



2025-0026785

Department for Education

**The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education**

Chris Coghlan MP

By email: chris.coghlan.mp@parliament.uk

18 November 2025

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your correspondence of 17 July, on behalf of your constituents, regarding special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision in Surrey. I am sorry for the delay in sending this response.

Thank you for bringing to my attention the open letter from parents and carers in Surrey, raising their concerns over the Council's conduct and what they consider to be maladministration, and the breakdown of accountability at the Council in the management of its statutory SEND responsibilities. The parent testimonials attached to the letter were deeply moving, and I was sincerely sorry to read of the difficulties that these families are experiencing in securing adequate SEND provision. I also appreciate your patience while awaiting my response.

As part of this government's Plan for Change, I am determined to fix the SEND system and restore the trust of parents, ensuring that all children and young people with SEND are able to access the support that they so clearly need and deserve. My department will do this by ensuring stronger support for families in the early years including through our Best Start Family Hubs, providing schools with the tools to better identify and support children's needs before they escalate; strengthening accountability on mainstream settings to be inclusive including through Ofsted inspections; and encouraging schools to set up resourced provision or SEN units to increase capacity in mainstream schools. We will be learning from current programmes such as the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools and Early Language Support for Every Child supporting early identification and engagement with families to meet children's needs. I would be very happy to visit one of these programmes in Surrey with you, and to hear from parents about what needs to change in the system.

I know that families are crying out for change, and that is exactly why it is critical to get this right. I am committed to delivering reform that stands the test of time and rebuilds the confidence of families, which is why I have launched a further period of listening and engagement – testing proposals with parents, teachers and experts in every region of the country, so that lived experience and partnership are at the heart of our solutions. I will set out the full schools white paper in the new year, building on the work my department has already done to create a system that's rooted in inclusion, where children receive high-quality support early on and can thrive at their local school.

In relation to Surrey County Council specifically, as you will already be aware, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook a local area SEND inspection in September 2023. The inspection report, published on 24 November 2023, found inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and identified four specific areas for improvement. Since then, my department has appointed an expert SEND advisor to support and challenge Surrey County Council, which has included reviewing their education, health and care (EHC) plan data, helping to improve the quality of EHC plans, reviewing and supporting the implementation of Surrey's SEND improvement plan, and facilitating the sharing of good practice with other areas.

To date, the Surrey local area partnership has been able to demonstrate to my department and NHS England that they are undertaking clear actions to drive progress. This has included improving how quickly EHC plans are completed, better tracking of waiting times, improving the performance of therapy pathways, and appointing a new independent chair for their SEND Improvement Board to enhance external scrutiny and challenge.

Surrey County Council has also restructured its SEND statutory service to improve consistency in provision and has announced a further £4.9 million of investment for 2026/27, to increase staff numbers and improve support for families. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has confirmed that the number of complaints in Surrey reduced from 23/24 to 24/25, and that the Council has a compliance rate of 100% (2024-2025) in responding to recommendations they have made, including personal remedies and service improvements.

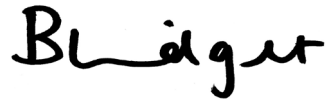
However, despite the progress made, both my department and NHS England know that the quality of services in Surrey is still not consistent and needs to improve. More work is needed, especially to improve the quality of EHC plans, and to embed improvements fully so that children and families can feel the impact of this work in their daily lives. My officials have made it clear to the Surrey local area partnership that the pace of improvement needs to be accelerated, and that the department needs to see clear evidence of impact.

As part of this, my officials remain committed to ensuring that the voices and experiences of parents, children, and young people are central to the actions we take and the support we provide. My department's most recent formal review meeting of Surrey's progress took place on 14 July 2025, during which my officials engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including local area partnership leaders, Surrey County Council frontline staff, special educational needs coordinators, parents and carers, and children and young people with SEND, to gather their views on the pace and scale of Surrey's improvements. This meeting identified three urgent priority areas: improving communication with families of children with SEND, data development, and strengthening governance to track progress more effectively.

Having read the concerns raised in the open letter and attached parent testimonials, I recognise that further steps need to be taken to more fully review and provide assurances as to the progress made by Surrey County Council. That is why I have asked my officials, working closely with Surrey's expert SEND Advisor, to conduct a targeted deep dive that will assess the pace and scale of progress, review the specific issues raised in the open letter, and inform my decision on whether further intervention is needed. I also plan to meet with Rachael Wardell, Surrey's Director of Children's Services, to gain further assurances on Surrey's progress.

I want to thank you again for raising your concerns relating to Surrey County Council's SEND services, and appreciate the time taken by parents to share their stories with me. I hope I have provided some clarity and assurance as to the steps taken by my department to drive improvements both nationally and in Surrey.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridget', with a stylized, cursive script.

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education