar to the issues identified in other local areas who have written statements of action. In line with other local authorities who have a WSOA there now has to be a period of time to enable the actions taken to address the weaknesses identified in the inspection report of January 2018 to be embedded and to see evidence of the impact in the new ways of working. However, it is important that pace and momentum are not lost.
- 3.2. The key focus for local area partners needs to remain on the strategic actions that need to be undertaken and not to be sidelined on to individual issues. However, it should be noted that at an operational level there is improved working with health and social care in terms of collaboration over funding, joint planning and professional development.
- 3.3. Some local authorities who have excellent SEND services have offered to share their good practices with Sutton in order to assist with the desire of Sutton's local area partners wanting to be a learning organisation and these invitations should be accepted.

4. PART 2 - PROGRESS ON ENSURING PRACTICE WITHIN COGNUS IS ALIGNED TO STATUTORY DUTIES

- 4.1. The early findings report stated that in using the methodology set out in section 8 of this report the findings would support the view that progress has been made in addressing the poor oversight of quality and impact of Education Health Care plans (EHCP) in meeting the needs of children and young people. Schools, educational settings and some parents are also reporting that they are seeing improvements in the ways of working and engagement with Cognus and the local authority. Notwithstanding this, it is acknowledged that there are still examples where the quality of the EHCP is not as good as it could be. However, although not an excuse, this is the case in all local authorities. The

quality of an EHCP is dependent on the quality of the advice received and how it is then able to be used.

- 4.2. There are two areas of concern within the SEN team in Cognus namely that of the historic and ongoing issue with annual reviews and secondly the work of the Tribunals team. Whilst there are plans to address these recognised areas of weakness they are areas of weakness within all local authorities. Cognus has been slow to implement their plans to address these issues and this has caused drift and dissatisfaction with parents/carers and schools and settings. Unfortunately, the scale of this issue was not foreseen nationally at the time of the 2014 Children and Family Act: the intention of the Act was to reduce the number of children requiring an EHC plan rather than see them exponentially increase.
- 4.3. The early findings report stated that an examination of the policies, procedures and practices, observations of staff at work and interviews confirm that the service now has a clear vision for what good looks like and have embarked on the journey to deliver improved outcomes and focused EHCPs. This continues to be the case.
- 4.4. The service has adopted a child centred approach to ensure that the needs of the child or young person are met. This is evidenced at the SEN panel meetings, through the EHC assessment and plan documentation and observations of staff at work. This is evidence of good practice and is now an embedded way of working.
- 4.5. All final EHC documentation and a summary of the relevant parts of the Code of Practice, as referenced in the Joint Working protocols, have been published on the Local Offer and disseminated via the Education Bulletin. This is further evidence of good practice and is now seen as 'part and parcel' of the routine way of working.
- 4.6. There is now responsible leadership and management in Cognus and an internal quality assurance process for final EHCPs has been implemented. There is also a programme of continual professional development for staff which includes improving communication with parents and families. Early evidence suggests that communication with parents and families is working better than previously but there is still a way to go to ensure complete consistency of approach.
- 4.7. Since April 2019, 100% of EHCPs have been issued in 20 weeks and the percentage of advice received from professionals within six weeks stood at 86% in October 2019. This continues to be the case and therefore going forward whilst the rates will continue to be monitored (this is a statutory requirement for the annual SEND2 return to the DfE) it will be through the use of effective tracking and monitoring systems.
- 4.8. Quarterly quality assurance audits are continuing to take place and the evidence from these audits which involves local area partners continues to show the quality of the EHCPs is improving.

- 4.9. A new system is in place for transition planning and evidence shows that secondary transfer arrangements are working well and schools will have more time to put transition arrangements in place for September 2020. However, it needs to be recognised that whilst at the end of July 2019 all 90 year 5 pupils with an EHCP had an identified secondary place, by October half term, as a consequence of movement during the summer holidays, the number with an EHCP had risen to 103.
- 4.10. Of the 103 Year 6 children with an EHCP, 32 have a place in a mainstream school.
- 4.11. Attendance at the SEN panel meetings confirmed the panel is appropriately constituted and works well. This was also confirmed by Headteachers and SENCOs who attend panel meetings. This continues to be the case and therefore no longer requires the focus it has previously had.
- 4.12. A sampling exercise and attendance at SEN panels showed that agreement to assess requests were being made appropriately and the content of the requests to assess have helped to make it a much better system. When requests were not agreed to, these were for valid reasons; for example, the school was stating they could meet the child's needs within existing resources and the child was making progress, or there was insufficient information about the graduated approach to the child's needs from the school: this is in line with the statutory guidance enshrined in the Code of Practice. Further attendance at the SEN panels showed this continues to be the case. Given this, there can be confidence in how well the SEN panel works.
- 4.13. The independent expert carried out case audits to check for EHC Plan compliance. The audits have demonstrated that compliance is within a statistically valid tolerance level. It is important to note that compliance with the Code of Practice is not judged on individual cases but on system and systemic practice and this is true for all local authorities.
- 4.14. There continues to be a good offer for continuing professional development opportunities for SENCOs and partners through workshops and surgeries.
- 4.15. A Health Systems Study Day has been undertaken in understanding the role of health professionals in the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process and their roles and responsibilities as they relate to the Children and Families Act and the Code of Practice. The CCG intend to provide an on-going programme of professional development for health professionals in respect of SEND.
- 4.16. Regular reviews (at least monthly) of Social Care advice is taking place looking at the timeliness of the advice and the content with a view to evidencing where further learning/development is needed.
- 4.17. Historically, Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) was seen as the sole responsibility of the SEN service. Although the Code of Practice is clear that responsibility for organising reviews sits with Education, Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) involves more than services transferring from children's social care to adult social care. It

requires a variety of options and opportunities being explored for young people post 16 until the age of 25 which includes amongst other things educational options, apprenticeships, internships, sheltered employment, personal assistants and sheltered housing. It is very important that other partners play their part in this process.

- 4.18. There are consistent criticisms that paperwork for annual reviews from Cognus is not sent out in a timely manner. The second consistent criticism is that EHCPs are not updated in a timely fashion. Consequently the task of carrying out a meaningful annual review is difficult. There are also consistent criticisms of schools over their roles and responsibilities as they relate to annual reviews. Therefore there needs to be clear guidance to schools about what their roles and responsibilities are in terms of the annual review process and when to request an update report from professionals and when to require their attendance at annual reviews. It is nationally recognised that a minimum of six weeks notice should be given by schools to professionals and parents and carers for annual reviews. Given schools know when annual reviews are due, as does Cognus, then giving sufficient notice should not be the problem nor should updating EHCPs. Notwithstanding this it is a recognised national issue given the volume of annual reviews.
- 4.19. The issue with the SEND tribunals is not the tribunals themselves but rather the administrative and reconciliation processes leading up to the tribunal. This has been a known area of weakness for sometime. Whilst there are now plans in place to address this issue it has been allowed to go on for too long. It has meant that those involved in making an appeal to the tribunal have had a less than satisfactory experience and this has caused reputational damage, not just for the SEN team but for Cognus as a whole. When the SENDIASS service has been involved in the mediation process, there has been a very high satisfaction rate with the service and the resolution to the cases. However, when this service has not been involved there is too much evidence of SEN staff not continually engaging with parents and carers to seek a resolution to a case prior to the tribunal. It is acknowledged that some staff do engage with the parents and carers on a regular basis prior to tribunal but this is not consistent or a matter of routine across the whole team and therefore this remains an area of concern. However, it is a recognised issue across local authorities as a result of the number of cases involved in the tribunal process which is a lengthy and complex one.

5. PART 2 - RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1. A programme of support needs to be developed across Sutton for partners to help them to continue improving the quality of advice they provide in their assessment reports. This is being created through the Learning and Development Strategy as previously described at People Committee.
- 5.2. The early findings report recommended that to improve clarity and understanding of systems and processes it would be helpful if two guides could

be produced; one for parents/carers and the other for professionals. The guide for parents/carers needs to set out what parents can expect to happen and why during the various stages of the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA), the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process and during the mediation process and/or tribunal process. The guide for professionals should set out what is expected from them in terms of the advice they provide for EHCNA and what advice and/or role they might have to play in an annual review and/or a tribunal.

- 5.3. The early findings report also said it was critical that these guides should be co-produced with the Sutton Parents Carers Forum and the views and voices of children and young people are also taken into account in producing these documents. Work is now in hand for this to happen.
- 5.4. Thought needs to be given to the local area's response to all aspects relating to the preparation for adulthood and where Cognus sits within that response to ensure that requirements within Chapter 8 of the Code of Practice can be fully met. Closer working relationships need to be developed with post 16 institutions and in particular the local colleges in order to provide young people with appropriate provision and courses as close to their home as possible. This issue is now starting to be addressed through the work resulting from the High Needs Block Review.
- 5.5. The plans to address updating the EHC Plans in light of annual reviews or changed circumstances needs to be implemented more quickly. This has recently been addressed by Cognus and is now in hand.
- 5.6. A system has now been developed to address the administrative challenges associated with tribunals. However evidence of this being routinely and consistently adhered to needs to be seen. Training needs to be undertaken by staff to ensure they know how to and when to engage with parents and carers in order to seek resolutions to their concerns prior to tribunal. Thought should also be given to the possibility of increasing the capacity of SENDIASS.

6. PART 3 - OPERATING MODEL OF EDUCATION SERVICES

6.1. The rationale for setting up Cognus, previously known as Sutton Education Services

- 6.1.1. In the light of the significant reductions in net funding for education services in March 2016 and the then proposed educational landscape where all schools were expected to become academies and the role of the local authority would decline still further, it was agreed that education services would be "spun out" into a joint venture company with schools as partners. (The joint venture company is owned 75% by the local authority and 25% by the 22 local schools who bought a share in the company). The company was originally known as Sutton Education Services, but it is now known as Cognus.

6.1.2. However, although funding for the local authorities has continued to decrease the statutory duties have remained and the educational landscape has not changed in the way that was envisaged in 2016. Local authorities are still required to ensure there are sufficient places for children and young people and plan for forecasted child population need and this includes working with academies in order to plan and meet these needs. The same can be said for the other statutory services namely Admissions, SEND services, Education Safeguarding, the legal aspects relating to Attendance, SEN transport, Sutton Information, Advice and Support Service, (SIASS), Early Years, Education Other Than At School, and the Licencing and Chaperone Service

6.2. The process of creating Cognus

6.2.1. In June 2016 the Children, Family and Education Committee approved the recommendations in the report 'Future Funding and Delivery of Education Services'. These recommendations in short were to:

1. Establish a Teckal compliant company limited by shares to deliver all the Council's Education Services; and
2. To invite schools based within Sutton to become joint owners of the company with the Council.

6.2.2. The process of spinning out the services from the Local Authority was extremely complex and Cognus has had to address residual issues as a result of the spinning out process alongside developing and delivering their service offer.

6.2.3. In addition, over recent years the London Borough of Sutton has also experienced a number of changes in senior strategic leadership. This has impacted on the strategic support available from the Council to Cognus up to summer 2018.

6.3. The relationship between the Council and Cognus

6.3.1. It is important to set out that a clear distinction needs to be made between the front facing operational services and the operating model between the Council and Cognus. It is acknowledged that the front facing operational services, are, in the main, working well and this is confirmed through the customer satisfaction services carried out by Cognus on a regular basis and parts 1 and 2 of this report.

6.3.2. A key factor which has influenced the change in the relationship between the Council and Cognus, was the SEND Local Area inspection outcome in 2018. This led to a greater desire to get things right for children, young people and the community more quickly, and for this to happen, a much closer working relationship with all local partners than existed prior to the inspection was required.

- 6.3.3. The challenges around the need to develop a trading arm for Cognus in order to establish a sound financial footing saw a lack of attention being focused on statutory education services in the early years of Cognus's development. This also led to a common misunderstanding about whether Cognus was a private trading company or a local authority trading company.
- 6.3.4. This was further compounded by the governance arrangements which are perceived to be complicated, and the lack of clarity in terms of shareholder roles and the board's role. There was also an absence of a Council Officer Non-Executive Director on the board until recently.
- 6.3.5. An examination of the relationship of the operating model between the Council and Cognus reveals there are areas which need addressing: these are in the main related to the degree of control the Council has over the company, the company direction and governance arrangements.
- 6.3.6. Given 6.3.5, the report will now consider how the Council could reassure itself in respect of having effective control, direction and efficient use of resources for delivering education services.
- 6.3.7. The direction for any form of education service delivery needs to ensure that high quality, well regarded and well used services are provided for children and young people. A successful operating model will need to have a business plan for service delivery which aligns with the Council plan and ensures continuity of service delivery and appropriate accountability to the governance arrangements.
- 6.3.8. The Council needs to satisfy itself that any future operating model for the delivery of educational services clearly shows appropriate control, direction and an efficient use of resources.
- 6.3.9. In terms of control there needs to be clear evidence that any education service delivery will comply with the strategic ambitions of the borough.
- 6.3.10. Therefore, the governance arrangements need to be reviewed so that an arrangement which ensures effective processes leading to the desired outcomes as noted in 6.3.8 can be developed. Various options to consider are noted below in 6.4, including the type of model that would create the most appropriate form of a local authority trading company.
- 6.3.11. The Council will need to reassure itself that it has specificity and accountability around objectives, deliverables, key performance indicators, reporting and monitoring requirements with Cognus.
- 6.3.12. When considering the efficient use of resources, it needs to be remembered that the Council's original decision for spinning out education services was based on diminishing resources and the inability to run the services on reduced budgets. Another key factor in

the decision at the time was the proposed change to the educational landscape whereby all schools would become academies and the role of local authorities would reduce further in terms of education. Thought will therefore need to be given to the cost the Council will incur in order to reinstate these services to the Council. The issues to be taken into account are, for example, the different IT systems in place, and the different terms and conditions for employees, e.g. pay scales and pension schemes. Similarly, HR and other support services are no longer provided by the Council to Cognus and therefore would need to be reinstated at cost to the Council. This is in addition to the costs of officer time and capacity to oversee such a large scale transition process.

- 6.3.13. Any form of traded service will need to be effective and efficient with traded surpluses being reinvested into education services. There will also need to be a close scrutiny of any income.

6.4. Options for the Council to consider .

- 6.4.1. There are four options for the Council to consider, which are as follows:

1. To continue with the status quo.
2. To bring statutory services in house and leave the non-statutory services in the trading company.
3. To develop a wholly owned Council company.
4. To bring all the services in house.

- 6.4.2. Option 1, the retention of the status quo at the end of the current contract period, is not a realistic option in the light of the details set out in this report. It does not enable the Council to exert sufficient control and direction over the company to ensure the company meets the Council's ambitions and priorities, nor does it enable the Council to provide sufficient support to Cognus.

- 6.4.3. Option 2, the option to separate out the statutory services from the non-statutory services, is not realistic given the way in which the roles are distributed and intertwined. Given this, no further work should be undertaken on this option.

- 6.4.4. Option 3, the option to develop Cognus as a wholly owned Council company with a revised governance structure and a new, strengthened commissioning agreement, is worthy of strong consideration. This would see a clear and simplified governance structure being put in place: the local authority would be the sole shareholder thus providing greater alignment to the Council's objectives and ways of working. This model would enable the current good working arrangements to continue and continue to develop with a greater degree of control from

the local authority. This option would be an affordable model without the need to disentangle issues as noted in 6.3.12.

- 6.4.5. Option 4, the option to return all services currently situated in Cognus to the Council would return all control for the delivery of education services to the Council. However, the scope for trading would then be limited: it needs to be remembered that a reason for setting up Sutton Education Services (now Cognus) was based on net financial reductions to the education budget, which have continued. In order to develop this option, given the issues noted in 6.3.12, a great deal of work will have to be undertaken to close the company and transfer staff (those who chose to continue in their roles) back into the Council.
- 6.4.6. Therefore, Option 3, to set up a wholly owned Council company, is the strongest of the options: the Council should now consider how best this is implemented.

7. PART 3 - NEXT STEPS:

- 7.1. The current operating model between the Council and Cognus does not lend itself sufficiently to Council officers being able to exercise day to day control, direction and management of the service offer that is required to expedite the borough's improvement and integration journey. The Council should therefore consider taking the following actions:
 - 7.1.1. Review the makeup of the Board of Directors of Cognus appointed by the Council, to ensure the Council is able to exert control over the company's affairs in the same way it would for one of its own departments.
 - 7.1.2. Review the Governance arrangements for the company - this should include reviewing the membership of the Company's Board of Directors.
 - 7.1.3. With Cognus, consider continuing with the acting Managing Director arrangements with long term arrangements pertaining to the Managing Director being determined once Cognus is a wholly owned LATC.
 - 7.1.4. Continue with the monthly contract management meetings to proactively monitor the performance of the company against the commissioning agreement.
 - 7.1.5. Consider how best to develop a wholly owned trading company.
- 7.2. In order to develop and support a positive perception of the work of Cognus across the Local Area, and to make the connection between the Council and Cognus stronger, consideration should also be given to developing a comprehensive communication strategy to ensure everyone is aware of the full range of educational services offered by Cognus.

8. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

- 8.1. The review methodology focused on the following themes:
 1. Data and Document Analysis/Review
 2. Observations of Practice
 3. Engagement with stakeholders, including parents/carers
- 8.2. To ensure a comprehensive triangulation of views and evidence, extensive examination of key data as it relates to Sutton, its statistical neighbours and nationally has been undertaken along with data, performance and progress reports that relate to the written statement of action.
- 8.3. Documentation which relates to the EHC needs assessment and EHC plans has been reviewed and cross referenced against the requirements set out in the Children and Family Act 2014 and the Code of Practice 2015.
- 8.4. Attendance at SEN panel meetings as an observer to monitor the quality and compliance of the meetings with the Code of Practice.
- 8.5. Observations of the SEN team at work have been undertaken. Evidence of their work and the reports from other parties that contribute to their work has been gathered and cross referenced in interviews with others and against the requirements in the Children and Family Act and the Code of Practice.
- 8.6. Meetings have taken place with parents, representatives of the Sutton Parent Carer Forum, Chairs of the Headteacher forums, representatives from the SENCo networks, Elected Members, the Chief Executive for the London Borough of Sutton, the Strategic Director of People Directorate, the former Managing Director of Cognus, the Services Director for Cognus, the Assistant Director for Education and SEND, the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, the Assistant Director for Adults Social Care, the Head of Service for SEN, Cognus staff and shareholders, the chair of the Cognus board, the Children's Health Commissioner, the Designated Medical Officer, the Designated Clinical Officer, the Head of Commissioning and Health Integration, the Commissioning Lead for Children's Health and SEN Lead, Commissioning Manager for SEND, Head of Pupil Based Commissioning, Head of Service for Practice and Quality and the LSCP Learning and Development Manager.
- 8.7. Telephone conversations were also held with members of the Cognus board.
- 8.8. Two open meetings have been held with parents and carers to gather their views on how the procedures and processes that relate to the EHC assessment and planning process could be made better for them and their children. All parents and carers were invited to the open meetings and particular efforts were made by the Sutton Parent Carer Forum to ensure that those parents who had expressed concerns were invited to the meeting. (There were 19 parent/carers attendees at the morning meeting and 10 at the evening meeting). Parents and carers were also given an open invitation to email the independent

expert with their particular concerns. Four emails were received, three relating to individual concerns and one relating to the use of evidence.

- 8.9. In addition to the aforementioned meetings with parents, there were also meetings held with a number of elected members across the council who were keen to ensure they fed-back issues raised with them by parents and carers of children and young people with SEND.
- 8.10. The Sutton Parent Carer Forum also facilitated a private meeting with a small group of Sutton parents known as the 'EHCP Crisis Group'.

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