**SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy & Partnership Board**

**20 October 2026, 10.00-12.00, Imberhorne School, East Grinstead**

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| **Chair:** Brian Pope, Independent Chair | **NHS Sussex ICB** |
| **WSCC** | Emma Davies, Designated Clinical Officer |
| Andrew Parker, Head SEND & Inclusion A | Rusell Shingles, ICB Head of Children in Care, Child Death and SEND |
| Claire Hayes, AD Education & Skills | **Apologies** |
| Jade Fellows, Practice Development and Improvement Lead | **WSCC** |
| Jo Hill, SEND Reform lead | Adrian Dyka, Interim Assistant Director Corporate Parenting |
| Kathryn Kellagher, SEND Development Officer | Anna Parsons, Early Years SEND Lead (maternity cover) |
| Katie Bates, Public Health | Daniel Ruaux, Director of Children's Services |
| Karen Furse, Head of Standards & Effectiveness Rebecca Turner, Head of Commissioning | Charlene Hornsey, Early Help |
| Natalie McNeill, Designated Social Care Officer | Heidi Farr, Head of Assessment & Family Safeguarding Central |
| Rebecca Turner, SEND Commissioning | Jack Jones, Head SEND & Inclusion B |
| Sarah Bloor, Interim Head of Service, Children with Disabilities | Kelly Steel, Head of Service Assessment and Family Safeguarding Western |
| Sarah Clark, Head of Virtual School | Kieron Lyons, AD Children's Social Care and Early Help |
| Toby Silverman, Early Years SEND | Loretta Rogers, AD Adult Operations |
| Vicky Richardson, Head of Practice, Improvement & Inspection | Mark Dodson, Adult Social Care |
| **Education and schools** | Steve Trippier, CYPL Programme Director |
| Matt Whatford, Imberhorne Secondary School, plus colleagues | **Education and schools** |
| Liz Mellor, Head Horsham Nursery | Phillip Potter, Head Oak Grove College |
| **Parent Carers** | Doug Thomas, Head APC |
| Rowan Westwood, Head of Partnerships, Policy and Advocacy, Amaze | Zoe Gordon, Head North Mundhan Primary School |
| Dr Helen Fairman, Strategic Lead, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum | **NHS Sussex ICB** |
| Nicky Hiscock, Chair, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum | Naomi Ellis, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer and Director of Safeguarding, NHS Surrey and Sussex |
| **Department for Education** | Louise Needham, Senior Designated Clinical Officer, NHS Surrey and Sussex |
| Liz Flaherty | **Department for Education** |
| Luke Parker | Elizabeth Roff |
| **Councillor Representative** | **NHS England SE SEND Advisor** |
| Sam Raby, Cabinet Member | Adeline Gibbs |

# 1. Welcome

Brian thanked Matt Whatford for hosting the board at Imberhorne School.

# 2. Action Log

### Action 155 River Beach SSC

Continue to monitor and keep on action log.

### Action 162 Preparation for Adulthood – infographic

To show different pathways for CYP with EHCPs and on SEN Support.

### Actions 164, 165, 166, 167 – health actions

To be covered in November update.
The timeliness of health contributions to EHCPs should now be flowing through the system and can be broken down by locality across West Sussex. Andy and Russell to discuss outside of the board.

# 3. Report by Exception

### School Inclusion Strategies

By the end of December, every school is expected to have published an Inclusion Strategy in addition to the SEN Information Report.

- It will be discussed at the next Headteachers' Engagement event.
- Educational Psychologists are also working with schools on inclusive culture and the philosophy underpinning inclusion.
- It will be interesting to see whether Ofsted inspections are assessing these.

### SEND Funding

It was agreed that the Board should receive a regular overview of SEND finances from both the local authority and ICB.

### Strategic Recovery Programme (SRP)

The SRP has now been approved. Thanks were expressed to everyone involved, including Liz for her guidance. Feedback received following approval largely reflected issues that had already been identified internally after submission.

Communications are being carefully managed.

The importance of aligning governance and monitoring arrangements across the SEND Strategy, Ofsted improvement plans and the SRP was stressed.

It was agreed that SRP should be a standing agenda item.

### ACTIONS

3.1 Claire to discuss with Andy Thorne about a regular overview of local authority SEND Finances
3.2 Russell to discuss with ICB about what financial information could be brought to the board.
3.3 SEND Reform Plan to be a standing agenda item.

# 4. Ofsted datasets

It was recognised that producing the Ofsted dataset pack represented a considerable amount of work and colleagues were thanked.

Discussion:

Work is underway via the SEND Performance Group to enable further analysis of sub-groups, cross-cutting themes and local trends.

The datasets are reported monthly to DLT meetings, where responsibility for actions and timescales can be monitored.

The RAG rating system helps to identify strengths, weaknesses and improvement priorities. Further work is required before all data quality ratings can move to green and support more sophisticated analysis.

Annex A information is being compiled and added to the evidence library.

Suggestions for further development:

- Emerging positive and negative trends should be escalated proactively through Report by Exception rather than waiting for formal reviews.
- The current pack contains local authority data only. It was noted that monitoring arrangements in some other local authorities integrate health data, thus providing a more comprehensive picture.
- Include attainment data for both SEN Support and EHCP cohorts
- Include Annual Review timeliness data

**Alternative Provision section**

It was noted that the alternative provision section remains predominantly red-rated. Suggested actions required for improvement are:

- reintegration rates into mainstream schools
- turnaround times
- attendance outcomes
- whether AP is being used effectively as a short-term intervention
- challenging the use of reduced timetables
- include contributions from Sara Hughes (attendance / reduced timetable work)
- include GCSE outcome data for AP pupils in 2026

**ACTIONS**

4.1 Heath data to be integrated in the Ofsted dataset pack (Russell).

4.2 Attainment data for both SEN Support and EHCP cohorts to be included in the Ofsted dataset pack (Karen)

4.3 Annual Review timeliness data to be added to Ofsted dataset pack (Jack)

4.4 Alternative provision update to include reintegration rates into mainstream schools, turnaround times, attendance outcomes, whether AP is being used effectively as a short-term intervention, challenging the use of reduced timetables, contributions from Sara Hughes on attendance and reduced timetables, and GCSE outcomes data for AP pupils in 2026.

# 5. Feedback from Imberhorne School

Four students from Imberhorne School joined the meeting to share their experiences of moving between school sites, transition arrangements, support received in school, relationships with staff and their hopes for the future.

The school offers a good selection of vocational programmes, including construction, sport, creative media and child development. There are plans to introduce horticulture.

The students were appreciative of the support structures in place, which include The Hub, Thrive and the learning support teams.

**SENCO perspective**

The school SENCO reflected positively on her role which she described as rewarding despite the increasing demand and frustrations associated with factors outside school control, particularly EHCP assessment waiting times and SALT services.

She welcomed developments such as Individual Support Plans and felt these aligned well with existing practice. She spoke highly of support available from the local authority, describing teams such as Learning Behaviour Advisory Team and the Autism and Social Communication Team as "phenomenal".

**Discussion**

- There was discussion around the challenge of balancing parental expectations with decisions about the most appropriate provision for children and young people.
- There's a need for strong communications and positive stories from schools demonstrating successful inclusion in practice. It was noted that parents can base their expectations on their own school experiences rather than current provision, which can lead them to seek special school placements.
- It would be interesting to hear about health and social care support beyond the school environment, including hobbies and wider opportunities.
- The school gets increasing numbers of referrals through Right to Choose pathways, which creates additional workload and requires careful management due to waiting lists.

# 6. Special Schools Survey

This survey was designed specifically to capture the views of families whose voices are not often heard through wider consultation activity. 235 responses were received and overall satisfaction was very positive, with an average score of 4.21 out of 5.

A number of issues were raised and it was agreed to return to the survey at the November meeting, to allow officers time to read and analyse the survey findings.

# 7. Ofsted Schools Inspections analysis

This was moved to the November meeting.

# 8. Area for Improvement 3: EHCP timeliness

EHCP needs assessment requests continue to rise, although growth has slowed compared with previous years. This is the first time this trend has been observed for some time. Pleasingly, the 20-week timeliness indicator has moved above 30% and the trend over the past six months has been improving.

The "Pink Process" is helping with current demand, but it does not directly reduce the backlog. Balancing new requests and historic cases therefore remains challenging.

Positive developments include:

- Increased staff confidence and empowerment.
- Learning from new ways of working.
- Increased Educational Psychology capacity for assessments.
- Greater use of AI-supported tools.

A separate process is focusing on older cases requiring finalisation, with a dedicated panel established to address long waiting times.

**VITA**

VITA is a plan-writing tool that assists SEND Officers by organising information and pre-populating content while retaining professional oversight. The aim is to allow officers to spend more time focusing on plan quality and engagement with families.

The system is expected to improve productivity and contribute to improved 20-week timeliness.

**Trial of duty phone system**

This is to be trialled in November 2026.  Its aim is to centralise enquiries and improve responsiveness to families.

- While there are potential benefits, reallocating staff to manage enquiries could have consequences elsewhere in the service.
- There was strong agreement that improved productivity must lead to more meaningful engagement with families, rather than simply increasing output volumes.