

Letter from the Department of Education to the Local Area Partnership.

This partnership delivers SEND services in Suffolk and is made up of Suffolk County Council, the NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB), NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB and education settings.

Background and context:

The Department for Education has written to the Local Area Partnership (LAP), which is responsible for delivering SEND services in Suffolk, outlining its findings following a deep dive exercise into SEND governance and leadership.

This Government review tracked the progress being made against one of two priority actions agreed following the Ofsted and CQC inspection into Suffolk's SEND services in November 2023. On this occasion, the priority action deep dive focused on governance and leadership within SEND. Previous DfE deep dives include EHC statutory processes (July 2024) and managing transitions and preparing for adulthood (May 2025).

The priority action stated: "The LAP should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning. This needs to deliver systems with measurable impact that will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

- The robustness and impact of governance
- The rigour of quality assurance approaches, so that these give the information leaders require to address weaknesses effectively
- The frequency and quality of multi-agency working

What does the letter say:

You can read the letter on the [Suffolk Local Offer website](#).

In summary, the review found that 'significant improvements in relationships and developing a culture of trust have been achieved'. It said this had been evidenced by strengthening the handling of complaints and the maturity of conversations, plus positive feedback is being heard from children, young people and their families. It also said the partnership has a shared commitment to governance to deliver 'consistent, measurable impact for those they serve'.

Other findings included:

- Governance structures show open and honest dialogue, but many partners do not fully understand where their fit within governance structure. Skills and expertise of partners need to be utilised effectively.
- Strong examples of effective communications, but this is not felt universally, with families still reporting issues at operational levels.
- Education, health and social care need to be integrated into decision making and accountability structures.

The Department for Education makes eight recommendations following this deep dive. These include evolving the communication strategy to ensure the right messages are given to the right people at the right time and systemising the approach to monitoring the impact of improvement activities, rather than just the activity. It also recommends establishing more systematic

feedback loops with families, so they understand how and where to escalate matters and receive regular updates on how issues are being addressed.

It is anticipated that officers from the Department for Education will undertake a stock take visit in the autumn to assess progress against these recommendations and the overall improvement journey.

What does the Local Area Partnership say in response:

“We welcome the support, expertise and scrutiny from the Department for Education as we continue to improve the way we deliver SEND services in Suffolk.

This letter is testament to the hard work underway to strengthen governance and leadership. It is a small part of the work needed in ensuring we provide the best provision and may be of little interest to our children and young people who use our services, however it is important that we get the foundations right. We recognise that we still have a long way to go.

Good governance and leadership are important because they provide clear direction, ensure accountability, promote collaboration across services, and focus resources on meeting the diverse needs of Suffolk’s children and young people with SEND.

The success of good SEND services is dependent on a number of organisations, who may all deliver different things and in different ways, working together to achieve a common goal. This isn’t always easy, but the Department for Education has acknowledged we are heading in the right direction.”