

Independent Chair's Update on SEND Improvement Board Meeting

29 January 2026

Representatives from the SEND Improvement Board attended the latest meeting on 29 January 2026.

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 (ICB), NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB), Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, schools and settings, colleges, health providers and the voluntary sector.

Chair's reflections

This meeting was a full one and reflected the extent of the work currently taking place across the SEND partnership. It is a very busy time, and I hope this report provides reassurance regarding the scale and breadth of improvements underway.

Board members reiterated at the January meeting that partnership working is in a much stronger place than it was when Ofsted/CQC last inspected. This is especially true in relation to performance monitoring, data insight and understanding ourselves and the system more effectively.

It was particularly pleasing to hear an update on the Children and Young People Data and NHS Health Data Linkage Project, which enables education, health and social care to share datasets. This will make a significant difference across sectors, allowing professionals to identify children and young people who need help earlier and coordinate support more effectively.

As previously noted, the data continues to indicate that improvements are being made within SEND services. Where progress has been slower or challenges remain, plans are in place to address these issues.

Summary of discussions at the January Board meeting

Update from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum

The Forum reported that this continues to be a very busy period.

The Board was pleased to hear that nine new members have been recruited. These members are experts by experience and bring growing cultural and linguistic diversity. The 'Tell Us Tuesday' social media campaign is working well, with parents and carers sharing what is working well and identifying areas requiring improvement, including quality assurance.

The Forum raised that current reporting processes and timings, including 'You Said, We Did' responses, are not yet aligned with SEND Operational Group and SEND Improvement Board

cycles. The Board acknowledged this and agreed that the reporting cycle needs further development.

Members also recognised the breadth of work the Forum is undertaking and expressed their thanks.

Preparing for Adulthood Update

It is crucial that Suffolk has a robust strategy to support SEND students in preparing for adulthood. This is not solely about employment, but about helping young people achieve positive adult outcomes, including employment or meaningful vocational opportunities, independent living skills, good health and active participation in the community.

Suffolk's Preparing for Adulthood Strategy forms part of the Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP). The Board discussed progress, including governance arrangements, co-production with partners, capturing young people's voices and the development of workstreams to support transitions for young people with SEND.

The Board endorsed the timeline for development of the Preparing for Adulthood Strategy and agreed reporting frequencies.

Good progress was noted.

DfE Stocktake – Statutory SEND Updates

At each Board meeting, an update is provided on key indicators and markers for SEND improvement.

There are currently 885 children and young people undergoing an education, health, care needs assessment. 83.6% of the total assessments are within 20 weeks, and 16.4% of assessments exceed 20 weeks. The longest wait is now 78 weeks and two days, which has reduced from 112 weeks in December 2024 due to focused recovery work.

Requests for new assessments in academic year 2025/26 are currently averaging 206 per month, compared with 221 per month in 2024/25.

The Board raised concerns and sought further clarity regarding children and young people who have been waiting the longest for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), particularly in relation to their lived experiences.

It was agreed that regular assurance — capturing both positive and challenging experiences — would be reported to the Board. SENDIASS also offered to share insights to support forward planning, particularly around key pressure points such as transitions.

The Board noted that families are likely to welcome improvements outlined in the stocktake. However, members emphasised the importance of accuracy and careful communication. Updates on timeliness should be communicated with appropriate context.

An action was agreed to develop an approach to communicating improvements to families and to add a further update on communication — including how it is being managed by teams and experienced by families — to the forward plan.

Children and Young People Data and NHS Health Data Linkage Project

The Board received a presentation on a new and significant piece of work aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people.

The project enables education, health and social care to share datasets so practitioners and strategic leads can identify needs earlier, coordinate support more effectively and address inequalities in access and outcomes.

The initial focus is on ASD and ADHD waiting lists. This will provide insight into the characteristics of children awaiting diagnosis, enabling more timely and targeted support, while establishing a foundation for further analysis to enhance support for SEND families.

The Board challenged the reliance on SNEE ICB data alone, noting that this limits a full understanding of local need, particularly given Waveney's differing context and trends.

In response, members were advised that this is a pioneering project — only the second of its kind nationally — and remains in early development. A key technical challenge is securing source data from Norfolk and Waveney ICB. This is compounded by the recent merger of the ICBs on 1 April, which may cause short-term disruption.

It was agreed that further trend analysis will be undertaken and reported back to a future Board.

You Said, We Did

This is a standing item on the SEND Improvement Board.

You Said: Variability in inclusivity, SEN support and school-level practice across the local area.

We Did: Inclusion is being strengthened through the Belonging and Inclusion Conference (30 January), bringing schools together to share effective practice and shape a consistent, inclusive approach. Regional parent-carer engagement events will follow. Inclusion is also being embedded structurally through the School Inclusivity Pilot Project and the 'Inclusive Practice' building block within the LAIP.

You Said: Inconsistent identification, understanding and delivery of EHCPs.

We Did: A large-scale review of annual review practice is underway to strengthen consistency, identify training needs and ensure children and young people receive the support set out in their plans. 'Tell Us Tuesday' sessions are also being embedded to enable direct engagement with senior managers.

You Said: Delays in parent carer needs assessments and limited meaningful support.

We Did: A full review of the Parent Carer Needs Assessment process is underway, with findings scheduled for presentation to the SEND Quality Assurance and Performance Group on 11 March 2026.

You Said: Inconsistent and impersonal communication.

We Did: A comprehensive SEND Communication Strategy has been developed, setting clear expectations for timely, consistent and personalised communication. A working group including SPCF and SENDIASS is reviewing Statutory SEND Service letters to ensure clarity and accessibility.

Local Area Inclusion Plan

The SEND Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP) was presented for final approval. It has been co-produced with partners across the Local Area Partnership and sets out strategic priorities and actions.

The Board provided positive feedback, noting clear reflection of parent carer voices, embedded governance arrangements and the use of a live tracking tool to monitor progress.

Quality Assurance and Performance

An update on the EHCP Quality Assurance Audit Programme was presented.

The purpose of the programme is to ensure that:

- EHCPs are timely, effective and legally compliant
- Plan quality aligns with SEND regulations and promotes continuous improvement
- Professionals collaborate to drive shared learning and consistency in practice
- Child-centred outcomes remain central

The Board sought clarity regarding alignment with social care quality assurance processes. It was acknowledged that arrangements are not yet fully holistic but form part of ongoing development toward whole-system auditing.

Members requested greater visibility of EHCPs rated as 'good' and more detailed reporting on timeframes and recommendations. Assurance was provided that quality improvement remains a key priority.

I hope this update is helpful.

The next Board meeting will take place on Thursday 26 March.

Thanks,

Kathryn Boulton

Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Board