2026



independent schools council

iaps

Independent Schools SEND Conference

Friday 27 November

Headline Sponsor: Quest

Park Plaza Victoria, London, SW1V 1EQ

Programme

SEND Conference 2026

08:45	Registration, refreshments and exhibition
09:30	Welcome - Barry Huggett OBE
09:40	Keynote: Inclusive Teaching: Needed for Some, Benefiting All- Amjad Ali
10:30	Seminar session 1
11:15	Refreshments and exhibition
12:00	Seminar session 2
12:45	Lunch and exhibition
13:45	Networking and roundtable discussions
14:30	Refreshments and exhibition
15:15	Keynote: Demand Avoidance and Psychological Safety:What helps, and what to do when it doesn't - Pooky Knightsmith
16:15	Closing remarks - Barry Huggett OBE
16:30	Conference closes

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Seminar Sessions

SEND Conference 2026

Please choose one seminar from each column below

Session 1:	Session 2:
What works- enabling your school to help students with SEND and everyone else **Barry Huggett**	Why Regulated Adults Create Regulated Schools **Hannah Lovegrove Campion**
Neuro-affirming spaces: unlocking emotional regulation for every learner **Samantha Dholakia**	Neuro-affirming spaces: unlocking emotional regulation for every learner **Samantha Dholakia**
Lightening the Load: Using Assistive Technology to Support SEND Leadership and Inclusive Practice **Frances Akinde**	Lightening the Load: Using Assistive Technology to Support SEND Leadership and Inclusive Practice **Frances Akinde**
The Intersection of SEND, Culture and Ethnicity in Schools **Domini Choudhury**	The Intersection of SEND, Culture and Ethnicity in Schools **Domini Choudhury**
Fireside Chat: Navigating SEND and the Law in today's school landscape **Katharine Sharpe and James Garside**	Fireside Chat: Navigating SEND and the Law in today's school landscape **Katharine Sharpe and James Garside**

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A word from Barry Huggett OBE:

I write to welcome you to the 2026 SEND Conference. I hope you have a really good day and find ideas which you can take back to your schools and develop to help your students in new ways.

Every year, I seem to be writing about the changes that successive governments want to bring in to support children with SEND .(And to reduce costs??)

This time there has been a lot of “noise” and we have had the Schools White Paper, with plans to introduce a three tiered support system using school led Individual Support Plans, (ISPs) and EHCPs will only be for those with the most complex needs, but, presently, existing law is maintained, so children may still join our schools on EHCPs, with no real change until 2030 at the earliest. Additionally, there is a desire to keep all children in their local area and much extra training will be built in so that all teachers can teach all the children found in their classes. Inclusion is the watchword.

But there will be an election by 2029 and will other parties want the same reforms as are being proposed? How far will legislation have gone by then?

I have had the privilege, over many years, of visiting independent schools all over the country, certainly from Northumberland to Cornwall and into Wales as well. Only once, have I seen SEND support which was questionable. Parents choose each school for their child who has SEND, not for just for the provision available, but for the whole ethos of the school, where children fit in and can be their best selves, not restricted by there only being one way of doing things, where the curriculum recognises that needs and interests will be as many and varied as the children attending. They are not clones.

We do , already, deliver “inclusion” and have been doing so for many years, but of a different sort, not just trying to cater for children with SEND,

“Inclusion” in our schools enables those with strengths to develop them further, those who find specific difficulties to develop strategies until they can support themselves and not be blighted by feeling that they cannot follow the norm. And this applies across all aspects of life, socially, intellectually,, with sporting skills and craft skills.

And in all our schools, this is going on naturally, daily, and our students become at ease with themselves , with what they are asked to do within both the environment of their school and in preparation for what lies beyond it. They know that they are included. This is the huge strength of our way of working in our schools. Of this we should be very proud and publicly so. We are offering something good and , I believe, better than what is proposed. Let us, therefore, develop this further today at our conference and share ideas too.

Have a great day!

ISC Advisory Group for SEND



Barry Huggett OBE

Principal, The More House Foundation and Chair of ISC Advisory Group, SEND

Barry was Headmaster of More House School, in Farnham, from 1993 until 2015 when he became Principal of The More House Foundation. More House School provides high-quality education and pastoral care for boys aged eight to eighteen who might be bright, but struggle in mainstream schools due to SEND issues. When he joined the school there were 69 pupils, when he left there were 470, around half funded by some 35 LAs on EHCPs, the rest privately funded.

The More House Foundation aims to open other schools similar to the one in Farnham, to offer expert SEND help to independent and maintained schools and to also specialise in training and research into SpLD, language and social communication issues.

Barry is Principal Advisor for SEND for the Independent Schools Association, chairs the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Advisory Group for SEND and has represented the ISC in discussions with DfE and other official bodies. He has spoken at educational conferences and gives advice to fellow Heads who would like to update their SEND department.

In 2014, he was awarded an OBE by the late Queen Elizabeth II for Services to Education.

Katherine Bluck

Head of Professional Development, IAPS



Katherine is a distinguished educational leader known for her unwavering commitment to fostering inclusion for all learners. She is the current Head of Professional Development at IAPS and oversees the Conferences and Courses programme, as well as the Subject Advisers across the network. Her previous roles have included being Head of two prep schools, as well as held leadership roles at Lambrook and the Stephen Perse Foundation.

Katherine is a proud late diagnosed ADHDer herself and has had the honour of supporting the ISC SEND committee to put the programme together, as well as chairing the Neurodiversity panel for the conference.

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Naomi Ashman

Director of Learning Success at The Blue Coat School, Birmingham



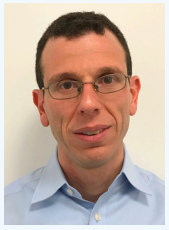
Hannah Lovegrove Campion

Head of SEND at ISA



Becca Barnett

Education Officer (Primary Focus) at HMC



Simon Nathan

Deputy CEO and Head of Policy at ISC



Janette Brook

Head of Learning Support and DDSL at Ballard School and AAA course Lead at Patoss



Emily Rattenbury - Barlow

Director, Therapy at Octavia House Schools



Judit Coulehan

Assistant Head - Inclusion, SENCO and Teacher of Learning Development at Shiplake College



Dr Katharine Sharpe

Educational Psychologist & IAPS SEND Consultant



Kathryn Gorman

Founding Director of Clarion Education Ltd and ex-GSA Head



Helen Stanton-Tonner

Director of Education and Inclusion at ISA



Jonathan Hetherington

Headmaster at More House School and Vice-Chair of ISA



Helen Stockdale

Director of Learning Support at Edgbaston High School



Dr Jacqueline Leadbeater

SENDCo and Head of Neurodiversity and Academic Support at Oxford High School GDST



Gaelle Sullivan

Research and Inclusion Director at BSA Group



Christopher Lofthouse

Proprietor and CEO at St Crispin's Grammar and Preparatory School



Melissa Wright

SENDCo, Head of Learning Support and DDSL at Bolton School Girls' Division

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Speakers

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Frances Akinde

Frances Akinde is an experienced education leader, inclusion specialist and founder of Inclusion HT. With extensive leadership experience across mainstream and specialist education, she is passionate about creating genuinely inclusive schools where every child can thrive. Frances is recognised for her work supporting school leaders to develop practical, sustainable approaches to SEND, equity and belonging, with a particular focus on intersectionality and the lived experiences of children and families. Through training, consultancy and advocacy, she challenges systems to move beyond compliance and towards meaningful inclusion, equipping leaders with the knowledge, confidence and strategies to create lasting change for their communities.

Amjad Ali



Amjad Ali is regarded as one of the most engaging and empowering voices in the fields of inclusive leadership and professional development. With his trademark humour, warmth and clarity, Amjad brings a rare ability to translate the complexities of teaching and educational leadership into practical strategies that challenge, inspire and stick.

Having spent over 19 years teaching and leading in diverse and high-need schools, Amjad now serves as CPD and Inclusion Lead for the Chiltern Learning Trust, supporting leaders, teachers and school communities to grow cultures of equity, ambition and sustained professional learning.

Amjad's delivery is grounded in lived experience and his journey has shaped a leadership philosophy rooted in equity, high expectations and transformational CPD.

Amjad supports schools to refine their approaches to training and inclusion so that professional development becomes embedded, evidence-informed and impactful. His mantra is simple: What will you now try, refine and ditch.

He also co-founded The BAMEed Network, a national grassroots organisation committed to diversifying educational leadership and ensuring equity across the system — a mission that continues to shape his work in inclusive leadership today.

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Domini Choudhury

Domini Choudhury is an associate Belonging Effect trainer, an award-winning EDI consultant, a former Deputy and Acting Headteacher for 17 years, a local authority consultant and an Evidence Advocate for the Research Schools Network, part of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

Samantha Dholakia



Samantha Dholakia is a behaviour, inclusion and emotional regulation specialist, consultant and trainer, and the creator of The Behaviour Balance System™. She is also the founder of The Behaviour Bank™, an online platform providing schools, educators and families with training, resources and practical tools for behaviour, wellbeing and emotional regulation. With extensive experience across education, including school leadership, Samantha works with schools and education professionals to develop practical, inclusive and sustainable approaches to behaviour, emotional regulation and inclusive practice.

A key focus of her work is helping schools move from repeatedly managing behaviour towards developing the skills and processes that support longer-term change. Samantha also works extensively in communication and oracy, inclusion, wellbeing, staff development and parent partnerships, recognising the importance of consistency and collaboration between the adults supporting a child..

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James Garside

James Garside is a Partner in the Education team at law firm, Veale Wasbrough Vizards, which works with schools and education providers nationwide in the private, public and third sectors. With over 15 years' experience in legal practice, James specialises in regulatory law and dispute resolution. He works extensively with schools and charities on compliance and best practice including, advisory support for senior leaders and managers, claims and complaints handling, policy and contract development, and training and guidance. His work is underpinned by a deep understanding of the complexities of his field and he has a particular reputation for expertise in SEND, equality, and risk management. As a regular speaker at firm and sector events, James delivers insightful commentary on topical legal matters, showcasing his thought leadership within the field.

Pooky Knightsmith



Dr Pooky Knightsmith is an autistic speaker, author, advisor, and assessor specialising in neurodivergence, psychological safety, and mental health in education. She works across schools, local authorities, and NHS settings, and is a Chartered Psychologist with a PhD from the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London. Pooky is widely known for translating complex ideas into practical, actionable approaches that resonate with SENDCos and classroom staff alike.

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Speakers

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Hannah Lovegrove Campion

Hannah is the Head of SEND at ISA and is an established leader in SEND education. She has extensive expertise across a broad spectrum of needs and a proven track record working in specialist and mainstream education nationally and locally, across independent and maintained sectors, including setting up and running an Independent Special School, as well as working for a Local Authority, overseeing SEND provision. Hannah's work focuses on strategic improvement: by collaborating with leaders, practitioners, and wider stakeholders to enhance SEND provision, strengthen practice, and build capacity across education systems. Her leadership is driven by a commitment to ensuring high-quality and accessible support for all learners.

Dr Katharine Sharpe



Katharine is a Chartered Educational Psychologist, experienced educator, and Director of Sharpe Psychology Ltd with over 30 years of experience in the world of education. She has extensive expertise in psychological assessment, consultation, training, and teaching. Katharine has been a classteacher, Head of Learning Support and Assistant Head (Pastoral) during her teaching career and previously managed a team of Educational Psychologists in a large local authority. She currently works in private practice as an Educational Psychologist and SEND Consultant for several local authorities and within the independent school sector. She is an experienced conference speaker, formerly served as SEND Subject Advisor for the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS), and currently sits on the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Cross-Association SEND Advisory Group.

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Keynote Sessions

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Keynote 1:Inclusive Teaching: Needed for Some, Benefiting All - Amjad Ali

Discover how inclusive teaching can transform outcomes for every learner while reducing unnecessary workload for staff. Drawing on the latest evidence, including the EEF Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools guidance, this keynote explores practical, low-effort, high-impact strategies that remove barriers to learning, strengthen adaptive teaching and create classrooms where all pupils can thrive. Delegates will leave with evidence-informed approaches that can be implemented immediately to improve access, engagement and achievement for every child.

Keynote 2: Demand Avoidance and Psychological Safety: What helps and what to do when it doesn't - Pooky Knightsmith

This session gets underneath what's really happening for children who avoid demands, why their capacity can vary so much from one day to the next, and the small changes in how we communicate that change the dynamic. Underpinning all of it is psychological safety: when a child feels safe, demands become more possible. You'll leave with a sharper understanding of the children you're trying to reach, things to try tomorrow, and a session you can cascade back at school.

By the end of this session, participants will:

· Understand why 'won't' is almost always 'can't right now'
· Apply small changes that lower the threat
· Recognise the demand piggy bank and what drains it
· Know what to do when the demand is non-negotiable
· Use their own calm as the anchor, and repair when it goes wrong

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Seminar Sessions

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What works- enabling your school to help students with SEND and everyone else - Barry Huggett

At the time of writing, the government's solution to its SEND crisis is a sort of "super inclusion " strategy, with most children and young people being accommodated in mainstream schools. Whether this will be successful depends on a host of factors, such as the training or re-training of most teachers so that they can deliver to children with SEND and those without it in their classes whether they are teaching Physics, Maths or RE.

Barry Huggett OBE, who was Headmaster of More House School, Frensham for many years and Chair of the ISC Advisory Group, for SEND will demonstrate that we have been doing this in our independent schools for years and he will show how he believes that with a few minor adjustments in the way that schools are run, and with no further expenditure, our schools may support those with SEND and challenge those without it, so all may achieve success and not just in the narrow confines of the exam system.

Why Regulated Adults Create Regulated Schools - Hannah Lovegrove Campion

This session explores the growing role of staff wellbeing as a powerful SEMH intervention and shares that when schools invest in the wellbeing of their staff, they strengthen outcomes for every child. Drawing on neuroscience, attachment theory and practical experience from both mainstream and specialist settings, this session examines how the emotional regulation of adults directly influences school culture, student behaviour and learning outcomes. We will consider why emotionally supported staff are better able to co-regulate pupils, foster safe and inclusive environments, and sustain relational approaches to SEMH. The seminar will also share practical strategies, while highlighting the crucial role of leaders in creating cultures where both adults and young people can thrive.

Seminar Sessions

SEND Conference 2026

Neuro-affirming spaces: unlocking emotional regulation for every learner - Samantha Dholakia

Creating truly inclusive learning environments requires us to move beyond managing behaviour and towards understanding the needs that sit beneath it. In this practical and thought-provoking session, Samantha Dholakia explores how educators can create neuro-affirming spaces that support emotional regulation, belonging, and engagement for all learners.

Drawing on neuroscience, relational practice, and inclusive approaches, Samantha will share practical strategies to help staff recognise signs of dysregulation, respond effectively to behaviour, and build environments where children and young people feel safe, understood, and able to thrive. Delegates will leave with a deeper understanding of emotional regulation and a range of tools that can be implemented immediately within their own settings.

Lightening the Load: Using Assistive Technology to Support SEND Leadership and Inclusive Practice - Frances Akinde

This practical session will explore how assistive technology and AI can support SEND leaders, SENCOs and classroom practitioners by:

- Reducing administrative workload.
- Supporting EHCP reviews, reporting and documentation.
- Improving accessibility and inclusion for pupils.
- Exploring practical applications of Microsoft Copilot and other assistive technologies.
- Considering implementation, governance and safe use within educational settings.

Delegates will leave with practical strategies and tools that can be implemented immediately within their own settings.

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Seminar Sessions

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Framing SEND Intersectionally - Domini Choudhury

In this session we will:

- Review your current approach to SEND as a parallel strategy to your DEIB approach
- Consider what an intersectional lens on SEND looks like for all stakeholders
- Ensure that your staff are conscious, confident and competent in their approaches to SEND
- Identify the multi-layered barriers that some learners and their families are navigating in having their needs met
- Navigate societal and systemic barriers impacting the SEND system
- Explore culturally specific barriers to SEND diagnosis including the role of cultural and religious frameworks in understanding disability and need
- Reflect on how to how to counter family and community trust deficits to work better with those who have historical or lived reasons to distrust institutions
- Discuss language, communication and SEND, specifically the frequent misidentification or under-identification of EAL learners for SEND
- Address practitioner bias and unconscious assumptions of staff bringing unintended bias into their SEND practice
- Support leaders to interrogate their own data through intersectional lenses.

Fireside Chat: Navigating SEND and the Law in today's school landscape - Katharine Sharpe and James Garside

Join Dr Katharine Sharpe, IAPS SEND Adviser, experienced SENDCo and Educational Psychologist, for an insightful fireside chat with James Garside from leading education law firm VWV.

Drawing on the questions they are most frequently asked by schools, James will explore the key legal challenges facing school leaders and SEND professionals today. Together, they will discuss common pitfalls, emerging trends, and practical strategies for navigating an increasingly complex SEND landscape. This engaging conversation will provide valuable guidance to help schools balance their legal responsibilities with the needs of pupils and families, ensuring confident and compliant practice in a rapidly evolving environment.

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