

SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Board Update – September 2025



This update provides an overview of progress, developments, and key areas of focus from the SEND Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Board.

This update reflects the collaborative efforts of local authority teams, education providers, health and care partners, and families.

The September meeting delivered a series of significant updates, beginning with a compelling Voice of Experience session led by ZeZe Sohawon from EDA. Helen Ellis provided a detailed overview of Birmingham's outcome following the publication of the SEND Inspection Report. Robert Ferris outlined the future direction of the Improvement Board in light of the inspection findings, while Heather Wood shared progress on Curriculum Pathways. Jodie Newson presented the proposed next steps for the Local Offer, shaped by inspection feedback, and formally requested Board approval for the 2024/25 Annual Report.

1. Voice of Experience

The Board welcomed guest speaker ZeZe Sohawon who is the founder of Emotional Dysregulation in Autism (EDA), a newly registered charity. ZeZe is a care experienced young person with lived experience of autism and severe mental health challenges. After surviving four years of being sectioned, a coma, and multiple suicide attempts,

ZeZe has become an award-winning international speaker, TEDx presenter, and published author.

EDA has visited Parliament three times to advocate for reforms to the Mental Health Bill and is set to give evidence in the House of Lords. ZeZe will also be featured as a case study for the SEND team, further amplifying hers and the charities voice.

EDA is not only a beacon of hope for people with autism; it is a testament to the power of lived experience in driving meaningful change.

2. SEND Inspection Outcome

A heartfelt thank you was extended to Pam, Chair of the Parent Carer Forum (PCF), for her exceptional commitment throughout the three-week inspection. Her full-time involvement, entirely in a voluntary capacity reflects the strength of partnership working across the local area.

Helen Ellis, Director of SEND and Inclusion, provided an overview of the inspection outcome. While the local area partnership is encouraged by the findings, it was acknowledged that further work is needed.

Key points from the update included:

- Overview of the inspection process
- Completion of 2,270 surveys within the one-week Ofsted/CQC deadline, capturing voices of children, young people, families, carers, and practitioners
- Birmingham LAP's approach, including two core elements and key areas of focus in preparation
- Presentation of the improvement plan and governance structure
- Summary of the report's findings:
 - What it is like to be a child or young person with SEND in this area
 - What the LAP are doing effective
- Identification of six priority areas for continued improvement
- Next steps in response to the report
- Appreciation for all partners who contributed to the inspection

3. Future of the Improvement Board

Robert Ferris provided an update following the positive inspection outcome. Ministerial consideration is now underway to transition Birmingham into a new oversight regime. The Improvement Board will remain in place, with strong consensus among members to continue its role in driving progress.

A post-inspection meeting is scheduled for 2 October 2025, to be chaired by either Robert Ferris or Katie Pritchard. Following this, the revised strategic plan will be re-published within 50 working days of the inspection report's release.

4. Curriculum Pathways' Update

An update was provided on the development of curriculum pathways and autism-friendly settings. This work is being shaped through a series of targeted workshops, with clear next steps identified across key areas: action planning, communications, workforce development interdependencies, enhanced provision, and neurodiversity pathway design. The support required to drive meaningful behavioural change was outlined for each area, ensuring alignment with inclusive practice and long-term sustainability.

5. Local Offer Update - Response to Ofsted inspection findings

Following feedback received in the inspection report regarding the Local Offer, a comprehensive response is now underway. This includes a wider review of the Local Offer, with a focus on gathering meaningful feedback from children and young people, parent carers, schools, and settings to ensure it reflects the needs and experiences of its users. Improvements to the website's format and layout are planned, including simplifying navigation to enhance accessibility. The content and language used will also be reviewed, with particular attention to terminology that may act as a barrier, increasing the visibility of language translations, and introducing more visual aids such as videos and animations.

Promotion of the Local Offer will be strengthened through collaboration with schools and settings, using their existing parent communication channels, newsletters, and websites to raise awareness. Additionally, work will be undertaken to expand the directory and 'Out of School' activities, including a mapping exercise and opening new channels of communication to share events and groups more effectively. These actions aim to ensure the Local Offer is inclusive, user-friendly, and widely understood across the local area.

6. Annual Report 24/25

The Board was asked to approve the 2024/25 Annual Report, a statutory requirement under the SEND Code of Practice, which outlines key activity and progress between April 2024 and March 2025. Web analytics show that most users are accessing the Local Offer site via organic searches, with SENAR and EHCPs remaining the most frequently searched topics. Notable updates include the adoption of recommendations from a review conducted by the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA), the addition of assessment timelines, a co-produced visual aid, and clearer guidance around mediation. The SEND Advisory services have now successfully

migrated from the Access to Education site, and the FAQs section has been enhanced with dedicated content on Autism and ADHD.

With our very best wishes

Dr Sue Harrison – Strategic Director for Children and Families

John Coughlan – SEND Commissioner