Independent Chair's Update on SEND Improvement Board Meeting

16 July 2026

Representatives from the SEND Improvement Board attended the latest meeting on 16 July 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), parent and carer representatives, schools and settings, colleges, health providers and the voluntary sector.

Chair's reflections

What stood out most at this meeting was the growing evidence that Suffolk's sustained investment in data, quality assurance and partnership working is beginning to translate into tangible improvements for children and young people with SEND. While significant challenges remain, particularly around inclusion, attendance and the quality of planning, the Board saw clear evidence that improvement activity is becoming increasingly targeted, informed and effective.

I'd like to highlight the strength of Suffolk's data.

We all know the importance of good data.

Strong data is a critical foundation of SEND improvement. It helps us understand the needs of children and young people, identify trends and challenges, and make evidence-based decisions about where to focus our efforts. Within SEND partnerships, data insights enable us to track progress, measure the impact of improvement activity, and ensure resources are targeted effectively. This helps us make better decisions, strengthens accountability, and ultimately supports better outcomes and a better experience for children and young people with SEND.

The partnership has worked hard over many years to ensure that Suffolk has robust, trustworthy and extensive data in place to guide SEND reforms.

At this Board, it felt that hard work was finally paying off, and it was evident that strong data was supporting well-informed and effective improvements.

There is still some way to go, but the pathways and plans informed by strong data are now firmly in place, which was recognised by Board members.

I hope this board report provides reassurance regarding the scale and breadth of reform underway.

Update on the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum

Sadly, since the last Board meeting, it has been announced that the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum has closed.

The Board expressed their heartfelt thanks to all of those who worked with the forum and with the SEND Improvement Board as a strategic partner.

Plans to ensure continued parent and carer involvement in SEND improvement activity are underway, and further details will be shared shortly.

Travel Training Case Study

We were treated to a wonderful video showcasing the benefits of travel training for young people with SEND to help them gain confidence and independence. Training covers practical skills such as buying tickets, reading timetables and planning journeys, helping young people travel independently to school, college and community activities.

The training is generally over 12 weeks, but some students complete it earlier and it is growing in popularity.

Performance & Data – The SEND Scorecard

As is standard for the Board, key data was presented and discussed.

- System performance has improved, with strong recovery in EHCNA and EHCP timeliness and reduced overdue plans
    - Strong recovery in statutory timeliness, with 75.5% of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (from 10.5% last year), continuing to outperform national (46.4%) and regional benchmarks
    - Average issue time has reduced sharply, continuing below the 20-week threshold
    - Delays in issuing new EHC plans have been significantly reduced.and successful completion of historic overdue plans
- Demand remains high, with rising volumes and increasing complexity
    - Demand persists with 774 plans, compared to 728 for January to April 2025
- Mainstream provision continues to face challenges, shown through SEN Support volumes, exclusions and attendance gaps
- Post-16 participation is improving for EHCP learners, but employment outcomes remain below expectations.
- EHCPs show strong overlap with social care, while SEN Support reflects earlier-stage need

A wider conversation was had about attendance and exclusions amongst students with SEND and plans in place to address some worrying aspects that the data has flagged.

Within the cohort of students with SEND, there are a low volume of exclusions, but these are disproportionately high compared to students with no SEND needs identified.

A similar pattern is seen within attendance data across primary and secondary schools in Suffolk. Attendance for pupils with an EHCP in both primary and secondary schools continue to

decline below benchmarks. In Suffolk, conversely general attendance for students with no SEND needs continues to improve.

In response, the Board heard that Suffolk is not alone in experiencing these patterns. Discussions are taking place regionally, including with the Department for Education, to share best practice and identify effective approaches to improving attendance and reducing exclusions. The inclusion dashboard which records the data allows the team to drill down to individual school level which supports tailored interventions. The Board will continue to monitor improvement activity closely as it is recognised that greater positive impact on pupil outcomes is needed.

SEND Quality Assurance Activity

It has been a priority for the Board that whilst timeliness of EHCPs must improve, this must not be at the expense of the quality of the plans.

The June 2026 SEND Quality Assurance activity highlights ongoing inconsistency in the quality and effectiveness of EHCPs, transition planning, tribunal casework, and support for vulnerable learners. Across the audit activity, common areas for development included SMART outcomes, links between aspirations, needs, provision and outcomes, and the quality of multi-agency working. While children and family voices were often captured well, plans can lack the clarity and specificity needed to drive effective support.

The EHCP QA audit found that most plans required improvement, with only a small proportion judged good. Key areas for development included greater consistency in t outcome writing, better evidence of joint working, and reducing gaps in the “golden thread” across EHCP sections. The post-16 transition audit also identified areas for development, including reducing delays in reviews, better preparation for adulthood, and placements being influenced by availability rather than young people’s aspirations and needs.

Overall, the findings reinforce the need for continued system-wide improvement.

Priorities include improving EHCP quality, strengthening multi-agency working, embedding clearer standards and moderation, and delivering targeted workforce development. The training and quality assurance activity planned within the improvement plan should support more consistent, outcome-focused practice across the SEND system.

Coproduction and Development of the Belonging and Inclusion Strategy

The Board was asked to ratify the Belonging and Inclusion Strategy, which has been developed through extensive coproduction involving education leaders, health partners, Suffolk County Council, parents, carers, and children and young people.

The strategy has been shaped through workshops, meetings, events and direct feedback from stakeholders across the local area partnership. A consistent theme throughout the engagement was the importance of creating a shared understanding of belonging and inclusion, while ensuring the voices of children, young people and families remain central to decision-making.

Board members welcomed the collaborative approach and agreed to ratify the strategy. Future reports will provide updates on implementation and impact.

It was also noted that the next Belonging and Inclusion Conference will take place on 23 September 2026 at Trinity Park, Ipswich.

I hope this update provides a useful overview of the work of the Improvement Board and the progress being made, along with the priorities that remain for the SEND partnership.

The next Board meeting will take place on Thursday 1 October 2026.

hanks,

Kathryn Boulton

Independent Chair of the SEND Improvement Board