



Education Directors Network

Date: 13th March 2026

Chair: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)

Attendees: Marie Denny (MKC), Elizabeth Funge (ESCC), Matthew Rixson (Surrey), Natalie Smith, Mark Kingswood & Emma Steele (Hants), Ming Zhang (Wokingham), Clodagh Freeston (Southampton), Claire Hayes & Sarah Clark (W Sussex), Michelle Stanley (Kent), Duane Chappell (BFC), Matthew Rixson (Surrey), Clive Haines (RBWM), Chris Owen.

Apologies: Georgina Clarke-Green (BHCC), Donna Tandy (Southampton), Christine McInnes (Kent), Julia Katherine (Surrey), Kim Wilson (Oxfordshire).

Notes

Actions

- Collate a table of queries submitted to DfE in relation to the SEND Reform Plans: CO to draft a spreadsheet of questions communicated by SE LAs to the DfE and of responses.
- SESLIP offer to facilitate liaison between officers project managing the development of each LA's SEND Reform Plan. Ed Dirs to inform Chris of the email address of the lead (or leads) in their LA. Chris (or AN-other from SESLIP) to compile and maintain an email directory and other communication options.
- RISE is to be a standing agenda item for the forthcoming meetings. CO will attempt to broker regular meetings to grow the 2-way communication at regional level between SESLIP LAs and DfE South-east on RISE. An 'email interest group' will be supported by CO.
- With the support of the 'RISE Interest Group', prepare summary report for 2025-26 about RISE-LA collaboration – for end of summer term.
- CO to poll Access to Education Group members to find out whether or not their LA collates S19 data and reports to directorate management. Review in May what the coverage is.

1. Welcome, introductions and matters arising

Notes from Jan were agreed as accurate.

Matters arising:

- CO circulated the LGCSO Q&A note following launch of their 'alternative provision practitioners guide'.
- Sarah took part in the DCSs meeting with DfE Regions Group leaders. A note was circulated, but the specific commitment was for DCSs to be notified in advance of all schools in their LA selected for RISE Targeted Support.
- Edited proposal for a joint 'in principle' statement for S19 and SEND have been shared with SE19 leads; no response as yet from SEND strategic leads.

2. DfE White Paper (Every Child Achieving and Thriving) and the SEND Reform consultation.

Wide ranging discussion about these major policy announcements and the following up direction from the DfE to submit a local partnership SEND Reform Plan by 19th June.

Key point included:

- Terminology is important: a schools white paper, whilst the SEND reforms are a consultation. Important that DfE's RISE programme needs to align with these and that the regulatory system needs to evolve and update to keep pace with proposals.
- The SEND Reform Plan demand is a major challenge for LAs whilst there are gaps currently in the guidance and in financial information from the DfE, but unlocking funding for the HNF deficit is a priority consideration.



- Views that the tone of the SEND Reform guidance and cover letter are disappointing. The president of ADCS has written to the SofS flagging that this has been an inauspicious start to a partnership to reform the SEND system.
- Concerns that the messaging about a move to a new system with narrower scope for EHC plans might trigger a spike from parents for needs assessment requests or move to EHE or demand for s19.
- Some LAs plan to submit a 'cross-partnership' response to the SEND Reform consultation.
- Some noise and anxiety from maintained headteachers: about budget pressures (which are not going away) and is there a timeline to have moved to a trust?
- Portsmouth CC is to have a meeting with DfE about its 'Mission Coastal' white paper proposal and focus on white working-class children.

Actions:

- CO offer to either circulate or post on the SESLIP website any LA presentations about the schools white paper and/or the SEND reforms.
- CO to collate a table of queries submitted to DfE by LAs in relation to the SEND Reform Plans: CO to draft a spreadsheet of questions communicated by SE LAs to the DfE and of responses. This would be in the form of a spreadsheet that I would update weekly and posted to the SESLIP website (restricted access page). (Mechanism would be for me to be cc'd in emails where questions are raised and/or answers provided [add 'queries' or 'SESLIP for queries' in the subject line]).
- SESLIP offer to facilitate liaison between officers project managing the development of each LA's SEND Reform Plan. Ed Dirs to inform Chris of the email address of the lead (or leads) in their LA. Chris (or AN-other from SESLIP) to compile and maintain an email directory and ask the group about what other channels of communication would be helpful for them (e.g. WhatsApp chat), during the period to 19th June.
Also, do Ed Dirs want SESLIP to share draft business cases developed in connection with the SEND Plan (emailed to CO; posted in the 'restricted access' page of the SESLIP Education Directors page)?

3. DfE RISE: discussions about universal RISE and following Regional Roundtable meeting

Comments on note from Catherine Turton following the meeting with Education Directors about Universal RISE:

- Largely in agreement. Accountability for RISE and transparency (from the DfE) are still important themes that are under-developed at the moment.
- Education Directors are keen to meet regularly in support of developing an effective RISE offer for schools in the South-east. We are keen for LAs and CEOs of small trusts to feel a sense of parity of approach and communication from DfE Regions Group.
- LAs are happy to support the mapping of the networks and groups around / between schools that support the DfE's national policy. We would want to be assured that efforts to take part in this would be part of an on-going, two-way communication about local architecture and signs that it can iron out duplication of support for schools.
- Evidence from some LAs that the partnership and communication with RISE advisers about targeted support for schools is improving and working much better.

Actions:

- RISE is to be a standing agenda item for the forthcoming meetings. Chris will seek to broker regular meetings to grow the 2-way communication at regional level between SESLIP LAs and DfE South-east on RISE. An 'email interest group' will be supported by Chris (and also invited to any regular meetings, but on an "if available" basis). Those involved currently: Marie Denny (MKC), Matthew Rixson (Surrey), Natalie Smith (Hants), Kim Wilson (Hants), Michelle Stanley (Kent). Please email CO if you wish to be added to this interest group.



- With the support of the 'RISE Interest Group', SESLIP prepare a 2025-26 summary about RISE-LA collaboration: shared commitments, aspects of progress and aspects 'in need of development'. Chris to request SESLIP time to support this and it might be necessary to have a first iteration ready for the SE ADCS 'Strategic Challenges' session on 22nd May.

4. SESLIP Dashboard and section 19 data: use made to inform decisions

Milton Keynes talked about how they use s19 data and schools to inform decisions about support for schools and strategies if some schools, possibly, are not identifying need with parents early. Discussion that these data are important to 'get ahead' of where there is demand or individual schools facing pressures.

Actions:

- Poll Access to Education Group members to find out whether or not their LA collates s19 data and reports to directorate management. Review in May what this coverage is and what next in terms of expectations.

5. Update: AP task & finish group – QA of non-school AP

Group met for a final time. There will be a pack published from the work of the group and this will be shared at the May meeting (with chair of the group Hayden Ginns).

Future support: the recommendation of the group was to not set up a standing group for LA AP leads. Instead look to developing (in discussion with CPP LAs) a programme of webinars and dissemination activities for Sept to March. Preparatory work could include building a list of key contacts on AP in all 19 LAs. Also, an overview profile of QA of non-school AP arrangements will be shared in May and whether this should be extended across all 19 SE LAs.

Actions:

- Agenda item for May meeting. Views on the above recommendation to be sent to CO.

For a future meetings:

- RISE
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Agenda Items for Next meeting:

- RISE – SESLIP collaboration.
- Presentation of AP QA pack as example of work with Change Partnership Programme LAs.
- Discussion on falling rolls and school sustainability.
- Section 19 data collation.

Next Meetings:

Future meetings: 8th May, 19th June (in-person in London), 9th Oct.

