



Department for Education

2025-0025320

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for School Standards

Chris Coghlan MP

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

3 September 2025

Dear Chris,

Thank you for raising your concerns on 7 July about Surrey County Council special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services. During our discussion, you mentioned the department had responded to your correspondence addressed to the Secretary of State on 26 February 2025, but that you felt the second part of your letter regarding Surrey County Council's performance and its support for children with SEND had not been fully addressed. In addition, your further correspondence of 8 July addressed to the Secretary of State, raised your concerns and that of Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP regarding the challenge of schools being named in education, health and care (EHC) plans, despite expressing concerns that they are unable to meet the needs of the child or young person. I intended to address the concerns raised across both letters and our discussion in this response. I would be grateful if you could share this response with your co-signatory.

As I outlined in my letter in February, keeping children safe could not be more important to this government, and we are also already taking swift action to reform the child protection system. To stop children from falling through the cracks and to ensure they are not out of sight of those who can keep them safe we are legislating:

- to introduce a unique child identifier, like an NHS number;
- for a register of children not in school;
- for a new duty so that parents need local authority (LA) consent to home educate their child if they are subject to a child protection plan;
- to make it a requirement for every council to have multi-agency child protection teams - involving police, education and health services; and
- for a new duty on safeguarding partners to ensure education is sufficiently involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

As you are aware, the Area SEND inspection of the Surrey Local Area Partnership took place between 25 and 29 September 2023, conducted by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The inspection report, published on 24 November 2023, found inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and identified four areas for improvement. These related to the strategic evaluation of interventions, communication with parents and carers, the timeliness and quality of health assessments, needs assessments, EHC plans and annual reviews, and reviewing the breadth and offer of alternative provision.

To drive improvements in these areas, the department has deployed an expert SEND advisor to provide support, advice and challenge. This has included working with Surrey County Council to analyse their EHC plan data and trends, review their improvement action plan and statutory progress, provide guidance to enhance the quality of EHC plans, and facilitate the exchange of best practice with other local areas.

To date, the Surrey local area partnership has been able to demonstrate to the department and NHS England that they are undertaking clear actions to drive progress. This has included improving the timeliness of EHC plans, strengthening performance monitoring, and waiting time oversight for therapy and neurodevelopmental pathways. Surrey County Council have also recently announced that their cabinet has approved a further £4.9 million investment as part of the LA's Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND) transformation programme for 2026 to 2027.

Despite the progress made, the department and NHS England acknowledge that services are still inconsistent. We are clear that further work is needed, including in relation to the quality of EHC plans, and that improvements must be fully embedded so children and families can feel the impact of this work in their daily lives. We have made it clear to the Local Area Partnership that the pace of improvement needs to be accelerated, and that we need to see clear quantitative and qualitative evidence of impact.

The department and NHS England's most recent Surrey review meeting, in July 2025, identified three urgent priority areas requiring action at pace: communication, data development, and governance arrangements to better monitor impact. Officials have shared this feedback with local leaders and have agreed to conduct an additional review meeting in three months to further assess progress; after which, the Department will consider its next steps for intervention.

With regard to the challenge of schools being named in EHC plans despite expressing concerns that they are unable to meet the needs of the child or young person, where an LA has issued an EHC plan the responsibility to secure the provision set out in the plan rests with the LA.

When an EHC plan is first drawn up, or following a review of the plan, parents have the right to request that a particular education setting be named on the plan, and the LA must consult with the requested school or institution. Further information on parental right to request a particular education setting be named on their child's EHC plan can be found in the SEND code of practice, which is available on GOV.UK at: tinyurl.com/4PNRTUD9.

Equally, as part of the EHC plan drafting process, LAs must consult a school or college before naming it in a plan, and the school or college can express concerns about being named. This can include making representations in relation to its total pupil population and its capacity where it feels that admitting the pupil might have an impact on the efficient education of other pupils already in the school. This is a matter that the LA would need to carefully consider in reaching its decision about whether to proceed to name the school. If the LA proceeds to name it in the plan, then the school or college is under a statutory duty to admit the child or young person.

Where a school feels that an LA has not carried out its statutory duties appropriately, they can make a complaint to the department by email at: academy.questions@education.gov.uk. However, whilst that complaint is being resolved, because the school is named in the EHC plan, it must admit the child with immediate effect.

We are aware of the challenges in the SEND system, and we understand how urgently they need to be addressed. You will appreciate that these are complex issues that require a considered approach to deliver sustainable change. My department is committed to improving support for all children and young people with SEND. We are working closely with experts on reforms, recently appointing a strategic advisor for SEND, who will play a key role in convening and engaging with the sector, including leaders, practitioners, children and families as we consider the future of SEND reform.

Details of the government's intended approach to SEND reform will be set out in a white paper in the autumn. As part of a reformed system, I would be very grateful to hear MPs' views on improving intervention pathways where councils are not delivering for children and young people with SEND to the standards we expect.

With regard to funding, the overall core schools budget (CSB) will total £65.3 billion in 2025 to 2026 compared to £61.6 billion in 2024 to 2025. This represents an increase of £3.7 billion for mainstream schools and young people with high needs in 2025 to 2026 compared to 2024 to 2025. It includes the £2.3 billion announced at the 2024 Autumn Budget and £1.4 billion in additional funding being provided to support schools with staff pay awards as well as the increases to employer National Insurance contributions (NICs) from April 2025. Following the Spending Review announcement, core schools funding, including SEND investment, will increase from £65.3 billion in 2025 to 2026 (including the additional funding announced in May 2025) to £69.5 billion by 2028 to 2029. This additional funding will provide an above real terms per pupil increase on the core schools budget, which will take per pupil funding to its highest ever level and enable us to transform the SEND system.

Total high needs funding is over £12 billion in financial year 2025 to 2026. Of the total high needs funding, £11.3 billion is allocated using a national funding formula (NFF), details of which were published in November 2024. The structure of the high needs NFF remains largely unchanged for the 2025 to 2026 allocations, as the government needed more time to consider what changes were necessary, both to make sure that we establish a fair education funding system that directs funding to where it is needed, and to support any SEND reforms that will be taken forward. £11.2 billion of the funding through the NFF is being allocated to LAs through the high needs funding block of the 2025 to 2026 dedicated schools grant (DSG). 2025 to 2026 DSG allocations were published in December 2024. The rest of the high needs funding total is being allocated through other grants to specialist provision, and the core schools budget grant.

Surrey County Council is being allocated £241 million through the high needs funding block of the DSG, an increase of £15.4 million on last year's DSG high needs block, calculated using the high needs national funding formula.

To support LAs to meet their statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for children with SEND or who require alternative provision, the department provides LAs with annual capital funding.

The department has published allocations for £740 million in high needs provision capital allocations for the 2025 to 2026 financial year. This funding can be used to adapt schools to be more accessible, to create specialist facilities within mainstream schools that can deliver more intensive support adapted to suit the pupils' needs and to create special school places for pupils with the most complex needs. Of this £740 million, Surrey County Council has been allocated £16.1 million for 2025 to 2026.

It is up to the LA to prioritise this funding to meet local need and you may wish to speak to Surrey County Council about how they are going to be using the funding that we are providing.

I would like to thank you again for raising your concerns with me both through correspondence, and in discussion, and to reassure you that the specific issues highlighted in your correspondence will be raised and addressed with Surrey County Council through ongoing discussions and through the department's in-depth monitoring of their SEND service improvement.

I am aware that you have also recently joined parent carers in delivering an open letter to the department which raises similar concerns about Surrey's SEND services. The Secretary of State will be responding to this letter in due course, allowing for the time required to fully consider the breadth and depth of the issues included in the letter.

Yours,



Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for School Standards