

# Primary Headteachers' Phase Council

## Phase Leads

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Executive Officer: Joanna Jones  
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Monday 17th November 2025

Dear Secretary of State for Education

I am writing to reiterate the concerns that myself and my colleagues from Primary Council have raised regarding Surrey SEND. We are a group of headteachers who represent over 300 Primary Schools across Surrey. We are not seeing many of the positive messages that the local authority are communicating about their support for children with SEND, in our schools, and trust is diminishing. Our experience in our roles corroborates the poor performance by Surrey County Council highlighted in the letter from Surrey's Liberal Democrat MPs to the Secretary of State for Education, dated 25th February.

We have also surveyed primary headteachers across the county and these are the current main areas of concern:

### **Severe Underfunding for Children with Complex Needs**

Schools are facing an unsustainable financial burden when supporting pupils with significant and complex SEND. Current funding allocations do not reflect the true cost of providing appropriate support, leaving schools to divert resources from other areas, which compromises the quality of education for all children.

### **Lack of Specialist Placements, especially for Younger Children**

There is a critical shortage of specialist settings for children with high-level needs, particularly in the early years and primary phases. This results in children being placed in unsuitable environments, which can lead to increased anxiety, extreme behavioural challenges, dangerous behaviour and disrupted learning for both the child and their peers. Sadly, this sometimes results in a permanent exclusion.

### **Insufficient Educational Psychologists (EPs) and EHCP Co-ordination Officers (formerly known as Case Officers)**

The shortage of EPs and local authority EHCP Co-ordinators is causing significant delays in assessments and decision-making. These delays not only hinder timely support but also create frustration for families and schools, while poor communication exacerbates the problem. The support that schools receive from EHCP Co-ordination Officers continues to be mixed.

### **Private Diagnoses Not Involving Schools**

Increasingly, families are seeking private diagnoses due to delays in the public system. These assessments often occur without school input, leading to recommendations that are impractical or misaligned with the child's educational context. This disconnect places additional strain on schools trying to implement appropriate strategies. This also increases the divide between children who come from families that can afford to pay and those that cannot. It creates a system where children from disadvantaged backgrounds are placed further behind as they are having to wait much longer for a diagnosis than those who can afford to pay.

### **Inconsistent EHCP Processes and Quality**

The Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process lacks consistency across the local authority, and the quality of EHCP documents varies widely. This inconsistency results in unclear expectations, inadequate provision, and frequent disputes, which consume valuable time and

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resource. Incorrect provision and support can have a hugely detrimental effect on a child's mental health.

### **Lack of Alternative Provision (AP) for Infant and Primary-Aged Children**

There is an acute gap in alternative provision for younger children. Where AP does exist, it is often prohibitively expensive, inappropriate and difficult to access. This leaves schools with no viable options for pupils who cannot cope in mainstream settings, resulting in exclusions and inadequate support.

We have raised these points to Surrey MPs and Councillors already over the last 18 months and Headteachers are reporting very little progress in many of these areas. Sadly, we see that it is the most vulnerable children in our schools who are being negatively impacted.

Best wishes

Anne Cooper

On behalf of the Primary Phase Council Executive Committee

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