SE19 Mainstream Inclusion Community of Practice
Notes of meeting
Thursday 17th September 2026

Attendance

Name	Role	Local Authority
Gavin Spiller	SEND Improvement Manager	Bracknell Forest Council
Tracey Williams	Principal Educational Psychologist and Head of BHISS	Brighton & Hove Council
Amanda Meier	SEND Reform Manager	Brighton & Hove Council
Fiona England	Brighton and Hove PaCC- Interim Lead	Brighton & Hove Council
Justine Harvey	Virtual Head of SEND	Brighton & Hove Council
Holly Riley-Saxby	East Sussex Parent Carer Forum	East Sussex County Council
Andrew McKechnie	Strategic Lead SEND reforms	East Sussex County Council
Lucy Jones	Team Leader	FACT Bucks PCF, Buckinghamshire
Diana Lowth		Hampshire Council
Emelia Fox	Engagement Officer at Kent PACT Parent Carer Forum	Kent County Council
Siobhan Price	Assistant Director, School Inclusion	Kent County Council
Vanessa Grizzle	Interim Principal Educational Psychologist	Medway Council
Chelsea Maxwell-Norris	Educational Psychologist	Milton Keynes City Council
Joanne Friday	Setting and School Inclusion Lead	Milton Keynes City Council
Michael Scott	Section 19 Lead Teacher	Milton Keynes City Council
Rebecca Latham	Designated Clinical Officer	NHS Hampshire & IOW ICB
Louise Needham	Senior Designated Clinical Officer (SEND)	NHS Surrey & Sussex ICB
Lyndsey Rogers	Designated Clinical Officer (SEND)	NHS Surrey & Sussex ICB
Jane Elvidge	Lead Officer, SEND Strategic early intervention	Oxfordshire County Council
Emma Lamb	Inclusion advisor	Portsmouth City Council
Keran Currie	Head of Inclusion	Portsmouth City Council
Anne Bishop	Area SENCo	RBWM
Alec de Sausamarez	SEND Advisory Service Manager and Educational Psychologist	Reading
Claire Woodcock	SESLIP Consultant, leading the SE 2026-27 SEND Workforce Survey	SESLIP
Julie Pointer	SESLIP Consultant, PfA and CYP	SESLIP
Marian Cullen	SEND Consultant – Mainstream Inclusion and Experts at Hand	SESLIP
Sheelagh Sullivan	Regional SEND Lead	SESLIP
Sonia Dayal	Project Manager	SESLIP
Jude Macdonald - **Chair**	SEND Consultant and Director of Inclusion	SESLIP and Diamond Learning Academies Trust
Jo Shawyer	Locality Lead for Cluster Funding Model	Southampton City Council
Jim Nunns	Assistant Director - Early Intervention Prevention and Support (EIPS)	Surrey County Council

Liz Bone	Assistant Director SEND	Surrey County Council
Melissa Perry	Interim Lead for Inclusion	West Berkshire Council
Anna Cook	Children's Services Participation Officer	Wokingham Borough Council
Emily Hinson	Assistant Principal Educational Psychologist	Wokingham Borough Council
Helen Jackson-Brench	Area SENCO	Wokingham Borough Council

1. Welcome and introductions

- Jude welcomed everyone to the meeting. Colleagues were asked to introduce themselves in the Teams chat due to the size of the group.
- Jude explained that this meeting will focus on the Mainstream Inclusion programme, the SEND reforms timeline, Experts at Hand requirements and readiness, shared practice and next steps

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2. SE19 Inclusion Community of Practice – the journey so far and next steps

- Jude shared updates on the journey so far and next steps.
- The programme is currently in a set-up and sharing phase, with a strong focus on Experts at Hand, possible delivery models and capturing practice from across local areas.
- Task and finish activity will support the collection of evidence and practical examples. Cluster peer learning and comparable data are expected to develop through October and November.
- The programme will move towards a "show and improve" phase, using co-produced inclusion case studies from schools and partners. Case studies will be quality assured before wider sharing.
- The inclusion case study quality framework is being tested with partners including Whole School SEND, RISE, CDC and the Department for Education.
- A whole-day celebration event is planned for February 2027, with the final project report due in April 2027.

3. SEND Reforms Timeline

- Jude shared a SEND reforms timeline designed to translate national proposals into practical implications for schools, academy trusts, SENCOs, leaders, governors and families.
- Published documents are referenced directly in the timeline; where final guidance is not yet available, the timeline signposts the best available information and makes clear that it is provisional.

Key implications highlighted for schools and trusts

- Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) arrangements need to be clearly understood, ring-fenced and aligned with other funding streams so that the same activity is not funded twice.
- Ordinarily available provision needs to be visible in day-to-day classroom practice, supported by coaching, case studies and practical examples rather than policy statements alone.
- Schools will need to identify vulnerable pupil groups, develop relevant scorecards and assessment approaches, and ensure governors and trustees understand the reform programme and local arrangements.
- SENCO capacity is a significant operational issue, particularly where cluster models increase time away from school or where pupils attend from more than one local authority area.
- Schools should review evidence-based interventions and the deployment of additional adults so that support is effective at the earliest stage and avoidable referrals reduce over time.

- Longer-term planning will need to consider inclusion bases, individual support plans, phase transfer, specialist provision, estate and capital planning, and the financial impact of changing patterns of EHCP support.
- Communication with parents and carers will be critical because the reforms are complex and are developing alongside other changes affecting schools.
- The Teams chat also signposted the July 2026 update to the Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance as a relevant resource alongside the wider reform timeline.

Action

- Jude/Sonia to circulate the SEND reforms timeline and supporting presentation materials after the meeting.

4. Experts at Hand – key requirements

- Sheelagh summarised the elements of the Experts at Hand guidance described as requirements ("musts"), distinguishing them from broader guidance and suggestions.

Governance and additionality

- Local arrangements must have clear governance and accountability, including a named senior responsible officer and relevant senior Integrated Care Board representation.
- Experts at Hand must add to, rather than replace, support specified through EHCPs or existing local provision.
- Funding must expand capacity and must not replace, displace or reduce existing health or education interventions or funding commitments.
- Local areas and schools will need clear cross-referencing between Experts at Hand, IMF, pupil premium and other funding so that additionality is transparent.

Workforce and access

- The workforce offer must increase both health and specialist education capacity. Colleagues highlighted significant recruitment pressures across educational psychology, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy.
- There is a risk that attractive early-intervention Experts at Hand roles could draw staff away from existing statutory or therapy services. Colleagues discussed blended roles and career development as one way of supporting recruitment and retention.
- It was highlighted that one local authority shared a time-allocation model in which educational psychologists have a planned mix of statutory/business-as-usual work and Experts at Hand activity rather than separate roles, with associate capacity supporting statutory workload.
- Another local authority confirmed that locum educational psychologists are still being used for statutory work and that budget pressures remain, illustrating the practical workforce and affordability challenges alongside the new model.
- Access should be straightforward, diagnosis-free and measurable across early years, primary, secondary and post-16. Diagnosis should not be a prerequisite for support.
- The advanced speech and language practitioner role was described as a strategic workforce and pathway role rather than direct work with individual children. Early-adopter learning is expected to inform later recruitment.
- Delivery models should be flexible enough to reflect local population, geography and future demand.

Local examples discussed

- A local authority described a link educational psychologist/locality model introduced from September 2025, with improved retention of trainees and assistants. The model is mapped

to communities, family hubs and local health structures and is producing useful demand intelligence, although implementation and buy-in vary across the county.

- Another local authority is developing 11 locality clusters and a team-around-the-school approach, beginning with discovery and planning meetings with schools and then matching support to identified priorities. The model is also being designed with local government reorganisation in mind. It was also highlighted that its 11 clusters are intended to include a wider core multidisciplinary team, including Family First for Children/partnership links, Best Start in Life practitioners, Mental Health Support Team practitioners and other professionals, rather than being limited to the formal Experts at Hand roles.
- One local authority described special school outreach funded initially through DBV, focused on leadership, inclusive practice and workforce development rather than individual-child support. The model is valued by mainstream schools and is expected to expand within Experts at Hand. A strong interest was shown in the Teams chat for this model, particularly its referral portal, whole-school focus and approach to building capacity rather than relying on individual-child support.
- Another local authority described five mixed-phase school clusters led by school-based chairs and vice-chairs, supported by a cluster data dashboard and a focus on early intervention and developing "experts in-house".
- One local authority reported using a combination of Team Around the School, cluster working through Best Start Family Hubs and expanded special-school outreach, including an additional three FTE specialist teachers. The cluster work is also being used to strengthen social care involvement for children and young people with more complex needs.
- A Team Around the Setting example shared in the chat highlighted the value of a confidential professional space where settings could discuss concerns openly and receive challenge, reframing, advocacy, problem-solving and practical support.

Action

- Local areas that have not yet received informal feedback on their Experts at Hand plans to check with their DfE SEND adviser.
- Julie Pointer and Sonia Dayal to share available Portsmouth Preparation for Adulthood hub materials with the group where appropriate.
- Sheelagh to invite Amanda Percy to a future session to share Portsmouth Preparation for Adulthood practice.
- Sheelagh to link Jim Nunns from Surrey with Luton regarding experience of the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce approach.

5. Experts at Hand Readiness Survey Analysis

- Sixteen local area partnerships responded to the readiness survey across seven areas of readiness. Six areas also offered to share models and materials already developed.

Headline findings

- There is broad support for earlier help and the principle of Experts at Hand, but a clear gap remains between strategic plans and practical delivery.
- Workforce sufficiency is the strongest shared concern. Every responding area raised educational psychology capacity; 13 of 16 also raised occupational therapy and speech and language capacity, and around half rated specialist capacity as low.
- Most areas are moving towards cluster/locality approaches, often combined with team-around-the-school models or specialists working directly with settings.

- Schools and SENCOs do not yet consistently understand what Experts at Hand means in practice, how it will operate or how it relates to existing school responsibilities and budgets.
- Family communication is a major gap. No area reported high confidence in explaining the reforms consistently to parents and carers. Colleagues emphasised the need for plain, shared wording about what support is, how to access it, how it relates to EHCPs and what is - and is not - changing.
- Participants noted that communication is especially difficult while local areas are still defining their offer and, in some cases, cannot yet implement planned models because recruitment is unresolved. Work with parents and carers was identified as a priority area for further development.
- Colleagues repeatedly favoured coaching, modelling and supported practice over additional generic training. This was reinforced in the Teams chat, where "coaching rather than training" was specifically highlighted. Learning should be rooted in real school situations and followed through to check whether practice has changed.
- Evaluation should focus on impact rather than satisfaction alone, for example access to help, staff confidence, changes in practice, attendance, suspensions/exclusions, repeat requests, parental experience and longer-term demand. The chat reinforced the need for a shared approach to evaluating the impact of Experts at Hand.

Practice sharing and case studies

- Colleagues wanted practical examples of delivery models, cluster arrangements, benchmarking, quality assurance and school-level implementation, with opportunities to problem-solve together rather than only receive presentations.
- The Teams chat specifically requested more sharing on cluster models, effective practice and the way confidence is built within schools and communities. Colleagues stressed that mainstream inclusion should not be reduced to Experts at Hand alone.
- There was support for case studies that are honest about challenges and learning, including what did not work and what was changed, rather than presenting only polished success stories.
- Short video clips were suggested as a useful way to draw people into fuller case studies, alongside quality assurance and written detail.
- Potential case study areas included post-16/PfA models, specialist outreach, locality/cluster approaches and work with parents and carers.

Action

- Local areas to send existing family/school communication materials and relevant examples to Sonia and Sheelagh to support development of shared regional messaging.
- SESLIP team to develop shared communication principles/examples that local areas can adapt, including clear messages on what Experts at Hand is and is not.
- SESLIP team to continue identifying and quality assuring case studies, ensuring they include challenges, learning and next steps as well as positive impact.

6. Breakout discussion/collaborative discussion

- Formal breakout rooms were not used. Instead, discussion took place in the main session alongside the survey findings so that local areas could share examples and questions in real time.
- Colleagues highlighted the importance of joining up post-16/PfA work, ensuring local delivery reflects different patterns of need, and using cluster data to understand geographical variation.
- The group also discussed whether some solutions could be shared regionally while preserving sufficient flexibility for local context.

7. Pulse survey

– Colleagues were asked to complete a short pulse survey to provide feedback on the session, identify gaps and help shape future activity. The link was also placed in the Teams chat.

Action

- All participants to complete the pulse survey and identify priorities for future Inclusion Community of Practice sessions. The link to the survey is Fill | SE19 Inclusion Community of Practice Pulse Survey - September 2026
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8. Look ahead to upcoming activities

– Colleagues were asked to identify what the Community of Practice should focus on next. Sheelagh emphasised that mainstream inclusion is wider than Experts at Hand, although this session gave the topic additional time because it is an immediate concern for many areas.
– There was interest in developing a more focused Experts at Hand subgroup that could report back to the wider Community of Practice.
– Interest was also expressed in a post-16 subgroup feeding into the wider inclusion work, with support in the Teams chat for early years to be considered alongside this.

Future meeting dates

– Thursday 26th November 2026, 10:00am to 12noon via Teams.
– Friday 5th February 2027, all-day in-person session at Broadway House, London.
– Friday 12th March 2027, 11:00am to 1:00pm via Teams.

Action

- Colleagues interested in an Experts at Hand subgroup to email Sonia to register interest.
- Colleagues interested in a post-16 and/or early years subgroup to email Sonia to register interest.
- Participants to share suggestions for other mainstream inclusion topics they would like the Community of Practice to cover.