

## **Independent Chair's Update on SEND Improvement Board Meeting**

**18 December 2025**

Representatives from the SEND Improvement Board attended the latest meeting on 18 December 2025.

### **What is the purpose of the Board?**

The purpose of the Board is to provide strategic oversight and to hold those with responsibility to account for improving special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services across Suffolk. Senior leaders recognise that children and families are entitled to a better experience and are committed to delivering the improvements needed.

The SEND Local Area Partnership comprises Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board, NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, schools and settings, colleges, health providers and the voluntary sector.

### **Chair's reflections**

As previously reflected, there is a significant amount of work underway, and data indicates that there are some improvements being made within SEND services. Where progress has been slower or challenges remain, plans are in place to address these issues.

It is reassuring to note that colleagues from the Department for Education (DfE) share this view. A recent letter following a stocktake visit reported progress in governance, quality assurance and timeliness, leadership, and multi-agency working. The DfE recognised the shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and set out a number of recommendations for further improvement.

However, the DfE also emphasised the need to translate activity into measurable impact for families, acknowledging that too many families are not yet feeling the benefit of this work. They reported ongoing frustration, particularly around statutory processes and communication, and noted that some planned activities have yet to begin, including work to prepare children for adulthood. Steps for effective action are being developed and will be discussed at the next Board meeting on 29 January.

The DfE's findings will continue to inform our work, and we are grateful for their support and guidance, including the sharing of good practice from across the country.

Alongside DfE scrutiny, partners across Suffolk are preparing for the next Ofsted and Care Quality Commission visit. While the timing is unknown, it could take place within the next few weeks. Part of the Board's discussion focused on reviewing progress with these preparations.

We will endeavour to keep you updated.

### **Summary of discussions at the December Board meeting**

## **Update from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum**

The Board received an update from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum (SPCF).

The Forum welcomed the increased engagement activity being felt across Suffolk's SEND services but challenged the partnership to move beyond descriptive reporting towards a clearer, more strategic articulation of how SPCF feedback is shaping priorities, decisions and tangible improvements.

The Forum's newsletter was published on 10 December, sharing information on free activities and support services available to families during the festive break. They are also running a weekly "Tell Us Tuesday", providing an anonymous opportunity for families to share their experiences. This has been described as valuable and well received.

Feedback shared with the Board included concerns regarding non-inclusive practice in some schools. The Forum also reported that some schools and multi-academy trusts are excluding children due to behaviour rather than addressing underlying needs or responding to unmet needs which can contribute to discrimination against disabled pupils.

There was a particular focus on inclusivity within some post-16, further education and higher education settings. The Board noted assurance that these issues are reflected within the Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP) and will be addressed through the Preparing for Adulthood work, while emphasising the need for visible progress and impact.

The Forum also highlighted ongoing issues with communication from services, including examples of generic and impersonal letters that have left parents and carers feeling dismissed.

### **"You Said, We Did"**

The Board reinforced the importance of fully "closing the loop" with families and young people. While progress was noted, members stressed that reporting must clearly show how feedback has been revisited, what has changed as a result, and how recurring themes are being tracked and resolved through LAIP workstreams.

Examples included feedback on the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, such as communication gaps, delays in issuing draft plans, incomplete provision and families not receiving all agreed support. Actions taken in response include new training, audits and improved handover processes. Feedback regarding limited clubs and activities for children with SEND has led to enhanced marketing and communication, with new materials and outreach planned.

### **SPCF Survey Action Plan**

An update was provided on the SPCF Survey Action Plan. Once finalised, actions will be transferred into the new Local Area Inclusion Plan. This will help ensure that parents'

and carers' views and experiences are fully listened to, acted upon and owned by local partners.

This work will support understanding of whether changes in SEND services are making a tangible difference to families and to children and young people. The Board acknowledged challenges related to capacity pressures and delays in accessing raw data, alongside the need to strengthen future survey design to better evidence impact. Members were assured that actions will be finalised and embedded within the LAIP by January 2026.

### **Performance and data**

The Board reviewed the Suffolk Health Data Dashboard and the SEND Data Exceptions Report. Discussions focused on moving from data reporting to meaningful intelligence, understanding the "so what" behind the figures, and ensuring insights flow effectively through the system. Members also emphasised the importance of shifting focus upstream, rather than concentrating solely on EHCPs.

Discussions explored education, health and care needs assessment referrals in the context of sufficiency, early intervention, graduated response and the Families First approach. The forthcoming Belonging and Inclusion event was highlighted as a key opportunity to further this dialogue with education leaders.

The Board raised several challenges, including:

- The absence of Mental Health Support Team (MHST) outcomes within the Health Data Dashboard
- Concerns regarding NSFT advice requests, particularly those that are overdue or unanswered
- Clarity on mental health support in schools and its alignment with ordinarily available provision and EHCPs
- The pace of progress on neurodevelopmental data
- The need for greater clarity around the "Cease to Maintain" process

The Board agreed that these challenges need to be addressed and actions either agreed or updates presented.

### **SEND Sufficiency Strategy**

The draft SEND Sufficiency Strategy was presented and approved, subject to minor amendments. The strategy considers future requirements for specialist places and sets out how local mainstream schools can be supported to meet the needs of learners with SEND.

It provides a holistic, system-wide partnership response to sufficiency, encompassing mainstream inclusion, specialist placements and health integration, to ensure the right

resources and support are available in the right place at the right time for children and young people with SEND.

The Board challenged assumptions within the strategy, particularly around patterns of moderate and severe learning difficulties and expectations regarding the proportion of children accessing specialist versus mainstream provision, highlighting the importance of alignment with SEND reforms. Members welcomed plans to produce a summary and Easy Read versions.

### **Strategic SEND communications**

The first draft of the SEND Communications Strategy was presented to the Board and approved. The importance of aligning this with the Co-production Charter was highlighted, alongside the development of an accessible summary and enhanced social media engagement to strengthen communication with parent carers, supported by regional partners.

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I hope this update is helpful.

The next Board meeting will take place on Thursday 29 January. Among other items, it will focus on preparing for adulthood, covering strengths, risks, data and lived-experience case studies across education, health and care.

**Thanks,**

**Kathryn Boulton**

Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Board