



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
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David Shaw, Director of Children's Services
Vanessa Whatley, Chief Nursing Officer and Executive Lead for SEND

26 November 2025

Dear Colleagues,

ACCELERATED PROGRESS PLAN (APP): 30 MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW

Thank you for meeting with DfE SEND and NHS England officials on 12 November 2025 to review the progress you have made against your APP.

The Local Area Partnership continues to make positive progress to address the three areas for improvements, identified during the last Area SEND inspection. The evidence submitted as part of the review meeting and the discussion with partners on the day demonstrated the following key findings:

Successes

- **Strategic SEND Transformation:** Leaders have established a fully integrated, strategic, and systematic approach to SEND improvement. This is driven by an ambitious partnership SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) strategy, and a robust, comprehensive outcomes framework that aims to deliver better experiences and outcomes for children and young people, through a focus on impact, not just delivery.
- **Impact and Outcomes:** Partners demonstrated evidence of positive impact against the APP and improving outcomes for children and young people, supported by a range of initiatives designed to ensure the right support is provided at the right time. This includes whole-school approaches to neurodiversity (PINS), the Working on What Works (WOWW) programme and Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC).
- **Quality of EHC Plans:** Partners remain committed to ensuring quality and meaningful plans are issued to children and young people. This is enabled through robust quality assurance mechanisms across the system partnership.
- **Strong Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP) and Support-While-Waiting Offer:** There is a robust OAIP and a well-developed support-while-waiting offer across health services, including service advice lines, sign posting to family hub provision and a range of resources including digital applications.
- **Co-Production with Families:** The local area partnership is committed to co-production through implementation of the co-production & participation strategy. Engagement with families is playing a meaningful and influential role in shaping service development and strategic decision-making, through the

understanding of lived experiences and outcome focused approaches. Changes to the Parent Carer Forum have been navigated and supported well by the partnership.

- **Graduated Support Pathway and Inclusive Practice:** A clearly defined graduated support pathway and enhanced inclusion offer is enabling early intervention to support children and young people with SEND.
- **Health Data Dashboards:** Improved health data dashboards are strengthening performance monitoring and providing robust operational and strategic oversight.
- **Workforce Investment:** Significant workforce investment has been made across key services, including the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) service and the EHC Team (statutory assessment & review team). This includes establishing a permanent workforce structure, deploying additional recovery resources to address the annual review backlog, and jointly commissioning therapy roles within the SEND Hubs.
- **Training and Development:** A comprehensive training and development offer across education, health, and social care is contributing to continued practice improvement and enhanced service delivery. This includes mandatory social care training, EHC Team induction, development and supervision opportunities.

Next Steps & Recommendations

Leaders recognise improvements are ongoing and some actions remain outstanding against the APP, but the partnership is making positive progress. The following next steps and recommendations will assist the partnership to continue delivering sustainable improvements.

- **Statutory Assessments:** Delays in 6-weekly advice from sector partners to support the 20-week statutory process and EHC team recovery plan. Delays and inconsistency in partners' contributions to annual reviews.

Recommendations: System partners to develop robust improvement plans to address delays with statutory assessment advice, with particular focus on health, and educational psychology contributions. Liaise with neighbouring systems to share good practice around reducing delays.

- **Strengthening Strategic Co-Production with Children & Young People:** Further development is required to strengthen children and young people voices & co-production strategically.

Recommendations: Embed co-production and the voices of children and young people at a strategic level by aligning with, and building upon, well-established mechanisms for understanding lived experiences. This includes systematically collating themes and trends to inform and influence ongoing SEND improvements.

- **Waiting times for those needing assessment:** Progress has been made in both the Neurodevelopmental and SALT waiting times. However, further work

is required to ensure that families' waiting times for accessing these services is reduced, including any waits for additional assessment or intervention.

Recommendations: SALT – continue to embed the 'Staffordshire Risk Matrix' and regularly review the impact on caseloads and flow through the service. Ensure the SALT service is closely aligned with the ELSEC programme and benefitting from the impact of earlier intervention for children with speech, language and communication needs. Neurodevelopmental – ensure resources are aligned to strengthen collaboration.

- **LAP Data Dashboard Development:** Delays in developing a LAP data dashboard.

Recommendations: Partners to take effective action to ensure ongoing developments including incorporating outcomes framework metrics.

- **Workstreams and Project Ambitions:** There are a range of workstream and delivery groups such as Children & Young People operational delivery groups, LD & ND Partnership workstreams.

Recommendations: Partners to align activity with established workstreams and project ambitions to reduce duplication and promote greater efficiency across the system.

- **Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF):** A revised SEF will enable partners to reflect the current context, celebrate achievements, and highlight priority areas for development.

Recommendations: Leaders to consider the reflection of risks & issues relating to local system transformation (alongside the SEF). This includes capturing the actions underway at both service and system levels to evidence effective risk management, demonstrate robust governance to drive ongoing improvement.

- **Joint Commissioning:** Changes in commissioner leads and lack of timescales.

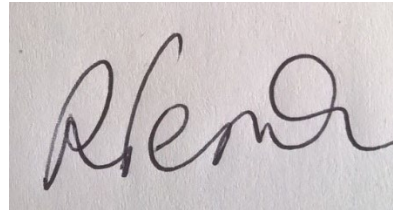
Recommendations: Continue to develop the joint commissioning strategy and confirm timescale to finalise. Proactively explore opportunities for innovation through pilots and targeted projects, ensuring learning informs future system planning and practice.

Over the next 6 months, the partnership should continue to embed new initiatives and deliver against the SEND strategy and outcomes framework. We will be in touch soon to arrange your next six-month review meeting. In the meantime, your SEND Case Lead, Grace Rees, DfE commissioned SEND Advisor, Rebecca Hogan, and NHS England Advisor, Penny Teale, will continue to provide you with support and challenge. If you have any questions or need any further support, please contact any party in the first instance.

I am copying this letter to David Shaw (Assistant Director of Education Achievement), Laura Powell (SEND SRO), Jennifer Griffin (Designated Clinical Officer for SEND), Sharon Graham (Designated Social Care Officer for SEND), Helen Johns (DfE Lead

Professional Adviser), Lorraine Mulroney (Head of SEND, NHS England), Penny Teale (NHS England Adviser) and Rebecca Hogan (DfE Commissioned SEND Adviser).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Perry', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Robert Ferris', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Kirsty Perry, SEND Delivery Lead, West Midlands Vulnerable Children's Unit,
Department for Education

Robert Ferris, Regional Programme Director – Learning Disabilities, Autism and
SEND, West Midlands NHS England