



Together
for Change

SENAT Automatic Email Response

After hearing from families that the automatic response from SENAT did not feel supportive, the Together for Change Panel collaborated with SENAT to redesign the message, ensuring it is warm, reassuring, and focused on family needs.

Original Auto-Response

“Thank you for contacting the SEN Assessment Team (SENAT).

This email serves as an acknowledgment of receipt of your email in line with Council Standards of Correspondence and a full response will be provided within 10 working days from receipt of your email.

Whilst we will endeavour to respond as soon as possible to your email, due to the volume of correspondence received, it may not be possible to respond any sooner than the timelines above. If you do not receive a response from me within 10 working days, please do send a follow up email, and or forward to EHCNA.team@westsussex.gov.uk and a member of the team will follow up if I am unable to do so. Please note leave notice below.

Advanced warning:

Abuse of any kind will not be tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to, personal attacks, offensive language, threats, discriminatory remarks.

Any emails containing abusive content will immediately be referred to colleagues in Law & Assurance for consideration and action.

Leave and or /notice of working arrangements:

Working Hours:

- I work a 9-day fortnight between 8-5. I will not be available every other Friday.

Annual Leave:

- 17th July and 28th July to 1st August

Availability:

- I attend panel's on a Monday, Tuesday and Thursday on a rota each week, and have meetings normally arranged throughout each day so may not always be able to respond to emails quickly.

Thank you for your understanding.



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Submissions
to the panel

How involved the panel
felt in the first discussion



Engagement

How involved the panel felt
in the Final discussions



Coproduction

Panel Feedback & Suggestions:

- The message felt too formal and impersonal, a warmer tone was needed
- Legal warnings felt intimidating, suggested replacing with respectful, values-based wording
- Too much focus on staff availability, suggested simplifying to avoid overload
- No signposting, recommended adding helpful links to SENDIAS, Local Offer, WSPCF

Why It Matters

- ✓ Creates a more welcoming and compassionate first contact
- ✓ Reduces anxiety by replacing legal warnings with reassuring language
- ✓ Helps families feel supported through clear signposting
- ✓ Builds trust in SENAT as a service that listens, understands and cares

What;s Changed

In response to panel feedback, the revised response reflects families' needs and emotions through a warmer, more personal tone. Legal warnings were replaced with clear, supportive language, and signposting has been added to provide empathetic support along with practical guidance.



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Read the updated response below:

“Thank you for contacting the West Sussex Special Educational Needs Assessment Team (SENAT). This is an automated message to confirm that your email has been successfully received.

We understand that many of the enquiries we receive are both important and time-sensitive, especially when they relate to supporting children and young people. In line with West Sussex County Council’s standards, we aim to respond within 10 working days. While we will always do our best to reply sooner, the volume of correspondence we receive means this may not always be possible. We truly appreciate your patience and understanding.

If you have not received a response within 10 working days, please follow up and copy in SENAT.South@westsussex.gov.uk. A colleague will ensure your enquiry is appropriately followed up if I am unavailable.

My working arrangements and availability:

- I work a 9 day fortnight, and take every other Thursday off.*
- I lead panels on Monday and Thursdays and have limited access to emails on those days.*

Advanced warning of annual leave:

- None currently booked.*

. West Sussex recognise that navigating SEND processes can feel overwhelming at times, and we want to ensure that families feel supported. You may find the following organisations helpful while you wait to hear from us:



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· *West Sussex Local Offer - Information about SEND services, processes, and support available in the county.*

<https://westsussex.local-offer.org>

· *West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF) - An independent charity for the parent carers of children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who can support by providing information, signposting, and training that equips them in their lifelong caring role and empowers them to participate in shaping services for their children and young people.*

<https://www.wspcf.org.uk>

· *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS) - Independent, confidential support for parents and carers in West Sussex.*

<https://westsussexsendias.org>

· *Reaching Families - Resources and support for families of children with additional needs in West Sussex.*

<https://reachingfamilies.org.uk>

We are committed to treating all families with respect, compassion, and professionalism. We kindly ask that communication with our team remains courteous, even during difficult times. Any correspondence that contains offensive or abusive language may be referred to the Council's Law, Assurance and Insight Team for review in line with our communication policy.

Thank you again for getting in touch, and for your continued patience and understanding."