

**SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy & Partnership Board**  
**19 May 2026, 10.00 – 12.00, Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chichester**

**Chair:** Brian Pope, Independent Chair

**WSSC**

Andrew Parker, Head SEND & Inclusion A

Claire Hayes, AD Education & Skills

Charlene Hornsey, Early Help

Jack Jones, Head SEND & Inclusion B

Karen Furse, Head of Standards & Effectiveness

Kathryn Kellagher, SEND Development Officer

Katie Bates, Adult Services and Health

Natalie McNeill, Designated Social Care Officer

Rebecca Turner, Head of Commissioning

Sarah Bloor, Interim Head of Service, Children with Disabilities

Vicky Richardson, Head of Practice, Improvement & Inspection

Cara Lambert, Lead Manager Library Service

Jane Blackwell, Principal Librarian, SEND

Graham Olway, Head of Service – Schools Organisation and Planning

Laura Tomlin, Schools Planning Officer SEND

Jade Fellows, Practice Development and Improvement Lead

**Education and schools**

Doug Thomas, Head APC

Lisa Harris, Head Rumboldswyke Primary School

Phillip Potter, Head Oak Grove College

**NHS Sussex ICB**

Emma Davies, Designated Clinical Officer, West Sussex

Louise Needham, Senior Designated Clinical Officer, NHS Surrey and Sussex

Toby Silverman, SEND Improvement Manager

**Parent Carers**

Rowan Westwood, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum

**Department for Education**

Luke Parker

Elizabeth Roff

**Apologies**

**WSSC**

Anna Parsons, Early Years SEND Lead (maternity cover)

Adrian Dyka, Interim Assistant Director Corporate Parenting

Daniel Ruaux, Director of Children’s Services

Heidi Farr, Head of Assessment & Family Safeguarding Central

Kelly Steel, Head of Service Assessment and Family Safeguarding Western

Kieron Lyons, AD Children’s Social Care and Early Help

Loretta Rogers, AD Adult Operations

Mark Dodson, Adult Social Care

Nadia McGarry, SEND Improvement Lead

Sarah Clark, Head of Virtual School

**Education and schools**

Matt Whatford, Head Imberhorne Secondary School

Liz Mellor, Head Horsham Nursery

Simon Brown, Chichester College

**NHS Sussex ICB**

Naomi Ellis, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer and Director of Safeguarding, NHS Surrey and Sussex

**Department for Education**

Liz Flaherty

**NHS England SE SEND Advisor**

Adeline Gibbs

## **1. Welcome**

## **2. Action Log**

## **3. Report by Exception**

SEF – This was approved by the board and praised for having much more evidence than previous versions. Members were asked to email Vicky directly with any suggestions for the next edition, which will be October 2026.

SEND Reform Plan – work on this continues at pace and a draft was shared with partners on 11 May. Feedback from partners (WSPCF, public health, Brian) is being considered for the next draft, which will be further refined to reflect DfE guidance issued last Thursday. The SEND-AP Board will have another opportunity to review the plan at an Extraordinary meeting on 9 June, before its final submission on 19 June.

SEND Award for Further Education – The SENAT Post-16 team and Chichester College Group have been shortlisted for a national SEND award, in recognition of their innovative and collaborative approach of placing SNOs within colleges to manage annual reviews and work proactively with young people and parent carers.

## **4. Disability Register – annual update**

Cara Lambert and Jane Blackwell from the Library Service presented its annual Disability Register report, which was formally approved by the Board. Performance against KPIs was strong overall, with notable success in growing membership in Chichester and maintaining high engagement with the Disability Newsletter.

Partners were encouraged to contribute articles to the Disability Newsletter.

Two key initiatives were highlighted:

A popular Dungeons & Dragons programme that significantly improved engagement, wellbeing and peer connections among young people.

A supported volunteering pilot that successfully built employability and independence skills but requires further funding to scale.

## **Actions**

4.1 Contact Adam at Woodlands Mead Special School to explore adapting the supported volunteering model into supported internships, enabling access to relevant funding streams (e.g. VFP funding).

## **5. Partnership Agreement**

The Partnership agreement is between West Sussex County Council (WSSCC), NHS Sussex and the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum. It is a refreshed version of a 3 year agreement and is supported by a detailed operational plan and monthly contract meetings. It is intended as a strategic/cultural document, not a detailed delivery plan.

It is recognised that some commitments from the previous agreement were not delivered, in particular the feedback loop following WSPCF updates.

Contract meetings will be used to track delivery of commitments and review impact.

Funding has been agreed in principle but delays linked to the new Oracle finance system mean that the WSPC has not yet received it. Brian to escalate this with Dan.

Overall, the content of the Partnership Agreement was endorsed by the Board.

## **Action**

5.1 Brian to escalate the funding delays to Dan.

## **6. Focus: Alternative Provision (AP), Area of Improvement 4**

Leaders should continue to implement their oversight and commissioning arrangements of suitable specialist school places and AP so that there is sufficient high-quality provision that meets children and young people's SEND.

Discussion points:

- AP is increasing being used as an "overflow" due to insufficient specialist provision in mainstream and special schools. This trend is mirrored nationally and is not unique to West Sussex.
- There is a significant rise in demand, and a concern that AP is being used as a destination rather than a short-term intervention. Some children remain in AP for prolonged periods, in one case for 7 years.
- AP is not designed to replace full-time education and there are concerns around children receiving very little education.
- Rising permanent exclusions also point to children's needs not being met in mainstream schools, and 87% of children excluded in West Sussex between 2022 and 2025 have SEND. Worryingly, very young children (eg aged 4-5) are being excluded.
- Schools report increasingly complex and severe needs, and that they lack space, resources and specialist support to meet those needs.
- There is growing interest in developing on-site AP / inclusion bases within schools, which can enable earlier intervention and maintain relationships with the school community.
- These inclusion bases and other elements of SEND Reform such as Experts at Hand will help reduce future demand for AP.

Safeguarding concerns

- This is an area of major risk. A large proportion of AP is unregistered provision. Schools commission directly and only 50 have signed up to the new AP framework. This means there is limited oversight of where children are placed and challenges in tracking attendance and outcomes.
- It should be possible to see which APs schools are using via their IDSR; these can then be cross referenced with the AP framework.
- There are concerns around safe recruitment practices with some AP providers.
- There are further risks for children known to social care.

Experiences of children and families

- Parents report that they and their children can feel isolated when they enter AP, as they are no longer part of the school community.
- The small-group, positive environments of AP settings can be very beneficial short-term. There is a risk that children can become institutionalised in AP settings and struggle to transition back into mainstream.

## **7. Focus: SEND Sufficiency quarterly update, Area of Improvement 4**

Leaders should continue to implement their oversight and commissioning arrangements of suitable specialist school places and AP so that there is sufficient high-quality provision that meets children and young people's SEND.

Discussion points:

- Graham and Laura outlined the current position of the SEND Sufficiency programme, noting that some work is still evolving due to alignment with national SEND reforms.
- They are working to strengthen data-led planning, including collaboration with Early Years and Public Health.
- The team is mapping existing support bases and provision across the county to identify gaps and inform future commissioning.
- The Small Capital Awards programme is being reviewed, with updated guidance planned ahead of the SEND Reform Plan submission.
- They are working with the Together for Change panel to strengthen the impact assessment form for the Small Capital Awards programme. This includes surveys for children, young people and parent/carers.
- It was recognised that there is significant pressure on special schools, which are operating above capacity.
- With the shift to increase provision in mainstream settings through setting up support bases, there will need to be capacity within the Local Authority to help schools decide how to best use capital funding.
- They are taking part in a DfE pilot on the best use of surplus school places to support SEND and wider community provision. This may come with some funding.
- There needs to be a greater focus on reintegration from AP or special school into mainstream. Providers should demonstrate clear integration pathways.
- It would be helpful to have clearer definitions of provision types and thresholds (tiers) to support planning and commissioning.

## **8. Quality Assurance Framework**

### **Context: Quality Assurance Framework**

This updated version of the framework outlines all the quality assurance activity to support children and young with SEND.

- Jade was thanked for the hard work that has gone into creating the framework.
- The partnership approach to quality assurance has led to evidence-based conversations across teams and services, where we are identifying gaps and learning to inform service improvements.
- It was suggested that Permanently Excluded Pupils with EHCPs could be a topic for a thematic review, and Jade will take this idea to the Area SEND Partnership Improvement Group where these are planned.