

South-East Sector-led Improvement Partnership South-East Access to Education Group Meeting

17th September 2025

Record of meeting

Present: Natalie Smith (Hants), Pauline Martin Ellis (Hants), Gavin Thomas (BHCC), Vidy Narayan & Sarah Speedie (ESCC), Fiona Hostler (Reading), James Fowler (Bucks), Colin Mayo & Cathy Shaw (M Keynes), Neil Stevenson (Portsmouth), Katy Daly (Bracknell), Cathy Edwards & Claire Overal (Kent), Clare Raffaelli & Annette Taylor (RBWM), Anjli Sidhu (Slough), Rachel Williams (IoW), Emma Block (Medway), Carole Vernon (Wokingham), Maria Langford & Katie Johnson (Surrey), Chris Owen.

Apologies: Ming Zhang (Wokingham), Simon Smith & Jesse Reis (Kent), Jon Willcocks (Hants), Melissa Perry (W Berks), Eliza Johnson (Southampton).

In attendance: Evan Lerwill (Assistant Ombudsman)

Item	Actions
Welcome and introductions	
1. Discussions with LGSC Ombudsman (rep Evan Lerwill) Evan ran through a presentation of update from the LGCSO, with a focus on alternative provision investigations and the practitioners' guide that is due for publication in the near future. Key themes from LGCSO's perspective: - Timely and decisive actions - Person-centred, with review and engagement - Clear (detailed) communications, especially with parents / carers Highlighted 80% complaints received are reviewed and do not proceed to being investigated (including EHCP-related ones where redress should be sought via SEND Tribunal). There has been an eight-fold increase in 'alternative provision' investigations since before the pandemic. Chris to circulate the slides to group members. Discussion topics included: - Do the LCCSO take sufficient heed of safeguarding concerns, including remedies that minimise risks for the child? - The "Guide for Practitioners" that has been shared with the group will be launched over the coming weeks. Although the current version can be shared with colleagues, ensure it is made clear that the final document will be the version to refer to. - Welcome direct communication between LA and investigating ombudsman, for example this can help to clarify context and engagement with the complainant over time (e.g. where there has been a series of complaints made). Review of the draft determination and response from the LA with comments or challenge, is very highly recommended. - Where complainant has lodged a series of complaints with other national bodies (e.g. Ofsted, DfE) – this information is not systematically gathered by LGCSO at the start of the investigation. LGCSO plans consultation focus groups before the end of this year, including to consider the topic of 'symbolic financial remedies' and whether they are needed to ensure impact and action. Dates will be circulated to SESLIP. Evan was thanked for a helpful presentation and the valuable discussion of themes.	CO EL / CO
2. Notes of June meeting and matters arising - Accuracy of notes: agreed and passed for publication - Chris and Neil Stevenson attended the South-east DCO meeting in July. Helpful start to communicating regularly between the groups. NHS/ ICB reorganisation is affecting progress with partnership working. LA A2E leads should still raise with local NHS (& DCO) where there has been unhelpful advice about illness and absence from particular general practices, as a means to encourage compliance with local agreements. Likewise, NHS colleagues should	

raise with LA A2E contacts where a school might be making unnecessary demands for sickness certification. Ming and Chris will be joining SE Early Help network meeting tomorrow, focusing on the EHE CME Dashboard. The join-up between early help / family hub staff and attendance teams can be vital in implementing strategies to help families where children are severely absent.	
3. S19 practice sharing groups Group A (policy & decisions): continued to meet during the summer and has shared examples of wording and challenges with policy updates and procedures (e.g template for parent letter). Among the aims is to produce typical decision-making flowcharts which can be shared across the region. Current request is to review a proposed statement of principle for all SE LAs: setting out parallel track for responsibilities for decisions between EHCP (& EHCNA), by SEND leader, and non-EHCP, by attendance leader. Statement was shared and discussed. Hants, Kent and Medway all adopt such an approach (though the details of the team manager who is responsible varies). Financial recoupment from schools for section 19 costs was discussed and sample wording from the new draft policy from Reading BC was shared. There was some interest. The statement shared has been jointly developed with their education finance and reviewed by headteacher reps, including their School Forum. Bracknell and RBWM shared similar procedures they have developed in consultation from their schools. Further discussion on finance and section 19 will be planned at future meetings. Gloucestershire CC's relatively recent Attendance and Section 19 policy was recommended as a strong example. https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/fchbn2d0/attendance-and-section-19-policy-v10.pdf <u>Action:</u> Agreement to support the proposed statement of principle. Natalie and Chris will table this with the Education Directors. If they are in support, Chris will table with SEND Strategic leads.	NS/CO
4. EHE – CME Dashboard - Request for COLLECT data returns from the October census will be sent out soon (Additionally these will ask for SEND status to be included: E or K or N). Thanks to those who have updated who their contact for the data return is. - Agreement that the Dashboard will be expanded to include section 19 numbers as of census date from October. Agreement to include whether the child has an EHC plan or not. - Colleagues at BHCC are exploring ways to make the interface a bit more flexible. <u>Action:</u> Respond to data request promptly.	
5. Plan for themes for the year ahead (not just s19) - Chris will raise the topic in the WhatsApp chat. Please respond with suggestions and offers of practice to share. - Important that the full scope of the group is considered over the cycle of meetings. <u>Action:</u> Respond to request for themes etc	All
Dates of future meetings: 6th Nov (2pm); 21st Jan (2pm); 5th Mar (10am); 28th Apr (10am)	