

SEND Courageous Conversations

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SEND Courageous Conversations

Funded through DfE Regional Improvement & Innovation Alliances Grant – for Children's Social Care (CSC) and SEND

1 day workshop

Provide a unique opportunity for the local area to focus on a particular topic, of their choosing

Sits within everything else that's going on, including the area's own SEND development programme, the fuller range of SEND review activity provided by the LGA Peer Review approach or DfE SEND Advisor work, wider SEND SESLIP offer

Opportunity for LA colleagues, Parent Carers Forum reps, ICB colleagues to be part of another area's work



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DfE Enablers & Principles for SEND Reform

1. **Early.** Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. This will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse, instead intervening upstream, earlier in children's lives when this can have most impact.

2. **Local.** Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.

3. **Fair.** Every school should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children in mainstream, special or Alternative Provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.

4. **Effective.** Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children.

5. **Shared.** Education, health and care services should work in partnership with one another, local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children.



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DfE SEND Enablers

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Co-production and relationships at the heart of the system 2. Shared vision and evidence-informed priorities 3. Stable and knowledgeable leadership and governance 4. A focus on high-quality delivery of the essentials 5. A well-organised, skilled and supported workforce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly enables the voice of the child: • Promotes the engagement and involvement of the LAs Parent Carer Forums • Supports reflective practice, quality assurance and audit • Supports effective leadership, management and professional supervision • Uses regional diagnostic information and analysis • Uses other forms of LA engagement and feedback • Uses existing LA centred work including the Delivering Better Value in SEND toolkit |
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So far...

Staff, parent carers forums, parent carers representatives, other partners inc. settings, schools, Trusts, AP providers, post 16 providers, health providers, health commissioners, private & voluntary sectors, Councillors.

c.25 – 110 participants

Buckinghamshire, Kent, Reading, West Sussex, Hampshire, Windsor & Maidenhead, Portsmouth, Surrey, Brighton & Hove, Wokingham, West Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes, East Sussex and Medway (**15 LA areas**) have taken part.

Reading (first of **Round 2**) taking place 26 November 2025, supported by colleagues from East Sussex and Oxfordshire PCF

Hampshire, Buckinghamshire, Portsmouth, West Sussex, Brighton & Hove starting planning for 2nd SEND Courageous Conversation. Buckinghamshire aiming for Feb/March 2026, Portsmouth aiming for March 2026, Hampshire in May 2026.



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List of topics/themes chosen by LAs so far:

- Developing/reviewing the local area SEF
- Transitions, including 16+
- Alternative Provision
- Timeliness/quality of new EHC assessments
- Annual Reviews
- SEND support and inclusive practice in mainstream schools
- Joint commissioning
- Coproduction and impact of this
- Ordinarily available provision/Prevention
- Outcomes for children – including evidence of partnership working having positive effects
- Quality Assurance
- What happens when?
- Communication



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Feedback from first wave

Very positive, highly valued & worth continuing

Benefits are intended and unintended

Value of independent facilitation

Safe, structured spaces for SEND Courageous Conversations to take place

Value from participation of colleagues from other LAs and from other Parent Carer Forums

Useful experience for those part of the visiting team



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Feedback from first wave

Re-evaluation and changes to Quality Assurance frameworks and practice

Revised and improved approaches to Annual Reviews

New templates (EHCPs) and enhanced processes

Learning & reflecting on best practice

Improved partnership relationships and communication, including with parent carers forums

Wider understanding of ordinarily available provision

Improved development of Self Evaluation.



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Next step theme	Operational Actions
Quality Assurance of EHCPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop multi-agency QA frameworks - Clarify what "good" looks like in EHCPs - Reduce duplication and jargon - Improve child/parent voice in plans
Communication & Engagement including EHCP correspondence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simplify language and formats - Use storytelling and word-of-mouth - Improve reach to underrepresented groups
Child-Centred Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include child photos and direct quotes - Focus on lived experience and aspirations - Ensure EHCPs reflect real progress
Graduated Response (Practice-Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve communication of Refusal-to-Assess decisions - Use videos and bite-sized communication for accessibility - Address backlog and documentation complexity
Coproduction (Practice-Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refine EHCP letters using parent feedback - Use "you said, we did" formats - Build trust through transparent comms
Training (Practice-Level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create an 'local way' for Annual Reviews - Provide bite-sized training for practitioners - Use visual aids and overlays to support understanding

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Next step theme	Strategic Actions
System-Wide Strategic Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use SEND Partnership Boards to drive change - Align SEF, strategy, and inspection readiness - Develop system-wide capacity for Annual Reviews - Clarify ownership and leadership roles
Training & Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build consistent training across settings - Reduce documentation burden through simplification
Coproduction & Parent Carer Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embed coproduction in QA and strategic planning - Involve forums in decision-making panels - Use feedback loops to refine system processes
Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embed Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) expectations across settings - Use champions to model inclusive practice - Align OAP with funding and inclusion strategy
Alternative Provision (AP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define AP purpose and reintegration pathways - Clarify QA roles and funding mechanisms - Build shared understanding across LA and schools
Graduated Response & Early Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen graduated response post-refusal - Build confidence in non-EHCP pathways - Clarify escalation routes and thresholds
Data, Metrics & Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use audits and dip sampling to track impact - Share metrics across system partners - Evaluate strategic interventions (e.g. inclusion teams)

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We have made the Annual Review a working document – so much quicker, so it can be part of a cycle. No need to update the whole plan – this allows people to focus on a specific area.

'[We were able to] meet with other people and get feedback that wouldn't have got.

I can see a direct line between the CC sessions and the development of the SEF, particularly with relation to the parent/carer set of questions

The space provides an opportunity for collaborative working, underpinned by transparency. We know our problems, now let's work together to help.

The broad range of participants – and their understanding – enabled the conversation to broaden out. Great to have different organisations involved in the day. This will be particularly helpful when we start co-producing the QA framework and move forward.

Good to have an opportunity to be transparent and honest. Not many other opportunities to be so blunt.

[Provided] an opportunity to explore; honest, not defensive conversation, without baggage

Good opportunity to talk about SEND in more detail that might have been a 30 minute Teams call

Having an external facilitator, outside of SEND team, helped to change tone of conversation and shift it, across the partnership.

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This was such a brilliant CPD opportunity for myself and supported me to develop my understanding and explore new ideas within another LA's context which I was then able to apply when returning to [LA] and now as the Strategic Lead for SEND in [another LA], I am very grateful for this opportunity, and would say that this has probably been one of the most meaningful CPD I have engaged with in my career in SEND.

Based on my experience, when joining [another LA] I promoted my wider leadership team to engage in the programme to provide additional CPD. Being part of this work has allowed my wider leadership team an opportunity to develop a broader professionals network and an opportunity to consider best practice and how it can be implemented within the [other LA] context. My leadership team was grateful of the opportunity as they felt it was a meaningful opportunity to engage with peers; problem solve collectively and have some space to stand back and reflect on what is next for us in our LA.

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Get involved

[Evaluation Report October 2025](#) available via SESLIP website

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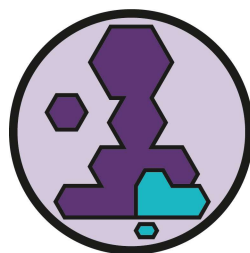
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