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Ask for: Anna Taylor  
Date: 10 September 2025

Dear Member

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WEDNESDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2025**

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Wednesday, 17 September 2025 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, the following report that was unavailable when the agenda was printed. This report is provided for information

**Agenda Item No**

D1 **Work Programme (Pages 1 - 48)**

**SEN Background Information**

Yours sincerely

Benjamin Watts  
General Counsel

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From: Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

Subject: SEN Update

Background Information (September 2025)

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides up to date background information for Scrutiny Committee Members' awareness in relation to future substantive items on SEND for inclusion on the Committee's work programme.

This is intended to be for the Committee's information only but is published with the agenda for transparency and openness.

## 1. Government monitoring

1.1 Work is continuing to improve the SEND service and to make it more financially sustainable. KCC is continuing to receive Department for Education (DfE) funding contributions towards the High Needs Funding deficit under the Safety Valve programme. The KCC Safety Valve reports are published and can be seen here [Safety Valve agreement](#)

1.2 Scrutiny Committee has previously considered reports on the Safety Valve in January 2025 [Scrutiny Committee, 29 January 2025](#) agenda item C1 pg. 185 and March 2025 [Scrutiny Committee, 18 March 2025](#) agenda item C4 page 113.

1.3 The DfE and NHS England continue to monitor the delivery and impact of outstanding actions in the Accelerated Progress Plan through attendance at the SEND Partnership Board and formally through twice yearly assessments when range of written and verbal evidence is considered. The feedback letter from the last assessment is included as Appendix 1. which shows the number of projects being monitored has reduced by 65%, from 127 to 45. The letter includes the areas/projects the DfE and NHSE are still monitoring.

## 2. Recent reports on key issues

2.1 The reports and documents referenced and appended to this report were considered at the most recent SEND Partnership Board in July 2025.

2.2 Previously the Scrutiny Committee considered data including completion of Education, Health and Care Plans within the 20-week statutory deadline on a quarterly basis, however since the inspection there has been a parallel focus on

improving the quality of EHCPs. There are a number of strands to the Quality Assurance process, including dip sampling of plans by the DfE. Appendix 2 provides a summary of the process and outcomes of the quality assurance of EHCPs.

- 2.3 Parents and carers of children and young people with special and additional needs are important stakeholders and a number of approaches are used to support parental engagement. An overview can be seen in Appendix 3.
- 2.4 Appendix 4 Early Years Vision Impairment Spring Event- Kent Life 2025 is the report of a parental engagement event where feedback is used to inform future planning.
- 2.5 KCC is committed to engaging children and young people in the SEND statutory processes. Appendix 5 How we capture youth voice is written by the Head of the Statutory Specialist Teaching and Learning Service and provides one example of the range of work going on to shape services to meet client needs.
- 2.6 Appendix 6 is a published article outlining the rationale for one of the student councils that KCC runs 'Student voice – Why did we feel the need for a sensory student council? Which outlines the rationale' for just one of the student councils run by KCC officers.

### **3. Contact Details:**

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### **Appendices Attached**

Appendix 1 Kent 3<sup>rd</sup> Review DfE NHSE Feedback 03.04.25 Final

Appendix 2 Quality of EHC plans - July 2025

Appendix 3 Parental engagement

Appendix 4 Early Years Vision Impairment Spring Event- Kent Life Review

Appendix 5 STLS Sensory and Physical Development Youth Voice report

Appendix 6 Why a student council?

Sarah Hammond, Director of Children's Services, Kent County Council.  
Lee Martin, Executive Director for SEND, NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board.

By email to: [Sarah.hammond@kent.gov.uk](mailto:Sarah.hammond@kent.gov.uk) and [lee.martin@nhs.net](mailto:lee.martin@nhs.net)

3 April 2025

Dear Sarah and Lee,

**Feedback following the Third Progress Review of Kent's Improvement Plan (APP)**

I am writing following the third Improvement Plan (APP) formal progress review meeting held on TEAMS on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

Thank you to you and your teams for the paperwork that was submitted prior to the meeting, for the contributions during the meeting itself, for the responses to our follow up questions after the meeting as well as the further parental feedback from Kent PACT.

During the meeting, the local area demonstrated a collective determination to continue making sustainable improvements to Kent's SEND services and to the lives of children and young people with SEND. The evidence provided in advance, alongside the additional information from partners, demonstrated a range of actions being taken to accelerate improvement.

Your Improvement Plan (APP) includes the nine areas that were highlighted by Ofsted/CQC as areas of weakness in Kent's local area SEND revisit in September 2022. Our summary and feedback on the evidence you submitted is set out below.

**Area 1: A widely held concern of parents that the local area is not able, or in some cases not willing, to meet their children's needs.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported ongoing improvement in the level of satisfaction from parents whose children are being issued with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. However, you are aware there is more to do to engage with families where EHCPs have been in place for some time. You reported that the SEN enquiries hub is helping with answering parent concerns and queries more efficiently, but it was not clear whether the wider body of parents would agree with this.

Based on the evidence and information provided at this review, it is view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress against actions 1A1, 1A3, 1B2, and 1E1. This means we will reduce formal monitoring of these actions.

The actions that we are still formally monitoring are: 1A2, 1B1, 1B3, 1C1, 1C2, 1C3, 1D1, 1D2, 1E2, 1E3, 1F1, 1F2, and 1F3.

For the next review we would like an update on all outstanding actions and in particular we are looking for:

- Evidence of improved communication with schools/families and the impact this is having.
- Focused feedback from parents on the implementation of new communication working practices by SEND officers in relation to keeping parents informed during EHC processes (Action 1A2).
- For Actions 1F1 – 1F3 we would like to see examples of the evidence you have that demonstrates the effectiveness of antenatal and postnatal support for families.

**Area 2: A variable quality of provision and commitment to inclusion in schools, and the lack of willingness of some schools to accommodate children and young people with SEND.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported an increase in the percentage of children and young people with SEND successfully educated in mainstream settings, and that you had received some positive feedback from school leaders and parents regarding more consistent application of inclusive practice.

To secure further progress in this area, the local area needs to ensure this inclusive practice is evident in the majority of schools in Kent, particularly in secondary schools where the response thus far has not been as widespread.

Based on the evidence and information provided at this review, it is view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress against actions 2A1, 2A4, 2D3, 2E2. This means we will reduce formal monitoring of these actions.

The actions that we are still formally monitoring are: 2A2, 2B1 and 2C1.

For the next review we would like an update on all outstanding actions and in particular we are looking for:

- An update on how you are supporting schools to take up the Autism Education Trust Training (Action 2A4).

**Area 3: That parents and carers have a limited role in reviewing and designing services for children and young people with SEND.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported some improvement in the engagement and co-production with children and

young people with SEND and their families on mental health pathways and the Lived Experience framework. You reported that there is better engagement with parents and carers and that these dialogues are influencing and shaping policies and practice. It was reported that parents are not confident that co-production is fully embedded, and this requires further work, including embedding the Co-production Charter.

Based on the evidence and information provided at this review, it is view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress against actions 3A2, 3D1, 3D2, and 3E1. This means we will reduce formal monitoring of these actions.

The actions that are still being formally monitored are: 3B2, 3B3, 3B5, 3C1, and 3C2.

For the next review we would like an update on all outstanding actions and in particular we are looking for:

- Evidence of engagement with families on Action 3B5.
- The latest report of the most recent termly meeting with Kent PACT held as part of the collaboration agreement (Action 3C1).

#### **Area 4: An inability of current joint commissioning arrangements to address known gaps and eliminate longstanding weaknesses in the services for children and young people with SEND.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported ongoing progress in this area. You provided a commissioning timetable and further information linking three SEND strategic priorities to the reprocurement of community services, which is led by Kent and Medway ICB. There are plans to continue rolling out the Lived Experience framework and you reported early signs of improvement in the language and practice of professionals across the Kent system. There is an ambition to embed the Lived Experience framework in contracts to underpin strategic work and commissioning thereby making lived experience a golden thread within strategic planning and design across the local area partnership.

Based on the evidence and information provided at this review, it is view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress against actions 4A2, 4B1, and 4C2. This means we will reduce formal monitoring of these actions.

The action that is still being formally monitored is: 4C3. For the next review we would like an update on this action. We would in particular like to see the data developed to support the local area partnership in the oversight of commissioned activity and the impact for children and young people with SEND and their families.

#### **Area 5: Poor standards achieved, and progress made, by too many children and young people with SEND.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported that the work of the inclusion champions is having a significant impact on schools' response to the outcomes framework, which has been refreshed following

feedback from stakeholders including young people. The local area confirmed that this will continue to be an area of focus, with both quantitative and qualitative evidence being collected to help shape future plans and maintain effective two-way communication regarding the outcomes framework.

Based on the evidence and information provided at this review, it is view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress against actions 5A1, 5A2, and 5E1. This means we will reduce formal monitoring of these actions.

The actions that are still being formally monitored are: 5B1, 5C1, 5C2, 5C3 and 5E3. For the next review we would like an update on all outstanding actions and in particular we are looking for:

- An update on the roll out of the Communities of Schools project and what impact this has had (Action 5B1).

**Area 6: The inconsistent quality of the EHC process; a lack of up-to-date assessments and limited contributions from health and care professionals; and poor processes to check and review the quality of EHC plans.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported significant progress in the timeliness of both new assessments and completing annual reviews. Further work is needed to secure improving quality of the content of plans, but you consider your multi-agency audits and quality assurance processes to be good, and that they are becoming embedded into the process as BAU. Although there has been an improvement in communications with parents and carers, you acknowledged that there is more to do to, as some parents – particularly those where the EHCP has been in place for some time – remain unsatisfied with the current communication systems in place.

Based on the evidence and information provided at this review, it is view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress against actions 6B1, 6B2, 6C1, 6D2, 6D3, 6F2, 6F3, 6G1, 6H2 and 6J2. This means we will reduce formal monitoring of these actions.

The actions that are still being formally monitored are: 6D1, 6E1, 6F1, 6F4, 6I1, 6J1, and 6J3. For the next review we would like an update on all outstanding actions and in particular we are looking for:

- An update on how Kent PACT are part of the quality assurance process for EHC plans and reviews (Action 6J1).

**Area 7: Weak governance of SEND arrangements across the EHC system at a strategic and operational level and an absence of robust action plans to address known weaknesses.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported ongoing progress in the area. We heard of the continuing commitment from senior leaders across the local area to effective partnership working to deliver improvements in SEND services. You are evolving SEND governance in Kent with



the introduction of the SEND Partnership Board (SPB), with an independent chair, membership based on expertise, and the inclusion of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills. The SPB has been designed to provide strategic oversight of SEND improvement across Kent, and to support this you are in the process of mapping all work across the Safety Valve programme, the APP and the 11 areas in the Area SEND inspection framework. You are very close to publishing your new SEND Strategy which has been developed over the past two years with education, health, and social care stakeholders, as well as parents/carers and young people.

There is only one action in this area that we are still monitoring closely which is 7B2, and we will continue to do so. For the next review we would like an update on the refresh of the Kent SEND strategy.

**Area 8: Unacceptable waiting times for children and young people to be seen by some health services, particularly CAMHS, tier two services, SALT, the wheelchair service and ASD and ADHD assessment and review.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported some further progress in the area. You reported a positive trajectory of the number of young people age 14+ with a learning disability having an annual health check and an increase in health action plans in place to meet their health needs.

There is a system wide Neurodiversity transformation plan, with several workstreams focused on providing 'support first' to children, young people and families, with a diagnosis or waiting for an autism assessment. However, despite the collective efforts across the system, the number of children and young people waiting for an autism assessment continues to rise.

We heard that the number of children and young people waiting, and the time waited, for a speech and language assessment has reduced, which is attributed to the Balanced System model. However, there are a number of children and young people waiting for longer than 12 weeks; a majority of these children and young people are from the Swale area. You have told us there will be further work to improve this through the community health services reprocurement.

Based on the evidence and information provided at this review, it is view of the Department and NHS England that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress against the action 8A3. This means we will reduce formal monitoring of this action.

The actions that are still being formally monitored are: 8A1, 8A2, 8A4, 8B1, 8C1, 8C2 and 8D1. For the next review we would like an update on all outstanding actions and in particular we are looking for:

- An update on plans to roll out the ND alternative screening and support interventions, including the offer and coverage across all areas.
- Data to evidence that children and young people with SEND and their families are supported whilst waiting for an autism assessment.
- A recovery plan to address the number of children and young people with SEND waiting for an ADHD assessment and treatment.

**Area 9: A lack of effective systems to review and improve outcomes for those children and young people whose progress to date has been limited by weaknesses in provision.**

In the evidence submitted and the information shared at the review meeting, you reported that the revised outcomes framework is becoming embedded, and that the scorecard captures statistical evidence to help the local area glean an overview of outcomes. You are aware of some specific areas that still require improvement, for example showing the impact of the anxiety-based school attendance (ABSA) initiative, and tuition provision for those children and young people not in school.

The Department and NHS England will continue to formally monitor the following actions: 9A1, 9A2, 9A3, and 9B1. For the next review we would like an update on all these outstanding actions.

**Summary**

In summary, it is evident that the local area has made further progress in all nine areas of the Improvement Plan (APP); though there is still progress to be made, particularly in demonstrating the impact of some of the remaining actions on the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families.

We know that this positive result is due to a great deal of commitment and hard work across the local area partnership to address the areas of weakness highlighted in the SEND revisit report by Ofsted and CQC in November 2022. We would like to thank you for everything you are doing to support the children and young people in your local area and encourage you to continue with these efforts and build on your successes across all remaining areas of your Improvement Plan (APP).

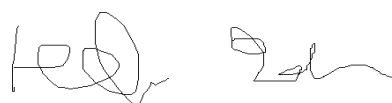
For the next review meeting, please report any relevant brief updates on actions that have been reduced for formal monitoring, along with a full update on all remaining actions in the Improvement Plan (APP). We will aim to arrange the third Improvement Plan (APP) review meeting for September 2025.

A copy of this letter goes to Councillor Roger Gough, Councillor Rory Love OBE, Christine McInnes, Abigail Kitt, Sophie Dann and Liz Flaherty.

Yours sincerely,



**Catherine Norrie**  
Assistant Director  
South East Vulnerable Children's Unit  
Region's Group  
Department for Education



**Helen Todman**  
Assistant Director of Mental Health,  
Learning Disabilities, Autism and SEND  
South East Region  
NHS England

## SEND Quality Assurance and Practice Development

Progress made on ensuring all EHC plans are of a good quality

1 July 2025

# What is the purpose of an EHC plan ?

- In order to make a judgement on the quality of the EHC plan we must first decide its purpose and against what are we judging.
- The definition of an EHC plan is a statutory document which identifies a child or young person's (CYP) special Educational Needs, Health Needs and SC Needs related to their SEN and the additional provision required to support those needs in order to achieve their outcomes, potential and the child's aspirations .
- There is no "blue print" as to what a "good" EHC plan looks like but the SEND Code of Practice provides guidance on what should be included

# The Legal requirements of an EHC plan



- An EHCP must include the following Sections
- A – the CYP's and parent's views wishes and aspirations
- B – a concise description of the CYPs identified special educational needs and the impact of those needs
- C- the health needs of the CYP related to the SEN
- D – the SC needs related to the SEN
- E -The Outcomes to be achieved to meet the needs in SEN Health and SC
- F The additional provision required to meet the SEN and achieve the Outcomes . This must be specified and quantified i.e. what is to be delivered, by whom and how often and how is it to be reviewed
- G- The additional provision required to meet the Health needs and achieve the Outcomes . This must be specified and quantified i.e. what is to be delivered, by whom and how often and how is it to be reviewed
- H1 and H2 The additional provision required to meet the SC and achieve the Outcomes . This must be specified and quantified i.e. what is to be delivered, by whom and how often and how is it to be reviewed
- I the description of the type of placement and the name of the setting
- J Personal budget
- K a list of the contributors to the EHC plan

# What do we do currently that ensures quality

We complete over 1000 audits each year for quality assurance on EHC plans and this also includes processes for assessment, EHC plans and Annual Reviews.

- The SEND Audit – an audit of the assessment process and the annual review process (20 of each) each audit is moderated by a senior leader. 6 cycles of audit per year on a bi-monthly basis
- Multi agency audit – currently this takes the form of a single case study using the SEND Inspection Framework assessment, the reviews will assess how highly ambitious their aspirations and outcomes are. The review evaluates to determine if the child has had the opportunity to be included in their community, have friendships, feel safe and valued, are resilient, as well as developed knowledge and skills to gain employment, move on to higher education or live as healthily and independently as possible. These happen every 2 months before the single case studies, multi agency audits consisted of a bi- monthly review of each of the professional services involved in a child with an EHC plan. E.g. Health; Social Care; Education; EP Service. This involved a random selection of about 10 cases with the service involvement and looked at the quality of the advice and information from the service, the impact on the EHC plan and areas for development. We also conducted a multi agency audit with PACT focusing on the views and wishes of the child and parents. This resulted in the production of a pioneering adaption of Section A of the EHC plan with 4 pathways for enabling the voice of the child to be heard according to their needs and age.
- On Vision Audits – a platform which is used by multiple authorities throughout the Country which identifies the overall quality of EHC plans as well as by Section. At least 40 audits are undertaken each month on a multi agency basis with auditors coming from SEN, EP service, Inclusion Service, Health, PACT. Audits are randomly selected and moderated by SEND QAPD members.
- Audits of draft initial EHC plans and Amendment Notices( draft amended EHC plans) before issue to parents – used as a CDP for staff as well as gatekeeper for ensuring draft are judged as Good as well as ensuring that the Final will be judged as Good. These audits are on a rolling basis and are arranged so that every officer has the opportunity for the CPD . A report is made each month on the audits undertaken.
- Audit of Annual Review process ( new from May 2025)
- 5 EHC plans are presented to DfE originally on a monthly basis but now mainly on a 3 monthly basis, which are judged as being Good as a moderation tool
- Feedback audits – learning from what others have thought of the processes
- Through analysis of all the audits to develop a “learning loop “ of improvements through Practice Development . Developments have included weekly cycle of training through Workshop Wednesdays / individualised induction and refresher programme (through SharePoint) -SEND Information Library channel with Guidance and process material; training documents; standardised wording suggestions; DELTA Training; Targeted support with staff; whole service training spending a day in a different part of the service – phase 1
- The audits are also used in the performance management of staff and are recorded on the Synergy database.

# Current position of our EHC plans

When auditing began only those EHC plans issued for the first time (Initial) were included. In Sept 2024 we included EHC plans amended through Annual Review First issue plans had more of a focus then and we are now working on improving the amended EHC plans

May 2024 Initial EHCP

Grade	Kent	National
Outstanding	0%	2%
Good	21%	40%
RI	66%	42%
Inadequate	13%	16%

Amended final EHC plans issued Sept 2024

Grade	Kent	National
Outstanding		1%
Good	21%	37%
RI	47%	46%
Inadequate	32%	17

May 2025 Initial and final EHC plans

Grade	Initial	Amended	Kent	National
Gold	0%	0%	0%	0%
Silver	59%	5%	29%	32%
Bronze	41%	76%	61%	46%
Significant Gaps	0%	19%	10%	22%

As can be seen from the above comparative tables there has been an improvement in overall gradings of EHC plans Individual Sections of the EHC plan have seen improvement as well Particularly in Sections A, B C, and E . The gradings have now changed in line with Ofsted; Gold = Outstanding; Silver= Good; Bronze = Requires Improvement and Significant Gaps = Inadequate

# Kent SEND Quality Assurance in the wider community

- The SEND QAPD Manager took part in a working party with Dame Christine Lenehan ( DfE lead advisor for SEND) and Deborah Glassbrook on Understanding Quality Assurance Frameworks for SEND Improvement working with Council for Disabled Children and DfE to produce a National Guidance for Writing Quality Assurance Frameworks for SEND.
- Our own SEND Quality Assurance Framework along with other documents was submitted as part of the research . The Kent Framework was held up as exemplar to be referred to in the Guidance and Dame Christine described our framework as excellent.
- As a result, we were also asked to provide a case study to be included in the national guidance on our workforce as it came through as integral to what we do. In particular our Quality Assurance Cycle and how it works in practice.
- Youth Justice – QAPD has supported Youth Justice in updating their framework and providing a consistent approach across services.



# Action points going forwards:

## 1. Targeted Professional Development and Recognition

- Implement structured 1:1 feedback for officers responsible for EHC plans graded as having “Significant Gaps,” focusing on developmental support and upskilling.
- Introduce a formal recognition system (e.g. “Gold Standard” acknowledgments) for officers producing high-quality plans, reinforcing a culture of excellence.

## 2. Strengthening Social Care Contributions

- Co-design improved guidance and shared expectations with Social Care colleagues to enhance the quality and consistency of input for Sections D, H1, and H2.
- Develop practical tools to support translation of professional advice into clear, accessible, and meaningful content for EHC plans.

## 3. Reinstating and Expanding Multi-Agency Audits

- Resume bi-monthly multi-agency audits involving Health, Social Care, EPs, and Education professionals to assess the quality and clarity of advice being submitted.
- Use audit insights to drive cross-agency workshops and improvement plans, ensuring all partners understand what high-quality input looks like.

## 4. Embedding the New EHCP Template and Pathways

- Roll out and monitor implementation of the updated EHCP template, including Appendix 1 with the four pathways to voice.
- Provide targeted training on embedding a clear “golden thread” from aspirations to provision and outcomes.

## 5. Quality and Consistency in Key EHCP Sections

- Deliver focused training on:
  - **Section F:** Writing provision that is specific, measurable, and distinguishable from universal offer.
  - **Sections D and G:** Effectively utilizing Social Care and Health advice in EHCPs.
- Continue 1:1 pre-issue coaching for officers to quality-check draft plans and ensure consistency of standards.

## 6. Enhanced Partnership Working and Shared Accountability

- Engage partner agencies in reviewing the quality of advice provided, supported by re-established multi-agency case audits from September.
- Develop shared improvement objectives with Health, Education and Social Care partners based on audit outcomes.

## 7. Improving Quality of Amended EHC Plans

- Strengthen links with schools via SENCo forums and webinars to raise understanding of amendment processes and expectations.
- Create exemplars and practical tools to support schools in producing high-quality review documentation that leads to robust plan amendments.

# Challenges

- Advice and Information . EHC plans are only as good as the advice and information received from professionals . It is sometimes difficult for officers to interpret the professional language used by our professional colleagues which means that information may be missed . Surgeries are now in place with Health, Social Care and EP service for the Assessment Service although capacity prevents this extending to the Casework service. However more work is needed to ensure needs are accurately described, Outcomes are presented in Advice and Information and are S.M.A.R.T. and additional provision is specified and quantified.
- Quality Assurance of the advice and Information from professionals is needed to ensure the correct information is received and the needs and required provision are better identified. From September the Multi agency audits will be re-established – alongside the single case studies. This is to analyse what is being received as Advice and Information and that it is fit for purpose. Joint working on this will help our partner agencies take forward to their service colleagues what is good and what needs to improve in terms of [providing SEND with impactful and timely advice and information.
- Raising the quality of amended EHC plans. We are working closely with both Schools ( SENCo Form and webinars for SENCos) to ensure that the process of Annual Review meetings and the reports required enable robust decisions on EHC plans including accurate amendments based on evidence received.

## **Board Reporting Template**

This template is designed for officers to report to the board, providing key updates, progress, and recommendations aligned with the board's objectives.

Submission Date: 24/06/2025

Officer Name and Role: Christine McInnes, Director of Education

## 1. Report Title and Submission Details

- Report Title: Update on parental
- Date of Submission: 23/06/2025
- Officer Name and Role: Christine McInnes, Director of Education
- Reporting Period: 2024-25

## 2. Purpose and Context

This report provides an update on work being undertaken across the system on engaging with parents and carers and how their input influences service development. Being able to evidence how leaders take account of the views of parents and how this intelligence is used to shape services will be considered during inspection.

The SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) highlights the expectation of co-production with parents/carers both at an individual level in relation to their own child or children, working together as equal partners with professionals to design, plan, deliver and review support and services to achieve shared outcomes. At a more strategic level there is an expectation parents (and their children) are involved in discussions and decisions about local provision. This includes reviewing educational and training provision and social care provision, and in preparing and reviewing the Local Offer.

Whilst the COP is more specific in its definition of co-production and this has informed the Kent Area Co-production Charter, Ofsted take a more flexible approach and will be looking for evidence of influencing practice and outcomes, rather than focusing on true co-production, which is a very resource intensive and lengthy process, so not always appropriate.

The key criteria referenced in the Evaluation schedule of the Area SEND Inspection Guidance and handbook April 2024 related to co-production include:

“ 31. Inspectors will evaluate the impact of the local area partnership’s SEND arrangements on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, including the extent to which:

- children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support...”

“ 32. Inspectors will evaluate how the local area partners work together to plan, evaluate and develop the SEND system, including the extent to which:

- leaders actively engage and work with children, young people and families

- leaders evaluate services and make improvements and
- leaders create an environment in which effective practice and multi-agency working can flourish.”

We are working towards addressing these expectations in the SEND improvement work and further embedding parental engagement and co-construction.

### 3. Key Updates and Progress

#### 3.1 The Kent Approach

Kent has a multi-faceted approach to parental engagement, collecting feedback and on occasion when it is appropriate co-construction.

Kent Parents and Children Together (KPACT) is the DfE recognized, statutory Parent Carer Forum (PCF) for Kent. Their role is to work with the LA and NHS to gather the voice of families to 'design, develop, review, and improve services and support for children and young people with disabilities 0-25 yrs in SEND.'

The DfE provided consultancy support from the Council for Disabled Children in 2024 to facilitate a greater understanding across all stakeholders about the terminology used in relation to engagement, consultation, and co-production. This informed the development of a draft Kent Co-Production Charter, which is in the final draft prior to expected publication in September 2025.

The relationship between KPACT and Kent (primarily KCC and the ICB representatives) is formalised through a collaboration agreement that was co-constructed with Kent PACT and signed off in October 2023 refreshed through an annually agreed plan.

**3.1.1 Examples of How Kent PACT Has Gathered the Voices of Families to Design, Develop, Review, and Improve Services** - Kent PACT is committed to ensuring that the voices of parent carers are central to shaping local SEND services. As a small organisation with limited resources, we continue to prioritise meaningful engagement wherever possible. Below are key examples of how we have actively gathered and used family feedback to inform and influence service design and delivery.

**3.1.2 Co-Production** - Co-production lies at the heart of Kent PACT's approach. We believe services are most effective when designed in partnership with the families who use them. However, meaningful co-

production is time- and resource-intensive. As a small parent carer forum serving the largest county in England, limited staffing and volunteer capacity require us to prioritise carefully.

Despite these constraints, we remain committed to co-production wherever feasible and continue to advocate for sustainable infrastructure and support to scale our efforts effectively.

**3.1.3 Focus Groups and Forums** - Kent PACT has developed and facilitated themed focus groups and forums to collect direct feedback from families. These sessions, held in partnership with key service providers and SEND stakeholders, are designed to be inclusive, accessible, and grounded in lived experience.

Examples include:

- Education & Inclusion: Topics such as SEN support, transitions, and “myth-busting” for communities of schools, delivered with education partners.
- Health Engagement: Parent carer input into the NHS Balanced System for Speech and Language Therapy (SALT).
- Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG): Sessions delivered with professionals (e.g., IASK, Local Offer), including roadshows and community events.

These events enable families to identify service gaps, propose improvements, and receive direct support navigating the system.

**3.1.4 Surveys and Consultations** - Kent PACT actively promotes local authority and partner consultations and conducts independent engagement through:

- Targeted polls
- Formal surveys
- Online and in-person feedback sessions through webinars.

Recent and planned survey topics include:

- Biannual SEND survey (July 2025)
- Short breaks provision
- School transport
- Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme
- Transitions between educational stages

### 3.1.5 Targeted Engagement with Marginalised Groups - Kent PACT

recognises that mainstream engagement often excludes some families. To address this, we have prioritised inclusive outreach by:

- Representing neurodivergent children and young people on the ND Steering Group.
- Engaging parents of children in Alternative Provision
- Supporting neurodivergent-led families with tailored workshops
- Working with families from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds

Examples of targeted actions include:

- Working with Family Hubs to share early help and training opportunities.
- Offering a 6-week wellbeing workshop for burned-out parent carers, led by a therapeutic professional.
- Investing in and delivering the Exeter University **Healthy Parent Carer** programme, including a bespoke **SEND Dads course** delivered by trained SEND dads.

### 3.1.6 Strengthening Communication and Engagement - Since 2023, Kent PACT has significantly enhanced its communication and engagement impact. Improvements include:

- Enhanced staff training
- Investment in a new CRM system
- Expanded media and marketing expertise

These steps have resulted in more professional, accessible communications and a substantial increase in engagement. Between March 25 and June 25 alone, we recorded **81,349 views** - a **68% increase** in social media engagement since 2023.

### 3.1.7 Conclusion - Despite the challenges of limited capacity, Kent PACT continues to demonstrate the impact of authentic parent carer engagement. By actively listening to and amplifying the voices of families, we contribute to more informed, inclusive, and effective services for children and young people with SEND across Kent.

## 3.2 KCC

### 3.2.1 Evaluation Practice - Parents and carers have regular opportunities to submit evaluations (at the completion of the EHCP process and following an Annual Review) and a new Feedback Framework is used to collate

information for consideration in decision-making. An example of how this feedback is used to influence includes through the 'Talk Tuesday' initiative. In 2024, nearly 16,000 calls were made to parents during dedicated engagement hours. This provided a consistent platform for families to be heard and supported. Learning from this initiative has informed quality assurance practices, workforce training, and better complaint resolution, particularly within the post-16 team who now have protected communication time each day.

**3.2.2 The Information and Guidance offer including the SEND Enquiries Hub.** This Hub handles high volume of phone calls and emails, the SEND Roadshows and the newly launched SENDCast interactions. The whole offer has recorded over 25,000 direct engagements in 2024.

**3.2.3** Qualitative feedback specifically about the Hub included highlights its effectiveness. Families described the service as “clear,” “brilliant and very understanding,” and “second to none.” Many parents reported feeling “guided,” “listened to,” and “valued,” with one parent noting, “They helped me understand what to do next and followed up quickly.”

**3.2.4** The Enquiries Hub also provides trend data which is shared across the service and inform system improvements. Analysis of the first 5 months of 2025 queries shows recurring themes around:

- How to navigate the EHCP application and review process
- Understanding Autism and ADHD diagnosis pathways
- Clarifying post-16 transitions and support
- Managing timelines, delays, and communication breakdowns

In response, several improvements are being put into place:

- Revised online FAQs and decision-tree visuals for EHCP and diagnosis pathways
- Stronger integration with Family Hubs for earlier navigation and trusted points of contact including SEND staff working from Hubs
- Targeted staff training for Enquiries Officers to ensure more consistent messaging and improved escalation routes
- Targeted training for staff on communication and customer service
- Communication has also been embedded in our revised performance management targets.



- 3.2.5** Case studies and interviews with parents and carers, young people and education colleagues to celebrate success, identify challenges and promote what is happening across Kent in our education sector are now being collected. Building on this, the SEND service is currently organising SEND staff attendance at school coffee mornings across Kent to be part of conversation and be a part of the local community. These changes are being implemented following direct feedback from families.
- 3.2.6** SEND Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) Roadshows have significantly increased access to trusted information for families across Kent. Throughout 2024, these place-based events were delivered in partnership with Family Hubs and local services. They reached over 15,484 families, with an additional 9,743 individuals engaging via the newly launched SENDCast (available on Facebook) and online content linked to these sessions. Across these events, more than 600 direct click-throughs and 18,000 video views were recorded, reflecting both reach and sustained engagement with IAG content online.
- 3.2.7** Feedback collected via event evaluations and comments has been overwhelmingly positive. Families consistently described the events as:
- “Very informative.”
  - “I learnt about services I didn’t know existed.”
  - “Now I know where to get the support I need.”
  - “Brilliant range of support for different age groups.”
  - “Really helpful — thank you so much.”
- 3.2.8** The impact extended to professionals too. Family Hub staff reported increased confidence in discussing local SEND services with families, contributing to greater trust in the universal offer. These joint-working relationships were foundational in increasing accessibility of support earlier in a family's journey. The events also generated valuable intelligence on what families need and where service gaps are felt. A trend analysis of IAG interactions found that families most frequently sought support or clarification around:
- Navigating EHCP processes and post-assessment delays
  - Understanding Autism/ADHD diagnosis and support pathways
  - Clarifying post-16 options and transitions
  - Mental health and well-being services for children and young people
  - Access to inclusive recreational activities and social groups.
- 3.2.9** In direct response to this feedback, the following changes are being implemented in 2025:
- A dedicated post-16 event planned for Tunbridge Wells and a cluster-based approach in Sevenoaks working with local schools

- Stronger partnerships with schools and SENCos to improve early information sharing
- Visual and interactive planning tools being added to the Local Offer site, based on family feedback requesting easier navigation and clearer timelines
- Further integration of IAG into Family Hub models to ensure continuity of messages across the system.

**3.2.10 KCC benefits from continuous consultation through the involvement of experts by experience.**

By embedding expert voices directly into program design, KCC ensures that its services remain responsive and relevant to the complex, real-life challenges faced by families.

Key programs influenced by these experts include:

- Designated Key Worker Program: This initiative assigns experienced individuals to provide tailored support, guiding families through complex needs and individual care plans.
- Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway: Designed to streamline assessment procedures for conditions such as autism, ADHD, and other developmental challenges, ensuring timely and accurate support for CYP.
- Children and Young People's Crisis and Complex Care Program: This program supports families managing acute mental health and behavioral needs, offering immediate intervention and ongoing care resources.

**3.2.11 Multi-agency quality assurance audits.** The QA team undertake regular audits of EHCPs, with findings fed into system development, training and individualized feedback to individual staff. Multi agency audits also take place where the team includes KCC officers, Health representatives and KPACT, again with findings being fed into service development. In July 2024 the Multi agency audit had a particular focus on Section A of the EHCP.

**3.2.12** The audit examined 10 EHCPs issued between April and June 2024 and highlighted significant inconsistencies in how the child/young person and parent/carer voice was captured and represented. Only 30% of plans clearly presented views from both children and their families, while in 70% of cases, it was not evident whose voice was being represented or how it was gathered. In over 60% of plans, Section A did not reflect a holistic or individualised view of the child or young person. Instead, views were often drawn from third-party reports, with limited use of direct quotes, adapted formats, or trauma-informed language.

- 3.2.13** This learning directly informed the development of a revised Section A template, which the redesigned template places greater emphasis on:
- Clearly identifying whose views are being shared (child, parent, both)
  - Capturing direct voice using appropriate communication methods
  - Including 'how best to communicate with me' guidance as standard
  - Structuring content around strengths, aspirations, and lived experience.
- 3.2.14** Parents consistently advocated for clearer, more personal representation of their child, especially in the early sections of EHCPs that set the tone for provision and outcomes. The new Section A reflects this by ensuring that Appendix 1 is actively used, promoted, and supported during the planning process, and by discouraging reliance on second-hand summaries from professionals. This is a strong example of how parental voice, supported by data and collaborative audit, is leading not just to better individual plans, but to systemic service improvement.
- 3.2.15 The work of the Commissioning Service** - Following engagement with parents and carers the Short Breaks Activities Grant Prospectus was designed and published. The objectives of this programme are:
- Provide a break for parents and carers to enable them to continue their caring duties.
  - Provide meaningful activities for children and young people when their carer is on a break.
  - Distribution of available funding based on an agreed set of variables.
  - Commission an equitable offer of short break provision to meet variable levels and types of need.
  - Ensuring a wide range of available short break activities across the county at different times and meet differing needs e.g., school holidays, weekends, after school to meet the needs of both the CYP and parent/carers.
  - Ensure a broad range of activities available for all age ranges.
- 3.2.16** The assessment of submitted bids were assessed remotely by four members of KPACT, a representative from the Wellbeing for Schools Project, and a commissioner. The representatives from Kent PACT included a parent who has a lived experience of a child with a disability. Whilst it is difficult to compare the current activities with the previous commissioning process due to differences in reporting, there has been a reduction in no-shows of 36% between 2023/24 and 2024/25 demonstrating that the activities are more tailored as a direct result of engagement from the outset.

**3.2.17** Together with Parents is a commissioned service developed in 2022. The service supports parents and carers whose child is currently on the waiting list for a Neurodiversity (ND) diagnosis and is also in receipt of Integrated Children's Services. The aim of the service is to support parents and carers to build resilience and self-help strategies to avoid reaching crisis whilst awaiting assessment. The service was developed through co-production with parents and carers. The key feedback was that parents valued a service that understood their needs, anxieties and stresses, that sitting on a waiting list for up to three years can create, for both the child and the wider family. We listened to their feedback and created a service that has a staff team with lived experience and feedback from families throughout the contract has been extremely positive (case studies can be provided).

**3.2.18** Since its inception in May 2022 TWP have supported 1,520 families through the service. This includes (but not limited to) 3,978 face-to-face family meetings, 560 peer support groups (average six per week), 455 Cygnet Programmes (average four per week, term time only), reduced the Cygnet waiting list by 265 families in 2023/24 and employs 12 (7.5FTE) staff members with lived experience. The majority of Cygnet and Peer Support sessions are delivered in the evening, from 9pm to 11pm and they are trialing an early morning one during the school holidays from 7am - 9am. Due to their lived experience and the complex lives these families live, these times work better, and attendance is good, especially for those families with adolescents.

### **3.3 The Integrated Care Board**

**3.3.1** The ICB's approach is included in two key documents both published in 2024. The Lived Experience Engagement and Employment Framework was jointly produced by KCC, Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway to support all levels of engagement including co-production which is being implemented locally. This can be viewed here <https://www.kmhealthandcare.uk/get-involved/lived-experience-engagement-and-employment-framework>

**3.3.2** In September 2024, Kent and Medway ICB Children's Team published a report on How the voices of children, young people and families are gathered and how they are used to improve their experience and outcomes' and this can be viewed here - <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=127799>

**3.3.3** Work has been reported previously, one example of the Social Media Plan for The Balance System is included in appendix 1.

### 3.4 Joint KCC and Integrated Children's Board

**3.4.1 PINS** (Promoting Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools) project in Maidstone. This nationally funded (Department for Education (DfE), supported by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England (NHSE) pilot project has been rolled out initially in Maidstone and is now being expanded to Thanet. It aims to support a joint KCC and IBC programme to reduce the waiting list for ASD diagnosis, establishing a whole school approach to supporting a wider range of needs by strengthening the universal offer, as well as establishing early identification and intervention for Neurodiverse children in mainstream schools. Collaboration with parents and carers is integral to the programme and this aspect of the work has been supported by KPACT.

**3.4.2** One outcome was the development of a comprehensive menu of support for parents in response to their requests and the establishment of parent/carers fora in each participating school to make the partnership sustainable going forward. More information including on the Parent Forums can be seen here [Supporting neurodivergent children in Kent schools - News & Features - Kent County Council](#)

**3.4.3** The participating schools' self-evaluation includes data on co-production and parental engagement which includes assessment against the following criteria:

- Ensure we make greater use of parental voice in some of our decision making around our provision
- Continuing our efforts to engage all our parents
- Reflect with our parents and how we are consistent with the information that we share with them
- Create opportunities to more formally gain SEND parent voice when considering policies and practice (parent forums) Which showed improvement.

**3.4.4 The Balance System** - Recently parents/carers were brought together to co-produce information about the Balanced System. An FAQ document was developed which was aimed at parents/carers already receiving support from speech and language therapy services. However, after discussion with our parent engagement group, it eventually iterated into information that schools would be provided with to put on their websites to

explain the Balanced System to all parents and carers. The group have also supported us around development of social media posts to explain the Balanced System for parents.

### 3.5 Key Performance Indicators

**3.5.1** This reports includes just some of the work that is ongoing with parents and some examples of the impact of the engagement. Despite the significant increase in investment of officer time in engagement, we are not seeing evidence of this translate into more parental confidence in the SEND system. In the interests of streamlining reporting and in view of the challenges of developing an appropriate KPI related to parents, a new simplified score card has been developed for the Board which does not include a parental KPI. The Board will want to consider how to support, challenge and make a judgement about this important area of work.

**3.5.2 Risks and Challenges** - There is a continued risk of reputational damage and that this will influence the outcome of the next area inspection. Whilst before the local election, given success in making tangible improvements to the SEND system meant there was an easing of reporting requirements, creating greater capacity in the senior leadership team to devote to comms and engagement there are now growing demands for FOIs, media enquiries and reporting which is eroding the time available to devote to positive comms.

Content is being generated, and discussions are underway about changing the methodology for disseminating positive stories to build greater confidence in the system, for example by the Partnership Board (and the post 16 Pathways for All Board) developing a social media presence and being used to disseminate information.

The second key risk is accessing a range of parental views, particularly during inspection. As can be seen from the quotes above there is positive feedback, however it is currently very difficult to give voice to these parents and carers during assessments and the inspection.

**3.5.3 Recommendations for Board Action** - The Board is asked to note the contents of the report and advise on:

- views related to the current direction of travel with regard to the breadth of engagement, influence and co-production with parents

- how officers can better demonstrate the strategic use of data to evidence the influence of parents and carers of the development of services
- to give a view of how the Board would want to consider this area going forward
- how to better mitigate the risks in this area
- to agree with the development of a Board social media presence and for this to be used to raise the profile of the SEND development work particularly the influence of parents in service improvement.

## 4. Appendices

### Appendix 1 - Social Media Plan for The Balance System



TBS Social Media  
Plan July 25 report.pdf

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## **Early Years Vision Impairment Spring Event- Kent Life 2025**

On Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2025, our Spring Event for vision impaired pre-schoolers took place at Kent Life in Maidstone. This event was offered to all our VI and MSI families with pre-school aged children.

The weather was perfect with lots of sunshine which definitely made a difference as we had 11 families joining us. We had 11 vision impaired children with an additional 5 siblings. It was so lovely to see two older siblings not only playing with and supporting their own sister, but they offered to help the adults organise the activities and played with some of the other vision impaired children. It was also lovely to see most of our families bringing other family members with them to make a day of it.

We offered a selection of activities based in the Village Hall. These offered sensory experiences as well as an opportunity for children to play together. We had a farm play activity set up in a paddling pool, a baby sensory area for under 2s and a doodle table.



We also made a Spring flower picture with each child (including siblings) using paint and hand and foot prints.



In addition to the activities that we provided, we had a visit from some animals. Ed, from Kent Life brought 2 rabbits, a ferret and a guinea pig for all the children to stroke and say hello to. Then at the end he brought in a very large fluffy sheep. Some of the children weren't too sure as it was bigger than most of them but lots of them enjoyed giving her a stroke. This activity, which we did at our event last year, went down really well again with all the children sitting patiently waiting their turn.



Throughout the day, there were opportunities for the families to get to know each other or have a catch up as some already knew each other from other events they have attended. They were also able to catch up with our team and the mobility officers from KAB (Jent Bent and Nicola Tallon).

We finished with the ever popular parachute and then families were able to go and explore the rest of Kent Life.

### **Feedback from families**

In what way was your child engaged with the activities?

- Hands on with the animals
- He liked the sensory and messily activities that were set up
- S loved feeling and touching the animals.
- Enjoyed painting hands and feet to make a picture, loved the sensory toys and books
- Played with toys and touched the animals

Did you get the opportunity to chat with the other families and VI team? If so was this helpful?

- Was nice to be in a social situation with families who understand each others circumstances. We have met some life long friends thanks to the VI team
- Yes lovely to meet old and new friends
- Yes, spoke to a few members of the team and found them very reassuring and helpful

Is there anything else you would like to say about the day?

- Pleasant experience for all
- It was very good, a thoroughly enjoyable day, thank you!
- The day was lovely, thank you for having us.
- Weather turned out lovely

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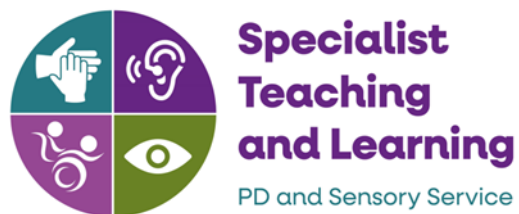


## Board Reporting Template

This template is designed for officers to report to the board, providing key updates, progress, and recommendations aligned with the board's objectives.

Submission Date: 25.6.25

Officer Name and Role: Rory McDonnell, Head of STLS Sensory and Physical Disabilities



## 1. Report Title and Submission Details

- Report Title: **How we capture youth voice**

**“It made me feel proud to be deaf”.**

This is a comment from a deaf child in Thanet who attended one of our recent activity sessions called “Sound Circle”. It’s a lovely quote and just as important: it is evidence of how we as a service listen to and engage with the learners we work with all the time, we value their comments and their thoughts and I hope this report will show this is embedded in all our practice.

There is a range of work on pupil voice within KCC and this report focuses on just one aspect from STLS Sensory and PD.

- Date of Report Submission: 25.6.25
- Officer Name and Role: Rory McDonnell, Head of STLS Sensory and Physical Disabilities
- Reporting Period: June 2025

## 2. Purpose and Context

- Provide a brief summary of the purpose of this report.
- Explain how this report aligns with the board’s objectives or priorities.
- The purpose of this report is to give the board an overview of how KCC staff in CYPE capture the opinions of the children and young people we work with. In particular it will focus on the activities of staff working with learners who have sensory impairment, physical disability and complex medical needs, and communication needs. Other KCC CYPE teams are also involved in a great deal of SEN youth engagement work which could become a focus of a future report.
- The STLS Sensory and PD Teams are made up of 49 CYPE staff. They are specialist teachers, specialist outreach and technology officers, and administration support. This includes specialist teachers of the deaf, of vision impairment, and for multi-sensory impairment, specialist teachers for physical disability and complex medical needs, as well as play specialists for vision impairment, a technology officer for VI, and two intervenors for children with multi-sensory impairment. The team was based at Valence School in the past and joined KCC in January 2023. The team visit children across the whole county, they visit children in all educational settings and in their homes. The team are commissioned to work with children from birth to age 18 but work with young adults up to 25. The team provide a great deal of training, specialist advice and guidance, 1 to 1 and small group teaching, and provide technology to support learning such as remote microphone systems, and braille notetakers. Growing numbers

of the children that the team support are successfully placed in mainstream schools in their communities. A smaller proportion attend specialist placements.

- The team also run a range of inclusive projects that bring the children and families together (see updates and progress for some examples).
- The team has a strong reputation nationally. For example, the team acts as the regional centre of expertise for multi-sensory impairment (in the past described as deaf-blind); the team has consistently supported the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NATSIP); and two of the team teach at Birmingham University on the specialist teacher training programmes there. One member of the team co-chairs the CRIDE Survey committee (CRIDE - Consortium for Research into Deaf Education – is a national group of Multi-disciplinary professional who work with deaf learners. The group consider areas that impact deaf learners achievement for example staffing, resources, and service provision within deaf education). Together with a small group nationally one of our team led the planning and coordination for a national conference in MSI in Birmingham in May this year. The feedback from the event has been very positive and another is being planned for next year.
- Staff in our team know that by maintaining such national connections that we bring the latest initiatives and approaches back to KCC to reinforce delivery of strong outcomes for the children we support here in Kent.
- **Key data:**
- Number of children and young people we support (active cases, June 2025):

Please note that the areas of need we support are sometimes described as ‘low incidence’ disabilities, and that is why the data here will look rather different compared to data for children who are neurodiverse for example.

Area of Need:	Number of children and young people
Hearing Impairment	511 Total Preschool/Nursery 85 Primary 182 Secondary 244
Vision Impairment	527 Total Preschool/Nursery 63 Primary 186 Secondary 222 Year 14 and beyond 56
Multi-Sensory Impairment	37 Total Preschool/Nursery 4 Primary 11 Secondary 22
PD and Complex Medical	314 Total Preschool/Nursery 43 Primary 164 Secondary 107

### 3. Key Updates and Progress

- Summarize the status of ongoing projects or initiatives.

STLS Sensory and PD run a number of projects and initiatives, and youth voice is embedded into all of them. The projects include:

- **Sensory Student Council** (meets 3 to 4 times a year, the number of learners involved is 15 from across the county, when students have left and others have taken their place). Sophie Dann and her colleagues will attend the next meeting on Saturday 28th June.
- **North/West Kent VI meet up:** This group is run for learners in secondary school. Activities include: pottery, golf, goal ball, wall climbing and many more. It helps them not to feel alone and to socialise and make friends. A lot of the learners are friends now outside of the group and message and meet up. Recently one of the VI learners at the age of 14 got invited to her first birthday party of another teenage VI learner. This moment alone makes all of our efforts worthwhile. The normal attendance for this group is 12 to 14 VI teenagers.
- **All My Own Work** (run for years 2 through to 11)- opportunity for learners to come together to talk about their vision impairment and what that means for them, to develop ways of coping with difficult situations that arise because of their vision impairment and build strategies for these, to consider how they develop their independence and goals for the future, to consider the skills that they need for employment and how to advocate their needs. It also allows them an opportunity to talk to each other about their experiences and share thoughts on how things could be better for them. It allows them to have a voice and be open and honest about anything related to their vision impairment. They can also question and challenge ideas and get advice from the QTVIs running the sessions. For the most recent groups the attendance was as follows: Year 3: 11 attendees; Year 6: 5 attendees; year 9: 7 attendees; year 11: 9 attendees.
- **VIP clubs-** (Vision Impairment Primary Clubs in Thanet) run for Primary aged pupils currently. It gives VI learners the opportunity to come together in a relaxed environment and have fun, playing games and taking part in planned activities. They get to meet children just like them and talk about what they do in and out of school. It is a chance for them to celebrate being special and make new friends. They have the opportunity to share with the group what they have been up to when we have 'biscuit and drink' time! The attendance at a recent event was 8 attendees.
- **Sound Circle and Sound Social** are the HI equivalent of VIP club, also in Thanet. Sound Circle is for Primary and Sound Social for Secondary. The Secondary group is a lot more structured. See attached slides with comments from the children about the latest primary session. Sample comments: "I liked meeting and seeing other children with hearing aids". Another comment: "I liked playing the games with the older learners". Sound circle is regularly attended by around 10 learners and Sound social by 15- 20 learners.



- **Little Ears** Deaf Children's Toddler Group in Maidstone (changing name soon to Mini Sound Circle); 10 to 12 families normally attend, at least six times a year.
- **MSI Family Days:** three times a year, including an SEN friendly panto at Meadowfield on a Saturday every Christmas. 14 families regularly attend these events.
- **VI Toddler Group:** Folkestone, at least once a term, five families regularly attend.
- **VI Early Years Spring Event:** we have run this twice ('24 and '25), and are already planning the 2026 event, see attached for a summary, which includes parental feedback, some of the children are too young to comment but if you look at the photos their happiness at the event shines through. 11 families attended the event this year.
- **HI Family days** – this is a new initiative, and 6 families attend the initial event at local country park to meet families with deaf children. We intend to run 3 events annually and rotate the locations around the county.
- **The Great Kent Sensory and PD Exhibition** 13.7.25 This is the latest iteration of a series of events run by the service since the 1990s. We have run Deaf Expo and VI Expo a number of times, our next event aims to bring this together and be a little bit bigger as it involves children and their families across Sensory and PD, the next event will be at Cornwallis and is a cross between a Sensory/PD summer fete and an exhibition. Many of the children and young people we work with happily attend mainstream schools and nurseries... we know they also really value the opportunity throughout the year to meet other children with similar needs and we create those opportunities. It's very important for their well-being.

## Sensory Student Council (SSC)

As a sensory service, we already gather views from our learners through a variety of means including postcards, questionnaires, and previously through our 'On the Road to Independence' events.

**Every child has an annual report** and there is **always a section for child voice or student voice** in their report. We value their views and regularly seek them.

However, we wanted to gather more in-depth views and felt setting up a student council for our learners would be one way to achieve this, please see the attached article published in the Magazine of the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf in September 2023 for a summary. The article was written by Gill Coates, Specialist Teacher for Hearing Impairment with our service. The magazine goes out across the UK and internationally.

The SSC is an ongoing project and the learners and staff involved meet at least three to four times a year.

In the last year the learners involved have made video clips talking about school and life which we shared with DfE colleagues in January. We would be happy to share them with the board (sharing permissions are in place).

The next event/most recent SSC event is on 28.6.25, and student members of the SSC will also be attending our Exhibition event in July to help out.

Sample video comments from a VI learner/member of the SSC in relation to the future and support:

Question: "What would you want a parent of a newly diagnosed visually impaired baby to know?"

"I would want them to know that there's always going to be specialists and people that are willing to help in a time of need"

Question: "And how will the future look?"

"I think that a good way of thinking about that is that disability is not a barrier and that there's only other ways of going about it".

### **Annual Surveys of Parents and of young People age 16+**

We send formal surveys out to parents, sencos and young people we work with annually. Comments are overwhelmingly positive, when they are negative we follow up to find out why and see what can be improved. In last year's 16+ survey 80% of respondents thought our service was excellent (rating our service as 5 out of 5), and 20% thought very good (rating of 4 out of 5).

Sample comments from the 16+ survey last year:

- "Teacher x would give my reports in a lot of detail and run back through them with me to ensure they were right, this allowed for clear communications and the appropriate decisions to be made for me in school"
- "Teacher x gave me so much information about my hearing impairment, she even taught me how to read audiograms which has been extremely useful".
- "Teacher x helped me a lot with career goals".
- "My school would appropriately respond to my needs due to the reports Teacher x would make and they have become more educated on my hearing impairment - this never would've happened without Teacher x's help"

Sample comments from the parental survey last year:

- “The team member is amazing, you can tell she truthfully cares about the children. She has assisted so much with visits at home, sessions out of home and at nursery. She’s always very detailed with her reports and has helped a lot with knowledge of which specialists my son should be under. He also loves the sessions and everyone leaves happy”.
- “The team member is brilliant. She is so good at communicating with us as parents and helping us understand what his challenges are visually in school and learning and what can be done to support him”.
- “The team member is an absolute expert in her field. She combines this with empathy & understanding to help me as a parent, but also to help teaching & members of senior leadership in schools understand and deliver their obligations. Her approach appears to make it easier for teachers & members of senior leadership accept necessary help and training from her”.

#### 4. Impact Seen

- Describe the tangible or measurable impacts observed from the initiatives or actions undertaken.
- Highlight improvements or outcomes directly benefiting stakeholders.

Redacted comments from learner’s views in their reports, the views have been amended to protect anonymity, please note ... we include learner’s views in every formal report we write. All of our formal reports are proofread before sending by another colleague, we have a system in place for this, we encourage each other to proof read and edit so that we can ensure high quality reporting:

- Sample one: “Student one preferred being at College X but was open with me about why he had to transfer to a different college. He is enjoying his course and feels that he is accessing the learning well. Student one has decided he would like STLS HI visits bi-termly, but he knows that he can contact me, or ask a tutor to contact me should he need any support in between visits”.
- Sample two: “Student 2 explained that she likes going outside to play, in the big playground and the nursery garden. Nothing is tricky for her. She says her hearing aids help her; she likes to wear them all the time. She likes to help Mrs M clean her hearing aids and ear moulds”.
- Sample three: “Student three explained that she really enjoys school. She said she was not as happy at her previous school and she felt the other children were not as kind. She was happy to work with me, reading beautifully and taking part in the vision assessment willingly”.
- Sample four: “Student four says that she is happy in both of her school settings. She says that she has friends and when asked is able to name them specifically”.

All of our project work is well received by the learners, however we rarely sit still as a service and we seek the learners' views, and those of their parents and teachers to think carefully about future plans for activities. We recently hosted an MSI Family Day in Shorne Woods... we had not been there before, the learners all loved it there and we know we will be going back. It was also very positive to work with the park rangers there (who all happen to work for KCC too). The picture below is of the learners and their families pond dipping at Shorne, a very popular activity.



### **How youth voice and impact information from our service is used strategically for wider service development:**

Our team meets together regularly and feedback from the learners and their families is a consistent topic. Data and evidence is analysed and discussed. A common theme that comes forward is that the learners, their families and school staff appreciate the opportunities to come together across the range of activities we provide. There is clear evidence that friendships and informal parental support forms; and the children and their families really value this. Many of the children and young people we support are in schools and settings where they might be the only learner with their needs or might be one of a small handful. Research evidence and our own anecdotal evidence shows clearly that when the children and young people with sensory and PD needs come together that it is of great importance to them socially and psychologically.

For example, "All My Own Work" grew out of the lack of employment available to VI learners, we wanted to better equip learners for the world of work. It shows how the whole team are always looking for ways to better support the learners. At first All My Own Work was a development plan workstream, since then it has become embedded in our practice each year.

Similarly, it was recognised in the Thanet area that there were cohorts of deaf children who needed a social opportunity to come together, "Sound Circle" and "Sound Social" came from this, they are development plan workstreams which will also become embedded in our practice.

The youth voice and survey evaluation information we have shows that our education reports are useful and valuable to the learners, their families and their schools. The youth

voice information we have also demonstrates the learners want and appreciate ongoing project work. We look for new venues and activities and do consult with the learners about this. We review all of our training, reports and information for settings to ensure it is relevant and useful, and this includes the youth voice element of our reporting.

## 6. Risks and Challenges

- Describe any current or potential risks.
- Outline actions taken or proposed to address these risks.

The Sensory Service has an appropriate number of staff to meet needs, and all staff hold the relevant mandatory qualifications for their roles. The PD Team are also well qualified, they may need more staff in future and the current Head of Service is asking for this to be reviewed.

Moving to KCC in 2023 strengthened the team's position, many staff within the team feel that being part of CYPE gives the team a better and more positive influence with schools and settings across the county, and better connections with other colleagues in SEN, the EP Service and with social care teams.

## 7. Recommendations for Board Action

- As a Service we welcome comments and feedback from the board. If the board would like to see some of our video clips of our learners we can share them. If board members would like to attend our exhibition event in July they would be welcome. The flyer for the day is one of the attachments to this report.

## 8. Supporting Data and Evidence

- Please see the attached documents:
- 1. "Student voice – Why did we feel the need for a sensory student council?" magazine article
- 2. Sound Circle Feedback slides
- 3. Early Years Vision Impairment Spring Event- Kent Life 2025 feedback report with parental comments.
- 4. Flyer for exhibition event

## 9. Follow-Up and Next Steps

- Outline next steps or future plans related to this report:

Next annual surveys to be sent out in September 2025.  
All of the projects listed are ongoing.

We are interested in comments from the board about how we further use information from youth voice to develop our service, and how our information might inform future inspections and be used as inspection evidence.



# Student voice – Why did we feel the need for a sensory student council?

**Gill Coates**, QToD, shares the successful experience of getting a group of learners from a large county together to form a student council

This year in Kent, we have looked to expand the ways we gather the student voice. As a sensory service, we already gather views from our learners through a variety of ways including postcards, questionnaires, through their reports, and our 'On the Road to Independence' events. However, we wanted to gather more in-depth views and felt setting up a student council for our learners would be one way to achieve this. Many schools have student councils that provide an opportunity for learners to offer feedback to their school. A student council can offer learners more than just the opportunity to provide feedback; it also supports peer well-being, and gives opportunities for mentoring and role modelling. Learners will feel they belong and their diverse range of voices can be heard. For many of our learners, they may be the only deaf/hearing impaired, vision impaired, or multi-sensory impaired learner in their school. The student council would also offer an opportunity to meet learners with needs similar to their own.

In March this year, the government published their improvement plan for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), 'Right support, right place, right time'. The plan highlights the need for co-production and considers children and young people to be the stakeholders in developing the national standards. Dame Christine Lenehan, DBE gave the keynote speech at the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) 'Involve, Engage and Inspire – Deaf young people and decision making' conference. Throughout this keynote speech, she reiterated the need for young people to be involved and for professionals to be creative with ways to co-produce. The need for the learners' views has been expressed on Head of Sensory Service Forums, at the Sensory Reference Group (in Kent), and also at Kent's Children's Hearing Services Working Group (CHSWG).

## Planning

As peripatetic specialist teachers, we cover not only a large age range (0–25 years) but also a large area, Kent has a land area of 1,368 square miles.

Therefore, we had a lot to consider in getting a group of learners together to form a student council. Our day was free for the families as we were funded by Kent County Council. We decided that our age range would be Year 2 and above. We felt that learners in this age range would







be comfortable to articulate their views on their needs, schooling, and support. Due to the time of year, we were holding our first meeting (we thought that Years 11 and 13 might not be able to attend due to revision and public examinations). Following discussions with the sensory service, we consulted with parents about suitable timing and venues. We decided to hold our first meeting at the weekend so parents/carers would be able to get their children to the event. We contacted a wide range of activity centres in order to see what would be available for our day. We settled on a farm school where staff are qualified teachers. It is registered as an alternative provision and teachers have experience of working with learners with additional needs.

Obviously, we wanted the day to be a fun experience for our learners, but a key part of the day was gathering learner's views. We were also mindful that this would be the first time the learners would have met. We wanted the activities to be interactive and enjoyable. Our ice-breaker activity was to decorate gingerbread people to represent themselves; our next activity was to consider what support they already had in place and ways they felt they could be more supported. Our final activity was getting them to think



about the future and we supplied a prompt for this activity: For this activity they would draw around themselves and each other and write the answers to the questions inside their body shapes. All activities were adapted to meet the needs of the learners. At our previous 'On the Road to Independence' event, the panel was made of deaf/hearing impaired, vision impaired, and multi-sensory impaired learners – at these events the learners showed that they could advocate for the needs of other learners, so we were hopeful that the learners would support each other with the activities as well as drawing on the support of staff.

### The day

On a very hot day in June, we met together at the farm







school. Unfortunately, some learners were unable to attend, but actually, we felt that the smaller group may have been more beneficial so the learners could interact more and not be as intimidated as in a larger group. For our vision impaired learners, we had a sighted guide. We alternated practical and focused discussion activities including feeding a variety of different animals, gathering eggs, and having a cuddle with the more fluffy variety of animals. Listening to the discussions about disability, and watching the younger learners gazing up at the older learners with hearing aids/cochlear implants or a cane was also great. For a number of learners, it was the first time they had met another learner with a similar sensory need. We had an age range of Year 3 to Year 12. The learner in Year 12 is currently running for head girl at her secondary school, and we felt that this learner provided such an inspiration for the younger learners attending. For the deaf/hearing impaired learners, there were discussions around vocabulary they used to describe themselves. Some considered themselves Deaf, others hearing impaired. Some mentioned that they saw themselves as disabled, others did not. They also talked about what support they received from school, eg seating positions, use of the 'Roger' assistive listening device, access to lipreading. Ways they felt they could be supported further were meeting learners with similar needs, telling others about misconceptions about their hearing loss, and disability awareness across the school. One final activity was about the future – it was great to see all the learners helping each other by drawing around each other. We also noted the high expectations some of the learners had for the future including wanting to be a lawyer or a rollercoaster designer/engineer. We were encouraged by the way the learners shared their opinions, their thoughts about their current support, and their aspirations for the future.

## The future

The day was so well received, and parents emailed staff to say how much their children had enjoyed the day and were already looking forward to the next one, which we plan to hold in October.

Throughout the cycle of co-production, part of it is implementing the feedback received. After the event, we had a debrief about the meeting. The information will be shared not only with the specialist teachers but also with the wider SEND team at Kent County Council, East Kent and West Kent CHSWGs, the Sensory Reference Group, and other stakeholders involved. At the next meeting we would like to share with our learners what changes we have/plan to make following our last student council meeting so learners feel their opinions that they shared were valued and heard.

Following this event, we were contacted by Kent County Council's Educational Psychology Service to discuss joint working to capture the learners' voices in Kent, and we plan to share our day in the Kent County Council SEND newsletter.

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