



Department
for Education

Inclusive workforce models

Case studies

September 2026

**Authors: CFE Research and ASK
Research Partners**



Government
Social Research

Contents

Illustrative case studies of models of provision	2
Model 1: Mainstream only approach – primary setting	2
Model 1: Mainstream only – secondary setting	9
Model 2: School-led support base – primary setting	15
Model 2: School-led support base – secondary setting	20
Model 3: Specialist base resource provision (RP) – primary setting	29
Model 3: Specialist base resource provision (RP) – secondary setting	34
Model 4: Tiered support – primary setting	38
Model 4: Tiered model – secondary setting	43
Thematic case studies	51
Thematic case study 1: Whole school approach	51
Thematic case study 2: Developing internal specialist provision	58
Thematic case study 3: Teaching assistant (TA) deployment	63
Thematic case study 4: Upskilling staff	68

Illustrative case studies of models of provision

This report contains descriptions of what the identified models of supporting pupils with SEND can look like in both primary and secondary school settings. While some examples may reflect effective practice, they are provided to illustrate model operation rather than to endorse or evaluate practice.

Model 1: Mainstream only approach – primary setting

This local authority (LA)-maintained school has 600 pupils on roll, with an average number of pupils on the special educational needs (SEN) register. The school operates a mainstream only approach to supporting all pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The classroom environment is inclusive with class teachers adapting lessons to meet pupil need. Teaching assistants (TAs) support delivery in class and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) ensures differentiated teaching is being implemented in lessons. English and maths interventions are delivered to small groups during non-core lessons. For pupils who still cannot access the curriculum with this level of adaptation, more bespoke learning is delivered by TAs in the classroom, or they have a reduced timetable.

Context

This school is an LA-maintained primary school in the Southwest with a good Ofsted rating. The school has approximately 600 pupils on roll with a below average proportion eligible for free school meals (FSM). The proportion of pupils on the SEN register and the number of children with an education, health and care (EHC) plan reflect the national average. This school operates an inclusive mainstream only model and has no school-led or LA-funded provision. The school, from leadership down, reports being committed to inclusion and aims to ensure equal opportunities for all pupils. Staff strongly believe that all children, including those with SEND, should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The school has high expectations of children with SEND and believes most can make good progress in the classroom learning alongside their peers, experiencing the full school offer.

Features of the model and staff deployment

The driver for using a mainstream only approach is to ensure all children are part of the school community and can access the curriculum alongside their peers. The SENCO described how important they view the mainstream only model to be in achieving the best for pupils and to maximise academic progress.

In the classroom, children are exposed to language and to expectations, [children with SEND] are seeing what their peers are doing. That brings them on, because you're in that environment and contextually it works if you can stay in the room, that's why we favour that model. – SENCO

Provision and interventions

The school ensures that all children with SEND receive adapted teaching within the classroom alongside their peers, regardless of type of need or whether they have an EHC plan. The SENCO manages and monitors pupils' progress with their teacher to ensure their needs are being met. A team of higher-level teaching assistant (HLTAs) and TAs support children with an EHC plan to access their adapted lessons. They also deliver interventions, as directed by the SENCO and teacher.

In previous years, the school delivered a full timetable of interventions for children who needed extra help and support, which was run by HLTAs with additional training in areas such as numeracy, literacy and phonics. An increasing number of children with more complex needs are now entering the school, resulting in HLTAs supporting children in the classroom. This has reduced the number of targeted interventions delivered by HLTAs. The interventions that are delivered primarily focus on helping year 6 pupils with maths and English. HLTAs and TAs also deliver small group interventions, for example, in Lego therapy, where it is stipulated in an EHC plan. These take place inside the classroom where space allows. Otherwise, it takes place outside the classroom, usually during the afternoon to ensure children can participate in core subjects in class in the morning.

Staffing model

The school has a full-time SENCO who has significant experience in SEND provision and inclusion in an LA and both primary and secondary school settings. The SENCO is part of the senior leadership team (SLT) with strategic responsibility for SEND policy, is the designated safeguarding lead and works closely with the deputy headteacher. She is based in the key stage (KS) 2 provision. In addition, the school has a teacher on the infant site who holds the SENCO qualification and carries out SENCO duties in KS1/early years foundation stage (EYFS) for 3 days a week. They support the operational delivery of SEND but they do not act as a statutory/lead SENCO. Both qualified SENCOs recruit, train and deploy (part- and full-time) TAs and HLTAs, of which the school has around 30.

The main SENCO's role is to ensure all children with SEND access an adapted and scaffolded curriculum appropriate to their needs. They manage the team of support staff who help children to access the work assigned to them by the teacher. The SENCO provides the teachers with information on the children with SEND in their class at the start of the academic year and they meet with parents to complete an individual education plan (IEP) for those children who need one. Teachers also share learning and knowledge with each other.

We have regular staff meetings where we share good practice on supporting pupils with additional needs. So, we try to learn from each other. – *Teacher*

In addition to the SENCO qualified staff, 2 pastoral support staff are employed on a part-time basis with responsibility for attendance and school avoidance. They conduct home visits and provide support to children and families, including those with SEND. They also have wide experience in working with disadvantaged pupils in primary and secondary school settings.

The role of each classroom teacher is to firstly ensure the classroom is inclusive. This involves thinking about the whole class environment, seating plans, movement breaks, extra support (e.g. for handwriting and maths in core lessons) and the provision of resources to help remove as many barriers to learning as possible.

I try to be inclusive. So, if I have a child who needs their own workstation, I always like that workstation to be attached to the main table, so they won't have somebody right next to them and they have the space they need, but they are not segregated to the side of the classroom. I like them to be amongst their peers. – *Teacher*

Teachers plan and adapt lessons for all the children in the class. For a child with an EHC plan, this may mean doing the same lesson as everyone in the class but adapted, when possible, to ensure it meets their individual needs. A very small number of children who have more significant SEND have an entirely bespoke curriculum. This happens, for example, when a child is working at a significantly younger age than their year group. Their lessons are designed by the teacher and delivered by the TA within the classroom or in another space if the pupil needs a quieter space. Teachers brief and direct TAs on how to deliver the planned adaptations and interventions and when/where they should take place. Further specialist strategies and interventions (such as those determined by the speech and language therapist (SaLT), educational psychologist (EP), or outreach service) are modelled by the specialists for support staff to then implement. The teacher retains oversight, monitoring and assessment of support and progress for pupils.

Support is provided on a 1:1 basis if that is stipulated in an EHC plan. The teacher briefs the TA about the needs of the children and what types of interventions are needed. As the key person for that child, the TA will work with the teacher to monitor the progress of the pupils in their care and recommend further adaptations.

The teacher is great in terms of communication and tells me what [the child] needs. If [the child] struggled with something in the morning, the teacher will ask me if we can go through it in the afternoon. I am briefed at the start of the academic year about the interventions they need, so it is my job to get them done. – *TA*

HLTAs have undertaken additional training in, for example, dyslexia screening and speech and language support. They disseminate this information to TAs and support them to implement interventions. Where the needs of a group of pupils are similar, TAs provide appropriate interventions, on phonics or friendship circles for example, to small groups during non-core lessons.

Because TAs primarily support children with EHC plans on a 1:1 basis, there are sometimes 2 of them in one class, while other classes do not have any additional support. Most TAs provide support for one child for the whole academic year, although not for the whole day. In some cases, a child has 2 assigned TAs, one who works with them in the morning and the other who works with them in the afternoon. This provides respite from any volatile behaviour for the TAs and prevents the child from becoming over dependent on a specific member of staff.

If we feel like that the child is becoming too dependent on the TA or there needs to be a bit of a break, then other staff are around. But the huge difficulty is staff absence. – *Teacher*

TAs are sometimes required to take a child out of the class who is dysregulated or to help with another child who needs extra support. These situations also mean that the allocation of TAs varies. Increasingly HLTAs are supporting children with EHC plans in the classroom to cover TA absence.

I try hard not to use HLTAs for 1:1 support. But I do have to use them in that capacity sometimes, which is a false economy because they've got the expertise and experience in different areas. – *SENCO*

The SENCO attempts to ensure an even distribution of TAs wherever possible. Deployment is prioritised depending on who needs the most support and in what capacity. When a child with an EHC plan is absent, the TA assigned to work with them is re-deployed to support other children. However, timetabling is challenging and there are times when the appropriate support is not available.

It is like a giant jigsaw, trying to piece together the diverse needs of the different EHC plans... and marrying up [TA] hours to fit with the needs of the children. Logistically its quite difficult. – *SENCO*

Often the SENCO is called away from their desk to help a child in distress to regulate their emotions. This situation can also take a TA away from the classroom and another child who needs support, meaning the teacher must adapt for the varying needs of pupils within the class, as well as supporting children who have more heavily adapted curriculums. This often adds to an already high workload for teachers.

Although most children with SEND are primarily taught in the classroom, the school now has 8 pupils with more complex needs who are unable to access a highly adapted curriculum in the mainstream classroom full time. These children have bespoke

timetables, with 3 on a reduced timetable ranging from an hour a day to mornings only. Reduced timetables are reviewed regularly, with the view to increasing time in school. These children are supported by TAs in other areas of the school, when the classroom environment is too much for them, using resources supplied by the teacher and SENCO.

The school has converted part of their library and another area outside the classroom into spaces that can be used by TAs to support this group of children. The school would like a dedicated breakout room and sensory space, but space restrictions mean this has not been possible. The children in question are primarily non-verbal, they have a range of cognitive impairments, as well as personal care and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, with disruptive behaviour patterns. The time they spend in alternative spaces does vary for each child and often requires 1:1 support and sometimes 2 staff to 1 child. The driving factor for providing such a high degree of support is pupil safety. This impacts on staff deployment across the rest of the school. Although the school aims to ensure all children access mainstream provision in the classroom, for a minority of pupils, the SENCO finds it increasingly difficult to achieve this.

Training and development

The school highlights the importance of staff continuing professional development (CPD) to maintain an inclusive mainstream only approach. The SENCO runs a programme of training sessions throughout the year on adapted teaching and on creating an inclusive classroom for all staff. This training takes place in staff meetings and INSET (in-service training) days. Regular review meetings take place between teachers and the SENCO to assess whether the teacher is making appropriate adaptations for pupils with SEND and the impact of their approach on pupil progress. The SENCO and members of the SLT observe teacher, TA and HLTA practice against a proforma and feed this into performance management.

Staff also have access to external training. For example, a local pupil referral unit (PRU) delivers trauma-informed training and outreach for the school. SaLTs, bought in for 2 days a week to support staff and children, have also delivered training on social communication to all staff. Specific staff are trained in specific areas of SEND and strategies. For example, a TA is currently doing a positive handling course, an HLTA is trained to work with children with dyslexia, and a teacher is trained in understanding moderate learning needs. Another teacher has received training to become an Autism Champion so they can share knowledge across the school. Training in these areas is provided by external providers, for example the LA, the regional autism outreach team and [Team Teach](#).¹ There are also 2 teachers currently undertaking the national professional qualification (NPQ) for SENCOs, so they can be qualified to give additional support to the SENCO.

¹ Training to support the development of positive behaviour cultures in education, child and adult services.

I expressed an interest in doing my SENCO NPQ and [the head teacher] could have said no. We've got 2 SENCOs and I need to have some time out of class to be able to attend some of the course. But I think [the head teacher] saw it as a benefit for our school to have another staff member upskilled. – *Teacher*

Effectiveness

The school perceives their model to be largely effective in meeting the needs of most pupils. Most children with an EHC plan learn in class with their peers, benefiting from the rich educational environment and language within the room. The school reports that these children make good academic progress, have improved attendance and have more positive engagement.

I think, given the staff capacity, funding and space, I think we are doing a really good job in providing the best opportunities for our children with SEN. – *TA*

I've got lots of children with an autism diagnosis who are accessing the curriculum beautifully. The adaptive teaching model is working well for them. – *SENCO*

There is a small but increasing number of children with more complex needs that the school find difficult to manage in the mainstream classroom setting. The senior leadership team are currently considering whether their model needs to evolve to support these children more effectively, including through the creation of a dedicated specialist base operating as a nurture room with permanent staffing (as in the school-led model of support).

Our approach has always worked for the school. But we're getting an increasing number of children with more complicated needs who it doesn't work for, children who are non-verbal. – *SENCO*

The main barrier to this for the school is lack of space. The range of needs are also potentially too disparate to effectively support all of the children who need it in a single unit.

Challenges and considerations

- Implementing the mainstream only approach is perceived to add to workload pressures for teachers.

You have a teacher that's planning the teaching of Shakespeare along with children who don't know their number bonds to 10, that is challenging. – *SENCO*

- Financial pressures are also a concern as the school perceives there to be a greater need to provide a higher level of support for the increasing number of children with more complex needs.

It's a very stretched model. It is one that runs at quite a large financial loss. We don't get a lot of money from the LA. I think every EHC plan we have costs the school an additional £10,000. – *SENCO*

- Accommodating all children with SEND within mainstream lessons and ensuring that the offer all pupils receive is inclusive, is a key tension for the school. Difficult and challenging behaviours can affect the experience of other children and result in parental complaints. They are also perceived to contribute to staff turnover, which exacerbates recruitment challenges.

The reality is that there are some extremes that are impossible to accommodate in a mainstream school. That derails things. You have to ask yourself, what is effective inclusion? What does that really look like? – *SENCO*

- Recruitment challenges have resulted in the reliance, at points, on TAs from agencies to support children with high needs but without an EHC plan, which has exacerbated the school's financial pressures.

Model 1: Mainstream only – secondary setting

This large, rural, secondary school (part of an academy trust) adopts a mainstream only approach to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), built on the principle that pupils should spend most of their time learning in mainstream classrooms. Teachers lead on adaptive teaching methods, supported by teaching assistants (TAs) who are deployed to support classes rather than individual pupils, and form part of the teaching team. There are 2 spaces where academic interventions and short regulation breaks are delivered to provide individual, time-limited support, rather than alternative curriculum. Leaders consider that their flexible, relational and needs-led model ensures pupils remain embedded in mainstream learning while also meeting increasingly complex pupil needs.

Context

This large 11 to 18 rural secondary school educates just under 1,100 pupils, including around 160 in the sixth form, and serves a community with increasingly complex pupil needs. Approximately 15% of pupils are on the special educational needs (SEN) register. Overall, just under 3% have an education, health and care (EHC) plan, although in some year groups this rises to 5%, reflecting significant variation in need across the school. Leaders note that the school's strong reputation for inclusion means families often choose it over other local schools. The school is rated good by Ofsted.

The school reflects a mainstream only ethos. Although it operates 2 intervention spaces, pupils do not attend these spaces as an alternative curriculum, nor as a cohort. Access is individual, time-limited and targeted, and pupils remain in mainstream lessons for most of their timetable.²

Leaders summarise the school's core vision as "mainstream as default", which underpins both strategic decision-making and daily practice. SEND is considered a whole school responsibility, anchored in the belief that adaptive, well-structured teaching ensures an inclusive offer to meet pupils' needs. Leaders say they ground their inclusive practice in evidence.

We're trying to push for high quality teaching for all... strategies that support all learners but disproportionately support those with SEND. –
Assistant headteacher

² This research aimed to identify a secondary school operating a fully mainstream model of SEND provision without additional spaces, pupil withdrawal or offer alternative timetabled interventions. However, such models were rare. Every secondary school in this research had at least 1 additional space used by pupils with SEND for pastoral support, regulation or academic intervention.

Features of the model and staff deployment

Adaptive classroom teaching

Teachers across the school are responsible for adapting the curriculum to ensure teaching is accessible. They use techniques including scaffolded tasks, structured writing frames, visual prompts and dual coding, which are regularly reviewed and reduced over time to build pupils' independence. TAs are deliberately deployed to classes, not individual pupils, enabling them to work with relevant subject teams. TAs use a "least -help" approach based on [Education Endowment Foundation](#) (EEF) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)³ principles, prompting and cueing before offering pupils direct support, to prevent over-reliance. Teachers and TAs collaborate on settling routines and starter activities. Lessons start with a "brain in gear" task, a recall activity of 5 questions, during which the TA typically settles pupils, supports organisation, and gently re-engages those who struggle with transitions. Once teacher input begins, the TA positions themselves to offer visible support to the whole class, not single pupils. To ensure pupils with SEND benefit directly from teacher expertise, they deliver subject-specific explanations to them, while the TA circulates around the whole class to maintain pace and clarity.

Where it works best is where you can't tell who the teacher is and who the TA is, it's a teaching team for the class. – *Deputy headteacher*

Intervention delivery

Short, structured withdrawal from mainstream lessons occurs only when necessary, and is always driven by subject need. For example, a teacher may direct a small group of pupils to the Learning Support Centre (LSC) for a focused, 20-minute TA-led recap of a particular skill, before they return to complete the main task in class. These sessions are closely aligned with the lesson content, and teachers identify the exact skill to reinforce. This ensures pupils do not miss curriculum progression but instead have barriers to learning removed in real time.

This space is also used to deliver a range of interventions, including literacy and numeracy programmes, memory work, Lego therapy, reinforcement of curriculum content and supervised scribing sessions (a support arrangement where a trained adult writes down a pupil's dictated answer). These take place during tutor time or on a rolling basis, to ensure pupils do not repeatedly miss the same subject. It can also function as a regulation space. Pupils may come to the LSC with a timeout card and engage in a calming activity such as a jigsaw or sand tray, until a 10-minute timer runs out. The emphasis is always on swift re-integration into lessons and staff are clear that the space is not intended for pupils to

³ Universal Design for Learning is an educational framework designed to help teachers plan lessons and environments that are accessible and effective for all learners, including those with SEND. UDL comes from cognitive neuroscience and is now widely used in inclusive education.

spend a fixed proportion of their week in. Around 30 pupils receive interventions in this space, while others access the space for occasional support.

Pastoral and SEMH support

The school hosts a small, self-contained building at the front of the site, providing a safe and quiet space for social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) interventions to be delivered. These include mindfulness sessions, [thrive work](#), emotional literacy and short blocks of pastoral support. Currently, around 30 pupils have a brief, weekly timetabled session in this space across a half term. The space also offers a stable and emotionally safe environment to support any pupils experiencing instability or trauma, for example, a looked after child facing placement breakdown, or a pupil who has suffered a bereavement.

We balance the pastoral with the academic, we're still monitoring the quality of the work done in the SEMH space. – *Deputy headteacher*

Staffing model

A multi-disciplinary team supports the school's SEND provision. The team is overseen by the deputy headteacher responsible for inclusive education and includes a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), deputy SENCO, an experienced administrator, 5 higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and 11 full-time equivalent TAs. The deputy headteacher line manages the SENCO and deputy SENCO and oversees all SEND, teaching and learning, inclusion systems and key stage leads.

The SENCO oversees the LSC and all SEND delivery, including learning plan development, intervention timetabling, and complex case management. The deputy SENCO role was introduced to support workload management and succession planning. The pastoral/SEMH team is led by a qualified teacher with a pastoral background – including experience in safeguarding, early help and social care. They are based in the SEMH space, while also teaching in mainstream lessons. The SEND administrator supports both the LSC and SEMH provision, including planning timetable adaptations, EHC plan paperwork and acting as the first point of contact for parents.

One HLTA is based in the SEMH provision, and 4 HLTAs are based in the LSC. Their roles involve splitting their time between delivering interventions in the LSC, supporting targeted groups, attending specialist meetings and supporting mainstream lessons (often in subject areas where they have the most knowledge). HLTAs typically provide more specialist support, including visual or hearing support, support that aligns with occupational therapy or physiotherapy (e.g. setting up and supervising the use of sensory equipment or supporting pupils with fine or gross motor skills), and social communication interventions. While TAs are primarily deployed in mainstream lessons, 1 full-time TA is based in the LSC and 3 part-time TAs work in the LSC. TA allocation is driven by class need and timetable arrangements, which can change mid-year. To ensure continuity and

subject-specific expertise, the school prioritises deploying TAs and HLTAs to lessons where they have strong subject knowledge – such as maths, English, humanities and practical subjects.

Each TA, HLTA, SENCO, deputy SENCO and deputy headteacher holds a caseload of around 20 pupils for whom they act as the keyworker. The team meets at least once a term to review learning plans, monitor progress, discuss concerns and engage with parents. The senior SEND team generally oversee more complex caseloads.

Training and development

The school invests in professional development, despite financial pressure. TAs and HLTAs can access a comprehensive suite of continuing professional development (CPD), including training and resources on autism; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); dyslexia and dyscalculia support (for pupils with specific difficulties in understanding numbers and mathematical concepts); precision teaching (a fluency-building intervention that targets one specific skill at a time); thrive practice (supporting pupils' social and emotional development through relational and therapeutic activities); drawing and talking therapy; memory interventions; and trauma-informed practice.

I'll grab any opportunity to help TAs feel valued and give them the knowledge to do the brilliant job they do. - *Deputy headteacher*

In particular, HLTAs at the school have received extensive and relevant specialist training, supported by regular and ongoing input from external professionals. External occupational therapists, physiotherapists and counsellors, are on site multiple times each week to deliver therapeutic input and model strategies for staff. In addition, the trust's educational psychologist (EP) provides termly training sessions for the SEND team to strengthen practice in areas such as trauma-informed approaches, precision teaching and supporting distressed parents. Some HLTAs also collaborate routinely with LA specialists, for example, the teacher of the deaf visits once each term to review provision and advise on practice for pupils with sensory impairments, working directly with the HLTA who specialises in hearing and vision needs.

The school's unusually regular access to external specialists comes through the Wellbeing in Mind team, an NHS mental health support team (MHST) operating across the region in which this school is based. This service is not school funded but is delivered by the regional NHS foundation trust and commissioned as part of the government's national roll-out of MHSTs, created under the Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health green paper. MHST funding is dependent on continued national investment and NHS England commissioning cycles, which means it is more secure than school-level budgets but still subject to periodic national review and local re-bidding as programmes expand or restructure. Each term the trust's EP provides senior management with up to 2 days of casework and training which is cascaded to other relevant staff. The EP time is in

addition to what is provided by the NHS but is limited and shared across trust schools. SEND leads at the school also have access to support from a trust inclusion lead.

The SENCO and a teaching and learning lead jointly deliver whole school CPD on TA deployment and UDL/EEF approaches. This has helped to inform teachers' classroom practice and the effective use of TAs by promoting ownership of SEND adaptations and providing strategies for structuring and scaffolding learning. Faculty-level CPD is also used, with department teams undertaking specific training. TAs attached to the departments attend these sessions to build subject-specific confidence and understanding.

Effectiveness

Leaders report that pupils with SEND spend the majority of their time in mainstream lessons. Staff consistently describe calm classrooms, clear expectations and strong relationships. The HLTA highlighted how the school's model enables pupils to access support early in a flexible way that prevents escalation and preserves the pupil's relationship with mainstream learning:

If a student is dysregulated, I might make the decision, 'let's go and do our work in Learning Support Centre now', but it wouldn't be a regular thing. –
HLTA

The SEMH space and the LSC are both described as “bridges, not destinations”, with pupils quickly returning to mainstream provision. Staff value the supportive culture which fosters collaborative working across the school:

We do a good job of working together, we're all heard, and we all work on the same page. – *HLTA*

The deputy headteacher highlighted that GCSE attainment outcomes in the main subjects showed “no noticeable difference” between pupils with SEND and their non-SEND peers, an achievement they attribute to consistent adaptive teaching, targeted intervention and a strong team ethos.

Challenges and considerations

- The school is exploring ways to expand its Key Stage 4 pathways, recognising that a small group of pupils need more vocationally aligned or unit-based qualifications.
- Leaders aim to ensure planned pupil support is not routinely displaced by cover demands but acknowledge they suffer from a shortage of staff at times. They prioritise staff wellbeing by protecting time for debrief and supervision, acknowledging the emotional load carried by those working closely with trauma-affected pupils.

- Leaders emphasised that the school's model is under strain due to a significant increase in the number of pupils with EHC plans and complex needs, while staffing levels have not increased accordingly. Leaders believe additional specialist HLTA and TA capacity would have the greatest beneficial impact. They also plan to strengthen internal intervention capacity (related to both SEMH and academic support) to allow earlier and more intensive support. Their aim is not to set up a specialist provision but to reinforce their model that keeps pupils in the mainstream while meeting need effectively.
- Staff described pupils who are socially well-integrated but academically "completely lost," raising concerns about long-term suitability of a mainstream placement. Despite this, specialist options locally remain extremely limited. The school's rural location means that external alternative provision is scarce and prohibitively expensive, including with transport requirements. As a result, the school must meet an increasingly broad spectrum of need internally.

Model 2: School-led support base – primary setting

This urban primary academy serves around 300 pupils and has seen a sharp rise in the number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and the complexity of their needs since 2019. In response, they deliver a mainstream support approach as well as a school-led SEND classroom (support base) for pupils with the highest needs who cannot cope with the open plan environment. This provision is staffed full time by an emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA)-trained higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) and a teaching assistant (TA). A TA trained in diabetes care supports a specific pupil in the school-led SEND classroom when needed. More broadly, the school has moved from class-based TAs to phase-based deployment with around 14 TAs and 5 HLTAs providing in-class support.

Context

This medium sized urban, academy primary school has around 300 pupils on roll and in its pre-school provision. Pupil premium rates are below the national average. The school is rated good by Ofsted. Both rates of pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans and those on the special educational needs (SEN) register are close to the national average. However, since 2019, the school's intake of pupils with SEND has significantly increased, from 1 pupil to 19 with an EHC plan, plus 39 pupils in receipt of SEN support. Leaders described a marked shift in complexity of need, particularly in social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and neurodivergent support needs, alongside co-occurring trauma and health needs.

Features of the model and staff deployment

The school's approach is "mainstream first, flexible where needed", with most pupils with SEND remaining in class with tailored support. In autumn 2024, the school set up a classroom as a school-led support base for a small number of pupils with the highest regulation needs who were unable to cope with the semi-open-plan classroom environment and frequent transitions. The door from this provision opens directly to the playground, enabling pupils to take supported "learning breaks" outside without moving through busy shared areas. The school emphasises that the provision is not standalone, but an adaptation designed to ensure all pupils can engage in learning in a safe environment. This provision is based on level of need, rather than age. It currently supports 2 year 6 pupils and 2 year 5 pupils with the highest regulation needs who cannot cope in mainstream lessons.

Each pupil has an individual plan, and the aim is to provide them with short-term stability, curriculum access (through adapted teaching materials, targeted small group, 1:1 interventions and regulation time) and gradual reintegration. 1:1 support is reserved for pupils with significant personal care needs, communication or medical needs (e.g. Down

syndrome, limited mobility, diabetes), or for those who require a trusted adult to maintain safe learning. Where possible 1:1 support is integrated with group work and classroom time to avoid dependency.

The provision is staffed full time by an [ELSA](#) trained (HLTA) plus a TA who is a qualified overseas teacher. A further TA trained in diabetes care supports a specific pupil in the provision when needed. The amount of time pupils spend accessing the provision varies based on need – some are full-time, while others access the space for part of the day, particularly during higher demand periods (e.g. mornings or during core subjects). Pupils who access the provision full time have their curriculum planned by their class teachers, who set the content which is aligned with what their peers are studying but at a different pace and pitch. The HLTA and ELSA in the unit deliver this work on an individual basis and feed back regularly to the class teachers about progress and difficulties, ensuring ongoing adjustments and continuity. Although teachers rarely go into the unit, they maintain oversight of the curriculum and pupil progress. The school trialled a model where teachers delivered interventions within the provision, but it was unviable.

We've tried to do that, but... the cover, the release... it's really difficult. Those children really struggle with change... different people coming in can impact on them. – *Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)*

The provision space is also used to provide a soft start to the day for anxious pupils before they are accompanied into class once the rest of the school is settled.

In the rest of the school, class teachers adapt core lessons to ensure pupils with SEND can remain with their peers wherever possible. They make adaptations such as scaffolding, using “now/next” routines, short task/break cycles and low stimulation environments. Phase teams deliver “brain breaks”, [Rapid readers](#)⁴ and language games to achieve individualised targets for pupils with SEND. Staff carry these targets on lanyard cards so that appropriate prompts and check-ins can be conducted during the day. Pupils only leave the classroom when they are highly dysregulated and are expected to rejoin lessons as soon as they are settled. The English lead monitors progress for the lowest 20% of pupils and for those with SEND. They check that reading interventions and other support activities are running as planned and make any necessary adjustments.

External advice from local authority (LA) SEND advisory teachers and an alternative provision provider confirmed the need for more discrete, quiet spaces to deliver EHC plan requirements. There is a shortage of space at the school – classrooms are small, corridors are in constant use and there is a lack of quiet space. To increase capacity the school has converted a nurture room into a sensory room and installed a second-hand office container on the playground as its new nurture space.

⁴ An intervention for struggling readers working behind age-related expectations, and children with special educational needs.

The school is taking part in the [Partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools \(PINS\) programme](#) and has begun rolling out FUNMOVES⁵ as a universal motor skills programme with reassessment and referral to occupational therapy where additional support is required.

Staffing model

The SENCO is a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) and is also the designated safeguarding and mental health lead. They have 2.5 days protected time to coordinate SEND provision and teach. When the SENCO is teaching, the headteacher and deputy headteacher make decisions related to SEND and meet with parents as needed. The SENCO and other members of the SLT meet weekly to review pupils' support requirements, whether current support is working and what should be prioritised. They use [Insight Tracking](#) to support this process. The team also ensure that pupils' plans are comprised of achievable steps that staff can act on immediately.

The school finds it challenging to recruit TAs, but currently has 14, several of whom are qualified to level 3. Not all of these TAs are full time and 3 of them are supply TAs. The school also employs 5 HLTAs, 2 of whom are ELSA trained. This total includes the HLTA and TA based in the provision. In addition, a further staff member has a dual role as the pastoral lead and family support worker.

The school has moved away from class attached TAs to key stage-based teams. HLTAs and TAs are timetabled across each phase to respond to emerging behaviour issues and provide small group interventions and in-class support at the point of need. They are required to combine academic intervention with de-escalation, emotion coaching and practical support. This staffing model is more flexible and means that if they are required to cover classes, they already know the pupils well. One HLTA reflected that "the phase model lets us be where we're needed".

Training and development

Weekly SLT and staff meetings are used to discuss SEND issues while briefings undertaken during assembly time provide bitesize continuing professional development (CPD) and updates for TAs and HLTAs. Across the multi-academy trust (MAT), SENCOs regularly meet for peer challenge and a recent formal SEND review by a MAT SENCO prompted refinements to individual pupil plans and early years interventions.

All staff have received training on autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyscalculia, emotion coaching and crisis management. Additional training has also been provided on communication strategies (including [Makaton](#)), anxiety, attendance avoidance and occupational therapy programmes (e.g. Cool Kids/Cool Characters⁶). The

⁵ [School-based fundamental movement skill screening](#).

⁶ Shropshire Community Health NHS, [Information for schools and early years settings – cool characters programme](#).

ELSA-trained HLTAs receive half termly supervision from an LA-based educational psychologist (EP). The PINS programme has provided EP-led drop-ins for TAs and staff are undertaking online training matched to current cohorts' needs. Teachers value actionable research guidance, though it can be a challenge to implement change due to other pressures on their time.

Effectiveness

Leaders and wider staff reported that relocating pupils with the highest needs away from open teaching spaces has led to a calmer school environment, while enabling pupils with SEND to access learning they previously refused.

Teachers, HLTAs and TAs agreed that the school-led provision has reduced the intensity of incidents in shared areas. Pupils who previously refused to write are now producing drawings and sentences in a quieter, predictable space. Other pupils with SEND are able to access classroom learning for preferred subjects or short, supervised time with their peers. The English lead reported clearer progress tracking for the lowest 20% of pupils and SEND cohorts.

For some children, the separate room builds self-esteem and regulation; for others, staying in class with flexible breaks works best. It depends on the child, and we flex to that. – *English lead teacher*

The combination of mainstream adapted teaching, school-led provision for pupils with the highest needs, phase-based TA deployment and targeted training is seen by the school as having stabilised pupil behaviour and supported pupils to progress.

Challenges and considerations

- Leaders are open that for a small subset of pupils, the school-led provision is a holding response while specialist placements are pursued; the LA often agrees with the need, but places are scarce.
- EHC plan funding does not fully meet required provision, which means schools are topping up funding from their core budget and operating in deficit.
- When HLTAs are deployed to provide cover, planned interventions are missed and cannot be backfilled, which the leader felt slows pupil progress.
- If more space were available, staff could offer additional low stimulus rooms, protect intervention timetables and invest in practical resources (including software) that assessment reports often recommend but which the school cannot fund or find the space for.

We want to be inclusive and provide for our community... but some children simply can't cope with a busy, semi-open-plan environment. The SEND classroom makes learning possible while we work towards the right environment and long-term placements. – *SENCO*

Model 2: School-led support base– secondary setting

This large, urban, secondary academy rated as outstanding by Ofsted educates over 2,000 pupils and, despite having an average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), has a high number requiring support. The school adopts a mainstream first inclusion philosophy, with highly intentional teaching forming the core of its SEND approach. Staffing is carefully structured to keep most pupils with SEND in mainstream lessons, with only those in years 7 to 9 working significantly below key stage 2 expectations accessing the school-led provision. SEND leadership is multi-layered, and specialist SEND teachers, rather than high numbers of teaching assistant (TAs), form the backbone of support. TAs are deployed flexibly across mainstream lessons rather than assigned 1:1, providing responsive, teacher-aligned support, while specialist roles and a strong pastoral infrastructure ensure needs are met without removing pupils unnecessarily from the classroom.

Context

This large academised secondary school with over 2,000 pupils, spans years 7 to 13. It has an average proportion of pupils with SEND and around 3% have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. This translates into a high number of pupils with SEND in a school of this size. It is located in an urban environment but has a below average rate of pupils in receipt of free school meals (FSM). It is rated outstanding by Ofsted.

The school adopts a whole school, mainstream first inclusion philosophy. Senior leaders regard the school's approach as "highly intentional teaching", where lessons are structured around the support needs of pupils with SEND as, in their words, "what is essential for some will benefit all... We deliver... exceptionally high intentional teaching... which I think is a further layer... beyond quality first teaching." This approach involved designing a precise curriculum tailored to the needs of all, embedding SEND friendly strategies for all pupils, ensuring predictable routines and positioning teachers, not TAs as the key agents of support. They described it as a systematic, research driven approach to teaching that aims to minimise the need for differentiation or adult support by making the core teaching itself highly accessible.⁷

The headteacher emphasised that the school actively seeks out external evidence and emerging practice rather than relying solely on established routines. She explained that the school never launches anything with staff unless it's been fully researched, tried and tested.

⁷ Intentional teaching is not a term used by DfE but is frequently used and defined in early childhood research and professional publications, especially in contexts outside the UK. [Intention teaching – The Education Hub](#) includes further information.

We've done a lot of research – Mary Myatt, David Didau... the best available research out there, and we also undertake visits to high performing schools... so I can see what it looks like in action as well –
Headteacher

The school also uses evaluation tools like Step Lab⁸ but apply “homegrown examples” so staff can understand what works in their specific context. Through this combination of outward facing inquiry and in-house knowledge building, the school deliberately positions itself at the forefront of emerging, research informed practice.

Features of the model and staff deployment

This school operates a school-led provision for pupils in years 7 to 9 with cognition and learning needs, who are working below key stage 2 expectations. The school is clear that the needs of all other pupils with SEND are met within the mainstream classroom. They feel this is particularly important in year 10 and above, with pupils accessing mainstream GCSE classes taught by subject specialists. Pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) or neurodivergent profiles (for instance, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD)) are not withdrawn for curriculum purposes. Instead, pastoral systems, consistent routines and highly intentional teaching are used to meet their needs.

Identifying pupil needs

Reading is a central pillar of the school's approach to support. A cross-school daily reading programme combined with use of the [New Group Reading Test](#) (NGRT)⁹ enables teachers to identify issues and make adjustments before pupils fall behind. Leaders described using this measure as vital despite its cost.

We invest a lot in that... the NGRT is so vital, but so expensive, and the government need to fund that. – *Headteacher*

As all pupils follow the same reading routine, teachers do not need to withdraw pupils with SEND from mainstream to provide separate work, ensuring they remain with their peers and participate fully in lessons. Pupils with lower literacy attainment receive small group reading interventions, led by an English specialist teacher. Those who are still at the phonics stage work with a literacy intervention coordinator, a TA trained in [Read Write Inc.](#)¹⁰ for short rotational sessions.

⁸ [Step Lab](#) is a professional development platform for schools.

⁹ New Group Reading Test is a digitally adaptive assessment that adjusts as each student responds, giving reliable insights into both group and individual reading skills.

¹⁰ Read Write Inc. is a programme designed to support the teaching of reading and writing in schools.

School-led provision

Last year the school trialled school-led support for pupils with SEMH, cognition and learning, and communication and interaction needs. The trial was considered an ineffective approach, with leaders identifying that SEMH needs would instead be better supported via the wider pastoral system.

It was a complete and utter failure... we tried to mix need... and that did not work at all... those children weren't really learning effectively in that environment... That was a big error. – *Headteacher*

The school has now adapted the approach into a support base designated only for pupils with cognition and learning needs who are working below key stage 2 expectations.

This provision comprises 4 classrooms, a sensory room, meeting rooms and offices. A large communal room is used for breakfast club, social skills sessions and lunchtime access for a wider group of pupils with SEND.

Pupils study religious education (RE), humanities, a language and social skills within the support base. The curriculum mirrors mainstream provision, but the pace, pitch and accessibility is adapted according to different needs. Pupils access mainstream lessons for the rest of the week with targeted adult support where needed.

It is still exactly the same curriculum in the [school-led hub], but it's adapted for those learners. – *Headteacher*

It also delivers a nurture curriculum for around 10 hours each week for between 12 to 14 year 7 to 9 pupils with SEND for half of the academic year. This equates to around 30 pupils per year group and around 70 to 80 pupils in total. Data informs the allocation of pupils to the provision with allocations reviewed annually.

The curriculum is centrally planned and shared across the school – SEND staff liaise with subject department staff to ensure topics covered in the support base match those in the mainstream lessons. Routine pre-briefs, drawing on pupil passports and EHC plan requirements, are carried out with TAs, enabling staff to make same-day adjustments. This organisational structure is key to ensuring the support base is fully integrated rather than functioning as a standalone unit.

We plan every lesson with our SEND pupils' needs at the core... what is essential for some is beneficial for all. – *Specialist SEND teacher*

To support GCSE study, in year 11, leaders reallocate pupils with SEND into classes taught by teachers with the strongest track record of supporting pupils with SEND.

Leadership and staff deployment

The school has a multi-layered SEND leadership model. The lead special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) holds a senior assistant headteacher role and is supported by an assistant SENCO who is SEND trained and currently completing the [National Professional Qualification](#) (NPQ) for SENCOs. The SENCO provides strategic leadership of SEND across the school, overseeing curriculum access, assessment, data monitoring, staff training and whole school systems to ensure needs are met within the classroom. The assistant SENCO supports this by coordinating provision, contributing to curriculum planning, guiding staff on pupil needs and helping deliver training. An inclusion manager, a senior non-teaching post, coordinates day to day operations and small group teaching. They also oversee TA allocation, setting the daily timetable and managing flexible deployment to meet pupils' presenting needs.

Together, they lead the integrated SEND model, working closely with teaching staff to ensure flexible deployment of support and a consistent whole school approach.

A weekly leadership SEND meeting involving the headteacher, SENCO/senior assistant headteacher and data/exam leads provides an opportunity to review data for pupils with SEND to ensure staff are appropriately allocated and the right support is in place to support progress. Staff reallocations are typically made half termly.

The school employs 4 specialist SEND teachers (who have a degree in SEND), plus one primary trained teacher, who is an English specialist. These teachers deliver all the lessons in the support base including maths, humanities, and languages alongside their SEND roles, across the whole school and not just for the school-led provision. This staffing model is deliberate to ensure the inclusion area is fully integrated into the whole school approach and not seen as separate. This approach reinforces the school's philosophy that all pupils are mainstream first, and the inclusion area is an extension of mainstream, not an alternative to it.

TA deployment

Under a previous model, TAs were stationed mainly in the school-led provision, working with the same 8 to 10 pupils repeatedly. This meant that pupils with SEND in the mainstream, especially quieter or less disruptive pupils, were rarely seen by support staff.

Most TA time is now allocated to the mainstream with them only supporting pupils in the school-led provision who have physical or sensory needs (for example, wheelchair users or visually impaired pupils). One TA said, "In our school the core groups... have trained teachers to do it, so they don't need us there. So, we go to mainstream."

Staff deployment has moved away from fixed 1:1 support, towards responsive, teacher-centred support. The school argues that the biggest determinant of inclusion is the quality of teaching, and they are reweighting their staffing model accordingly.

We need more teachers and fewer TAs... quality of teaching is the absolute priority. – *Headteacher*

There are currently 16 TAs who 'roam' across multiple lessons, providing check-ins, prompts and on-task support aligned to the teacher's plan, rather than being 'Velcroed' to pupils. One TA is trained in [Read Write Inc.](#),¹¹ one TA specialises in speech and language, and another has a specialism in ASD.

This new model means TAs work across all mainstream lessons for different subjects and with different year groups. Pupil needs are more easily identified because TAs support pupils across a range of contexts, not just in one room. Where 1:1 mainstream TA support is required, there is an emphasis on discreet support to preserve dignity and independence.

SEND pupils now feel seen and listened to and they know there is a person who they can talk to... we are across every mainstream lesson so they don't disappear in such a big school. – *TA*

Pastoral support

Alongside TA support, leaders described a substantial pastoral infrastructure that supports pupils across the school. This team includes heads of year (with reduced teaching loads), some non-teaching assistant heads of year, learning mentors, pastoral co-ordinators for key stages 3 and 4, behaviour support staff, a pastoral centre manager, wellbeing practitioners and emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs), as well as a safeguarding team.

The philosophy behind the pastoral support is that teachers should be left to teach, that teachers should have the energy and the space to focus on their teaching in the classroom, and that we've got these wider mechanisms and systems and people that can support you with all of the other peripheral stuff that has been the driver for the approach. – *SENCO*

The headteacher reported exceptionally low levels of dysregulation, attributing this to highly consistent behaviour expectations, strict but warm boundaries, and a calm environment. In practice, this approach means that pupils experience highly predictable routines and consistent expectations in every classroom, reducing the likelihood of dysregulation. Staff use calm, clear language, structured transitions and uniform behaviour systems so pupils always know what will happen next and what the boundaries are. The environment is deliberately orderly and quiet, with minimal noise and movement during lessons. Where a pupil does begin to show signs of dysregulation, teachers respond early using the school's agreed strategies, such as giving additional processing time, breaking tasks into smaller steps or using calm, low-key redirection. If a pupil requires further

¹¹ Read Write Inc. is a programme designed to support the teaching of reading and writing in schools.

support, the pastoral team steps in to provide short-term regulation outside the classroom, helping the pupil to settle and return to learning quickly.

If something happens within a classroom, it's dealt with really quickly, really effectively. If something happens during unstructured time, we have enough adults that will be able to pick that up and deal with it. –

Headteacher

The school does not issue time-out passes or part-time timetables, as leaders believe these create additional learning gaps and can reinforce avoidance patterns. One teacher noted that while formal time-out systems are not used, the school does permit learning breaks, typically for neurodivergent pupils. These short breaks occur only at teacher discretion and pupils are accompanied by a member of staff to ensure the break is purposeful and monitored. Tracking breaks helps the school to identify patterns, such as difficulties arising at specific times of the day or within particular lessons, and to determine whether a different intervention might be needed.

Training and development

All teachers receive an additional hour of planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time each week, focused on core teaching and intentional teaching. In lessons, teachers routinely check pupils' understanding using strategies such as individual whiteboards and cold calling (where the teacher selects pupils to answer questions without asking for hands up, ensuring all pupils stay engaged, have their understanding checked and avoiding the same pupils dominating discussion). These approaches make learning visible and enable teachers to identify misconceptions quickly and respond in a timely, targeted way.

Nothing is left to chance. No child left behind... we only have cold calling at our school... we don't do hands up. – *Headteacher*

Short, bitesize training sessions (25-minutes) for all teaching staff and key support staff (including TAs, higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) and pastoral staff) are held weekly, focused entirely on highly intentional teaching. This training has been designed and delivered by the headteacher, alongside 2 senior assistant heads who support its delivery. Own-school video examples are used to ensure contextual relevance and reference material for all staff.

The SENCO or assistant SENCO lead weekly case review meetings. All relevant teachers for the focus pupil attend and share their experience and strategies to inform collaborative solutions and consistent practice. One teacher highlighted that this discussion forum is the most useful continued professional development (CPD) to inform day-to-day problem-solving.

The school requires that all new staff observe the SEND specialist teaching in the school-led provision during their induction and then on an ongoing basis. TAs at the school do not

receive formal SEND qualifications through the school. The school nonetheless supports TAs to engage in SEND related professional development through internal training, information provided by the SENCO and inclusion manager, and access to additional CPD. One TA, for example, had completed CPD focused on ADHD in girls, which helped them to understand neuropsychology and to know when to step back versus prompting when supporting pupils.

The school receives limited external support from the local authority (LA), although an LA ASD specialist is available when needed. This support is usually ad hoc and internal capacity is generally drawn on instead.

Progression pathways for support staff are being developed, including apprenticeship routes into teaching and upskilling for HLTAs, though leaders acknowledged constraints around pay and funding.

We're looking at pathways for them [HLTAs and TAs who have a specialism] to be able to actually train to teach [so] eventually they will become teachers... We are very supportive of the apprenticeship route into teaching, particularly the one for people that don't have a degree... We just want a really good teacher... sometimes that might be an instructor with strong practice and strong CPD. – *Headteacher*

Effectiveness

Leaders described strong and improving outcomes for pupils with SEND, attributed to the school's highly intentional teaching model, targeted reading strategy, and the partially adapted curriculum within the school-led provision.

Reported outcomes include notable gains for disadvantaged and SEND cohorts across key stage 3.

Year 7 students have made the equivalent of twelve months' reading progress; it's 14.5 months for pupils eligible for free school meals, and plus 10 months for those with SEND. *SENCO*

They described reading as the school's "cornerstone" for improving access to the wider curriculum and long-term outcomes for learners with SEND.

Leaders provided examples of pupils whose phonics progress and observed reading fluency had improved markedly. They explained that the lack of corresponding reading age score increase was due to the lack of sensitivity in assessment tools.

We have to use a more nuanced approach to assessment for pupils with more complex needs. – *SENCO*

Within the school-led provision itself, the school reports that aligning adapted content with mainstream curriculum goals, employing SEND specialist teachers and maintaining smaller teaching groups has strengthened pupil engagement and consistency of approach. Leaders explained that the model supports progress by ensuring pupils experience “the same curriculum... but delivered in a way accessible for them” while still maintaining high expectations for conceptual understanding.

Across the wider school, leaders believe that the fidelity of their teaching model, especially routine checking for understanding, modelling, guided practice and the use of mini whiteboards, has improved outcomes for pupils with SEND over time.

School leaders intend to sustain and deepen their ‘highly intentional teaching’ model, prioritising universal classroom practices, reading and targeted specialist input. The long-term aim is to ensure pupils with SEND are prepared for the world beyond school by reducing dependency, increasing independence and ensuring that what is essential for some benefits all.

Challenges and considerations

- Tensions with some EHC plans that mandate 1:1 support, which they believe can lead to dependency and deter improved pupil outcomes for those with moderate learning difficulties or specific learning needs. To overcome this, the school works closely with parents to advocate for classroom practices that increase pupils’ independence and access to learning. The school also makes it clear to parents that 1:1 TA provision will only be provided to pupils with a physical disability.

There are EHC plans that do say pupils [without a physical disability] must have 1:1 support, so in effect... by the letter of the EHC plan that hasn’t been met. However... that is in collaboration with the pupil and with home, and it is understood [by parents] that we cannot offer 1:1 support at all times. – *Teacher*

- Challenges recruiting high-quality teachers in certain subjects (most notably science) and a shortage of external specialists (e.g. educational psychologists). To overcome the challenges and recruit teachers, the school has sometimes appointed unqualified instructors and provided in-house training, preferring a good teacher over a poorly performing qualified teacher.¹² This aligns with the school’s model of reducing 1:1 TA dependency by putting expert teaching at the core of their provision.
- Not replacing TA posts when they become vacant and investing the resource instead to recruit SEND specialist teachers. For example, the school has invested their EHC plan funding to appoint a primary-trained teacher to lead English for

¹² In academies in England, [qualified teacher status](#) (QTS) is not a legal requirement.

pupils working well below age-related expectations. The school reports no deficit associated with SEND staffing.

- Reading assessments, which are important in helping to identify pupil need, are expensive and resourcing for them means making sacrifices elsewhere.

Model 3: Specialist base resource provision (RP) – primary setting

This local authority (LA)-maintained school is a part of a federation and has around 400 pupils with one-third on the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) register. They have a 19 place RP for pupils with speech and language needs. The unit is led by a speech and language therapy (SaLT) qualified teacher and supported by a teaching assistant (TA), trained in speech and language interventions and an additional 5 TAs. Pupils with SEND across the rest of the school are supported in core lessons by TAs in the mornings and receive interventions in the afternoons. Three additional SEND qualified TAs work across 2 year groups providing more specialist support where needed. The school also has a care suite for pupils with physical and medical needs, with 6 TAs specially trained to support pupils who need help with toileting and medication.

Context

This case study focuses on a primary school in a highly deprived urban area in the south of England that has around 380 pupils on roll, with a free school meal (FSM) rate of over 60%. It is LA-maintained and its most recent Ofsted inspection rated it as good. Just under one-third of pupils are on the SEN register, including over 40 pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans, putting it above the national average. The school currently operates on a 2 form basis for all year groups, having recently reduced from being a 3-form entry. The school has a keen sense of community, with staff living in or having grown up in the catchment area. The school adopts a whole school ethos to inclusion and celebrates difference.

Because of the high level of deprivation in the local area, pupils face a range of challenges. Speech and language difficulties are the primary issue among the school's intake and because of this the school screens all children when they start in reception using an off-the-shelf intervention package, called [Speech and Language Link](#).

Because we are in such a deprived area, it's quite common that many of our children come in with speech and language difficulties. It's by far the predominant need, and it can be quite significant. – *Headteacher*

Features of the model and staff deployment

Resource provision

The school has a 19-place LA-funded RP, specifically for pupils from across the LA who have EHC plans that stipulate a requirement for intensive speech, language and communication support. The RP occupies 2 small classrooms and 2 offices.

Pupils who access the provision meet the support criteria identified by an NHS speech and language therapist (SaLT). Around half the pupils spend most of their time in mainstream lessons and use the RP for small group work instead of certain lessons. For the other half of pupils, core subjects and specific interventions are delivered in the RP, with them only accessing mainstream provision at particular times. Younger pupils and those new to the school tend to be in the RP full-time, until they are ready to access mainstream classes.

If, despite the support put in place, pupils from this RP do not make sufficient progress in the mainstream lessons they access, the school moves them back into the RP for longer periods.

The RP is very much child-led, and they move between provisions based on how they are coping. Some pupils will move to spend more time in mainstream then might get further up the school and difficulties start showing again so we pull them back into the RP. – *Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)*

Staffing model to support the RP

A qualified teacher holding speech and language qualifications leads the RP and delivers the teaching. She has support from a full-time TA who also has specific training delivered by an NHS SaLT. This TA delivers all the SaLT interventions to pupils in the RP. There are 5 other TAs in the RP full-time, helping pupils with their learning and wellbeing. The school SENCO manages the RP lead.

Graduated approach

Overall, the school operates a graduated model of support. Pupils with the highest level of need, and who are allocated a place in the RP, receive direct input from the NHS SaLT service. This SaLT also sets out daily interventions for a specially trained TA to deliver to pupils in the mainstream provision. Pupils with the least severe speech and language difficulties are allocated to TA-led interventions. These pupils access mainstream provision during the morning and spend most of their afternoon participating in small group interventions.

Pupils with SEND who access mainstream provision full time are supported as much as possible by class teachers and 18 TAs, depending on their availability. These pupils also engage in a range of appropriate interventions during the afternoon.

The school used to have a nurture unit (where pupils received more social and emotional support and an adapted curriculum with fewer transitions and changes in adults) but are no longer able to afford to sustain this provision. Instead, they have nurture groups where a TA, supported by the school's wellbeing lead, provides soft starts¹³ and nurture-based

¹³ Allowing emotional regulation before the greater pressure of the learning day begins.

interventions for mainstream pupils with SEND. Part of the wellbeing lead's role is to ensure [Nurture UK](#) principles are embedded across the whole school.

Staffing model to support the graduated approach

Based on their availability, the 18 class-based TAs support pupils from the RP when they are in mainstream classes. The 18 TAs now work as class-based staff in the mornings only and deliver bought-in interventions during the afternoon. These include programmes such as the DfE's Ready to Progress¹⁴ and Number Stacks,¹⁵ which are designed to secure rapid learning recovery.

In addition to the 18 class-based TAs, the school employs a separate group of SEND TAs, including 3 with training in delivering specific interventions and a further 6 who work flexibly with pupils who have the most complex needs (their role is very much focused on an additional care suite as detailed below). The 3 SEND TAs delivering interventions are allocated across 2 year groups each (one covers years 1 and 2, one covers years 3 and 4 and the other covers years 5 and 6). This means where pupils have EHC plans that specify additional support, these pupils with similar needs are grouped together for targeted interventions as the school does not receive sufficient funding to resource it any other way. This set up makes planning and balancing support a challenging exercise. This structure has enabled TAs to develop greater expertise in the interventions they deliver and has allowed senior leaders to use the team's specialist skills more effectively.

SEND leadership is structured around the SENCO, who sits on the senior leadership team and oversees the special educational needs (SEN) TA team, the speech and language team, and the RP acting as the RP lead during maternity cover. They directly manage the SEND-focused TAs, including those delivering specialist interventions and those working with pupils who require a significantly adapted curriculum, while class-based TAs are jointly overseen by phase leaders for classroom work and by the SENCO when delivering interventions. Alongside this, the school has a wellbeing lead, who is NurtureUK trained and manages social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) interventions and the TAs involved in delivering these interventions.

Upskilling all classroom staff to support pupils' needs has been a key part of the school's inclusive approach. This training has included understanding different SEND, how these may present in children and strategies that may help support them in a mainstream setting.

¹⁴ See Department for Education, [Mathematics guidance: key stage 1 and 2](#).

¹⁵ [Number Stacks](#) uses a unique combination of stackable place-value counters and video tutorials to enable any adult, regardless of teaching experience, to help children master the foundations of the number system.

We've tried to bridge the gap by doing lots of training. When we set up our schemes for the school we tried to incorporate communication friendly classroom approaches. With having [the RP] and such high needs across the school it helps the teacher and the children if we have good approaches across the entire school. – *Headteacher*

A TA trained in Boxall¹⁶ is also deployed at another primary school within the federation, and the school also employs a play therapist funded for children in care. Both the Boxall-trained TA and play therapist work on site for a few mornings each week. All the support staff in the school, along with the RP lead, are managed by the SENCO.

Care suite

A larger than average proportion of pupils at the school also have physical disabilities, due to the school's good reputation of supporting pupils with SEND. In response to increased need, the school has created a care suite where personal care and medication can be administered. External specialists visit pupils once a term to provide occupational therapy and/or physiotherapy support as detailed in their ECH plan. NHS commissioned services also support pupils who are tube fed and have trained school staff, pupils and their families to administer this support.

Staffing model to support the care suite

The care team is managed by the school's dedicated wellbeing lead (a qualified teacher) who oversees 6 additional TAs who are trained to provide care to pupils who need support with toileting, the administration of medication and physical interventions. When pupils need it, these TAs receive extra pay to be full-time carers. They work across the school as SEND support staff and are called to the care suite when required. The wellbeing lead manages this function in the school as well as the nurture provision. The nurture provision in the school (which is not just for pupils with SEND) also has an additional nurture and wellbeing member of staff who delivers pastoral support and interventions across the school and a TA qualified to deliver emotional literacy support, also deployed at another school in their federation.

Effectiveness

The school perceives their model to be as effective as it can be, given the high level of need pupils have and their reputation as the 'go to' school for supporting pupils with SEND. They are committed to ensuring they can meet the needs of all pupils and provide as much support as is creatively possible to help them to thrive.

¹⁶ A standardised assessment and support tool for social, emotional and mental health needs in school-age children.

Our approach is as effective as it can be with what we have. With what we've got, we are doing the absolute best, but you look around and you know you're not doing it well enough. – *Headteacher*

Challenges and considerations

- A key challenge for the school is insufficient staffing capacity to support all pupils across all of their provision. Current staffing levels limit planning capacity and make covering staff absence challenging. To address capacity issues, the school has upskilled teaching staff to adopt inclusive approaches to support a wide range of needs in classes.

We are robbing Peter to pay Paul, which is all lovely on paper, until someone's either sick or pregnant, and then, as much as we don't like being firefighters, we feel that we are that more now than ever before. –
Headteacher

- The recent LA-led move to a community-of-schools funding model requiring schools to bid competitively for funding, is putting extra pressure on school capacity. Pupils with extremely complex needs are also entering the school without any additional funding attached to EHC plans leading to the school offering provision from its own budget. School staff are subsequently asked to deliver more without extra support.
- Support from external specialists is limited. Educational psychologists only visit pupils who are undergoing assessment for an EHC plan and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in their local area will not take on referrals for primary-aged children.
- The school has had to reduce enrichment and extra-curricular activities because they can no longer afford the amount of support needed for their pupils with SEND. The school reported finding this situation disheartening because those children who have limited access to sport, leisure and cultural activities outside of school now lose out on those experiences.
- There is a perceived growing mismatch between national curriculum expectations and pupils' needs. Staff believe it is important for pupils to develop life skills to thrive in their community, but these are not always aligned with the national curriculum expectations. High aspirations remain for all pupils, but the school think that goals must be realistic and appropriate for different individuals.

Model 3: Specialist base resource provision (RP) – secondary setting

This secondary school academy in the Southeast, has around 1,000 pupils on roll, with 17% on the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) register and 4% with education, health and care (EHC) plans. The school's ethos is to be inclusive no matter what and they believe they effectively include as many pupils as possible. The school has a local authority (LA)-funded resource provision (RP), offering 20 places for pupils with EHC plans. Time spent in the RP varies by year group and pupils study a reduced curriculum. This RP offers small-group teaching in English and maths, delivered by qualified mainstream teachers, alongside tailored interventions, including social skills sessions, occupational therapy, and speech and language interventions, delivered by teaching assistants (TAs) or higher-level teaching assistants (HLTAs). The assistant head manages the RP, alongside the RP lead, a special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) based in the provision full time. Two part-time assistant SENCOs also work in the unit, together with a SEND pastoral lead and an administrative support person.

Context

This secondary school is a standalone academy in the Southeast with a free school meals (FSM) rate of 25%. It is rated good by Ofsted and has around 1000 pupils, with 17% on the SEN register and 4% with EHC plans. The principal support needs in this cohort are cognition and learning.

The school is highly committed to being inclusive of all pupils and tries to accommodate as many referrals as possible, for those who can access mainstream provision, and for pupils that the school knows will not meet the threshold for placement in a specialist provision.

Features of the model and staff deployment

Provision and interventions

The school has an LA-funded RP, a set of rooms within the main building, offering 20 places for pupils that have EHC plans. Time spent in this specialist base varies by year group: Year 7 pupils spend 70% of time in mainstream and 30% in the RP and pupils in year 8 to 11 spend 80% of time in mainstream and 20% in the RP. Pupils with an RP place only study one humanities subject and they spend time in the provision when other pupils study a second humanities subject and instead of doing modern foreign language lessons.

The provision offers small group teaching in English and maths, delivered by qualified mainstream teachers, alongside interventions specified in pupils' EHC plans, including social skills sessions, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy. These interventions are delivered by TAs or HLTAs. All sessions are timetabled alongside the

rest of the school to ensure the appropriate staff are allocated to work in the RP at the right times.

Interventions for other pupils with SEND who do not attend the RP unit, are delivered in tutor time, both before or after school, or in place of a subject that the pupil has dropped. Provision that meets EHC plan or individual education plan (IEP) requirements is delivered by a range of staff, including heads of department, teaching and tutor staff, the SENCO or an HLTA.

The school also buys in 30 hours a year of input from an educational psychologist (EP), and a speech and language therapist (SaLT) is privately bought in for a day each week to support pupils with language and communication issues.

Staffing model

An assistant headteacher, who holds the SENCO qualification, oversees support provision for vulnerable pupils, which includes pupils with SEND, those with low attendance, pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and those in receipt of pupil premium. Her role involves ensuring a holistic and joined-up support approach is provided to prevent staff from viewing issues in isolation. The assistant headteacher also manages the SENCO and co-manages the RP.

The main SENCO is the RP lead and is based in the provision full-time, alongside 2 part-time (3 days a week each) assistant SENCOs, a SEND pastoral lead and an administrative support person. This team complete assessments and paperwork for all pupils with SEND across the school.

Within the wider school, 18 TAs and 6 HLTAs are assigned to individual departments to support pupils with SEND. Each HLTA oversees support for a year group. Support staff allocation is based on their individual strengths and interests. TAs attend weekly departmental planning meetings and have access to the schemes of work, which helps them to bolster their specific subject knowledge, enabling them to support pupils more effectively. This approach also ensures consistent provision is provided and avoids using a 'Velcro' support model. Most TAs have been in role for 2 to 3 years and have developed a sense of belonging within the department.

I know that when I see my year 9 maths group, I will have 1 of 2 TAs with me. They know where all the resources are, they attend our weekly planning meetings, they have access to our schemes of work. So, they are not going blind to lessons, and we are tapping into a subject that they are passionate and knowledgeable about. They know what we are doing and what to expect. Our students also know this is the TA that can do math, so, there is greater trust. – *Assistant headteacher*

Support staff are allocated by level of SEND need. The SENCO oversees how much additional TA and HLTA support each year group needs, which the heads of department

then manage on a daily basis. HLTAs may teach small groups but these may be pupils with SEND or other pupils, while the teacher works with pupils with higher needs.

Leadership

SEND provision is led from the top with the headteacher committed to being a fully inclusive school and investing heavily in the staff and skills needed to do this. The headteacher instils an ethos that SEND is everyone's responsibility and prioritises inclusion of pupils with SEND, despite trade-offs for other provision, such as limiting the breadth of curriculum offer. The senior leadership team (SLT), consisting of a principal, several assistant principals and the SENCO, review how different whole school approaches can benefit all pupils, such as a focus on additional phonics training.

All members of SLT oversee mainstream SEND provision and conduct regular open door learning walks. This involves visiting lessons and completing a checklist, which is then shared back with the relevant teaching staff. The checklist outlines key features of inclusive practice (e.g. low level of distractions in lessons, clear instructions), notes any adaptations made to support pupils, and reviews how assistive technology is being used in the classroom. After each visit, the SLT staff member provides the teacher with 2 key takeaways: one positive and one suggestion for future consideration. This process is designed to promote reflective practice and support teachers in adopting an inclusive, whole school approach.

Training and development

Effectively supporting pupils with SEND requires staff to be highly trained and committed to providing inclusive practice. The SENCO regularly delivers continuing professional development (CPD) to all staff on whole school approaches and strategies that support pupils with SEND and brings in experts on specific conditions to train staff who work with particular pupils. The school maintains a knowledge inventory, which enables them to align staff expertise with pupil needs, while also logging where additional training would be beneficial to build expert knowledge and support skills. Those who attend training cascade it back to wider staff in twilight training sessions. Signposting and links to particular guidance to support pupils with SEND is also provided during weekly teaching and learning training sessions.

The school is committed to 'growing their own staff' and supporting the teaching profession more widely. There is an expectation that TAs will become HLTAs and that they may progress to undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to become a teacher.

We are giving staff the opportunity to grow and develop because they're in an area that they enjoy and love, and they are very familiar with adaptive teaching. TAs and HLTAs have the knowledge and understanding of inclusivity for our SEND students, potentially better than a PGCE student that has had no experience in a real classroom. – *Assistant headteacher*

Effectiveness

The schools staff development pipeline of TAs to HLTAs to teacher training means they develop teaching staff who are specialists in SEND for their own school and the sector more widely. It also provides greater career structure and progression routes for support staff. They consider this to be a highly effective aspect of their approach.

They believe they are effective in including as many pupils as possible due to the principal's vision that they will try to be inclusive, no matter what.

Challenges and considerations

- The school has a reputation as the local SEND school, which attracts more pupils with SEND. The local and neighbouring LAs also name the school as a placement for many pupils with SEND, even when they say pupil needs cannot be met in their setting.
- Working with different LAs, who send pupils to their RP, can be a challenge due to variation in processes, approach and funding.
- Funding for SEND does not match the level of needs, both set out in EHC plans and the wider SEND cohort. This means the school is in deficit and other provision for other pupil cohorts with no SEND has been scaled back or cut completely.

Model 4: Tiered support – primary setting

This local authority (LA)-maintained school has 200 pupils on roll, 40% of whom need support with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The school has a support base in the form of a 4-area hub space for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans to use when they are unable to access mainstream learning. There is also an LA-funded SEN unit with 12 places for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. This SEN unit runs as a specialist base, separate from mainstream provision, where pupils attend full-time. The school has 20 teaching assistants (TAs) as designated key workers who support pupils with SEND. TAs use a helicopter approach, where they move around to support both pupils with EHC plans and other pupils on the SEN register. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) oversees the SEN unit and there is also a SEN unit manager who is part of the school's senior leadership team (SLT). A further 2 qualified teachers work in the SEN unit, alongside 6 TAs who provide 1:1 support for each pupil. The SEN unit also has a full-time family support worker, a mental health support worker and an educational psychologist. The SENCO is a therapeutic lead who upskills staff on therapeutic thinking and the use of various interventions to support pupils' needs.

Context

This primary school is in an urban area of south England with around a quarter of its pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and is rated good by Ofsted. It has 200 pupils on roll and the highest SEND rate in the area at around 40%. Most pupils with SEND have, or are awaiting, an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnosis, but a substantial number also have trauma-related issues.

The school takes a trauma-informed approach to ensure all pupils are supported and included as much as possible. The school prides itself on treating every pupil as an individual rather than having blanket approaches. All staff receive training in therapeutic thinking which underpins how they work with their children and families.

The school environment is SEND-friendly, to benefit all pupils. All staff from the headteacher through to the TAs, lunchtime supervisors and the caretaker receive training to work with children with ASD and ADHD. The SENCO is a therapeutic lead who upskills staff on therapeutic thinking and the use of various interventions to support pupils' needs.

Features of the model and staff deployment

Provision and interventions

The school adopts numerous approaches to support pupils with SEND in mainstream provision. Autism-friendly classrooms ensure pupils experience a calm and non-busy

environment where, for example, equipment is stored away in cupboards rather than being left out on tables, and displays of pupils' work are kept to a minimum.

Each class has between 1 and 4 workstations for pupils with SEND that are strategically placed around the classroom. The workstations are designed to support pupils with SEND to self-regulate and control their environment, which helps them to stay in mainstream provision as much as possible. The workstations are positioned to offer a quiet and calm space to help pupils feel safe. Each pupil can display and arrange their things and tailor it to make it as comfortable as possible. The workstations also display the zones of regulation and pupils' own visual timetable. Display boards can also be placed around them if they want to be closed in.

Teachers plan their whole class curriculum, while also adapting this for pupils with EHC plans and on SEN support. The teacher delivers to the whole class, ensuring all pupils receive the same high-level input. TAs support the delivery of differentiated work meaning all pupils work on the same tasks, using the same techniques but at a different level.

If Year 6 are doing spelling, then the pupil with an EHC plan for cognitive needs is also doing spelling but at a Year 1 level. – *Year 6 Teacher*

Differentiation for pupils with EHC plans is based on regular assessment of needs and progress. TAs record all activities that pupils undertake and their progress, which they communicate regularly to teachers to appropriately adapt pupils' support. Teachers decide which lessons pupils with SEND take part in and when it is more appropriate to teach them elsewhere to minimise distraction for the rest of the class. Leaders in this school reported that having the same TAs allocated to classes is beneficial to develop a relationship and understanding of the pupils, as well as how the teacher manages pupils with SEND.

Support base

Although the school wants its pupils to be in mainstream learning as much as possible, some pupils cannot access the same learning. The school has converted a former storage space into a 4-area hub space that operates as a school-led support base. It is mostly pupils with EHC plans that use this space when they are unable to access mainstream learning.

We have a pupil in year 2 who has cognitive and behaviour issues. He has to be taken out of class for 1:1 most of the time as he cannot access the class learning and disrupts others. He is on a completely play-based curriculum now, in agreement with all external specialists. We are now seeking placement in a play-based alternative provision to better meet his needs. – *SENCO*

Some pupils access the space when they are overly stressed in the classroom, while others do core English and maths learning there in the morning. Pupils are given lots of breaks and their work is highly differentiated or follows a different scheme of work to the

rest of the class. For example, 2 year 5 pupils require early years curriculum, which can involve early years foundation stage (EYFS) [Numicon](#) for maths and making letter shapes in sand as part of the English provision.

It's a very tailored, bespoke curriculum full of interventions just to enable pupils to get to a point to be able to learn. We don't just take them out and carry on with the curriculum. They're out because they're not accessing learning, and their behaviours become challenging because they can't access the learning, so then we bring it right down. – *SENCO*

Other pupils also access interventions in the hub space, aimed at enabling them to access mainstream learning. These interventions may be focused on the curriculum or wider skill development. These pupils are rarely withdrawn from core English and maths lessons.

Pupil progress in interventions is monitored by the SENCO and headteacher. Pupils stop being withdrawn once sufficient progress has been made, but the class teacher continues to deliver additional input. For example, volunteers from a local church hear all pupils read once a week, whereas a pupil who has completed a literacy intervention is heard 3 times a week.

Specialist base - SEN unit

The LA requested that the school set up a SEN unit with 12 commissioned places for pupils with SEMH as their main need. Six pupils who had either been excluded or were long-term non-school attenders currently attend the provision. Due to behaviour and safety concerns, these pupils do not access the mainstream setting or mix with the mainstream pupils. However, there is an ambition to achieve greater integration in the long-term, for example, during forest school or PE.

Pupils in the [SEN unit] can see other pupils through the fence if they want to. Sometimes pupils walk past their provision to get to the forest school. They wear the same uniforms and all come to the same school but, no, they don't mix when they're on site, not for assemblies or breaks or any learning. – *SENCO*

Staff deployment

The school has switched from having general TAs in mainstream classes all day to attaching support staff to pupils with EHC plan funding. These 20 TAs are designated key workers who support pupils with SEND in the same class. In the mornings, TAs support pupils with core English and maths in the mainstream classroom. Very few pupils require 1:1 support, which enables most TAs to use a helicopter approach, where they move around to support both pupils with EHC plans and other pupils on the SEN register, as directed by the teacher.

So, Johnny with an EHC plan and Ellie on the SEN register, they both would know that Miss Smith is their key worker, so they share that member of staff. If it gets beyond the point that I can manage the children in the class with the budget that has allowed the staffing that's in there, then I often apply for other pots of [LA] money under a child's name, and then that's how we get more staff in to go into the classes to help. –

SENCO

In the afternoon, TAs deliver small group interventions with 6 to 8 pupils in the hub space, as specified on EHC plans. Pupils are grouped by need and ability, rather than age. This model enables funding to be used more efficiently, while also ensuring TAs can specialise in certain interventions.

I deliver interventions – phonics support every day with year 4, 1:1 literacy intervention with 2 pupils from year 6 and twice a week an occupational therapist-devised intervention with a group of children who need strength and co-ordination help. I've not been formally trained in any of these but the SENCO showed me how to do it. – TA

The switch from general TA deployment to attaching them to pupils with EHC plans was completely driven by funding. The school ideally needs more classroom TAs to support all pupils with their learning, not just those with the highest needs. However, available funding does not allow for this.

The SENCO oversees the SEN unit, but there is also a designated manager who is part of the school's senior leadership team. The SEN unit manager is a qualified teacher with experience of managing challenging behaviour. Two further qualified teachers work in the unit, alongside 6 TAs who provide 1:1 support for each pupil. None of the TAs have specialist qualifications but they were appointed to work in the SEN unit based on personal or professional experience of supporting children with challenging issues. They have all received restraint and de-escalation training. The unit also has a full-time family support worker, a mental health support worker and an educational psychologist is bought in for 9 days a year (the maximum their roll number will allow).

Effectiveness

The school believes it effectively supports a range of pupils, although provision is not yet fully integrated. Pupils in the SEN unit remain separate from the rest of the school and those in mainstream with significant support needs often spend most of their time in the hub space. However, the use of classroom workstations helps most pupils to stay with their peers whenever possible.

The SENCO takes pride in being able to draw on a range of different funding streams to ensure pupils receive the support they need. The school makes use of its notional funding allocation and top-up funding and considers one of its strengths to be the ability to secure

additional funding – either to support a child in school, or to facilitate a move to a more appropriate placement. The LA offers several funding pots that can be applied for to meet pupil's additional needs.

We have a vulnerable children's grant, if a child comes from care, or if there's trauma, I can access that pot. If they are on a waiting list for an autism diagnosis, our autism team within the LA, they have a pot of money that I can apply to, and then we have another pot of money attached to the therapeutic thinking team, so I often apply there. I can get up to £5,000 for a child per term and then it would be expected that I apply for an EHC plan, if I've used up over £10,000 pounds worth of their money. – *SENCO*

Challenges and considerations

- Teaching staff feel that pupils without SEND are missing out. TAs are now fully allocated to pupils with EHC plans, which means they are no longer available to provide the smaller interventions that could benefit other learners.

More support staff would mean we could meet every child's needs better. We no longer have someone to help learners who just need a bit of help or a different adult to work with. Teachers are expected to do more and more with less. We would benefit from having class TAs back as well as the learners. – *Year 6 teacher*

- The wide mix of classroom ability can be challenging for teachers to manage and requires considerable planning and additional learning about pupil needs on their part. The school leader felt that class-based TAs would be useful to support delivery.
- The number of pupils with additional support needs exceeds the number of available classroom workstations and spaces to locate these.
- Providing high-quality, tailored support is expensive. Current funding does not cover the level of support provided, either in mainstream or the SEN unit. The school feels less able to support pupils who require SEN support.
- Preparing pupils in the SEN unit for the transition from primary to secondary school is a challenge. Many pupils in the SEN unit are highly disruptive and need specialist support that is not readily available.

Model 4: Tiered model – secondary setting

This academy school has 900 pupils with around one-quarter receiving special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support. The school has 2 local authority (LA)-funded Specialist Bases: a 30-place resource provision (RP) for pupils with autism, used primarily for emotional regulation and interventions, and a 10 place SEN unit for pupils with cognition and learning needs where pupils spend most of their time following a bespoke curriculum and interventions tailored to their needs. The RP is staffed by 2 specialist teachers and 4 teaching assistants (TAs) who may also support pupils in their mainstream lessons. The SEN unit is staffed by 4 teachers and 3 TAs. The school has a school-led support base for pupils at risk of exclusion. This bespoke offer provides vocational learning and off-site activities with behaviour interventions. It is staffed by a teacher and TA highly experienced in managing pupils with behavioural needs. Pupils across the rest of the school are supported by Quality First Teaching (QFT) and TAs attached to each department, who also deliver interventions.

Context

This case study is focused on a secondary school in the East Midlands, attended by around 900 pupils. It is a rural school rated good by Ofsted with the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at around 15%. A quarter of their pupils are on the SEN register, with 15% of pupils receiving SEN support and 80 have education, health and care (EHC) plans. This school operates a tiered model of inclusive provision, based on a core belief that pupils should spend as much time as possible learning in mainstream classes with their peers, taught by qualified subject-specific teachers. However, there is an acknowledgement that some pupils with SEND require additional support outside of the classroom.

Features of the model and staff deployment

This school has 2 local authority (LA)-funded specialist bases – a resource provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and severe anxiety, and a SEN unit for pupils who cannot access mainstream learning and require bespoke teaching and high levels of support. In addition to these provisions, the school also offers what they call a school-led ‘internal alternative provision’ (which the government refers to as a support base) and a range of interventions delivered both within these units and across the mainstream to meet EHC plan requirements and the needs of those with other SEND support requirements.

LA-funded resource provision (RP) supporting neurodivergent pupils

This provision primarily supports pupils with autism, as well as those with severe anxiety, ADHD, or awaiting diagnosis for similar needs. Six years ago, the LA invited bids from 3

local secondary schools to host the provision. This school applied in response to a clear need within their school and across the county. The RP was set up by an assistant head with extensive experience in special school provision and pupil referral unit (PRU) settings. They are also an Autism Education Trust trainer and deliver training to local practitioners. This RP is housed in a dedicated classroom within the main school building. Initially, it admitted 2 pupils per year group but now accommodates 5 pupils per year, creating a 30-place unit.

Pupils in the RP remain on the school's roll and are assigned to a mainstream form group. They can choose to complete morning check-in with their form or within the RP. Pupils have the flexibility to arrive at school earlier than other pupils and have their breakfast in the RP or later if it suits them, to avoid disruption at the start of the school day. Pupils select options in year 9, alongside their peers, with the intention of taking 8 or 9 GCSEs. Where needed, they can drop a couple of GCSEs in year 10 to support their wellbeing.

The aim is for these pupils to access mainstream provision as much as possible, following the same curriculum as their peers. The RP acts as a therapeutic base and safe space for pupils when they are unable to manage in mainstream. When this happens, they bring their classwork to the RP and rejoin lessons once settled. In mainstream lessons, they follow the same curriculum as their peers, supported by RP TAs, departmental TAs or just by the teacher.

When I go with them into class, I make sure they are on task, I chunk things for them and check their understanding. I'm basically there to make sure they are happy and able to learn. If they are not, or something triggers them, we take them back to the RP and give them an activity that will help re-focus and re-set them, with the intention of getting them back into that lesson as soon as possible. – *RP TA*

Alongside pupils in the RP, the school also supports pupils with high anxiety and/or emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) by offering time in the unit. The low arousal environment, quiet space and trained staff support pupils to rebuild their confidence and improve their attendance.

Staffing model to support the RP

Two teachers with specialisms in autism and 4 full-time TAs support pupils in the RP. Each is linked to a specific year group, enabling them to support pupils both within the unit and mainstream classes when required. With 30 pupils spending most of their time in mainstream, the TAs cannot always support all pupils. Support is targeted at those who find accessing mainstream classes the most challenging and for departments with few additional staff. TAs divide their time roughly equally between the RP and supporting pupils in mainstream classrooms. One TA also provides mentoring for pupils in the nurture unit for a few hours a week.

LA-funded SEN Unit

Nurture-based provision is provided to pupils with cognition and learning needs in a SEN unit in a separate building comprised of 3 teaching rooms. This LA-funded unit offers 10 places for pupils in years 7 to 10 and operates as its own form group within the school.

These pupils could not get on being in a form group of 30. They'd get lost and that would lead to very poor outcomes for them. They are academically weak so we separate them off so they can be given the support and environment they need and tailored learning support. –

Assistant head

Pupils are grouped by year and ability and receive bespoke lessons, alongside elements of mainstream curriculum. The unit aims to increase the continuity and consistency of support to meet pupils' EHC plan requirements, through small-group teaching (8 to 10 pupils per class) and by reducing the number of different adults that work with pupils. At key stage 4, pupils can opt to study towards a reduced set of subjects and may follow entry-level qualifications alongside subjects such as art, home cooking and life skills AQA awards.

Staffing model for the SEN unit

A dedicated team of teachers and TAs deliver all the support in the SEN unit. This is comprised of a lead unit teacher, who has qualified teacher status (QTS) and trained in nurture provision, and 3 specialist teachers who are all based in the unit full-time. The specialist teachers each lead a nurture class and deliver tailored support. Three TAs work full-time solely with pupils in the unit, each supporting a class and delivering specific interventions. One of the TAs also delivers English and maths interventions to mainstream pupils for around one day per week. Another TA provides mentoring and coaching sessions (paid at an unqualified teacher rate). A TA from the SEN unit often accompanies pupils into mainstream lessons when additional support is needed. TAs also supervise lunch and break times to ensure pupils are supported throughout the day.

The assistant head explained that, for mainstream schools wanting to improve their offer, the most achievable first step is to create a small nurture-style group for pupils with the most complex needs, particularly those who are awaiting special school places.

I think the easiest initial win is the nurture group. If you can secure extra funding for those students, who really should be in a special school, but there's no place for them. – *Assistant head*

School-led support base

The school has also developed a support base (what it calls 'internal alternative provision'), funded directly through the school budget for pupils who struggle with their behaviour and who cannot access a full mainstream curriculum. These pupils are often

already on a reduced timetable and at risk of permanent exclusion, despite having worked through the school's layers of support.

Pupils in the support base complete work aligned with their mainstream classes. Subject teachers set the work, and the support base lead adapts and delivers it. Alongside academic work, pupils participate in behaviour interventions, off-site behaviour management activities (such as sessions at a local boxing club) and, where appropriate, one day per week of vocational training with an external provider.

The school uses its LA-allocated alternative provision funding to run this in-house support, rather than commissioning external provision. This approach has several benefits: pupils remain part of the school community, re-integration can be more effectively managed, staff can closely monitor the quality of support and curriculum delivery, and pupils avoid reduced hours and travel associated with going to an external provider. Typically, pupils attend the support base for a 6-week, full-time block, designed to help them to re-focus and engage with learning and develop positive behaviour strategies before returning to mainstream lessons.

The idea is that this is a provision that isn't fixed. Students don't come into it and then stay in it forever. The idea is they perhaps come in and do a 6 week refocus, so they're not falling behind with lessons, but also doing some behaviour intervention. – *Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)*

Staffing model for the support base

The support base is led by a full-time qualified teacher, supported by a TA, known as the alternative provision coach. Both staff have experience of working in PRUs and supporting pupils with significant behaviour needs.

Other provision

The school also delivers a range of other interventions within mainstream provision for pupils with EHC plans and those receiving SEN support. One of the specialist teachers based in the nurture provision receives an additional SEND allowance to spend around 20% of her time delivering small-group interventions in English and maths to mainstream pupils, including evidence-based programmes such as Dyslexia Gold.¹⁷ Mainstream TAs who are trained in emotional literacy support and Direct Instruction¹⁸ also work with identified pupils – either 1:1 or in small groups – to support their learning and wellbeing. These sessions are delivered in a variety of locations, depending on availability, including the RP, corridors and other quiet spaces around the school.

¹⁷ [Dyslexia Gold](#) is an online reading intervention for ages 6 to 12.

¹⁸ [Direct instruction](#) is a teaching method developed by Siegfried Engelmann to turn all students into confident learners through explicit instruction.

Personal development coaches (PDCs) provide pastoral support to all pupils, including those with SEND. PDCs are TAs (usually level 2 or 3) and are managed by the wellbeing lead, who is part of the senior leadership team. Each PDC is assigned to a specific year group and is based in the central wellbeing hub, alongside attendance and medical staff. Specialist training enables them to provide safeguarding and emotional support across the school and to respond to pupils' pastoral needs. The wellbeing hub also serves as a space that pupils can access if they feel overwhelmed or need time out, with PDCs available to support them.

In addition to the hub, the school has created a further wellbeing drop-in area in another part of the school. This provides a quiet and safe space for pupils who need time alone during break or lunchtime. Although it is not staffed, pupils need a pass to access it during lessons, and staff inform parents/carers when their child has accessed the space.

The school also offers a sensory room that operates in a similar pass-access way. This designated space is available to pupils from the RP as well as others who require sensory regulation. Like the drop-in area, it is not routinely staffed.

TA deployment

In addition to TAs directly supporting pupils in the specific provisions, the school has recently introduced a new model of TA deployment. Previously, TAs were assigned to pupil cohorts, whereas now, 9 TAs are attached to each department and managed by heads of department. This change was made to address TA shortages and to ensure that specialist subject support underpins the support provided to pupils with SEND.

We were finding that you can fall into that classic trap of the TA just sitting next to the student, doing the writing for them, which is not what we wanted. – *Assistant head*

Under this model, TAs support both pupils with EHC plans and those on the SEN register. They are expected to support with QFT in each lesson, circulating the classroom during lessons to check pupils' understanding, prompting, breaking down tasks and supporting access to learning. Pupils with SEND are taught across all classes and year groups and are not grouped into specific classes. To support effective practice, every teacher has a "grab file" containing information about each pupil on the SEN register, including key strategies that work for them. TAs also report receiving relevant pupil information via the SENCO or teaching staff.

Every teacher has got what we call a grab file that's got all the information about each child on the SEN register in it, and what the best strategies to use with them are. We have spent a lot of our CPD [continuing professional development] training on that. – *SENCO*

TAs bring a wider range of professional and personal experience to their roles – including former primary school teachers and individuals with family experience of SEND. They are

encouraged to engage in external training to support them in their role, including ELSA training, level 3 TA qualification, or being a lead Direct Instruction practitioner. The school funds training time, recognises SEND specialisms in pay, and supports career progression into teaching. Despite this, TAs reported feeling underpaid and expressed that their pay should better reflect their qualifications and experiences, as it does for teachers.

The biggest issue is teaching assistant recruitment because of pay. We've tried to move away from part-time teaching assistants so that students have got continuity, but that rules out a lot of the mums that want to fit it around school drop offs. A lot of our TAs go on and train to become teachers. We've got quite a good success rate. – *Assistant head*

Strong communication is integral to effective TA deployment. This includes ensuring clarity around lesson plans, how particular pupils' needs will be supported and opportunities for reflective practice. TAs work closely with all teaching staff and the SENCO and spend time helping teaching staff to understand and align strategies to pupils' needs.

We advise the teachers on what we know will work for the students we support. Often after a lesson the teacher will ask me what I thought, whether what they did was OK and anything they should be doing differently. – *Nurture unit TA*

Leadership staffing model

The school has 3 SENCOs – the lead SENCO for the school, who is a member of the senior leadership team (SLT), as well as the lead teachers for the RP and for SEN unit. The 2 provision leads have dedicated time to complete administrative tasks required for pupils' annual reviews. The lead SENCO is timetabled to teach 5 hours a week, giving her the capacity to complete administrative tasks for pupils with SEND in the mainstream. Having staff who have undertaken a SENCO qualification (who do not hold SENCO roles) is considered a strength, as it increases capacity to complete required paperwork, supports consistent inclusive practice across the school and provides a talent pipeline for future SEND leaders.

The lead SENCO manages the TAs who work within the specialist bases. Teachers leading the various provisions are recognised as SEN specialists and receive additional pay in line with their extensive experience supporting pupils with SEND and specialised training, such as ELSA or nurture training. Heads of department manage the mainstream TAs attached to their subject areas, reinforcing the principle that supporting pupils with SEND is a whole school responsibility and not just solely the remit of the SENCO.

During the exam season, additional staffing is required to support pupils with SEND, including alternative rooms, scribes, invigilators, laptops, specialist software and opportunities for anxiety breaks. To support this, the school employs a part-time staff

member who acts as a liaison between the SENCO and the exams office to ensure pupils' needs are met effectively.

Training and development

The SENCO provides training for staff on practical strategies to support pupils. However, the school attributes much of its success to embedding SEND within its wider teaching and learning training. Staff development focuses on 3 main strategies: checking for understanding, modelling techniques and retrieval practice, which are designed to benefit all pupils.

I think staff can see the tangible link, because we link in what is good for all students is also good for all pupils with SEND. And it's no different. – *SENCO*

Initially, some mainstream staff, particularly longer serving teachers, found it challenging to adapt their practice to support pupils with a range of needs, sometimes believing that external specialist provision was the best place for these pupils. To address this, the SENCO and external organisations have delivered extensive training about different types of needs, a variety of SEND approaches and effective strategies. This training was reinforced with clear expectations from senior leaders about inclusive practice.

The SENCO also undertakes departmental reviews to ensure staff are effectively adapting their practice and to offer further ideas for making content accessible and appropriate for all learners. Weekly SEND briefings and departmental SEND CPD sessions are also part of the SENCO's role. Staff are encouraged to attend external training aligned with their interests and the needs of their pupils. They are expected to share their learning and insight with colleagues, under the SENCOs guidance.

Effectiveness

The school believes their tiered model effectively meets the needs of all pupils. Their approach emphasises helping pupils to reach their potential, while recognising that this looks different for each pupil. Staff do not push pupils toward unrealistic goals that may compromise their wellbeing. Instead, they aim for meaningful progress academically, socially and emotionally.

There are numerous examples of positive outcomes, including improved attendance and good academic progress in line with their peers. Several pupils who have attended the RP have achieved a broad range of GCSEs and progressed successfully to post-16 options. Other pupils have overcome their school avoidance anxiety and moved out of RP to reintegrate into full-time mainstream provision.

We've got one girl in year 10 who was refusing to come to school, and when she did would spend all day in the RP. Now she's just been moved out of the RP into a normal form group and is doing a full set of GCSEs. – *SENCO*

Challenges and considerations

Staff identified several issues and challenges that affect the school's ability to provide inclusive support for all pupils:

- The school is recognised locally as an inclusive setting, which has led to many parents moving their child with SEND to the school to access better support. As a result, the number of pupils with SEND has increased, creating resourcing challenges. For the 2025/2026 academic year, the school does not have sufficient staffing or funding to meet the level of need. Teacher workload has risen, and the budget is insufficient to replace staff who leave. Although the school would ideally like 2 TAs allocated to each department, current funding only allows for 1.
- Offering different learning pathways and more vocational options ensure the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils. However, this can negatively affect the school's attainment data. The school's inclusive model has reduced its Attainment 8¹⁹ score, and the pressure to meet Attainment 8 targets does not incentivise senior leaders to adopt or sustain inclusive approaches.
- Timetabling remains a challenge as pupils need to be grouped in certain ways to allow TAs to support larger cohorts effectively. Balancing curriculum access, staff availability and SEND needs requires significant coordination and can restrict flexibility.
- The SLT believes resources should be directed toward pupils with the highest levels of need and those with a legal requirement for specific provision. However, some staff perceive this unintentionally prioritises pupils with an EHC plan over other pupils – both those with SEN support needs and those without SEND.

¹⁹ Attainment 8 measures pupil attainment across 8 qualifications including maths (double weighted) and English (double weighted, if both English language and English literature are sat), 3 other qualifications that count in the EBacc measures and 3 further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or technical awards from the DfE approved list.

Thematic case studies

Thematic case study 1: Whole school approach

This case study examines how a range of mainstream schools, across early years, primary and secondary phases are adopting whole school approaches to inclusion. The case study predominantly focuses on a 1-form entry local authority (LA)-maintained primary school in a deprived area, with a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) profile significantly above the national average. All pupils learn in their classrooms except 3 pupils with exceptionally high needs. These pupils have a dedicated learning space, supported by 2 teaching assistants (TAs) – one qualified at level 3 and one at level 2. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) does the lesson planning for these children and supports in lessons while class teachers lead on planning and adapting the curriculum for pupils with SEND who learn in mainstream classes, with the SENCO providing guidance and resources. Teachers design personalised curricula for pupils with additional needs in their classes and plan adaptations to ensure the same core content is accessible to all learners.

The school has 8 classes supported by 14 TAs, deployed according to pupil need. The reception class has 2 TAs (one qualified at level 3 and one at level 2) and 2 experienced early years teachers. TAs have a range of specialist skills including 1 who is autism spectrum disorder (ASD) trained, another is a specialist in phonics and 1 is emotional literacy support (ELSA) trained. Whilst other TAs are deployed by year group, these TAs are attached to a classroom and deployed more flexibly to deliver interventions.

Context

This case study examines how a range of mainstream schools, across early years, primary and secondary phases are adopting whole school approaches to inclusion in response to rising levels of pupil need, increasing complexity within SEND cohorts and growing pressures on specialist provision. There is a shared recognition that high-quality, adaptive teaching must sit at the heart of SEND provision. Although each setting has developed its own model, shaped by phase, context, staffing and cohort profile, they all demonstrate a shift towards systemic, whole school approaches that promote shared responsibility for SEND, build staff capability, and integrate personalised support within the everyday life of the school.

The case study predominantly focuses on a 1 form entry LA-maintained primary school serving a community with high levels of deprivation and a SEND profile significantly above the national average. The school currently supports 16 pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans, most of whom have very high needs. The approach taken here demonstrates a whole school commitment to inclusion, embedding inclusive practice

across all classrooms, prioritising staff training and ensuring strategic leadership drives the vision.

The school's ethos is rooted in its motto: 'Be the best that you can be.' This principle underpins a commitment to inclusion that recognises the individuality of each child. As the headteacher explained:

An inclusive school to me is where children enjoy coming to school and make the progress they are able to make because we have supported and scaffolded them – without putting limits on that progress. – *Headteacher*

Features of the model and staff deployment

Provision and interventions

This primary school operates a mainstream first approach. Across the school, around one pupil in each class has a personalised curriculum – usually for maths and English. Pupils with SEND study the same content as their class peers for other subjects but outcomes are adapted to reflect each pupil's learning stage. Resources and planning are shared across the school to enable class teachers to personalise the curriculum appropriately for their pupils with SEND, including by referring back to the curriculums for earlier year groups if required.

They may sit at a table with their own resources on it to make sure adults check in with them a bit more frequently... but ultimately, it is clear that their learning space is their classroom... There is a lot to be said for children being able to access the classroom with their peers in terms of developing their social interactions and for their self-esteem. –
Headteacher

All pupils learn in their classrooms except 3 pupils with exceptionally high needs (suspected, but undiagnosed ASD, with limited verbal skills). These pupils, who are all in the same year group, are on a full-time timetable within a dedicated learning space which has been put in place for pupils who are unable to access mainstream classrooms. Two TAs – one qualified at level 3 and one at level 2 – are permanently assigned to the learning space. The SENCO (who is a qualified teacher) does the lesson planning for these children and works with them directly in the learning space each week (however, there is no permanent qualified teacher available to these 3 pupils). Two other pupils with additional needs previously accessed this space but have since been integrated back into the classroom.

Both school staff and the parents of the 3 pupils with higher level needs agree that mainstream is not the right setting for them in the long term. Alternative settings have been explored, but the feedback from LA-funded resource provision is that it cannot meet the

pupils' needs. The headteacher believes key features of the support in place within their mainstream setting is helping to keep these pupils in school:

We are really personalising curriculums to their needs. We are making sure that the adults that work with them are the right adults and they have the right skills. They've had training progressively as we've gone through.
– *Headteacher*

In the 2025/2026 academic year, 11 pupils on the pathway for an ASD or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) assessment joined the reception class. The reception space is too overwhelming for this cohort, so the school now utilises a breakout space adjacent to the classroom. Pupils with SEND can move freely between the classroom and this space, which is also used for group interventions. In addition, the school has converted the corridor into a permanent sensory circuit.

Teachers at the centre of SEND provision in a primary setting

This large primary school has developed a school-funded model of SEND provision in response to a sharp rise in pupils with high needs entering key stage 1. Their approach demonstrates how targeted support can be successfully integrated within a teacher-owned, whole school approach for supporting pupils with SEND in mainstream settings.

A key feature of the model is placing teachers at the heart of SEND provision. Each class teacher is allocated 45 to 60 minutes per week of protected time to work directly with pupils on the special educational needs (SEN) register who remain in mainstream classes (rather than attending the school's on-site unit). This protected time is built within the timetable and covered by a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) for key stage 1 and a French teacher for key stage 2, ensuring consistency and minimal disruption to teaching.

During their weekly SEND time, class teachers:

- deliver targeted interventions such as pre-teaching upcoming topics, revisiting difficult concepts or supporting pupils to develop social-emotional skills
- work on individual education plans (IEPs) and short-term targets, which are shared in accessible formats so both teachers and support staff can act on them
- adapt classroom tasks to ensure pupils can experience success within the mainstream curriculum, using scaffolding strategies rather than simply lowering the level of work

As the assistant head explained: "Teachers are the most qualified people to work with these pupils... It's about accountability and scaffolding, not just differentiation".

Staffing model

The SENCO is an assistant headteacher and the strategic lead for SEND and inclusion. As a member of the senior leadership team, they ensure inclusion is embedded at the whole-school level. The SENCO is not class-based.

Led by the SENCO, the school's inclusion team comprise the headteacher and the pastoral welfare lead. The pastoral welfare lead supports the SENCO by ensuring children have visual timetables and appropriate sensory breaks. As the headteacher noted:

It's too much for one person because sometimes there is a safeguarding element attached to some of our high-needs children. – *Headteacher*

A key feature of the school's whole school approach is the central role of teachers in driving inclusive practice. Class teachers plan the personalised curricula for the pupils with additional needs in their classes, with support from the SENCO. All class teachers have received training in Quality First Teaching (QFT), while weekly supervision sessions facilitated by the SENCO and pastoral lead maintain staff wellbeing and quality of provision.

The school has 8 classes supported by 14 TAs, deployed according to pupil need. The year group that includes the 3 pupils with the highest needs has 4 additional TAs working alongside the class teacher. The reception class has 2 TAs (one qualified at level 3 and one at level 2) and 2 experienced early years teachers, including one who has been brought in for a few months to help introduce routines.

The level 2 TA working in reception has had specific ASD training from the LA ASD team. One TA is a phonics specialist and another is a trained emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA). Whilst other TAs are deployed by year group, these TAs are attached to a classroom and deployed more flexibly to deliver interventions. None of the TAs work 1:1 with pupils on a regular basis. This is in part because it is not a requirement in any of pupils' EHC plans, but also because this approach supports the school's aim to ensure pupils are prepared for greater independence in Key Stage 3.

The SENCO designs personalised curricula for the 3 pupils in the dedicated learning space in partnership with the assistant head responsible for teaching and learning. The SENCO, along with the TAs assigned to the space, work directly with these pupils. Both deliver highly personalised programmes focused on communication, early years learning, sensory regulation and structured routines. They use visual timetables, communication boards and tailored sensory breaks, with the SENCO modelling approaches and working directly with the pupils. Although no qualified teacher is permanently based in the space, teachers remain involved in curriculum planning and transitions; for example, an experienced early years teacher was deployed to help establish routines with a similar cohort. The SENCO, as an assistant head, provides ongoing specialist oversight and instruction.

Fostering a responsive culture in a primary setting

In another primary school that serves pupils aged 3 to 7 years, staff deployment is more fluid, with TAs working across year groups. The school reviews how staff are deployed within year. Adjustments are made both in response to changes in the needs of existing pupils and when new pupils with SEND join the school, particularly if this results in a significant shift in the profile of need within a class or year group. Decisions are based on watching staff with pupils and matching strengths to needs. Feedback from TAs is also considered; if an allocation is affecting the wellbeing of a staff member, then adjustments are made.

Following a review, the SENCO and headteacher reallocate staff, if required, to ensure the right expertise is in the right place. In one year group, where need is currently greatest, 3 TAs work across 2 classes and are not 'Velcroed' to any one pupil. To help further embed a flexible, responsive culture, TAs are empowered to cascade SEND-specific training to their peers.

Because support staff are training other support staff, it's not coming from SLT [senior leadership team]... the camaraderie has gone from strength to strength. – *SENCO*

TAs receive some form of continuing professional development (CPD) every week, covering a range of issues. The SENCO coordinates and oversees training on SEND for both teachers and TAs, which has included ASD and ADHD strategies and SEND related National College modules, along with training in trauma and attachment delivered by an educational psychologist. Two TAs have been trained in speech and language therapy (SaLT) methodologies while a nursery nurse has been trained in [Early Talk Boost](#). TAs receive additional role-specific training, but core SEND training is delivered to teachers and support staff together. Further, all TAs up to key stage 1 have received some form of training on delivering speech and language plans.

While standard resources on specific needs, such as autism, can provide a baseline, staff are encouraged to build relationships with pupils and their parents and develop a flexible toolkit of strategies. This approach avoids assumptions based on diagnoses and focuses on personalised support.

The most important training we can give is helping staff understand that every child, although they may have a diagnosis, will present differently. It's about knowing the individual, not the label. – *Headteacher*

Whole school SEND in secondary settings

Whole school approaches to SEND in secondary schools differ from primary models due to their size and subject specialisation. This large, urban secondary school situated in an area of high deprivation with high proportions of pupils with SEND has implemented a whole school, research-driven approach which integrates SEND support into everyday teaching.

Inclusion is embedded as a shared responsibility across the entire staff body. The leadership team ensures all teachers are equipped to adapt lessons and scaffold learning for pupils with additional needs. This is reinforced through professional development, including weekly 'teach meets' where staff collectively review strategies for individual pupils. During these sessions, teachers share what works, identify barriers, and agree on consistent approaches, creating a culture of continuous improvement. Structural adjustments, such as reducing key stage 3 class sizes to around 23 pupils, have been introduced to maximise teacher contact time. This investment, partly funded through SEND allocations, reflects the school's commitment to creating an environment where pupils with SEND can thrive alongside their peers.

A distinctive feature of the model is the introduction of academic support assistants (ASAs) – graduates with subject-specific degrees who are embedded within departments such as maths, science and humanities. Unlike generalist TAs, ASAs bring deep subject knowledge, enabling them to adapt resources and support pupils effectively in lessons.

The SENCO is also responsible for co-ordinating with external specialists, including a SEN strategic partner from the LA (a qualified SENCO) who provides support to the inclusion team and helps to draft EHC plans, an educational psychologist and a SaLT. The school had bid for SaLT support for 23 of its pupils. Although this bid was unsuccessful, the school has secured 2 hours of support from a SaLT per week, in addition to the half day they already receive, because of their involvement in an oracy project and the LA's involvement in a Safety Valve²⁰ project.

Effectiveness and challenges

Effectiveness is measured through pupil progress and engagement. The headteacher is proud that the pupils with the highest needs are still on a full timetable and this is regarded as a key indicator of success.

²⁰ The Safety Valve programme is a government-intervention scheme run by DfE. It targets LAs whose deficits in their "high needs" budgets for children with SEND are among the highest.

First, the children are here and they are making progress... 2 [of the 5 with higher needs] are now in the classroom, heavily supported, and they are making progress. – *Headteacher*

However, despite their successes, the headteacher explained that the school is “sometimes a very challenging and upsetting place to work”. Although staff absence is low overall, turnover in the SENCO role is high. Furthermore, some TAs have experienced violence, such as being bitten. The headteacher recognised that this is not a behaviour issue, but rather because “we're trying to contain some children in a place that is too much for them”.

Although the headteacher acknowledged that they cannot fully meet the needs of these and some other children with SEND, they “will move heaven and earth” to support them until more suitable provision can be found. To achieve this does, however, involve some trade-offs. The school is running at deficit which they are unable to reduce because they need the staff in place to support pupils with SEND, and those with higher needs in particular.

Thematic case study 2: Developing internal specialist provision

This case study includes a large secondary academy and a local authority (LA)-maintained primary, both with higher-than-average numbers of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those with education, health and care (EHC) plans. Both schools adopt a Quality First Teaching (QFT) approach, underpinned by a strong emphasis on specialist provision for all pupils.

The secondary school operates a tiered model that includes an LA-funded resource provision (RP) for 45 pupils with speech and language issues, autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and moderate learning difficulties. The school places high value on specialist expertise to support pupils with SEND. Its staffing model includes a primary-trained qualified SEND teacher based in the RP, a year 7 transition teacher, a subject specialist graduate coach, 2 higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) specialising in dyslexia and literacy interventions, 5 year-group teaching assistants (TAs) and 4 mainstream TAs. Ongoing SEND-related training for all staff is central to sustaining specialist support.

The primary school offer has also focused on strengthening specialist capacity to meet pupils' needs. Its RP serves 40 pupils across 4 classrooms, each led by a special school trained teacher and supported by 13 TAs. An additional 20 TAs provide mainstream and intervention support across the school.

Both schools developed their specialist provision in direct response to limited access to external specialist support and growing levels of need. Leaders reported that delays in securing external specialists, inconsistent availability of services such as speech and language therapy (SaLT), and the increasing number and complexity of EHC plans meant they could not rely on external agencies to meet pupils' needs. As a result, the schools deliberately built in-house specialist capacity so that pupils could receive timely, consistent support.

Context

This case study focuses on the development of specialist provision in a secondary and primary setting. The secondary school example focuses on a secondary academy in an urban area of the midlands. The school has above average numbers of pupils with SEND and EHC plans. It has a tiered model of SEND support including an LA-funded RP and a school-led support base.

The example of specialist provision in a primary school focuses on an LA-maintained primary school in the South West. This primary school also has above average numbers of pupils with SEND and EHC plans and has an LA-funded RP.

Both schools have a good Ofsted rating and aim to offer an inclusive approach for all pupils by removing barriers to success with QFT being standard practice across all mainstream classes.

This case study focuses on how the 2 schools have developed their specialist provision in direct response to limited access to external specialist support and growing levels of need.

Provision and interventions

The main driver for the secondary schools' approach is to ensure they have the most skilled staff delivering QFT to SEND pupils. The school believes that all pupils are part of the school community and what is good for SEND learners is good for everybody.

We work on the basis that the best thing for SEND learners is that direct instruction, modelling, scaffolding, vocabulary instruction. The things that we know are good for SEND is good for everybody, so that's our standard practice, reinforced through all our quality assurance processes, learning walks, drop-ins, work checks, book looks. – *Secondary school special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO)*

There is a strong focus on ensuring pupils with SEND receive subject specialist teaching delivered from the front of the classroom, with support provided by highly skilled and specialist staff. This approach is designed to enable pupils to access the whole curriculum alongside their peers. The school does not provide interventions outside the classroom that would remove pupils from their teacher or peers. Instead, all interventions take place within lessons. For example, in-class literacy interventions are provided for groups of learners with EHC plans. These are designed by teachers and delivered by trained support staff.

For key stage (KS) 3 pupils with an EHC plan, lessons are adapted and delivered in classrooms with similarities to primary school, for example, using workstations. This approach ensures pupils with SEND receive the support they need but feel part of the school and are not separated from their peers. Pupils in years 7 to 9 spend 30% of their time in an RP and the rest of the time these pupils are in mainstream classes, supported by 1 TA who moves around the class to support pupils with an EHC plan on a case-by-case basis.

Pupils with an EHC plan in KS 4 access the whole GCSE curriculum and are expected to take a full suite of qualifications. They are also supported by a TA, with 1 per year group.

Once pupils get into KS 4, we stop doing resource-based lessons, full stop, and they go off and do a full suite of GCSEs or BTECs. We don't limit anyone's access to any part of the curriculum. – *Secondary school SENCO*

The secondary school's RP is funded to support 45 pupils (approximately 9 in each year group) across years 7 to 11 with speech and language needs, ASD and moderate learning difficulties.

In addition to the RP, the school has 2 school-led support bases: one designated for school-avoidant pupils, led by a teacher, and another for pupils requiring social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) support. The SEMH provision is led by a pastoral member of staff who is also a qualified teacher.

Staffing model

The school has focused on strategically deploying teachers who have the specialist skills and/or are particularly interested in or suited to working with SEND pupils in the RP.

If you're a [RP] form teacher, it's quite a developmental role, you might want to get more involved in SEND practice, or [they are] people who are really good at running routines, who are really consistent because the evidence base suggests very strongly that routines and consistency are the most important things for neurodiverse young people. – *Secondary school SENCO*

The school employs a primary school teacher who has specialist training to teach pupils the skills stipulated in their EHC plans, including social skills sessions, emotional regulation and life skills, and how to effectively use assisted technology. There are 5 TAs, who also have special school experience or health and social care backgrounds, who support pupils across years 7 to 11 in the RP. TAs who work with the year 7 cohort are also instrumental in the school's transition activities, which requires them to have strong communication skills to effectively liaise with parents.

In addition, 4 TAs provide support in mainstream classes. One HLTA focuses on in-class interventions and access arrangements, while another HLTA provides dyslexia and literacy support. The senior leadership team (SLT) expects both TAs and HLTAs to perform at a high level and to have the confidence to support a wide range of learning needs.

I expect my teams to be confident enough to go and manage the rest of the class while the teacher supports the learners who are really stuck. – *Secondary school SENCO*

To further bolster specialist staff capacity, the SLT have created a new graduate intervention coach support role. Currently, 1 graduate intervention coach is employed as a TA equivalent to provide subject related support during mainstream classes. The graduate coach role is offered with the potential for further opportunities to spend time working in the RP and/or to train to become a teacher. Potential candidates for this role are required

to demonstrate how they would use evidence-informed practice to develop an intervention in their subject area.

We've realised that there's quite a pool of talent who are interested in working in a high-performance culture [where they are] challenged and can stretch themselves, but don't want to be teachers right now, but really want to come and do good. That's why we've created the graduate intervention coach role, which means we can then attract either high performing TAs or academically able and socially confident graduates. – *Secondary school SENCO*

Training and development

SEND-focused training for all underpins the school's approach to providing specialist support. Half-termly training sessions on subjects such as emotional coaching are delivered by the LA inclusion team. Support staff can access a range of continuing professional development (CPD) in, for example, using mini whiteboards, providing outdoor education and vocabulary instruction to support them in their role and areas of interest. The SENCO will set up training sessions on a rolling basis so that staff can opt into the training they want to attend, delivered by the SENCO.

I think the key thing for us is about making sure that roles like TAs are challenging and paraprofessional. – *Secondary school SENCO*

Currently, 3 teachers are undertaking the SENCO National Professional Qualification (NPQ). There are plans for a teacher to train as a forest school provider, and a TA is currently doing a level 5 TA apprenticeship. The speech and language team have trained 1 TA to support assessments and interventions. All these CPD strands help to build specialist capacity within the school.

The school takes the view that all staff should meet all pupils needs and that the staff employed to work with SEND pupils should have the right skills and the confidence, so they feel valued and effective in their role.

It's people, mindset and leadership. One of our TA's has just won [an external award]. It is making sure that our TAs feel that they've got agency and credibility. – *Secondary school SENCO*

A trauma-informed approach to supporting pupils in a primary setting

This LA-maintained primary school in the South West has 348 pupils on roll and an above average proportion of pupils with SEND and EHC plans. The school is rated good by Ofsted.

The school prioritises well-trained specialist staff for all pupils and follows a QFT approach. They have an LA-funded RP for up to 40 pupils across 4 classrooms led by an experienced special school teacher who reports to the SENCO. The SENCO works closely with the headteacher and SLT on SEND policy and staff deployment. The RP is supported by 13 full-time TAs, equating to roughly 1 TA to every 2 to 3 pupils. The school also has a dedicated sensory space.

Beyond the RP, 20 TAs support pupils with EHC plans across the school. A rolling programme of phonics provision and trauma-informed work is led by a TA who is a qualified psychology teacher with special school experience. She also acts as the school's trauma-informed key worker. Additional support includes 2 emotional literacy support (ELSA)-trained TAs, a pastoral TA, a qualified teacher TA who provides specialist interventions (e.g. Lego therapy), and a forest school trained TA who runs daily afternoon sessions.

All TAs are trained to support pupils with communication and interaction needs, with several trained to deliver specialist literacy, speech and language, and other intervention programmes. TA deployment is fluid and they are not 'Velcroed' to individual pupils.

The school's strategy of drawing on staff specialisms, strengths and interests enables ongoing upskilling and the development of specialist roles. The SLT emphasises that all staff are responsible for meeting the needs of all pupils.

Thematic case study 3: Teaching assistant (TA) deployment

This case study contrasts special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision in 2 secondary settings to illustrate the ways in which schools design and deploy their TA workforce. While 1 school has moved towards subject department-based, flexible TA deployment, the other has developed a more fixed, intensive approach with TAs allocated primarily to pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Characteristics of the featured schools

This case study focuses on a large urban 11 to 18 grammar school with 1,400 pupils and a lower-than-average number of pupils with an EHC plan, below average free school meals (FSM) and a good Ofsted rating. The school has a school-led support base (Hub) catering for 6 pupils with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). There are 15 part-time TAs aligned within subject departments overseen by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and SEND manager. The SEND manager has an operational role in pupil planning for the support base and oversees complex pupil cases. TAs are deployed in mainstream lessons, lead interventions and provide support to pupils in the Hub.

The other school featured is a secondary comprehensive school with a higher-than-average proportion of pupils with SEND. This school has a specialist base for pupils with the most challenging behaviour or complex needs. Subject teachers are supported by 2 higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), a TA and a behaviour manager. They also have a school-funded unit which is a nurture-style class for year 7 and 8 pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and/or very low attainment. Provision is delivered by a primary-trained teacher and supported by an in-class TA. In addition, the school operates an academic support base, staffed by a HLTA. The school also has 5 TAs who provide support in mainstream classes and deliver targeted interventions

Context

The grammar school's culture and ethos are rooted in equity:

Inclusive means that everybody has the same right to education and be part of the community... it's not about all being equal, it's equity. –
SENCO

The grammar school supports pupils with significant needs, but these needs often present differently compared to comprehensive schools. According to the school's SENCO, they frequently work with highly academic pupils whose unmet social or emotional needs lead

to behavioural difficulties. There are few specialist settings for academically able learners with complex needs, so grammar schools often fill that gap.

The grammar school combines support for pupils with SEND in mainstream classes with a school-led support base (Hub).

The Hub caters for small groups of pupils with EBSA in year 11 (and 1 in year 9). It comprises teaching spaces and a private study area that is monitored by TAs.

Pupils engage in core GCSE subjects within the Hub (English, maths and science) and join mainstream classes for other subjects to aid integration. English and maths are taught in the Hub by subject teachers deployed from the mainstream workforce. The science teacher has wider experience of EBSA and is based in the Hub for 3 days a week. This teacher does not deliver mainstream classes.

Social and emotional interventions, including nurture sessions, delivered in the Hub are led by TAs. They are offered to pupils to help build their resilience and communication skills. Pupils also have access to movement breaks and make use of flexible study spaces to reduce anxiety and support engagement.

Staffing model

The SENCO leads the grammar school's SEND strategy, co-ordinates and manages a TA timetabling system and oversees training and development for support staff. They co-manage the Hub with the SEND manager who also helps onboard and support TAs. The SEND manager reviews pupil passports and briefs the TAs on pupils' support requirements. The SEND manager works under the SENCO's leadership and has holds a more operational, non-senior leadership team (SLT) role supporting the SENCO.

Previously, TAs were deployed by year group but, according to the SENCO, this approach was ineffective. Teachers often worked with different TAs in lessons, which made it difficult to build trust between teachers and TAs and for TAs to develop subject knowledge; it was also perceived to lead to fragmented and inconsistent support for pupils.

A recent shift in the grammar school's model of leadership empowered subject leaders to shape the deployment of the TAs assigned to their departments. The new approach, supported by a TA timetabling system, is designed to be more flexible and responsive to changes in pupils' needs within and across departments and ensure subject leaders contribute to SEND support. It is also designed to address a key limitation of the previous approach by building TAs' subject expertise and strengthening collaboration between teachers and TAs.

Crucially, through the new system, the school is seeking to shift mindsets about the role of the TA and challenge existing deployment practices as part of a Quality First Teaching (QTF) approach. The aim is to encourage teachers to take responsibility for SEND support

within their classrooms and work with TAs to provide targeted assistance where it is most needed, as the SENCO explained:

We're moving away from LSA [learning support assistant] to TA to help change that mindset... you're not in there to support a particular student, you are in there to support the teacher to support that student. – *SENCO*

TAs are primarily deployed in mainstream classes and lead interventions (in addition to supporting the small group of pupils in the Hub). For example, some TAs run reading groups and nurture sessions during form time, while others deliver handwriting or transition support in the Hub. The TA deployment system facilitates this movement between mainstream classes and interventions (and the Hub).

TAs also fulfil the role of key worker. This system enables the TAs to develop a more rounded understanding of pupils' wider needs and behaviours. TAs conduct regular 1:1 check-ins outside the classroom, with oversight from the SENCO and SEND manager for more complex cases.

TAs also liaise with parents when needed and contribute to SEND reviews, ensuring continuity despite no longer being attached to the same pupil in every lesson.

Effectiveness

The new model of TA deployment was piloted in the languages department before it was rolled out across the school. Teachers reported that, as a result of the changes, they found lesson planning easier and developed an appreciation of their TAs' skillset and the value of the role. This gave teachers the confidence to deploy TAs effectively in response to pupils' needs.

Since the rollout, attitudes to SEND and the role of TAs have started to change and teachers are increasingly viewing SEND as a shared responsibility. Buy-in from the senior leadership has been critical to this success.

We started playing into TA's skills and actually, both the departments and the TAs were talking about how much better it was, and they didn't even realise that's what we were doing. – *SENCO*

TAs have become familiar faces within departments, which is resulting in better collaboration and communication about pupils' needs. Pupils are also reported to be noticing the benefits of subject-specific support. According to the SENCO:

TA are becoming a part of departments, part of the community instead of just, "They're SEND, that's SEND". – *SENCO*

Teachers report that, following the changes, they are better able to manage classrooms. TAs are deployed to respond to low level support needs across the class, which allows

teachers to focus on pupils with SEND. There is also evidence that teachers are proactively developing systems to ensure effective TA deployment at the departmental level and contributing to the school's SEND adjustment plan system. However, the SENCO acknowledges that some departments have been quicker to embrace the change than others and it will take time for the approach to become fully embedded across the school. It will also take time for TAs to build up their subject confidence.

To help sustain the model and retain valued staff in the future, the SENCO aspires to provide a structured progression pathway for TAs. They explained:

I would like to be able to provide a CPD [continuing professional development] programme where my staff feel valued... so, if they do a training course, say for level 3 TA, they can then get paid more. If they do an HLTA, they can get paid more. At the moment I can't guarantee that. –
SENCO

The TA timetabling web-based application is costly and requires ongoing investment.

An alternative model of TA deployment in a secondary school

This secondary school adopted a different approach to their TA deployment. Faced with high levels of SEMH needs, and a growing number of pupils at risk of exclusion, the school established an LA-funded specialist base and 2 school-led Support Bases within its mainstream setting.

The LA-funded specialist base is a SEN unit for pupils with the most challenging behaviour or complex needs. Here, pupils are taught in a small, highly structured environment by subject teachers deployed from the mainstream workforce, supported by 2 HLTAs and a TA (who are based in the unit full time) and a behaviour manager. The intention is to reintegrate pupils back into mainstream lessons when appropriate. According to the SENCO, the continuity and structured support that the unit provides are essential for enabling successful reintegration.

The school also operates a school-led nurture-style class for year 7 and 8 pupils with SEMH needs and/or very low attainment. This class is taught by a primary-trained teacher, supported by an in-class TA.

In addition, the school operates a school-led support base with an academic focus, staffed by an HLTA who describes their role as a learning mentor. The school also has 5 TAs who deliver in-class support and targeted interventions. The model is designed to support consistency and relationship-building.

Unlike the grammar school's model, which prioritises subject expertise and flexible TA deployment across departments, TAs in the comprehensive school are embedded within specialist classes and assigned to pupils with EHC plans in mainstream lessons. These contrasting models of TA deployment reflect different priorities: while the grammar school focuses on embedding SEND support within mainstream provision, this school has chosen to invest in smaller, structured environments to meet the needs of pupils with complex SEMH needs and reduce the risk of exclusion.

Thematic case study 4: Upskilling staff

This case study focuses on a large, split-site, mainstream secondary school with around 1,500 pupils on roll, located in an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage. There are currently 292 pupils on the special educational needs (SEN) register (around 22% of the cohort), including 126 with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

The school operates a tiered support approach, which is highly personalised, aiming to ensure pupils are educated in the mainstream where possible, with planned transitions to and from specialist provision when required.

We aim to keep pupils ‘within reach’ of education and build independence through phased reintegration to mainstream. – *Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and inclusion lead*

Their tiered model includes a bespoke bridging curriculum for pupils typically 5 or more years behind their peers, local authority (LA)-funded resource provision (RP) for pupils unable to access mainstream (the majority with autism) and a support base delivering 3 strands of activity for pupils with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), re-engagement and learning difficulties.

Staff training and development

Upskilling staff is embedded across the school to address the rising number of pupils with SEND and increasing complexity of need. This investment helps keep pupils “within reach” of education by reducing the need for external alternative provision or permanent exclusion. It also helps to mitigate delays in external assessments and specialist placements by strengthening early identification, internal screening and flexible in-school pathways.

The school’s approach includes weekly SENCO-led continuing professional development (CPD), targeted external training aligned to school priorities and staff interests, clear progression routes for teaching assistants (TAs) and higher-level teaching assistants (HLTAs), and regular input from external specialists.

The school’s SENCO has completed extensive training, including senior mental health lead training, autism leadership, cognition and learning assessment, and screening for social, emotional and mental health (SEMH), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism and dyslexia. The SENCO draws on this expertise to develop a comprehensive CPD offer that is available to all staff. Topics include autism, SEMH approaches (such as Team Teach²¹), phonics and reading interventions (for example,

²¹ [Team Teach](#) is training to support the development of positive behaviour cultures in education, child and adult services.

reading plus), communication strategies (such as [Let's Talk](#)) and mental health (for example, mental health first aid).

Staff receive a weekly bulletin highlighting pupils requiring support, updates on SEMH needs and recommended strategies, alongside weekly drop-in sessions for further guidance. Staff are encouraged to develop specialist areas of interest through external CPD and supervision or advisory input from educational psychology, SEMH teams and special school partners.

A monthly 2-hour multi-agency panel comprising health, social care, police, NHS, mental health support, educational psychology, youth justice, Turning Point,²² Early Help,²³ and the Violence Reduction Network, reviews up to 12 pupils per month. This enables timely access to targeted support and shared decision-making. Over a year, this collaborative approach has helped the school identify and support around 150 pupils.

Effectiveness

The SENCO emphasised that CPD creates stability and supports more personalised approaches. A recent staff survey found that most staff (87%) felt more confident to support pupils with SEMH needs and their understanding of pupil referral pathways has improved.

Recent impact data also shows marked reductions in the number of pupils accessing full-time external alternative provision, fewer pupils being removed from lessons and a decrease in repeated suspensions. Attendance has also improved for pupils with the most complex needs. A small number of pupils have made such strong progress that they are now fully independent and no longer require EHC plans:

We've now got a couple of children that are entirely independent and we've been able to approach the local authority to cease their EHC plans.
– *SENCO and inclusion lead*

²² Turning Point is a charity designing and delivering health and social care services in the fields of substance use, mental health, learning disability, autism, acquired brain injury, sexual health, homelessness, healthy lifestyles and employment.

²³ Early Help is a family support initiative which is made up of community support, universal services and acute and targeted services in an LA area.



Department
for Education

© Department for Education copyright 2026

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Reference: RR1631

ISBN: 978-1-83870-838-2

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact www.gov.uk/contact-dfe.

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications.