

SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy & Partnership Board

20 May 2025, 10.00 – 12.00

Training Room 13, County Hall North, Horsham

Chair

Brian Pope, Independent Chair

WSCC

Andrew Parker, Manager Pupil Entitlement Investigation

Clare Myall, Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist

Grace Hall, Early Years SEND Lead

Jessica Bubb, SEND & Inclusion Adviser

Kathryn Kellagher, SEND Development Officer

Rebecca Turner, SEND Strategic Commissioning Lead

Sarah Clark, Head of Virtual School

Education and schools

Mark Wignall, Head, Downlands Secondary

Zoe Gordon, Head North Mundham

Steve Dixon, Chichester College Group

Ruth Campbell, Executive Head of three federated nursery schools:
Chichester, Bognor Regis and Boundstone

NHS Sussex ICB

Caroline Tozzi, Joint Director for Children and Young People and
Strategic Lead for SEND

Rachael Prim, Designated Clinical Officer, for SEND

Parent Carers

Rowan Westwood, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum

Clare Eeles, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum

NHS England SE SEND Advisor

Adeline Gibbs

Apologies

WSCC

Charlene Hornsey, Head of Early Help

Claire Hayes, AD Education & Skills

Daniel Ruaux, AD Corporate Parenting

Derry Richardson, Head of Commercial & Contracting

Fiona Mackison, Public Health Strategic Commissioning Lead

Heidi Farr, Head of Assessment & Family Safeguarding Central

Karen Furse, Head of Standards & Effectiveness

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

Loretta Rogers, AD Adult Operations

Marie Foley, Head of Data, Projects and Systems

Nadia McGarry, SEND Improvement Lead

Toby Wilson, Young Voices

Vicky Richardson, Head of Practice, Improvement & Inspection

Vince Clarke, Director of Children's Services

Education and schools

Doug Thomas, Head APC

Liz Mellor, Head, Horsham Nursery

Simon Brown, Head of SEND, Chichester College

Phillip Potter, Head Oak Grove College

Nicky Smith / Gillian Santi Governors Association

Parent Carers

John Clifton, West Sussex Parent Carer Forum

NHS Sussex ICB

Toby Silverman, SEND Improvement Manager

Councillor Representative

Jacquie Russell, Cabinet member

Department for Education

Liz Flaherty

1. Action Log

See Action Log

Additional action from previous meeting:

Rowan and Brian to liaise with Graham's team and visit new buildings when they are complete.

2. Rag rating of Strategic Improvement plan

The board was happy with the definitions of the rag ratings, which add clarity, and welcomed the system put in place to ensure WSPCF involvement in the rating from now on.

- The rag ratings in the Strategic Improvement plan don't always align with the definitions and this needs to be reviewed. For example, the EHCPS are rag rated as "on track" but this doesn't feel right when looking at the latest data.
- It was suggested we advise the DfE that we are refining how impact is measured and will work on this for the next meeting.

Action

2.1 Rag rating of strategic improvement plan to be circulated in advance and brought back to the June Board for further review.

3. Focus: Co-production

Co-production is a key element in our improvement journey, and the current co-production workstream has been in place for a year.

During this time, we have laid good foundations for co-production and have established a strategic multi-agency steering group which oversees two panels: the WSPCF-led Together for Change "doing" panel and a young people's panel.

The multi-agency steering group has good attendance from a range of partners and is focused on embedding the culture of co-production and building evidence of impact. It has produced a Charter which is with the Graphics department. Next steps are to work with senior leaders and to develop a roadmap of how to embed an ethos of co-production across WSCC.

Co-production with education settings:

- Co-production at an operation level is working well in schools engaged in projects such as Autism in Schools, Autism Aware Award and PINS. The challenge is to spread this good practice with other schools.
- Downlands School has set up a SEND Parents group which has significantly improved relations with parents. The group helps with school communications and co-produces policies. It's important that Mark as head teacher sits in the group, so decisions can be made at the time. Mark to be invited to a multi-agency steering group meeting before the end of this term to share how this was done in a secondary school and the positive impact it has had on the school community.
- Schools can be reticent to establish parent groups but by meeting with parents and understanding the issues and barriers, it can be a constructive way to improve provision and relationships.
- Jess will talk to Karen Furse about how coproduction can be embedded into termly conversations with head teachers and how to engage with SEND Governors.

- It would be interesting to see how this could work with early years providers, where parents are at the very start of their SEND journey.
 - The Autism in Schools project is working with four nurseries and is putting together a toolkit/guide on how to establish a parents' group.
- It is harder to engage with parents at FE Colleges, where you need to first get permission from the student, but it is still vital as parents report feeling they are reaching a cliff edge.

Co-production in health:

- It's harder to pin down in health: there are three main health providers and it's not known how they involve parents in service design. There are defined projects where they work with parents, such as a mental health development plan.
- There are two representatives from health in the multi-agency steering group.
- Projects such as Autism in Schools and PINS are NHS funded and delivered in schools by partners. Autism in Schools has set up Autism Ambassador groups for children and young people.

Adeline shared links to help develop and audit co-production:

[Co-production and Partnership toolkit | Whole School SEND](#)

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/co-production-and-quality-improvement-a-resource-guide/>

<https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/what-how/>

Together for Change panel

This doing panel is working well with good feedback from submitters and panel members. The next step is how to evidence the impact of working with the panel.

- We need to encourage submitters to fill in the evaluation form.
- We are starting to track items that have come through panel, such as the SEND & Inclusion Strategy, to show the impact on individual pieces of work.
- Overall we're in a better place than we were at the time of the last Ofsted inspection. There are still some areas where there is little or no co-production but overall there has been a lot of progress.
- We need senior leadership support (DLT) to promote co-production across WSCC.

Action

3.1 Mark to be invited to a multi-agency steering group meeting before the end of this term to share how his secondary school established a successful SEND parent carer group.

3.2 Jess to link with Karen Furse around embedding coproduction in termly conversations with head teachers and how to engage with SEND Governors.

4. Focus: Early Years

Liz was unable to attend as their nursery is being inspected by Ofsted, so Ruth led the presentation.

In addition to the private and voluntary sector, there are four local authority nursery schools not attached to primary schools. Three are federated. Each nursery school has around 250 children on roll, aged from 6 months to 5 years. As they are

categorised as schools, they have Ofsted inspections as well as Early Years Inspections. They all have SSCs with a qualified SENCO.

All have SSCs and approximately 40% of their intake are SEND children. The ethos of the nurseries is to support children outside of their nursery schools by sharing expertise and skills with other settings.

Each SSC has 8 places which ultimately is 16 places as the nurseries offer morning and afternoon provision. Boundstone nursery SSC has a SALT designation, with children brought in by taxi from across the county. The other three SSCs are a mix of SALT and social communication.

Nurseries have termly considerations meetings, as children come in termly. The children who attend the SSCs are fully integrated with other children but with a higher level of support. Most of the work done with the children is in the nursery environment, and they can go to the SSC room for other support or when they need a calm space.

Speech and language development is very important. Some children have complex needs whereas other children experience developmental delay due to lack of stimulation and interaction. Speech and language skills are lower than ten years ago for a range of reasons:

- COVID.
- Over-using phones or other devices as a quick way to keep children quiet.
- There are fewer parent and baby groups, apart from franchised and expensive models, which can seem inaccessible to parents and which don't model different approaches which can be used at home.
- Children's Centres used to offer advice and support to parents, as well as an opportunity for parents to make connections with each other. There are family hubs but most parents get advice from social media, which is variable, or the health professionals they are in touch with. Once their child is at nursery, parents then lean on nursery staff.
- Libraries offer story time and SEND Stay and Play sessions run county-wide. Both have waiting lists.
- Ante natal classes and milk clinics are both useful ways to have a chat with professionals and meet other parents.

Role of public health:

- Health visitors see children on day 5 and then age 2. If a baby is identified as having needs from birth, there will be more contact and support.
- Public health is well embedded in other boards but not often seen here.
- Health colleagues are mapping our early intervention offer across Sussex, looking to link family hubs, GP practices, libraries, etc.

Challenges:

- While nurseries are fortunate to have a SALT working with them, their time is also used up by clinic report writing and training.
- SSC funding has not changed over the past decade, but salaries have gone up, so they make a loss.
- Delayed entry to school – on average they have around 6 children with EHCPs staying another year because they can't get a school space.
 - This leaves parents in a really difficult position and is stressful for nursery staff too, who feel the weight of responsibility.
 - In addition, if a child is school age, they are no longer eligible for early years funding and parents have to pay. If their child was at school with

an EHCP, SENAT would fund the place. Discussions with SENAT are ongoing to address this.

- Jess is working on a supportive offer for mainstream schools to take children who are waiting for a specialist placement, rather than their staying in nursery.
- Many of the delayed entry children are SSC children: the blockage in special school places filters down the system.

Early Years presentation – Grace Hall and Clare Myall

- It was noted that 11% of early years settings are not offering good provision. We were at 93% offering good or above and are working hard to bring it back up. Generally it's child minders which don't meet good. A team of advisors works with settings rated below good.
- SEND Under 5s: There is a lot of confusion around the remit of this: its main role is around the support that can be referred to now, eg Portage. It can't agree an EHCP and is not just about transition to school. They are in talks with SENAT around where conversations about transition to school should sit.
- The Early Years strategy was launched last year and there is now a SEND specific team to provide early intervention at a setting.
- The Early Years
- SEND children struggle to access wrap around care which offers no funding for SEND. They are putting together resource packs and toolkits but really need ringfenced funding.
- There has been a huge increase in referrals, which reflects parental lack of confidence in schools.
- The skill level of early years staff is lower than it was – Level 3 doesn't provide enough knowledge about child development and SEND. They are working with colleges on how to improve this.

Portage

- Portage is very popular with families and there is a focus on how to reduce waiting time without devaluing the service offered.
 - They have reduced the length of each visit and now offer 12 visits across a 6 month period.
 - They get a huge proportion of referrals following the two year check, which offers a golden opportunity for intervention. Data shows that around 27% of their children are over three years old. From September 2025, it has been agreed that they will no longer accept a child over three unless they are not in a setting. This will allow them to focus on providing timely support for younger children.
- The Early Years Inclusion Service will be maintained as a permanent service. This is where practitioners visit children with identified social communication needs in a setting, and model how to support the child. Referrals are via SEND Under 5s and they have so far supported 160 children.

The presenters were thanked for their comprehensive and insightful reports.

Any other business

5.1 There is a discrepancy between average weeks completed figures on slides 9 and 12 in the EHCP Response pack – can this be explained.

Post meeting note: the figure on slide 9 counts just those EHCPs completed in April whereas slide 12 is calculating a 3 month average.

