



# SE19 INCLUSION COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Guidance for establishing a Local Area Inclusion Community of Practice

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# Introduction



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**Purpose of this document** This guidance has been developed to support local areas in establishing their own SEND Inclusion Community of Practice, building on the SE19 regional model facilitated by SESLIP

**Who is this for?** Local authority leaders responsible for SEND strategy, Directors of Education, and colleagues tasked with setting up or coordinating local inclusion networks

## **What does it cover?**

- What a Community of Practice is and why it matters for SEND inclusion
- The national policy context driving this work
- Practical step-by-step guidance for setting up your local CoP
- Who to involve, how to structure it, and what to focus on
- Critical success factors and how to measure impact

**How to use this guidance** This is a practical resource designed to be adapted to your local context. Use it as a starting point, not a rigid template — every local area will shape their CoP differently

# What is a Community of Practice?

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common concern or passion and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly

## Three key elements of a CoP:

### Domain

- A shared area of interest — in this case, SEND inclusion in mainstream settings
- Members are committed to the domain and have a shared competence

### Community

- Members engage in joint activities, share information, and help each other
- They build relationships that enable learning together

### Practice

- Members are practitioners who develop a shared repertoire of resources
- This includes experiences, tools, stories, and ways of addressing recurring problems



# Why Establish a Local Inclusion CoP?



## Supporting mainstream inclusion

Increase confidence and knowledge around including children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings

Develop pragmatic, effective, and collaborative local approaches



## Sharing best practice

Maximise existing materials and provide a baseline tool for developing inclusive practice

Identify, celebrate, and scale what works across your local area



## Building local capacity

Create a network of professionals who can support each other

Reduce isolation for practitioners working on complex inclusion challenges



## Preparing for SEND reform

Align with the national direction toward a more inclusive education system

Support readiness for the Inclusive Mainstream Fund and new national expectations



# National Policy Context



## **SEND Reform White Paper (February 2026)**

- A decade-long reform programme moving toward one inclusive education system
- New layered support structure: Universal Offer, Targeted, Targeted Plus, and Specialist
- Individual Support Plans (ISPs) to replace over-reliance on EHCPs for less complex needs

## **Inclusive Mainstream Fund (£1.6bn over 3 years)**

- £400 million per year allocated to schools from 2026/27
- Schools required to publish an inclusion strategy
- Supports early intervention without need for diagnosis or statutory process

## **Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIAs)**

- DfE has asked regional alliances to establish Inclusion Communities of Practice
- SE19 regional CoP provides a model for subsequent local area CoPs



# Aims and Objectives of a Local Area CoP



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## Your Local Area COP should aim to:



Bring together local colleagues to develop approaches that increase confidence and knowledge around inclusion in mainstream settings



Maximise existing materials to provide a local baseline tool for developing and assessing inclusive practice



Support schools and settings to move toward practices that are inclusive by design



Facilitate peer learning and constructive challenge across education, health, and care partners



Identify and celebrate best practice within your local area



Build a shared local vision for inclusion aligned with national reform expectations



Support the development of local Inclusion Blueprints for Success



# Who Should Be Involved?



## Core membership

- LA Inclusion Leaders (e.g., Directors of Education, SEND leads)
- School leaders and SENCOs from maintained schools and academy trusts
- Health partners (NHS/NHSE representatives, therapists, educational psychologists)
- Parent Carer Forum representatives

## Wider membership

- Alternative Provision leads
- Early years and post-16 representatives
- Voluntary and community sector organisations
- Children and young people voice representatives

## Facilitation

- Appoint experienced facilitators who understand the SEND landscape
- Consider co-production with parents, practitioners, and young people at every stage



# COP Governance and Structure



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### Reporting and accountability

- Link to your Local Area Partnership Board or SEND Strategic Board
- Align with your regional RIIA CoP and share learning up and across
- Report progress to Directors of Children's Services

### Meeting frequency

- Meet at least quarterly — termly meetings work well for school participation
- Supplement with themed working groups between full meetings
- Consider an annual away-day or summit for deeper strategic planning

### Terms of Reference

- Define purpose, membership, decision-making, and confidentiality expectations
- Include commitment to co-production principles throughout
- Review terms annually to ensure they remain fit for purpose

## Getting Started: Steps 1 to 4



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### Step 1

#### **Establish your vision and scope**

- Define what inclusion means in your local context
- Agree the scope: age range, settings, and priority areas

### Step 2

#### **Map your local landscape**

- Use a maturity self-assessment to understand your starting point
- Identify existing good practice and gaps in provision

### Step 3

#### **Identify and invite members**

- Reach out to education, health, social care, and parent/carer networks
- Ensure representation from a range of settings and perspectives

### Step 4

#### **Plan your first meeting**

- Set a clear agenda with a mix of input, discussion, and practical activities
- Include time for members to share their context and priorities



## Getting Started: Steps 5 to 8



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### Step 5

#### Agree priorities and a workplan

- Identify 2–3 priority themes for the first year (e.g., workforce skills, Ordinarily Available Provision, data use)
- Create a simple workplan with milestones and review points

### Step 6

#### Establish working groups

- Form small task-and-finish groups around each priority theme
- Ensure each group has a clear brief, lead, and reporting mechanism

### Step 7

#### Share and celebrate practice

- Create opportunities for schools and settings to present their inclusive practice
- Use case studies, peer visits, and practice-sharing forums

### Step 8

#### Review and adapt

- Build in regular reflection points to assess impact and refine your approach
- Seek feedback from all members, including parents and young people



# Key Activities and Focus Areas



## **Inclusive Mainstream Practice**

Develop a shared local understanding of what should be ordinarily available in mainstream settings

Use the Change Programme learning and What Works in SEND evidence framework



## **Workforce development**

Coordinate training on inclusive practice, early identification, and evidence-based interventions

Support SENCOs and class teachers with practical tools and peer mentoring



## **Data and outcomes**

Agree shared metrics to track inclusion outcomes across your area

Use data to identify trends, target resources, and celebrate progress



## **Family and young person engagement**

Embed co-production at every level of the CoP's work

Include lived experience perspectives in planning, delivery, and evaluation



# Critical Success Factors

## Strong leadership and strategic buy-in

- Visible support from Directors of Children's Services and senior school leaders
- A clear shared definition of inclusion underpinned by a values-based approach

## Genuine co-production

- Parents, carers, and young people as equal partners, not just consultees
- Co-designed agendas, activities, and evaluation frameworks

## Multi-agency collaboration

- Strong partnerships across education, health, and social care
- Involving school leaders in strategic conversations and initiatives

## Commitment to action

- Move beyond discussion to practical, evidence-informed changes in schools
- Hold each other accountable through peer challenge and shared data

## Sustainability

- Plan for long-term sustainability beyond initial funding cycles
- Embed CoP learning into mainstream SEND governance and practice



# Measuring Impact and Outcomes

How will you know your CoP is making a difference?

## Process measures

- Attendance and engagement levels across meetings and working groups
- Diversity of membership (education, health, parents, young people)
- Number of schools and settings actively participating

## Practice measures

- Changes in school inclusion strategies and ordinarily available provision
- Uptake of training and evidence-based interventions
- Quality of Individual Support Plans and early identification processes

## Outcome measures

- Reduction in exclusions and moves to specialist/alternative provision
- Improved attendance and attainment for children with SEND
- Parent and young person satisfaction and confidence in local support



For more information or to join  
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