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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



Seminar Sessions

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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
Framing SEND Intersectionally Domini Choudhury	Framing SEND Intersectionally 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

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.



Speakers

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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 an international behaviour, inclusion, and emotional regulation trainer with nearly 20 years of experience across education and childcare. She works in close partnership with schools, teachers, and families to embed sustainable, neuroscience-informed approaches that support positive behaviour change, emotional well-being, and academic achievement for children and young people. As the CEO of SPD Training and Consultancy, and creator of The Behaviour Balance System™ and The Behaviour Bank™, Samantha has pioneered a holistic and inclusive framework that connects homes with educational settings.

Samantha's science-led Balance methodology, delivered through training, consultancy, and the only online holistic behaviour support portal, equips educators and practitioners with practical strategies that are both impactful and implementable.

With a career spanning executive coaching, leadership, consultancy, and accredited CPD creation, Samantha brings extensive expertise in inclusive practice and behaviour transformation. Her work focuses on empowering schools and nurseries to build emotionally regulated environments that foster resilience, collaboration, and positive behaviour at every stage of development.

Through her work as CEO of SPD Training and Consultancy, Samantha continues to drive innovation in behaviour support, helping schools and settings create cohesive, inclusive practices that deliver long-term impact for children, families, and communities.



Speakers

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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.



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.



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

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

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

Join us for a 45-minute session designed specifically to create neuro-affirming atmospheres that nurture emotional regulation for all learners. Delve into practical strategies and insights on how to adapt your learning environments, fostering a safe, inclusive space that supports behaviour, emotional regulation and cognitive development. Learn how neuro-affirmative practices can enhance student engagement, reduce stress, and promote well-being across the classroom. Equip yourself with the tools to make your school a place where every student can thrive emotionally and academically.

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.

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 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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