



SESLIP Regional Improvement Plan 2025/26

Project 20 - Mainstream Inclusion: Interim Evaluation Report, March 2026

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1. Project context and aims

The Mainstream Inclusion project was launched in the summer of 2025, led by Marian Cullen and Emma Stone, both SESLIP associates. The project is part of the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) which is funded through the DfE Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) SEND grant, as set out in the [SESLIP Regional Improvement Plan 2025–26 and RIIA Grant Delivery Plan \(publication version, 18 July 2025\)](#). The regional improvement plan is intended to help all South East local authorities deliver effective services that improve outcomes for children and young people. It promotes a non-stigmatising approach to improvement, recognising strengths in every local area and supporting innovation, skills development and the sharing of ideas and solutions across the region.

Within the delivery plan, Project No. 20 (Mainstream Inclusion Project) is positioned under the SEND Universal Improvement strand and is intended to support local areas to develop pragmatic, effective and collaborative approaches that increase confidence and knowledge around including children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings. The plan describes a focus on consolidating and building on existing materials by producing a regional inclusion tool for local areas to use as a baseline for assessing and developing practice. It also sets out the use of a regional community of practice as a model for subsequent local area communities, with identified best practice to be shared widely (including through websites and a celebration conference).

This project is being delivered in the context of the Schools White Paper [Every child achieving and thriving \(Department for Education, published 23 February 2026\)](#). The White Paper sets out a long-term direction of travel for the school system that places inclusion at its centre, with an explicit aim to ensure that children who have previously been sidelined are included and supported to achieve and thrive. In relation to SEND, it signals a shift towards stronger and more consistent support in mainstream settings, earlier identification and intervention, and improved access to specialist expertise and multi-agency support without unnecessary escalation to statutory processes.

In this context, Project 20's focus on a regional inclusion tool and regional/community-of-practice activity supports the White Paper's emphasis on building mainstream capability through shared standards, practical resources and workforce development, alongside stronger local collaboration between schools, local authorities and wider partners. Feedback from the SE19 SEND Inclusion Summit and the "Supporting Inclusion in Mainstream Settings" survey also reflects the White Paper's call for improved measurement of inclusion and impact, including outcomes beyond attainment (such as wellbeing and participation), and for clearer accountability and shared responsibility across local systems.

2. Delivery against project KPIs

The project activities and KPIs were agreed with DfE and are set out in the SESLIP Regional Improvement Plan. Overall, the project has had strong delivery against the Mainstream Inclusion project objectives, with engagement targets consistently exceeded and only one KPI experiencing delay due to external factors outside project control.

Key outputs and achievements included:

- Development and release of guidance to support Local Area partnerships to establish Inclusion Communities of Practice
- Establishment of the Regional Inclusion Community of Practice and delivery of three events (two in-person and one online), with sustained engagement across all 19 South East LAs and meeting attendance well above the 50% threshold.
- Delivery of the SE19 SEND Inclusion Summit (one of the three events) on 20 March which was well attended and received very positive feedback. A video of the event was also made.
- Regional insights on readiness for SEND reforms via the "Supporting Inclusion in Mainstream Settings Survey"

The remaining KPI - planning and judging for a regional celebration of best inclusion practice (summer term 2026) - was delayed, primarily due to publication delays for the Schools White Paper; work is ongoing to finalise award categories and criteria so they align with the SEND reform agenda.

Table 1: Project KPIs

KPI/Measure	Target	Actual	Status
Deliver a regional inclusion tool that supports the establishment of Inclusion communities of practice in local areas	By end Mar 26	Guidance for Local Area partnerships to establish an Inclusion Community of Practice delivered	Completed
Organise 2 meetings of a regional community of practice including partners in SEND, schools/settings, young people and LAs	By end Mar 26	Two in-person SE19 Inclusion Community events held, plus one online event	Completed
Engage all 19 SE areas, with at least 50% attending each meeting	By end Mar 26	Monthly engagement maintained; attendance: 95% (19 Nov 2025) 68% (online) 84% (20 Mar 2026)	Completed
Publish an interim evaluation and share with SEND strategic leads and SE DCSs	By end Mar 26	Interim evaluation published and shared	Completed
Plan a regional celebration of best inclusion practice (summer term 2026), including an awards ceremony; judging completed by end Mar 26	Event planned for summer term 26; judging by end Mar 26	Event planned for summer term 2026; award categories/criteria being finalised; judging not completed by end Mar 26	Delayed

3. “Supporting Inclusion in Mainstream Settings” survey

As part of the focus on mainstream inclusion, the project worked to establish a regional view of Inclusion in the South East. A survey was designed to help assess LA maturity in supporting inclusion in mainstream settings, as well as capture good practice and challenges in the key areas that enable inclusive experiences for children and young people. 12 of the 19 LAs in the region completed the survey.

The Purpose of the survey was to understand current practice, strengths and challenges in supporting SEND inclusion in mainstream settings across South East local authorities, across six domains (School Leader Buy-in; Partnership Working; Training & Workforce Development; Peer-to-Peer Support; Team Around the School; Co-production with stakeholders).

The survey findings are reinforced by the qualitative “Tell us more” responses, which describe a SEND system in transition. Across the region, local authorities report growing commitment to inclusion and increasingly mature partnership structures, alongside persistent constraints relating to funding and capacity, uneven implementation across schools and trusts, and challenges in evidencing impact (particularly for pupils on SEN Support and for outcomes such as independence and wellbeing).

Qualitative themes

- **School leader buy-in (variable, with some drivers of change):** Respondents report that leaders generally understand statutory responsibilities, but day-to-day practice varies widely. Engagement is increasing in part due to Safety Valve commitments and inspection requirements; SEMH is frequently cited as a particular challenge, and some schools seek specialist/AP solutions rather than strengthening inclusive mainstream practice.
- **Partnership working (strength, with uneven MAT engagement):** Governance structures (e.g. SEND Partnership Boards) are described as maturing, with schools involved in strategic programmes. However, collaboration and shared accountability with MATs remains inconsistent, data-sharing is still developing, and larger authorities report geographic variation in the strength of partnerships.
- **Training and workforce development (good provision, but uptake and evaluation gaps):** Many areas describe comprehensive CPD (e.g., SENCO forums, core standards training, OAP guidance) but with stronger engagement from SENCOs than senior leaders. There is a recurring need for more strategic workforce planning, additional development in SEMH/medical needs, and clearer evaluation of training impact.
- **Peer-to-peer support (well established, with scope to deepen practice change):** SENCO networks are consistently valued and new collaborative models are emerging (clusters, quadrants, communities of schools), often supported by special school outreach. A common challenge is shifting from reliance on additional staffing/interventions towards more embedded inclusive classroom practice.
- **Team around the school (developing, with capacity constraints):** Universal/targeted/specialist offers and referral routes are being established, but these are new in several areas and consistency varies. Restructuring and commissioned services are underway in places, though capacity and embedding remain key risks.

- **Co-production (embedded with PCFs; CYP voice varies):** Parent Carer Forums are widely embedded in governance and workstreams, and co-production is reported to be improving (e.g., around OAP documents and communications). Youth forums and CYP engagement are present in some areas, but strength and consistency vary and feedback loops are not always clear.
- **Leadership, accountability and measuring progress:** Some areas cite clearer governance and KPIs following inspection, and the adoption of dashboards (e.g., Power BI) for monitoring. However, consistent data from schools (especially for SEN Support) remains challenging, and there is a widely reported need for qualitative measures that capture outcomes beyond attainment, such as wellbeing and independence.
- **Clear strategic intent, with variable implementation:** 58% (7/12) of LAs report a “Very clear” vision for inclusion; responses note that consistent practice across schools/MATs remains uneven.
- **Networks are established across the region:** 100% (12/12) report established SENCO networks or cluster models, supporting peer learning and information sharing.
- **Funding/capacity is the dominant barrier:** 92% (11/12) cite funding/capacity constraints as a barrier, affecting staffing, training release time, and ability to deliver inclusive support consistently.
- **Accountability and measurement remain challenging:** 83% rate accountability measures as only “Somewhat effective” or “Not effective”; many highlight difficulties in capturing progress for pupils on SEN Support and measuring qualitative outcomes (e.g., independence, wellbeing).

Survey findings analysis

Table 2: Summary survey analysis

Theme	What the data suggests	Supporting evidence	Implications for practice/delivery
School leader buy-in, knowledge and experience	Most LAs describe leadership as “Developing”: inclusion is present in strategy, but confidence/consistency varies by school and trust.	Maturity: 2 Emerging / 9 Developing / 1 Embedded (12 total). Vision clarity: 58% “Very clear”.	Prioritise leadership development and shared definitions of inclusion; strengthen engagement with MATs and leaders where buy-in is weakest.

Partnership working	Partnership structures are largely in place, with many areas strengthening SEND/AP boards and school relationships; academy engagement and shared accountability remain recurring issues.	Maturity: 1 Emerging / 8 Developing / 3 Embedded. Partnership strength: 2 Very strong; 9 Somewhat strong; 1 Weak.	Support consistent models for LA–school–MAT collaboration, data sharing, and joint problem-solving (including finance/sufficiency pressures).
Training and workforce development	Most LAs report established CPD offers, but recruitment/retention and inconsistent uptake (especially by senior leaders) limits reach and impact.	Training rated Good/Excellent by 83% (10/12). Maturity: 3 Emerging / 8 Developing / 1 Embedded.	Develop workforce plans (including TA roles), improve access (release time), and build evaluation of CPD impact (pre/post measures and practice change).
Peer-to-peer support	This is the strongest domain overall: networks exist everywhere, with many areas moving towards systematic peer review, outreach and moderated practice sharing.	100% (12/12) report established networks/clusters. Maturity: 0 Emerging / 10 Developing / 2 Embedded.	Build on existing SENCO networks to share tools, case studies and quality assurance approaches; extend beyond SENCOs to wider leadership and classroom practice.
Team around the school	This domain requires the most development: approaches are emerging or variable, with capacity constraints and gaps in universal/targeted support.	Maturity: 3 Emerging / 7 Developing / 2 Embedded. Barriers: funding/capacity (11/12), lack of universal/targeted support (4/12), poor communication (2/12).	Prioritise shared models and referral routes, clarify universal/targeted offers, and share effective practice from LAs piloting/embedding this approach.
Co-production with stakeholders	Co-production is widely established with Parent Carer Forums; several LAs note a need to strengthen direct CYP voice and ensure consistent practice across workstreams.	Maturity: 0 Emerging / 9 Developing / 3 Embedded. School leaders co-production: 5 Yes consistently; 6 Sometimes; 1 Rarely.	Strengthen CYP engagement methods and feedback loops; support areas to formalise co-production approaches across the local offer and inclusion frameworks.

4. SE19 SEND Inclusion Summit

Building on the momentum created within the Regional Inclusion Community of Practice, the project facilitated the SE19 SEND Inclusion Summit in London on 20 March 2026. The day involved:

- A regional focus on national SEND reforms around Inclusion in Mainstream Settings
- Presentations from inspirational speakers, Schools, SEND Services, Parents and Young People framing the Inclusion Agenda, showcasing good practice and sharing lived experiences
- Networking and peer learning opportunities for regional colleagues

Feedback from attendees indicates the SE19 SEND Inclusion Summit was a high-impact, well-paced event that strongly aligned with attendee expectations and professional interests: 100% of respondents rated the overall experience positively (4–5/5), with 84% awarding the maximum score, and all respondents reported that expectations were fully or somewhat met. Suggestions for improvement focused on increasing depth and interaction - more time for discussion and networking, fewer speakers with longer sessions, greater space to reflect, stronger inclusion of young people’s voices, more practical strategies for mainstream inclusion. Priorities for future events centre on SEND and the Schools White Paper implementation, inclusion standards and strategies, lived experience, health–education collaboration, and practical case studies supported by evidence-informed practice.

Table 3: SE19 SEND Inclusion Feedback Analysis

Theme	Feedback summary	Illustrative evidence	Actions to consider
Overall satisfaction and delivery quality	Feedback indicates a high-impact, well-received event with consistently strong ratings across overall experience, speakers and content relevance.	Overall experience: 84% (21/25) rated 5/5; 16% (4/25) rated 4/5. Expectations: 84% fully met; 16% somewhat met. No ratings below 4/5.	Maintain the core event format and quality threshold for speakers; continue to use a balance of strategic context and practice examples.
Content relevance and	Content aligned strongly with attendee interests, with lived	Content relevance: 88% relevant; 12% somewhat relevant.	Replicate the strongest session features (lived experience, reflective

most valued elements	experience and reflection-led sessions creating notable impact.	“Gloriously Ordinary Lives” repeatedly cited as a standout; White Paper/policy content and case studies also frequently valued.	content, concrete examples). Ensure future agendas explicitly connect content to mainstream inclusion practice.
Networking and peer connection	Attendees valued meeting peers and making connections, and some wanted more time to interact.	Event length: 96% “just right”; 4% “too short” (suggesting appetite for more interaction time). Qualitative feedback highlights networking as a favourite element.	Build in protected networking time (e.g., structured roundtables, facilitated peer exchange) and consider optional extended sessions.
Depth, pacing and focus	Improvement suggestions focus on going deeper: fewer speakers, longer sessions, and more space to digest and discuss. Some respondents wanted a clearer focus on Section 19.	Recurring suggestions: more time for discussion/networking; fewer speakers with longer sessions; more opportunity to reflect; clearer focus on Section 19.	Streamline agendas (prioritise fewer, higher-value inputs); add facilitated discussion slots; make Section 19 a visible thread through the programme and materials.
Future priorities and co-production	There is appetite for both strategic updates and practical, system-level examples, alongside stronger inclusion of young people’s voices.	Future topics: SEND/Schools White Papers implementation; inclusion strategies/standards; lived experience and CYP perspectives; health–education collaboration; support below CAMHS thresholds; evidence-based practice.	Co-design future events with CYP and practitioners; include more practical workshops/case studies; invite research/academic inputs to strengthen the evidence base.

5. Project 20 opportunities and next steps

Potential opportunities and next steps have been identified, arising from the interim evaluation, drawing together learning from delivery against the project KPIs, survey insights, and feedback from the regional and local communities of practice (including the SE19 SEND Inclusion Summit).

A continuation of Project 20 could shift from establishing networks and gathering regional insight towards supporting implementation. In practice, this could mean focusing less on generating additional strategy and more on helping local areas, trusts and schools move forward with implementation of their SEND Reform Plans.

Project 20 could focus on the following areas.

1. **Delivery of Inclusion events with greater depth and interaction:** continue the regional community of practice and included themed events that align with the SEND reform agenda, that allow adequate time for discussion and networking.
2. **Maintenance of a repository of practical learning resources,** such as case studies, templates and short ‘how-to’ resources that are gathered through the Inclusion Community of Practice, as well as national guidance and researched good practice examples
3. **Support for regional LA partnerships to strengthen leadership buy-in and shared expectations for inclusion across schools and trusts,** responding to evidence of uneven implementation and variable trust engagement.
4. **Support for regional LA partnerships in developing their expert at hand”** approaches so that schools can access timely multi-agency and specialist input without unnecessary escalation.

Taken together, these steps align with the Schools White Paper *Every child achieving and thriving* and directly reflect themes raised through the survey and summit feedback, including capacity constraints, the need for practical strategies, and stronger shared accountability.

6. SE19 LA participation in project activities

Local Authority (LA)	Inclusion Event 1	Inclusion Event 2	Inclusion Event 3	Survey
Bracknell Forest	x	x	✓	x
Brighton and Hove	✓	✓	x	✓
Buckinghamshire	✓	✓	✓	✓
East Sussex	✓	x	✓	✓
Hampshire	✓	✓	✓	✓
Isle of Wight	✓		✓	✓
Kent	✓	✓	✓	✓
Medway	✓	✓	✓	✓
Milton Keynes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oxfordshire	✓	✓	x	✓
Portsmouth	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slough	✓	x	✓	✓
Southampton	✓	✓	✓	x
Surrey	✓	✓	✓	x
West Berkshire	✓	x	✓	x
West Sussex	✓	x	x	x
Windsor and Maidenhead	✓	✓	✓	x
Wokingham	✓	✓	✓	x