

# Solihull SEND Newsletter

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## February 2023

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As we move closer towards spring, the days are getting slightly lighter and bringing with them a sense of change coming this year.

The new local area SEND inspections have already begun to take place and over the coming months we should hear more about the DfE's delivery plans following on from the Green Paper last year – so it feels like a year of greater possibilities for our children and young people with additional needs and SEND.

On that note, it was wonderful to see and hear some of our young people address Full Council at their meeting on 7th February – talking about their lives in Solihull and what they would like to see change. A true reflection on how children and young people can affect change. You can watch a recording [here](#).

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## Strategic News

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### **Strategy for Inclusive Education**

We had a wonderful day with all Solihull Headteachers on Thursday 9 February focusing on education inclusion – hearing from a number of renowned speakers working in this field and from schools within Solihull who were celebrating the work they have done so far in making inclusion a priority within their development plans.

The passion and energy for change was infectious and this was definitely the best way to formally launch our Strategy for Inclusive Education and encourage all schools to sign up to auditing themselves and talking to their whole school communities to understand areas they could develop.

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### **Additional Needs Strategy**

Our Annual Report on the first year of the strategy has been drafted and will be published later this month. As mentioned in the last newsletter, and our special edition, we have been seeking the views of children and young people, and their families to what difference the strategy has made over the past year. Thank you to everyone who participated, and

those of you who helped parent carers and children and young people do so. We are currently analysing the feedback and will include it within the annual report.

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### **SEND Peer Review**

As mentioned in the last SEND newsletter, a group from the West Midlands Peer Review Programme undertook a SEND peer review of Solihull on Tuesday 17 and Wednesday 18 January. The team met with over 100 professionals as well as many school staff, parent carers and young people over the two intense days. Once the formal report has been received and shared with the Council's Children's & Family's Scrutiny Board it will be published, with our local area response, on the Local Offer website. We are pleased that improvements in SEND were identified by the team and that the areas for development reflect our own evaluation. I would like to thank everyone who was involved in this process for their time, hard work and honesty and am grateful to the review team in providing an external view on SEND in Solihull.

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## **New School**

**The Heights** is a new autism special school opening in Solihull in September 2023. It will grow in pupils over a number of years but will eventually provide 116 places for children and young people from Year 3 to Year 11.

We are pleased to confirm that the building works for the new accommodation for The Heights is progressing well. However, it is likely that the building will not be ready to welcome new pupils as soon as term starts in September 2023. The Council is working with the DfE and Forward Trust to make contingency plans in response to this, whilst ensuring children will be able to receive the specialist support they need.

The Council has started naming The Heights in final EHCPs for children so is starting to build up an understanding of the new cohort and will therefore be able to share plans with new parents over the coming months – both around the readiness of the new building and the transition plans being put in place to support children with their transition.

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## **Including children and young people with a hearing impairment - using subtitles**

We would love to see subtitles being used across all of our Solihull settings. For children with Hearing Impairment following spoken dialogue on a video, particularly an animation, is extremely difficult. Most streaming services have an s, cc or other icon you can click to add subtitles in just seconds. Subtitles don't just benefit children with hearing Impairment. This link shares information for teachers and parents about how subtitles can improve reading skills for all children in your setting: <https://turnonthesubtitles.org/>

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## Community Education Psychology Service

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### ***Jane Sowter – Principal Educational Psychologist***

The service now has a stable leadership team, following the promotion of Dr Sidra Aslam and Dr Craig Joyce; who are job-sharing the post previously held by Stella Lawlor. They are both skilled and experienced EPs with a strong background in therapeutic work, attachment and trauma. The service already feels revitalised as a result and we are slowly growing again, with two future appointments secured and new associate staff joining us. Although the service has continued to shrink in size with further resignations, we have been able to streamline our delivery and target the highest priorities. Although there will be slightly fewer hours delivered to schools and work streams overall next term, service will be maintained to all. Where possible, new link EPs will be in place for schools and I will be contacting heads directly to explain cover arrangements. I do hope the arrangements made during this time of change meet everyone's expectations, but do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries. The service is always at the end of the line whenever you need us and we wish you all the very best for the forthcoming spring.

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## The Early Years Team

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A range of early years advice and support is available for families, carers and early years practitioners. This covers advice and guidance around supporting specific areas of difficulties in young children.

Early years advice and support

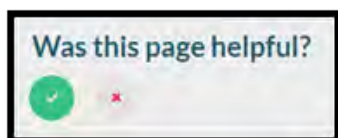
**Early  
Years**

### **Advice and Support page now live on the Local Offer**

We are delighted to share our support page for families with young children and settings.

<https://www.solihull.gov.uk/Children-and-family-support/localoffer/early-years-support>

We have built the guidance page by referring to the most asked for and perhaps most useful links. We hope to ask some of the families that we are working with whether the guidance is what they want. We would be very grateful if you could share your views.



Instant feedback is helpful as is more detailed feedback about content. It is hoped that the webpage will be updated and adjusted to meet the needs of parents and providers as we work alongside you.

Early Years settings can also access a range of information through the [Solgrid Early Years and Childcare](#) website. You will now find recently added resources that we hope will help setting leadership teams. We know that it is not always easy for leaders to get release during the day. We have been recording some of our on-line briefings so child-minders and setting leads can watch them at a time to suit. The last SENCo briefing focussed on



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## EHCP Service

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### ***Amanda Hana - Service Manager***

The EHCP Service have recently held two drop in sessions. 41 parent carers attended their session and the feedback was very positive. Unfortunately, no schools attended their drop in but we will try once more to see if this is needed, and hope this is because communications have improved over the last year.

The dates for the next drop-ins are:

**20th March 1– 4pm for any parent carer – The Loft, Chelmsley Wood, B37 5TN**

**22nd March 3–5pm for school staff – The Loft, Chelmsley Wood, B37 5TN**

**15th May 4:30pm–6:45pm for any parent carer - Civic Suit, SMBC Council, Manor Square**

At the moment we are working hard on transitions and from the start of February were already starting to name some placements for children for September 2023. To be able to meet our legal deadlines for Annual Reviews we need support from schools – because if schools do not meet their legal deadlines then we really struggle to catch up and get plans to parent carers on time. A reminder of those are:

- Ensure the review is booked in a timely fashion, and before the Annual deadline. Remember all Nursery 2s and Year 6s should be done **before October half term**, and all Year 11s, Year 13s and leavers should be done **before Christmas**
- Circulate all paperwork to be used in the review to all invitees **2 weeks prior** to the meeting
- Return the Annual Review paperwork, including any new reports, to the LA **within 10 days**

These are legal requirements so please help us with these. New Annual Review paperwork was introduced last year and has received positive feedback from parent carers, schools and other services so it would be helpful if all schools could use the current Annual Review paperwork; which should take you through the review process logically (and hopefully this will help everyone!).

Officers will attend reviews where this is absolutely crucial. However, no decisions can be made at Annual Reviews and an officer does not need to attend, even if a change of placement is being requested.

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## Education Inclusion Service

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***Michele Sadler, Head of Service***

**Attendance training for schools**

The Education Inclusion Service is continuing with a programme of training for schools to support the DFE guidance Working together to improve school attendance. Next half term we will be running a workshop for schools (**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1.30pm to 3.30pm at Elmwood Place**) looking at attendance procedures, including legal processes. The workshop will focus on the expectations of schools and the day to day processes which ensure good attendance. There has been a lot of interest in the session and positive feedback from the training we have run this academic year.

The government is committed to addressing the issue of poor attendance, and this month announced an inquiry into the causes and possible solutions to the growing issue of children's absence from school. The cross-party Committee of MPs will examine links between pupil absence and factors such as economic disadvantage, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), ethnic background, and whether a child or a family member is clinically vulnerable to covid-19. Rates of attendance at alternative provision schools will also be considered.

The results of this inquiry, as well as the information gained from current EEF research into effective interventions to support good attendance at school, will inform future training. For further information regarding the training or to book a place please email

[agnieszka.polanski@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:agnieszka.polanski@solihull.gov.uk)

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## Children's Commissioning

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***Julie Hackett - Head of Service***

**Review of SEND Mediation Contracts**

Work has commenced to review the current SEND mediation model and agree a new procurement compliant approach if appropriate. We believe this is a good opportunity to co-produce, getting feedback from parent carers as well as education colleagues in Solihull Council.

**Short Breaks for Disabled Children**

Short breaks are leisure opportunities for children and young people with disabilities which give their parent/carer a break/respite from their caring responsibilities.

This year, Solihull Council is providing grant funding to a number of organisations to increase the number and ranges of short break activities (details are in the table below).

As a result of the grant funding the costs to families will be kept low, but for most activities parents will be expected to make a contribution. Providers have been asked to prioritise the allocation of places to those eligible children and young people who aren't attending a short break elsewhere. This in addition to the funding Solihull Council provides to SoLO to subsidise the delivery of a wide range of after school, evening, weekend and school holiday short breaks activities. More details of the activities provided by SoLO are available on their website [Social Life Opportunities Solihull | At SoLO We Help People with Learning Disabilities](#).

Name of Provider	Name of Project	Location	Age range	Summary	Contact email address
Entrust Care Partnership	Unbound	The Core, Solihull town centre	14 - 19	Weekly theatre club run in partnership with Open Theatre. Aiming to develop young people's skills, independence and abilities to facilitate transition to adulthood. For 15 cyp. Project will focus primarily on ensuring Children/Young People are part of an active environment to improve physical activity levels, whilst simultaneously embedding skills and knowledge surrounding the cost-of-living crisis. 2 sessions a week, each for 25 children and young people.	<a href="mailto:lynnebarton@entrustcarepartnership.co.uk">lynnebarton@entrustcarepartnership.co.uk</a>
Inclusive Sports Academy CIC	Inclusive Sports Package	Hatchford Brook Youth centre and Chelmsley Wood venue	7-14		<a href="mailto:Claire@inclusivesportsacademy.co.uk">Claire@inclusivesportsacademy.co.uk</a>

North Solihull Additional Needs Parent Group	Opportunities for ALL	Connections Church in Fordbridge B37 North Solihull Sports Centre B37	7-19	Weekly evening activity to provide opportunities for up to 10 cyp to take part in social activities and develop skills, rolling programme of arts/crafts for 7+, sensory activities/games for 7+, cooking/independence skills for 12+, physical activity for 7+and gym for 12+.	<a href="mailto:northsolihulladditionalneeds@outlook.com">northsolihulladditionalneeds@outlook.com</a>
Signpost Inclusion	Signpost Inclusion Holiday Clubs	Renewal Family Centre or Hatchford Brook youth centre	8-16	Weekly holiday club for 9 children focussing on confidence building, friendships, independence, parent respite and social opportunities.	<a href="mailto:info@signpostinclusion.org.uk">info@signpostinclusion.org.uk</a>
Signpost Inclusion	Signpost Inclusion After School Clubs	Renewal Family Centre	3-16	Range of after school/evening activities providing social opportunities and a chance to develop skills. Younger dance (3-7), Dance and singing (8-16), Younger youth (8-16), Gaming (8-11 and 12-16)	<a href="mailto:info@signpostinclusion.org.uk">info@signpostinclusion.org.uk</a>
Solihull Moors Foundation	Inclusive Youth Club	Solihull Moors Football Club	11-19	Inclusive Youth Club that will provide a weekly opportunity for 25 young people with	<a href="mailto:becci.fox@solihullmoorsfc.co.uk">becci.fox@solihullmoorsfc.co.uk</a>



additional needs to  
enjoy inclusive  
activities. Activities  
will include team  
sports, craft  
sessions, drama  
and music therapy  
sessions, mentoring  
and employability  
support.

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### **Who can access short breaks?**

Children and young people will be eligible to attend a targeted short breaks service:

- Up to their 19th birthday (or until the end of Year 13 if they attend a special school)
- If they are resident in the borough or are in care and are the responsibility of Solihull Council, wherever they are placed.
- If they have a disability (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) that prevents them from accessing universal services without substantial ongoing additional support.

When applying to attend, families should provide confirmation of their child's eligibility. This could include any of the following:

- Evidence that the child or young person is in receipt of middle or higher rate disability living allowance (DLA) or any personal independence payment (PIP), or
- An Education, Health and Care Plan or Social Care Assessment showing a relevant assessed need, or
- A letter from a relevant professional (e.g. their GP, consultant, school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), community nurse or another relevant professional) confirming that the child or young person's needs mean that they require targeted services for children and young people with disabilities.

Eligibility for the targeted Short Breaks services provided by SoLO, and those activities funded through Short Breaks grants, can be accessed without having to undergo a social care assessment, providing the above criteria is met.

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## **Children's Community Therapies**

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The CATCH (Child & Adolescent Therapy Care & Help) soft launch on 26th January was well attended and the response to the changes was very positive.

We will soon be releasing our referral form and going live with our website.

We have taken on board suggestions around a glossary of terms, more guidance about age ranges and more links to universal services and we will be adding these to our website.

Other suggestions included holding approximate wait times on the website and this is something which we are planning to move forward with.

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## Solar

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2022 was a challenging year for Solar, which is being seen nationally amongst CAMHS services and the NHS overall. Mainly in terms of unprecedented referrals to the service since COVID 19 and staffing retention impacting on waiting lists.

However, as we move in to 2023 we are pleased to announce that Steve Harris has joined the service as the Clinical Services Manager. Some of you may remember Steve from when he was the Hub Manager for Solar previously.

With Steve's return he has a number of creative ideas, such as fishing groups and Assertive Outreach Work, which we will excitedly share with you all soon. We would like to thank Emma Brogan for all her support and guidance of the service over the last couple of years.

Other good news is that our Specialist Occupational Therapist Louise Baudet has returned to the service in January 2023 full time. We have welcomed Louise with open arms and she's already started working with our Assistant Practitioner, Cath Doughty, on groups that can be offered over February Half Term and all the other school holidays throughout the year.

Ideas such as a Robotics workshop, Lego activities amongst other ideas are currently being discussed. Louise has a wealth of knowledge and experience which will be of great benefit to our children and young people. Louise is keen to build a team of student Occupational Therapists and Support Workers to complement our Occupational Therapy offer.

Cath Doughty has been shortlisted in the Service User and Carer Choice Category, which forms part of the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust Values Awards, which again recognises the dedicated work she has done with a number of young people within the service. M Power, our Learning Disability/ Autism Specialist Service has also won Team of the Month for the dedicated efforts of Kelly Sheppard and her growing team. It is important to recognise the work of our staff as we continue to recruit more staff to the service also. This recruitment is going well and we continue to think about how we can work with our parents, carers, education and social care colleagues collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and young people moving forward.

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# Improving opportunities for people with learning disabilities, autistic people and their families and carers in Birmingham and Solihull

Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System have agreed the need to create a consistent vision across health and social care to help us focus collectively on the ways in which partners support people with learning disabilities, autistic people and their families and carers. This will help us as partners to prioritise our resources and to co-ordinate our approach to improve the support and outcomes for people with a learning disability and autistic people.

We have worked closely with people with lived experience and partners to develop draft visions for Learning Disabilities and Autism to ensure they reflect the lives and aspirations of our local people. We would now like to further engage with people, including professionals, providers, people with lived experience and parent/carers to help finalise our visions which will then help shape our respective and specific delivery plans in Birmingham and Solihull.

Further engagement on the draft visions and proposed priorities starts on Monday 16 January 2023 and

We would like to hear the views of your organisation and the people you support on the visions, proposed priorities and key actions you think we should be delivering. You can do this by responding to our surveys or coming along to an engagement event in Birmingham or Solihull. There are separate surveys for professionals and for members of the public. Easy read versions of the public surveys and strategies are available online and from Birmingham and Solihull libraries.

You can find the survey links and the following downloadable documents on the [Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board website](#) Engagement ends on Monday 6 March 2023.

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## Solihull Music

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Please find below link for a video made with our Inclusion partners MAC Make Music about our Inclusive Music group Creative Sounds. The video was filmed last year and since May we have significantly increased the numbers and diversity of our participants with additional needs. ( We now have 30 regular participants attending our sessions)

<https://youtu.be/bBlsyjewMvM>

Children and Young people with additional needs are able to join the sessions free of charge and can sign up using the link online: [Inclusive Music Making for Young People | Midlands Arts Centre \(macbirmingham.co.uk\)](https://www.macbirmingham.co.uk/inclusive-music-making-for-young-people/)

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## Solihull Parent Carer Voice

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### **As usual Solihull Parent Carer Voice have been really busy**

Our Autism Support Groups (Funded by the All Age Autism project) are now up and running with a group for parent carers of autistic individuals and a second group for autistic individuals aged 18+. If you want to find out more, please contact Emma at

[Autismsolihull.spcv@outlook.com](mailto:Autismsolihull.spcv@outlook.com)

We are also running some sessions about Long Covid- asking for your experiences of support for long covid and also offering advice and support about how to access support for Long Covid. The initial meeting is 31st January with further dates for February and March. If you would like to know more, please contact Kate at [Solihullpcv@outlook.com](mailto:Solihullpcv@outlook.com)

On **1st March** we are holding our 2nd Annual SEND Community Event at the Crowne Plaza in central Solihull, bringing together parent carers and professionals from SEND services. This meeting will be focusing where we are one year on from the launch of the Additional Needs Strategy, what has been achieved in the year and what needs to be done next. If you would like to attend, you can register for a place here:

<https://forms.office.com/r/x8tr2ck2Jb>

We try to make our events accessible for as many people as possible. If there are any barriers for anyone accessing our events, please do let us know and we will try to overcome these.

### **Resources**

We have developed a library of books that parent carers are able to borrow, further information about the books will be available on our website soon. We also have a number of iPads available for parent carers to use if they are struggling with access to online meetings/consultations/appointments.

### **Parent Engagement Groups**

We are continuing to build the number of schools across Solihull that we are working with to help facilitate and support parent engagement groups. We know that when schools and families have strong positive relationships the outcomes for children and young people are better, so this work aims to support that.

### **Workstreams**

We are involved with many different workstreams across education, health and social care, working to improve services for our children and young people and their families in Solihull. Information about these workstreams can be found in our quarterly newsletter that is on our website, or if you would like more information, please do contact us. Some of

these workstreams are: Joint Additional Needs Board, Education Inclusion Board, Autism in Schools, Children and Young Peoples Mental Health board, working with Birmingham and Solihull ICS to help develop the Autism Vision and the Learning Disabilities Vision, and many more.

### **Healthy Parent Carer Course**

As parent carers ourselves we know the challenges that we can all face and we know the impact it can have on our own emotional well-being and mental health. We also recognise that there is often little support available. As such we have trained to deliver a course to parent carers called Healthy Parent Carer Course, this course was written by Exeter University and Parent Carers and specifically focuses on well-being for parent carers.

The course is run for 2 hours a week for 12 weeks and is online. Parents can self-refer, or we accept referrals from schools and services with consent.

### **Solihull SEND Community Roundtable**

The roundtable is bringing together community organisations and support groups that work with or support children and young people with SEND or their families in Solihull, enabling organisations to share knowledge and support each other. Currently the Roundtable has 24 member organisations which is fantastic. The last Community Roundtable event was the **8th February** and more dates will be coming.

Solihull Parent Carer Voice can be contacted at:

[solihullpcv@outlook.com](mailto:solihullpcv@outlook.com)

[www.spcv.org.uk](http://www.spcv.org.uk)

Facebook: Solihull Parent Carer Voice

Twitter: @solihullpcv

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If you think other people you know would be interested in this newsletter please encourage them to [sign up on the Council website here](#).

If you have any feedback on the newsletter, or suggestions for future items please email and let us know: [jand@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:jand@solihull.gov.uk)

Thank you.

**Charlotte Jones**

Head of SEND service 0-25

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