Improvement Notice

To: Suffolk County Council ('the council')
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX

This Improvement Notice is issued to Suffolk County Council 2 October 2026 by the Department for Education following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection published on 30 January 2024, and the Area SEND Monitoring Inspection published on 28 May 2026, in response to the areas for priority action and improvement highlighted in the report.

1. This notice is given to address the findings of the Area SEND inspection published on 30 January 2024, which identified two areas for priority action, and the area of ineffective action highlighted in the subsequent Area SEND monitoring inspection published on 28 May 2026.

2. To comply with this notice, the following actions are required of the Council, working with Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board (ICB) and its other local partners ("partners"), as set out in section 28 (2) of the Children and Families Act 2014.

3. This Improvement Notice supersedes and replaces the existing Improvement Notice dated 28 May 2024.

Improvement steps to be taken

4. The Department requires the Council as a matter of urgency to review and resubmit your Local Area Inclusion Plan, which will set out how the Council will address the areas of concern identified.

5. The Council's improvement plans working with the ICB, should deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement, taking account of the views of parents, children and young people, school and education leaders and wherever possible, putting co-production at the centre of improvement activity. The improvement plans will be set out in the Local Area Inclusion Plan and must cover the areas for priority action specified in the Ofsted and CQC inspection reports published on 30 January 2024 and 28 May 2026. The two priority areas identified for the Council, working with the ICB and partners to take action on were to:

    a. Leaders should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning to deliver systems with measurable impact that

will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. There should be a particular focus on governance, quality assurance approaches to address weaknesses effectively, multi-agency working, transitions and planning for adulthood for children and young people.

b. Leaders should cooperate to take urgent action to improve the timeliness and quality of the statutory EHC plan processes, EHC plan needs assessments, and EHC plans and annual reviews, particularly using annual reviews to amend the quality of existing EHC plans where required. Plans should meaningfully capture the views and aspirations of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that they get the right support at the right time.

The May 2026 monitoring inspection report confirms effective action in area (b); however, it found that ineffective action had been taken in respect of area (a).

6. You have recently worked with partners to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan, and if you treat that as your “Strategic Plan”, which we know forms part of your Local Area Inclusion Plan, then it is this document that will need to be updated to address the areas of concern above. Whether you update the Reform Plan, and/or a separate strategic planning document, we require that plans for improvement align with your plans for reform.

7. So, during the period in which they are delivering necessary improvements against the specific areas set out in this Improvement Notice, the Council and its partners must also demonstrate the ability to show progress against these reform requirements.

8. The Council’s plans, working with the ICB, should deliver appropriate and sustainable improvement, taking account of the views of parents, children and young people, school and education leaders and putting co-production at the centre of improvement activity.

9. The Department is providing a SEND adviser and a finance adviser to offer support and challenge to the Council on identifying and delivering against the necessary improvements. The Council should work with these advisers, and any other support and challenge programmes put in place, until some such time that the Department is satisfied this is no longer required.

10. To ensure there is clear evidence of progression:
    a. the Council must continue to ensure there is an Improvement Board, with an Independent Chair, which is attended by key leaders across Education, Health and Care services, Parent/Carer Forum and appropriate Elected Members of the Council, to a timetable agreed with the Department. It is expected that the Chief Executives of the Council and the ICB, and the Children’s Services and ICB Accountable Officers are held to account for the improvements required to be made through effective engagement with the Board and escalation/resolution of matters arising as the Board identifies;

b. the Improvement Board must have clearly assigned accountabilities for all actions agreed, along with clear and measurable targets covering the areas of priority action and areas for improvement identified in the Ofsted and CQC report and any actions recommended by DfE;
c. the Improvement Board takes equal responsibility for ensuring that they also deliver against the core minimum requirements of the Local SEND Reform Plan, and that improvement actions are progressed in alignment with the Local SEND Reform Plan;
d. those accountable for the actions in the plans must keep the content up to date, with a risk register and mitigation plan updated in line with the meeting cycle and provided to the Improvement Board in advance;
e. reports to the Improvement Board should include data, analysis and evidence of the impact of improvements on the lived experience of children and families;
f. the Improvement Board should maintain an action and impact log which is updated at each meeting, highlighting objectives which are slow to progress and where contributions need to be strengthened; and
g. the Council must ensure that regular stocktakes focused on Area for Priority Action 1 are established.

11. Invitations to Improvement Board meetings must be sent on each occasion to the DfE appointed SEND adviser, NHS England adviser and to the Department's case lead as external attendees, rather than members of the board.

Improvement against the above measures will be assessed as follows:

12. The DfE appointed SEND adviser and NHS advisers, working alongside regional representatives from the respective departments, will provide regular updates to Ministers and the Department more generally of progress or concern against the areas set out in this notice; improvement against the Ofsted and CQC requirements; and any other such information relevant to the improvement journey.

Department for Education Stocktake Reviews

13. Officials from the Department will undertake reviews of progress against the Local Area Inclusion Plan at least every six months and more regularly where appropriate. We will also discuss delivery of your local SEND reform plan at least every three months, as part of the ongoing monitoring of these reforms – and where possible, we will seek to align timings so that the stocktake review meetings can also cover that quarter's monitoring of your reform plan.

14. Reviews, including areas of priority action deep dives, may cover but are not exclusive to leadership; governance; co-production; quality of workforce training and support; multi-agency arrangements including joint commissioning, Education, Health, and Social Care provision; the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care plans; and engagement with

children, young people, families and carers.

15. Prior to any reviews, the Council should provide to the Department its own assessment of improvement. This may include, but is not limited to:

    a. progress against the Local Area Inclusion Plan and the Local SEND Reform Plan objectives;
    b. feedback from parents, carers, children and young people;
    c. clear information about local accountability and governance structures;
    d. the documentary evidence used to plan, track and evaluate the impact of actions. This may include:
        i. A progress update against each area of priority action, each area for improvement and DfE recommendations;
        ii. A dashboard of performance measures showing whether targets and milestones are being met in a timely manner; any slippage; evidence of impact and whether the local area is on track to meet the next set of milestones; and
        iii. Evidence that key partners, including children and young people, families and schools are playing an active role in improving services.

16. From time to time, the Department may require that a diagnostic review or assessment is undertaken by a party agreed with the Department.

17. For any review or assessment, the Council must provide the person(s) conducting it with:
    a. access to, and time with, staff and leadership;
    b. accurate and up to date data on performance and quality;
    c. facilities to carry out the reviews; and
    d. access to minutes of meetings or any other relevant information.

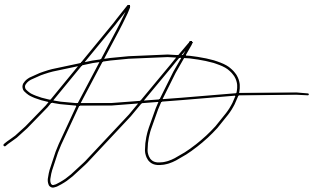
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18. The Council should aim for the inspection related improvement measures set out in the Local Area Inclusion Plan to be delivered by the end of August 2027 or sooner, and for the impact measures set out in those plans to be evidenced by the agreed target dates. The Council should also ensure that delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan is evidenced.

19. This Improvement Notice will not be stepped down until the Minister agrees that there is sufficient evidence of improvement against all of the areas for improvement. The Council should continue to deliver its local SEND reform plan alongside this improvement activity – if implementation of the reform plan is not line with expectations, the Department may consider a revised or new Improvement Notice to address this.

Failure to comply with this Improvement Notice by the assessment dates or poor progress:

20. Should the Council be unwilling or unable to comply with this Improvement Notice or should the Secretary of State not be satisfied with the Council's progress at any stage, she may choose to invoke her statutory powers of intervention (s497A Education Act 1996) to direct the Council to take any further actions deemed necessary to secure the improvements required in SEND services.

Signed:  **Date:** 2 October 2026

Senior Civil Servant in Department for Education