



House of Commons

# **2<sup>nd</sup> Corby and East Northamptonshire SEND Round Table**

**14th July 2025**

**Hosted in Parliament by Lee Barron MP**

**Focus for discussion: What does effective inclusion look like within education settings, and what does the government need to do to support settings to develop fully inclusive practice?**

# **How can education settings be supported to secure the foundations needed to be fully inclusive?**

## **Introduction**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this session was to follow up on the multi-agency SEND Roundtable held in January that resulted in an evidence submission for the Education Select Committee's inquiry: **Solving the SEND Crisis** and outlined several proposed solutions.

The aim of this second SEND Roundtable was to provide an opportunity for the stakeholder group to delve deeper into some of the key areas of focus identified in the initial session. It is hoped that resulting evidence will be used to help inform the Department for Education as it seeks to develop policy aimed at reforming the SEND system.

The session provided an opportunity to discuss the following three questions using a solution focussed approach and including specific examples of best practice from education settings within Corby and East Northamptonshire and beyond.

1. **How can education settings be supported to secure the foundations needed to be fully inclusive**
  - a. **Leadership and culture**
  - b. **High quality teaching**
  - c. **Environment**
2. **Where appropriate, what needs to be in place to support education settings to develop effective resource bases, SEN units or informal enhanced provision?**
3. **How can education settings be supported to work effectively with a wide range of specialists / other professionals to meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs?**

# **Inclusion through Leadership and Culture**

## **Issues**

- Lack of common principles and cross sector understanding about the true meaning of inclusion
- Lack of understanding of SEND by some senior leaders in education
- An education system driven by OFSTED accountability measures with a focus on outcomes which has resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum and exclusion of some of our most vulnerable learners
- Increasing amounts of pressure on Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENDCOs) with insufficient time allocated by leaders for them to carry out their role effectively
- Difficulties in recruitment and retention of support staff due to low levels of pay, poor status in settings and a lack of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities
- Insufficient funding resulting in education settings unable to meet need
- Increase in learners with complex needs being educated in mainstream schools without adequate funding, support or resources being provided
- A funding system that pits parents against schools and local authorities.
- Funding for Tribunals crippling the system
- Local authority use of independent provision with significantly higher costs than mainstream
- Lack of early identification of SEND resulting in an escalation of issues later caused by unmet need
- A lack of employment opportunities for young people with SEND
- Reduced post 16 and post 18 careers support for young people with SEND
- A wide range of inclusive practices within different settings

## **Recommended solutions**

- National evidence-based set of shared core principles which underpin what an inclusive ethos means in practice across settings
- Requirement for SEND to form a mandatory part of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)
- Curriculum review to rid the system of a 'One Size Fits All' assessment driven model and move towards a more flexible curriculum offer to meet the diverse needs of learners
- Mandatory expectation that leaders ensure the SENDCO is a non-teaching role enabling the flexibility to support observations, assessments and teaching and learning
- Professionalise support staff roles and improve status through improved pay, conditions, and support. Change job title from 'Teaching Assistant' to 'Assistant Teacher'

- Pay increases for support staff funded through central government or new money (otherwise counterproductive as school budgets may need to reduce support staff)
- Government to carry out a whole scale review of funding system, which reflects a flexible and contextual approach to investment allocated around local needs
- Invest in high quality Early Years support (see SEND RoundTable Report 1), including early intervention, ongoing monitoring, and reviews
- Develop a consistent model across Family Hubs with shared examples of good practice using a joined-up approach, for example, the approach at PEN GREEN (in Corby) with specialists in early identification and diagnosis
- Local settings benefit from working with early intervention professionals who have been awarded status as a Hub
- Closer collaboration between careers advisors and local DWP partnerships, Local authorities, parents, and employers to support young people with SEND into meaningful, paid employment
- Improved awareness in education settings about funding for learners with SEND (18-25 years) which provides additional support in the working environment
- Formalised and universal employability support for young people with SEND (see Northamptonshire DWP example)

## **Examples of Best Practice and Research**

**Northamptonshire Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)** -£100k invested this year to help young people with SEND with employability support

**Northgate Academy, Northampton** – Post 16 horticultural area has a community focus with a café which is linked with local retailers to enable learners to experience the world of work

**Corby Technical School, Northamptonshire** – Approved Partner Initiative has formed links with over 120 local employers who visit the school regularly (lunchtime pop ups), support students with workshops and employability skills, take part in careers events and offer work experience opportunities and apprenticeships

**The Woodlands Special School, Milton Keynes** - Careers leader co-ordinates an annual enterprise event with external boardroom directors

## **Inclusion through High Quality Teaching**

### **Issues**

- Inadequate CPD reliant on a traditional 'front loaded' model of SEND professional development at the start of the year and on teacher training days
- Insufficient time for teachers and support staff to 'assess, plan, do and review'
- Unrealistic expectations that some children require a bespoke approach beyond HQT. It must not be an 'inclusion at any cost' model as many children require a different approach
- Needs not identified early enough and without sufficient accuracy. Lack of understanding around triggers and strengths

### **Recommended solutions**

- High quality Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to develop expertise in identifying and meeting the needs of all learners with SEND and improving teachers understanding of the role of the TA to ensure they are utilised to their full potential using research informed evidence
- Mandatory research informed Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers to take place across the school year to support more effective identification of need, planning, and delivery of inclusive provision
- Specific training informed by research evidence to inform best practice for successful working relationships facilitating open conversations between teachers and support staff
- Time provided for high quality bespoke CPD for support staff for Preparation, Planning and Assessment (PPA)
- SENDCo or other specialist in school to be qualified to Level 7 to enable 'in-house' assessment to identify needs earlier and more precisely
- Career progression pathways for support staff in all settings to develop expertise in specific areas of SEND, develop subject knowledge, and lead interventions

## **Examples of Best Practice and Research**

**Jude McDonald** (Keys Academy Trust) referenced during discussions as 'an expert on professionalising Teaching Assistants'

Instead of defaulting to one-to-one support, Teaching Assistants are trained to lead small group interventions, plan effectively, and provide feedback—maximising their impact and efficiency

**Home - Shape A Life** – This pathway offers graduates the opportunity to work as a Teaching Assistant for a year, helps to improve SEND knowledge, confidence and expertise meeting the needs of learners across settings as the scheme generates trainee teachers with base knowledge of SEND

**Lodge Park Academy, Corby, Northamptonshire**- use regular surveys from Teaching and Support Staff and share the feedback with one another to create a constructive supportive working environment

## **Environment – Physical and Relational**

### **Issues**

- The physical environment of settings can be extremely challenging for many students, with barriers to learning and inclusion such as outdated buildings, noisy and busy spaces, strip lighting, unable to use toilets when needed, dark classrooms and a lack of outdoor and green spaces.
- Rising mental health issues for children and an increase in those unable to access school
- A lack of belonging in some settings (critical to motivation)
- Students were born to move but are required to 'sit still' for extended periods of time
- Focus on writing and 'traditional academic routes' (one size fits all) at the expense of 'Hands on experiences' – e.g. cooking and mechanics and meaningful links with local professionals visiting settings and engaging students with diverse needs
- Lack of staff communal spaces to allow for breaks during the day and to foster a sense of belonging and value

### **Recommended solutions**

- Calming regulation spaces with access to safe adults (as opposed to 'Removal' or 'Isolation' rooms)
- Regular movement breaks becoming the norm rather than the exception and exposure to fresh air and natural light throughout the school day
- Flexible seating options (see Grendon Primary)
- Greater consideration of sensory needs based on learner feedback – e.g. avoidance of strip lighting and calming classroom environments and use of sensory resources for all
- Up to date accessibility Plans to ensure all settings are fully accessible

- Leaders to create a sense of community and family within the school (a house is not a home) through a deliberate building of belonging and connectedness based upon self-determination theory and the principles of relatedness, competence, and autonomy (in Denmark students are 'taught' empathy skills from an early age)
- Peer learning projects and Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) trained staff in all settings
- Trauma informed awareness training for all settings
- Transitions between primary and secondary settings to be more inclusive e.g. having a base teacher in the lower years to support transition and promote belonging
- Staff to take compulsory breaks and to have a physical space separate from children

## Examples of Best Practice and Research

**Grendon Primary, Birmingham** – traditional school classroom environment of plastic chairs and tables has been replaced with comfortable floor seating and standing desks

**Gretton Primary Academy, Northamptonshire** – class teacher chooses times for regular movement breaks attuned to student needs

**Thrapston Primary School, Northamptonshire** – 'The Nest' specialist unit provision provides a bespoke sensory area with lots of outdoor space with a 'forest school' being built. Regular input from an Occupational Therapist (OT)

## Where appropriate, what needs to be in place to support education settings to develop effective resource bases, SEN units or informal enhanced provision?

### Issues

- Segregation of 'unit' attached to a mainstream school at odds with principles of inclusion
- Schools operate in isolation from other services and there are a shortage of education, health and social care and employment support services with long waits for referrals and assessments

- Disconnect between schools and social workers whose expertise could be extremely useful
- Systemic failings with application process for specialist settings receiving many more referrals (many unsuitable) than they can accommodate whilst still required to formally respond to all. Settings must formally respond even when they cannot provide suitable provision, or the setting is not a parental preference
- Unfair funding as different pots of money do not always reflect actual need. Many schools have specific needs and therefore require contextual funding - not all SEND units are the same
- Unreasonable time scales for EHCP consultation responses with instances where there has been an expectation staff will work during their school holidays to comply with legal timescales

### **Recommended solutions**

- Seek opportunities for shared learning and integration between students in SEND units and mainstream through combined learning opportunities, enrichment, and social spaces
- A multi-disciplinary approach with direct, reliable access to a layer of professionals involved in supporting the education, health and social care and employment of learners with SEND
- Educational Psychologists (EP), Speech and Language therapists (SALT) and Occupational Therapists (OT) to be shared across a Trust or group of schools
- Professionals to collaborate with support staff to build expertise and enable interventions to be regular, cost effective and sustainable
- Develop a bank of recommended interventions that are rooted in principles of inclusion
- Develop closer relationships between SEND units and local authorities through a link person and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to enable the local authority to be better informed about the specific nature of each provision with improved capacity to issue EHCP consultations, as well as school transport arrangements.
- Legal timeframes for EHCPs take account of school holidays and only sent during term time
- More standardised approach for face-to-face diagnostic assessment of need for EHCPs to ensure they are fit for purpose and based upon multi-disciplinary discussions

# **How can education settings be supported to work effectively with a wide range of specialists / other professionals to meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs?**

## **Issues**

- Lack of time and capacity in settings – how can we use the professionals time more creatively?
- Lack of places in specialist schools and long waiting lists
- Additional stress and fatigue for staff working with children with complex needs, particularly those affected by trauma
- CPD front loaded onto Teacher Training days without sufficient time to reflect on application in practice and work collaboratively with specialists across the year to support learners with complex needs
- Schools who operate more on an individual basis (particularly if small and not part of an Academy group) can result in a lack of collaboration between specialist settings and also between mainstream and specialist settings

## **Recommended solutions**

- Broader remit for multi-disciplinary professionals beyond individual casework, working across settings to provide CPD, support and collaborative guidance within a setting to give practical meaningful support
- Regular supervision and time for reflection for staff members including SENDCos and Teaching Assistants
- Knowledge sharing across localities of best practice for inclusion between mainstream and SEND units. Adopt a skills swap initiative between settings using a coaching and modelling approach
- Establish local inclusion networks and conferencing

## **Examples of Best Practice and Research**

**Bedfordshire multi-disciplinary model** – Wrap around support which includes Early Help assessments and links with independent providers