

SESLIP Education Network Update: February 27th 2026

From SESLIP:

- The link below is for information about the SESLIP SEND Inclusion Summit taking place on Friday 20th March, all day event at Broadway House in London. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/se19-inclusion-summit-tickets-1981565006276>

In Today's Update:

- DfE: Schools white paper "Every Child Achieving and Thriving", accompanying SEND paper and consultation (Putting Children and Young People First), guidance on gender identity: policy paper and consultation to add to KCSIE, 10-year School Estates Strategy which includes addressing school capacity, interim evaluation of the targeted RISE programme, consultation about extending targeted RISE to 'low achieving' schools, recommendations for schools from the Neurodivergence Task Group, report on understanding the support staff workforce in schools.
- Reports: LA-wide strategies to improve 'good level of development', summary of comparative lessons for SEND in England.
- Research: Sustainable school leadership research study final report, study into KS3 reading progress finds a strong relationship with students' belief their effort matters, research review of the educational experiences of those with disabilities, mainstream vs special school attainment for pupils with an EHCP (who sit a GCSE).
- News: 50% of LAs may need bail-out in next 3 years, 90% of historic SEND deficits are to be written off by Government, RISE: well-intentional but lacking system design, LGA briefing about the Schools White Paper, discussion of SEND reforms and continuing financial pressures for many LAs, Court of Appeal upholds VAT on private school fees, discussion of an issue with the proposed changes to P8, Mumsnet campaigns for U16s ban on social media.

1. DfE:

- Schools White Paper: "Every Child Achieving & Thriving". Among the headline commitments are: all schools to be part of a MAT with LAs and 'local education partnerships' able to set up MATs; there will be new 'trust standards' that aim to strengthen accountability for MATs; the Government aims to halve the disadvantage gap by 2029 with NFF and Pupil Premium being reviewed to support this; all schools to measure pupils' sense of belonging. There are also targets to increase attendance, to consult about changes to admissions code (promoting fairness), for RISE to add a focus on KS3, a duty to provide schoolwork for excluded pupils, new Reintegration Support Partnerships, and a DfE 'digital solution' for handling parental complaints.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69972c02bfdab2546272c007/Every_child_achieving_and_thriving_print_ready_version.pdf
- Consultation about the SEND reforms set out in the White Paper plus further details:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69986263b33a4db7ff889ecb/SEND_reform_putting_children_and_young_people_first_government_consultation.pdf. Key proposals include a ladder of support for pupils with SEND from 'targeted' to 'targeted plus' to 'specialist' and only children requiring specialist provision will need an EHCP; others will have 'Individual Support Plans' led by their mainstream school with access to 'Experts at Hand' that wraparound groups of schools. All secondary schools will have an 'inclusion base' and the DfE will launch national standards for inclusion from 2028. There will be 'national pricing bands' for independent special school places. The consultation page is here which is open until 18th May: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/send-strategy-division/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-firs/>. Note the SEND code of practice will need to be updated and the current timescales for the major reforms such as to EHCPs and prices of independent schools is from 2029-30 at the earliest.

- Policy paper on children questioning their gender:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/including-guidance-on-children-who-are-questioning-their-gender-in-kcsie/including-guidance-on-children-who-are-questioning-their-gender-in-keeping-children-safe-in-education-kcsie> together with link to consultation to add guidance for schools on this topic to Keeping Children Safe in Education (making it statutory guidance):
<https://consult.education.gov.uk/independent-education-and-school-safeguarding-division/keeping-children-safe-in-education-2026-revisions/> (closes 22nd April 2026).
- Ten-year Education Estates Policy and Strategy from the DfE.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6989dec6d3f57710b50a9bd9/Education_estates_strategy_accessible_version.pdf Together with guidance about making an application to the Schools Rebuilding Programme: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-rebuilding-programme-nomination> . The DfE will introduce its new programme by autumn 2028 to replace the condition improvement fund and the strategy is a vehicle to realise the ambition that all secondary schools have an inclusion base. The strategy commits to developing a ‘decision-making framework’ for schools and LAs to make better use of their surplus land and buildings linked to the current “demographic changes”.
- Interim process evaluation of the targeted RISE programme, based on feedback from 36 schools. Among the findings were that, although many matches with support organisations were working well, for nearly half of schools there had been problems including concerns about geographical proximity, suitability of the support offer and capacity of the support organisation. There were concerns expressed by some about duplication; of existing improvement strategies that were being supported. Researchers also questioned whether some of the schools should have been identified for targeted RISE, since they had made significant progress prior to RISE intervention commencing, and, for others, whether there has been an overload of intervention hampering their capacity for change.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6980baa3ec71a16669612e1b/RISE_targeted_intervention_interim_process_evaluation_report.pdf
- Consultation on changes to Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures through a refreshed Progress 8 curriculum model. The DfE seeks to make the changes on the basis that they offer a better way to recognise the progress of pupils with low prior attainment and about the options to extending targeted RISE support to primary and secondary schools with low achievement. Consultation closes on 4th May. <https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-accountability/key-stage-4-performance-measures-and-targeted-rise/>
- Report of the Neurodivergence Group set up by the DfE and its recommendations for mainstream education about how to support these children without the need for specialist diagnosis. Their ambition is to achieve a cultural shift so neurodivergent children are seen as individuals who are wanted in school, not as problems to be fixed. Recommendations extend across learning environments, curriculum and assessments, staff development and funding and commissioning with the aim for need (& strengths) to be identified earlier.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69984861339ee33f3ad0b9d0/The_Neurodivergence_Task_and_Finish_Group_report.pdf
- Report about the role and experience of support staff in England, based on a survey of over 9,000 working in schools. The analysis offers a breakdown of the numbers in different types of role and confirms how these vary by phase: for example TA form 68% of support staff in special schools, whilst the proportions are 54% and 27% respectively in primary and secondary schools. Themes of job satisfaction, access to training, work-life balance and recruitment and retention are also covered.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/699f1906532c9ad91ebbcce5/The_role_and_experience_of_support_staff_in_schools_research_report.pdf

2. Reports:

- LGA report about effective strategies for improving ‘good level of development’ (GLD) in the early years and moving towards meeting targets. Strategic alignment across the partnership is vital, in particular developing the whole 0 - 5 years system locally. Expanding workforce capacity and capability are important and exploring opportunities for an additional integrated Health Child Programme contact beyond the 2-2 ½ year review.

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/15.162%20-%20Achieving%20the%20Best%20Start%20in%20Life%20Research%20Project_04%20FINAL.pdf

- Lessons for the SEND system in England from systems in other developed countries. Although nowhere has solved all challenges for children with SEND, in Wales SEND (or ALN) focuses primarily on educational needs, whilst The Netherlands builds in local access to support such as for speech and language in its laws (rather than by individual). https://3a551fc8-7675-4cc5-9ecd-8697a47d348f.filesusr.com/ugd/5d3f2a_d28e6a6811cb405aa24f207001ba1eaf.pdf

3. Research

- Final report from the University of Nottingham’s Sustainable School Leadership project, a three study of the training, supply, retention and wider sustainability of senior school leadership across the UK. Key insights include:

- leadership has changed over recent years and now involves significant amounts of time on care and wellbeing;
- preparation for headship was seen as mostly developmental rather than national courses and nearly a quarter stated that they had not expected to become a head;
- local solutions are key to success in headship such as access to peer support and on-going coaching;
- there is still a lack of ethnic diversity across school leaders and a lack of initiatives to address this.

<https://sustainableschoolleadership.uk/all-publications/>

- The relationship between KS3 pupils’ perceived academic control (the belief that effort and strategies influence outcomes) and reading progress: pupils with high perceived control made around two to three months more reading progress over just four months than peers with low control. The study followed over 10,000 pupils across an academic year, linking pupil engagement data with Key Stage 3 reading age assessments. The research does not argue against reading interventions, but shows they are less effective if pupils do not believe their effort can lead to success. <https://www.tep.uk/research-and-resources/the-link-between-perceived-academic-control-responsibility-and-the-development-of-reading-skills>
- Government funded review of research about disabled peoples’ experience of education in the UK. A key finding for those in schools is that staff understanding of the pupil’s disabilities is key to a feeling of even and supported education. Other themes include that there is some way to go for there to be sufficiently inclusive access arrangements in place for formal assessments, that transitions are critical points and can be when gaps in arrangements are felt most acutely by pupils and that pupils’ worry about stigma means they often only partially disclose their impairments. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-peoples-lived-experience-of-education-in-the-uk/disabled-peoples-lived-experience-of-education-in-the-uk-an-evidence-review>
- DfE funded research analysing patterns of GCSE attainment for pupils with an EHCP, whether attending mainstream school or special school. Taking a very large sample, across 2011/12 to 2023/24 GCSE candidates and comparing performance in English and maths GCSEs, the research evidenced average 0.56 grade increase for those who sat the GCSEs attending mainstream as compared to those in special schools. The authors add significant caveats and report as correlational rather than causal, however the multiple models and factors controlled for make this a robust analysis, with particularly helpful steer for pupils with certain categories of ‘primary need’. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-outcomes-for-pupils-with-ehcps-comparison-of-mainstream-and-special-schools>

4. News:

- Nearly half of LAs responsible for social care and children’s service say they are likely to need to apply for Government financial bailout over the next three years, according to the LGA annual survey of English councils. Although funding settlements have gone up, the increasing demands and rising costs mean that their budgets are not able to keep pace. <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/emergency-government-bailouts-needed-third-councils-over-next-three-years-lga-survey>
- Government announces that 90% of historic deficits accrued by LAs for SEND costs will be written off and that similar arrangements will apply over the period 2026-2028 while the (to be announced) SEND reforms are implementing and bedding in. The announcement also states that the Safety Valve programme is to come to an end. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/government-to-write-off-90-of-councils-send-deficits/>
- Discussion of the RISE Targeted Support Programme: “a programme built on good intentions but hampered by system design”, lacking an underlying theory of improvement. Other points, informed by the DfE’s own interim evaluation, include: that compliance and time pressures drive too much of the intervention and this has resulted in operational overload and strained relationships. There is also a lack of clarity about who is responsible and accountable for improvement, including muddled views about the role of the responsible body. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/problems-with-rise-school-improvement-programme>
- Briefing from the Local Govt Association about the Schools White Paper. The LGA broadly welcomes that the reform plans, including for the SEND system, have now been published and support the emphasis on inclusion. They highlight the lack of detail about key proposals, such as LA establishing trusts and the Experts at Hand programme. <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/schools-white-paper-every-child-achieving-and-thriving-lga>
- Discussion about challenges in the short-term for LAs around SEND funding following the publication of the DfE’s SEND reforms consultation. Even with a Government commitment to take on 90% of high needs deficits this potentially leaves a number of LAs with £millions in accumulated deficits. Meanwhile parents might feel incentivised to seek an EHC needs assessment prior to the new system being implemented while the proposals for all schools as part of local SEND groups and pooling funding are untested. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/will-reforms-fix-the-send-funding-crisis/>
- Private schools lose their appeal against the ruling that to not exempt their school fees from VAT. The judgement found that Government had acted reasonably and, since the claim was from the point of view of a particular religious perspective, that parents had the option of home schooling should they object to the state school provision. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/private-schools-lose-legal-challenge-over-vat-fees>
- A helpful article of relevance to the DfE’s consultation about changes to Progress 8. It highlights that removing ‘confidence intervals’ from the analysis swaps one bias due to school size for another. It also points out that the DfE’s proposed approach runs counter to that being taken by Ofsted. <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2026/02/are-dfe-right-to-ditch-confidence-intervals/>
- Mumsnet launches campaign for laws to ban under 16s access to social media. It will involve cigarette packet style adverts and focuses on the addictive and distractive qualities of social media. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2026/feb/26/mumsnet-campaign-demands-ban-social-media-under-16s>
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