

This response is written on behalf of The SEND Partnership Board.

The SEND Partnership Board would like to thank the Essex Family Forum (EFF) for all their work in gathering and compiling feedback from families over the last calendar year which provides such a rich amount of information and experience.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Essex Family Forum throughout 2023 to bring about positive changes for the families that you represent.

What are we trying to achieve?

We know that people with 'lived experience' are often best placed to advise on what support and services will make a positive difference to their lives. The mechanisms put in place by Essex Family Forum, such as the Annual Family Impact Survey and the virtual Graffiti Wall gives us a great insight into what life is like 'on the ground' in Essex for children and young people with SEND and their families. Having a continuous cycle of feedback from families helps inform and drive policy decisions, supports and identifies the need for change, with the needs of children and young people with SEND at the heart of those decisions.

The EFF Family Impact Survey 2022

We would like to thank every parent and carer who took the time and effort to complete the Family Impact survey in 2022. As a Local Area we need family feedback to plan and make changes, and we are delighted that 517 parent carers took part in the second Family Impact survey

The Essex Family Forum shared your comments and thoughts widely, with leaders across Education, Health and Social Care and with the team of inspectors from OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) who visited Essex in May 2022. You can read the findings of the [inspection revisit here](#).

Leaders in Education, Health and Social Care have taken time to read and digest your experiences and have spent time discussing the themes and challenges highlighted in the survey. All the comments and experiences have also been shared with the practitioners who meet regularly to plan and oversee the improvement work.

The EFF Graffiti Wall

Thank you to the parents and carers whose comments and thoughts have been gathered for the Forum's [virtual Graffiti Wall](#) over the last two terms. This Graffiti wall is a quick and anonymous way for families to share their experiences of SEND Services in Essex. Information can be provided virtually through their website, via e-mail, or in person at events and coffee mornings, Parents can tell us what life is like for them, what is working, what is not and how things can be improved. As with the Family Impact Survey, all the comments and experiences have been shared with the practitioners who meet regularly to plan and oversee the improvement work in Essex.

The Challenges

We have organised this response by key themes raised by families.

The response covers:

- Finding support and information
- Attendance and anxiety
- Improving annual reviews
- Understanding Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs
- Therapy for children and young people
- Support for more complex SEMH needs
- SEND support for children and young people in schools
- Improving Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs)
- Autism

The challenges are in no particular order and the numbering does not reflect a priority or importance.

Not all experiences that were raised by families are answered in this response. In some instances, practitioners have met with, or contacted, groups to discuss their feedback and to agree the best ways forward. This is not possible on an individual basis as feedback is often anonymous.

Finding Support and Information

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- Information can feel overwhelming. As one parent said, it can feel *'like looking for a needle in a haystack.'*
- Pathways and next steps can be confusing - *'like an impossible puzzle'*
- It is important to feel connected and that *'finding out about local groups is absolutely vital.'*

What needs to change?

- We want families to be able to find out easily about the support in their local area – what is available?
- Information needs to be explained in an easy-to-understand way.
- We want families to trust that the Local Offer provides reliable and useful information.
- We want families to have options, face-to-face, online, written and video.

What have we done?

We have completely refreshed and rewritten the [Essex Local Offer](#). The Local Offer is a service to find out about the help available to children and young people with SEND in Essex. The sections include step-by-step explanations and families helped us to make sure the language is easy to understand and not full of professional jargon. It is now possible to search for services that are local to you. Have a look at ['I think my child needs help'](#) or [search for support, groups or activities](#).

We have continued with SEND Roadshows across Essex. Last year, more than five hundred families attended a roadshow with positive experiences.

In November we trialled an online evening event with speakers and topics suggested by families. The topics included helping children with anxiety, One Planning, continence tips and more. Parents requested the evening session as working parents wanted an option in the evening. We recorded the sessions, and they will be available on the Local Offer very soon.

The SENDIASS service received additional funding so they could implement the recommendations of the independent review carried out in 2021. There is now increased capacity on their helpline and their updated [website](#) has been launched.

What is ongoing?

We continue to work on and improve The Local Offer. If you know of a SEND service that is not currently on the Local Offer, [please let us know](#) and we can contact them.

The next round of SEND Roadshows will be in March and April 2023 and will also include workshops for parents and carers hosted by the SENDIASS service. Follow the Local Offer Facebook page for details of venues and dates.

The SENDIASS service is currently recruiting to caseworker roles, which will include additional capacity for the areas of Essex where they receive the most enquiries.

The SEND Navigators continue their work and are always happy to hear suggestions about what else we could try to help families feel connected and informed. You can contact the Navigators at

TheSENDNavigators@essex.gov.uk

What has changed?

- [The Local Offer](#) is now a much easier to use service and is being regularly reviewed to ensure the information needed by families stays relevant and up to date.
- There are regular face-to-face events and online events for families in their local area.

We hope that the Local Offer, the SEND Roadshows, and the online learning events are supportive to you as a family. We are interested to hear from parents who have experience of these events, what worked for you and how we could improve them. *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*



Attendance and Anxiety (Emotionally based school avoidance)

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- Children are experiencing high anxiety and are often out of school
- Not all teachers seem confident in knowing how to work with children who are not attending school because of anxiety
- Families would like more support to help children and young people to return to school

What needs to change?

- We want all schools and settings to be confident they know how to support children and young people who are not in school because of their emotions. (We call this 'emotionally based school avoidance.' You can read about the language we use in the [Let's Talk: a parents' guide to the language](#)) which was developed with support from families.
- We want to empower families by providing them with useful information about supporting their child/young person's anxiety and help them stay in school or achieve a successful return to school.

What have we done?

We have worked with children, young people, families and schools to develop new guidance for all schools and settings. It is to help schools work with children, young people, and their families and successfully support more children and young people back into schools.

What is ongoing?

As a first step we are launching the new guidance Spring term 2023 to all schools and settings. It is called "Let's talk..... we miss you." The focus is on maximising school attendance including emotionally based school avoidance

There are seven principles to "Let's talk...we miss you"

- 1) Intervene early
- 2) Work with the family throughout
- 3) Actively involve the child in discussions about their needs and their support
- 4) Develop an action plan based on a personalised approach
- 5) Review the plan regularly
- 6) Accept that the journey will not be smooth
- 7) Involve external professionals if initial attempts to get the child or young person back into school have not been successful

It will be the guidance that all within Essex will refer to when an attendance difficulty is a need.

We are reviewing what additional information is needed for families to help support their child or young person to either return or stay in school.

What has changed?

- Essex has developed a new approach to support schools, called "Let's talk...we miss you." This guidance will provide a helpful framework and advice when schools need support with helping children and young people be in school.

We hope that this approach will help more children and young people to either return to school or stay in school. We are interested to hear from parents who have experience of children and young people being supported to return to school, especially if your child is part of "Let's talk...we miss you" approach. Please click on the 'post-it note' image to share your experience.



Improving Annual Reviews

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- Quality of annual reviews is variable
- There is a lack of communication following the annual review meeting
- It takes too long for an EHCP to be amended after an annual review

What needs to change?

- We want annual reviews in schools to be high quality.
- We want parents to feel confident that an EHCP will be updated in a timely manner (if needed) after an annual review.
- We want communication with families to be good and families to be kept up to date so they know what is happening and what to expect.

What have we done?

A new group has been set up to review the annual review process and to make improvements. In the group there are representatives from education teams, health services and social care and parents from Essex Family Forum. The group has looked at all the feedback from parents and has completed a self-evaluation framework to agree what needs to improve.

We are now offering coaching and support to schools to improve their annual review processes.

A new role is being trialled in the SEND Operations Team in each area (Annual Review Coordinator) to oversee the process for annual reviews and amended plans.

There is also a new process in place so that education, health, and social care teams can work together better to support more reviews.

What is ongoing?

We are now working on the annual review paperwork to improve it for both schools and families.

We are reviewing the roles (including the Annual Review Co-ordinator role), responsibilities, and resources within SEND Operations, with a focus on co-ordination, timeliness, and communications.

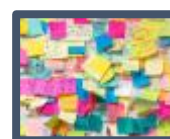
We are also implementing a process of quality assurance for amended plans.

The offer of coaching and support to schools is continuing.

What has changed?

- There is now a strong focus on annual reviews and improving families' experiences
- The new role, Annual Review Co-ordinator, has improved the communications between schools, settings and SEND Operations and is beginning to have an impact on timescales.

We hope that these improvements mean that you will have a positive experience at the annual review of your child's EHCP and that you receive communication without delays. We are interested to hear about your next experience of an annual review – are the changes making a difference for you and your family? *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience of your next annual review.*



Understanding Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- there is a lack of understanding of how to support children's mental health in schools
- that there is too much difference between teachers in schools
- when parents describe what their child's behaviour is like at home, parents feel that schools do not always believe them

What needs to change?

- We want all schools and settings to be confident they know how to support children and young people with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties.
- We want schools to work in partnership with parents and young people.

What have we done?

- Trauma Perceptive Practice (TPP) is the Essex approach to understanding behaviour and supporting emotional wellbeing. We are on track to achieve our aim for engaging all Essex schools by 2025.
- We have also collaborated with schools, settings, educational psychologists, and specialists from the mental health teams explaining what good support looks like for children and young people with SEMH to be included in a new guide.
- This guide is called the 'Ordinarily Available' and it lays out what good support looks like in schools. This will help all teachers and educators to know and understand the most purposeful ways to support children with a range of needs, including SEMH needs.

What is ongoing?

TPP continues to inform all our policy and practice development for supporting schools to better understand behaviour.

We are launching the Ordinarily Available with schools, and plan to have a finalised guide in the Autumn term 2023. This helps classroom teachers know how they can support children and young people in their classrooms, and what good additional support looks like.

We have also new training offers for schools around selective mutism and ADHD.

Our [SEMh Info Link Pages](#) for schools and settings shows all the resources and work that is taking place with schools and settings. We are continually making sure this is the first-place schools and settings go to find support on a range of needs.

What has changed?

- We have an ever-growing number of our schools who have Designated Mental Health Leads (completing the recognised DfE training).
- We are providing this group of Mental Health Leads with a targeted newsletter twice a term about things that they can do or things that they can access for support.
- Added resources and added support based on TPP have been developed for a range of needs to help schools support children and young people every day.

We hope that this means children and young people will have good mental health support in schools. We are interested to hear about your experiences of mental health support in schools– are the changes making a difference for you and your family? *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*



Therapy for Children and Young People

(Speech and Language, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy)

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- there is a lack of communication from therapists
- waiting times are long
- there is a lack of continued support
- schools are not delivering provision that is written in their child's EHCP

What needs to change?

- We want all parents need to know who to communicate with regarding their child's needs and for communication to be good.
- We want all parents to feel confident that their child's needs are being met through a range of provision - support from the school or setting and input from therapists when required.

What have we done?

The delivery of therapy in Essex is undergoing substantial changes. You will hear the new system being called 'The Balanced System.' To learn more, please take a look at the information on the [Essex Family Forum's website](#). This explains the work of the Balanced System and gives a timeline so you can see when things will happen.

Schools and settings are aware of the changes and can attend regular information sharing meetings about the Balanced System.

The Essex Family Forum is fully involved in the Balanced System and are leading the parent/carer engagement for Essex families.

What is ongoing?

The work on the Balanced System continues and the changes will start to be effective from September 2023.

The Local Authority continues to upskill teachers through a range of training opportunities. The training will help schools know how to identify needs early, how to put into place appropriate interventions and the best strategies to choose.

We are developing resources and information for parents so that parents know how to support their children at home.

Essex Family Forum will continue to work with the Balanced System on the best way to engage with parents and carers to keep them informed of progress. You can keep up to date here: [Balanced System](#)

What has changed?

- Since February 2022, pressures within the system caused by redeployment of therapists and post-pandemic delays, have now eased. Services are now better placed to deliver therapy provision outlined in EHCPs.
- The Local Authority is also closely monitoring the newly procured SEND contracts to ensure they deliver the therapy for children with EHCPs.

We hope that children and young people are experiencing positive support from therapy teams and/or from schools supported by therapy teams and communication is improved. We are interested to hear about your experiences of therapy services in Essex – are things improving for you and your family? *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*



Support for more complex SEMH needs

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- As a parent it is difficult to know where to find support. Schools do not always signpost, and parents feel isolated and confused by what is available
- The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) have a long waiting list and criteria are frustrating

What needs to change?

- We want families to know what support is available to help their child or young person.
- We want schools and colleges to be confident that they can support and signpost young people and their families to the correct support.

What have we done?

We have provided our schools, in collaboration with CAMHS, a weekly staff consultation helpline for concerns around children and young people's SEMH needs. This is supported by Educational Psychologists and can be booked via a designated mailbox. Schools can also request support from other services.

What is ongoing?

We are always looking at the provision we offer and making changes, or additions, to the options to support children and young people with complex needs:

- Enhanced provisions. We have a number of these at the primary phase on mainstream school sites and two at secondary for schools that wish to work in partnership with the provision to support inclusion
- ECC Education Access service provides support for children who may not be able to attend school for a medical reason.
- The POWER project. This supports children and young people who are at risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviour.
- [The Affinity Programme](#). This supports children and young people who are at risk of suspension or exclusion.

Information will also be shared with families through the Bridge newsletter every three months. Please email TheSENDNavigators@essex.gov.uk if you would like to receive this information directly in your inbox.

We are collaborating with colleagues in health services to better understand the complexities and partnerships required for complex cases. The endeavour is to provide more systematic process and procedures for re-engaging with education following a period of inpatient mental health support.

What has changed?

- The Local Offer website has been updated to make information about what is available more accessible to families.
- We have provided our schools, in collaboration with CAMHS, a weekly staff consultation helpline for concerns around children and young people's SEMH needs.
- Information for parents is available through The Bridge.

We hope that young people and their families know how to find the support that is available to them, and that schools and colleges are signposting families correctly. We are interested to hear about your experiences. *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*



SEND Support for Children and Young People in Schools

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- teachers across a school are different in the quality and amount of support they offer to children
- SEND departments are often 'fully onboard' but subject teachers do not take notice of the One Plan and strategies
- parents are not included in One Planning; meetings do not happen frequently enough, and parents do not know how to support the strategies at home
- schools are not making the reasonable adjustments to meet young people's needs
- schools do not always identify the needs of girls with autism

What needs to change?

- We want all teachers to offer the same high standard of support
- We want schools to feel equipped to correctly identify the needs of each individual child and ensure that the needs are met through good planning and provision
- We want all staff in a school to be aware and informed about how to support children and young people with SEND, not just SEND departments.
- We want regular communication and feedback throughout the year to be part of good One Planning with families

What have we done?

We have collaborated with schools, settings, educational psychologists, and specialists from across education, health, and social care to put together a guide setting out what good support looks like for children and young people in the classroom. It is called the 'Ordinarily Available.' This will help all teachers and educators to know and understand the most effective ways to include and support children in their lessons.

We have developed and improved the One Planning training for schools and settings, with a bigger emphasis on the importance of conversations. We are offering coaching and training to SENCOs to look at the quality of conversations with families.

All schools have been offered [Autism Education Trust](#) training at no cost. All schools who have accessed the AET training can also be supported to use the AET progression framework to help support them correctly identify needs and to plan appropriate outcomes.

What is ongoing?

- The Ordinarily Available has now been shared with all schools and Early Years settings in Essex for their thoughts and input. We plan to have a finalised guide in the Autumn Term 2023. This will help teachers be consistent and support children in every lesson. The guide will also help parents understand what is reasonable and can be expected in lessons to support children and young people.

What has changed?

- We have trained 1664 school and early years settings staff since Autumn 2021.
- One Planning training has been refreshed and coaching is being offered to SENCOs to improve the quality of conversations with families is being offered.
- Parents can access information about One Planning on the new [Local Offer](#) and on the [SENDIASS](#) website.

We hope that you are experiencing positive One Planning meetings and support in mainstream schools. We are interested to hear about your experiences of One Planning in Essex– are things improving for you and your family? *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*



Improving Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- There is a lack of communication during the EHC Needs Assessment process
- Different people give different information about when to apply for an EHC Needs Assessment. For example, a parent was told it was not possible to request an EHC Needs assessment (EHCNA) before your child turns 3 years old
- The advice from health services is not well co-ordinated during the EHCNA process
- Schools' implementation of the EHCP is not consistently good

What needs to change?

- We want communication with parents to be good throughout the EHCNA process. We want parents to feel informed and up to date.
- We want schools and Early Years settings to have the right information so that they can inform parents correctly of their rights.
- We want the EHCNA to involve everyone who teaches, supports, or cares for the child or young person - including practitioners in health and social care.

What have we done?

Training has been provided to the SEND Operations team on requesting health advice and effectively incorporating this into the needs assessment report/ EHCP.

Updated guidance has been provided to Early Years settings so they are aware that EHCNA applications can be made before the age of three.

EHCNA guidance has been developed and shared with all SEND operations staff, schools, Early Years settings and partners, to ensure all parties are clear on the criteria for requesting an EHCNA, the evidence required to support the process and the criteria for assessment.

To improve communications, the Local Authority have reviewed the capacity of the SEND teams.

What is ongoing?

As a result of parental feedback, a group is being put together to look at the implementation of EHCPs in schools and Early Years settings. This will look at how the Local Authority can support schools and settings to implement the provision in a plan.

There are plans to increase the amount of resource in SEND Teams available to directly support communications.

What has changed?

- The new Local Offer contains accurate information for parents about how to request an EHC Needs Assessment.
- A framework has now been in place for over a year to quality assure new EHCPs. This has significantly improved the quality of new plans and the way information about a child's health and care needs are included.

If you are thinking about making a request for an EHCNA, we hope that the information on the Local Offer is clear and helpful. If your child has a new EHCP, we hope that you are happy with the quality of the plan and your experience. We are interested to hear your thoughts and experiences. *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*



Autism diagnosis and support

What were families reporting?

Parents shared that in their experiences:

- Long waits for an initial assessment and specialist assessment, sometimes with no support
- Little or no post diagnostic support available
- Poor communication, families not knowing what is happening
- Having to use private health services at a personal cost
- Diagnosis feeling overwhelming

What needs to change?

We want families to:

- have access to useful information, advice, and guidance at the earliest opportunity.
- feel supported and know they can access a range of services and support whilst they wait for an assessment, from professionals, charities and from peers
- have excellent support, advice, and information from health professionals at the first point of contact.
- have a true understanding of the journey and expected waiting times in their area and know that services will check in and keep you updated.

What have we done?

Essex Family Forum have worked with families and those that support them to review and redefine the Outcomes and Effectiveness Measures to ensure the voice of the families we represent remains at the centre of the improvement journey. For more details click here: [NDD Pathway Project](#)

Additional monies have been invested in health services to reduce the backlog from the pandemic. We have looked at reasons for delays and referrals to make sure families are being sent on to the right service and at the right time.

We have a new service provider at the Lighthouse Child Development Centre which serves families in Castle Point & Rochford. In addition a Parent Carer Network has been set up, supported by Essex Family Forum and hosted by PALS to work alongside health to develop a service at the Lighthouse that families want to see and can contribute to.

Some areas have invested additional funding in Voluntary Support Services so families can access a local service known to them and closer to home.

It is now mandatory for all health and social care providers to ensure their staff receive appropriate learning and autism training for their role. Find out more about the government's [recommended training here](#).

What is ongoing?

We have applied for and been awarded a new contract to provide post diagnostic support to young people and parents across Southend, Essex and Thurrock which will start this year. Essex Family forum have been consulted throughout the process, alongside the Multi Schools council.

We have just been selected to become a parent/carer peer support hub for a consortium of Autism organisations including National Autistic Society, Ambitious About Autism and Autism Education Trust. This will mean in the coming months we will be able to train parent/ carers and Personal Assistants to become peer support trainers for other families who are varying stages of their journey. This will be a free service to families.

We continue to work with health providers to capture the number of families referred to health services for assessment, how quickly families move through their journey, what the outcome is and how we can improve to make it a positive and supported experience. In doing so, we can tell you more honestly how long the wait is and, more importantly, how we can best support you.

What has changed?

- We supported the Essex Family Forum to produce the Family Resource Pack, [Supporting your Neurodiverse Child](#). We are providing and have invested funding to make sure families who need hard copies can access free of charge.
- The new Local Offer contains accurate information for parents about the health services across Essex.
- We have reinstated the [Good Beginnings](#) training available to parent/carers of children with autism in Early Years and Preschool settings.

Much work has taken place since the Spring and progress is being made towards many of the solutions suggested by families. We are interested to hear about your thoughts and experiences. *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*



Recognising when things are working. A thank you to the people, teams and services who are offering invaluable support to children, young people, and families in Essex.



Please do give a mention to the people, teams and services who are getting it right. A simple thank you makes a difference, and your comments will be shared with the teams and services. *Please click on the 'post-it notes' image to share your experience.*

Thank You	January 2023
YCT were amazing with our son. He was given 16 weeks play therapy which has just finished.	
Jigsaws have been absolutely amazing.	
SALT for stammering since age 3 – (<i>therapist name</i>) truly listened to our concerns and has supported us whenever we have requested her help	
Physio and OT - excellent service. Felt they actually cared and got on so well with my child	
OT and physio - I found the therapists very approachable and helpful.	
Speech, Community and Mental services, and Occupational are all excellent, just not enough of them.	
My son goes to Kids Inspire and they are amazing	
EWMHS, he had CBT and talking to a therapist. It was very good and made a difference in his anxiety.	
I have been very happy with how the school and sixth form have dealt with my daughters VI. She is fully involved, as am I and feel she is supported.	
EHCP - It is accurately put together, with realistic objectives. The support from the class teacher and SENCO has been excellent.	
We had help from EWMHS, Speech and Language and paediatrics. The support from primary and secondary school has been such that he has been discharged. The parents' sessions I attended were excellent.	
XXXX (<i>name removed</i>) Primary School have been outstanding.	
I cannot fault either the primary or secondary schools in their understanding and support.	
The ASD assessment was done in Chelmsford. We found the experience really well organised, and the staff who carried it out kind, caring and extremely knowledgeable.	
ADHD nurse - every 6 months enjoy all the workshops and parent programs so far.	
Supported post diagnosis, by nursery nurse (<i>name removed</i>) she is amazing, so helpful and knowledgeable	
Since he has been diagnosed now feel that help is more at hand and that I am being believed that my son needs help understanding our world as well as us learning to understand his world	
Primary School (<i>name removed</i>) are amazing at meeting her sensory needs.	
Out of school clubs all been wonderfully supportive.	
Her OT and PT have worked really well with her. And the orthotics department are great. OT have visited us at home and helped and have also gone into school to guide them on how to support her needs.	
The EHCP system is currently reviewing our case. The secretary has been brilliant (<i>name removed</i>)	
After completing an autism awareness level 2 course, I now feel I have some tools to help my little girl	