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iaps

Independent Schools SEND Conference

Friday 21 November

Headline
Sponsor:



Park Plaza Victoria, London, SW1V 1EQ

Programme

SEND Conference 2025



- 08:45 Registration, refreshments and exhibition
- 09:30 Welcome - Barry Huggett, OBE
- 09:40 Keynote: What real inclusion looks like; a neurodiversity panel - Victoria Bagnall, Samantha Dholakia and Kate Longworth
- 10:30 Seminar Session 1
- 11:15 Refreshments and exhibition
- 12:00 Seminar Session 2
- 12:45 Lunch and exhibition
- 13:15 Boost AI lunchtime talk
- 13:45 Seminar Session 3
- 14:30 Refreshments and exhibition
- 15:15 Keynote: The relationships-first approach - Kief Ho and Emily Rattenbury-Barlow
- 16:15 Closing Remarks - Barry Huggett, OBE
- 16:30 Conference Closes

Seminar Sessions

SEND Conference 2025

Please choose one seminar from each column below



Session 1:	Session 2:	Session 3:
Using PACE and emotion coaching to build connected, regulated and emotionally healthy schools Kief Ho and Emily Rattenbury-Barlow	Neuro-affirming spaces: unlocking emotional regulation for every learner Samantha Dholakia	Inclusive practice and the use of continuous provision in our EYFS and into KS1 Emma Lewry
Navigating the links with families of safeguarding and SEND pupils Christine Freestone	Maths teaching to support SEND learners Julie Clarkson	The power of perspective: a whole-child approach to inclusive learning Claire Ginty
Inclusive learning environments and equal access for all: turning vision into action Lisa Pinkerton	How to be 'The Perfect SENCO' (taking a whole school approach so you're not alone!) Natalie Packer	The Neuroscience of neurodiversity Victoria Bagnall
Using solution-focused thinking and approaches to work with key stakeholders Katharine Sharpe	The overlap effect: where disability meets SEN - a legal perspective Miriam Carrion Benitez	An evidence-led approach towards AI for SEND Dina Foster

Welcome

SEND Conference 2025



"It's broken!" cried the Education Secretary.

"It really is!" chorused Junior Ministers, loyally.

"We can't afford it!" shouted the county councillors. "We are broke!"

"We want our money back" grumbled the Treasury Team.

And that is where we sit this morning, six weeks before our conference. Except that we are not broken. We are still delivering high quality education to all the children and young people with SEND in our schools. We look at all of them and value all of them as individuals, not as clones. We know that they all have significant strengths as well as learning differences, and it is important that we put as much time and energy into helping each to discover and harness those strengths as we do into supporting those learning differences, for it is from these that career paths and success flows. Above all, we want to help all those in our schools to be confident and comfortable in their own skin, whatever their learning profile.

So why are we here?

It is good to gather, to exchange ideas, to hear experts and let them stimulate us, not to copy their ideas, but to allow each of us to experiment in our own schools, to develop our own thoughts, to benefit all the children who we work to help.

So Welcome!

I hope that you have a fruitful and enjoyable day, although the White Paper is now delayed until 2026, we will continue to support with the issues that affect our schools across the sector.

Barry Huggett OBE



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. He chairs the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Advisory Group for SEND. He 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 for Services to Education.

Katherine Bluck Head of Professional Development, IAPS

Katherine Bluck 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 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.



ISC Advisory Group for SEND



Becca Barnett

Education Officer (Primary Focus) at HMC



Christopher Lofthouse

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



Janette Brook

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



Simon Nathan

Deputy CEO and Head of Policy at ISC



Kathryn Gorman

Founding Director of Clarion Education Ltd and ex-GSA Head



Dr Katharine Sharpe

Chartered Educational Psychologist and Director of Sharpe Psychology Ltd.



Victoria Guest

Senior Associate at VWV



Helen Stanton-Tonner

Director of Education and Inclusion at ISA



Johnathan Hetherington

Headmaster at More House School and Chair of ISA



Helen Stockdale

Director of Learning Support Edgbaston High School



Dr Alison Jefferies

Learning Support Teacher at Downside School



Gaelle Sullivan

Research and Inclusion Director at BSA Group



Dr Jacqueline Leadbeater

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



Melissa Wright

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

Speakers

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Keynote: What real inclusion looks like- A Neurodiversity panel



Victoria Bagnall

Victoria is a Cambridge-educated, neurodivergent educator and published author. She co-founded Connections in Mind in 2016 to pioneer executive function coaching in the UK and now works with schools and organisations worldwide, including Cheltenham Ladies' College, UC Berkeley, Ernst & Young, and the NHS, to create neuroinclusive environments.

Her forthcoming book, *The Neuroinclusive Educator* (Bloomsbury, 2026), distils her years of research and classroom experience into five pedagogical elements that empower educators to build inclusive, thriving classrooms.

Kate Longworth

Kate Longworth is the CEO and Founder of Gaia Learning and Gaia Bloom, an inclusive, personalised online learning platform designed to help neurodivergent young people thrive. Kate believes every child should feel safe, seen, engaged and happy to learn - Gaia's online classes and the Bloom platform act as a bridge to support children back into school to improve engagement, attendance and wellbeing.



Speakers

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Keynote: What real inclusion looks like- A Neurodiversity panel



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 with 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

SEND Conference 2025



Keynote: The relationships-first approach



Kief Ho

Dr. Kief Ho holds a Master's degree in Special and Inclusive Education from University College London and a PhD from Buckinghamshire New University, where his research focused on quality of life. He also contributes as a guest lecturer for the BA Education degree programme at the university.

With extensive teaching and leadership experience in the special education sector, Dr. Ho previously served as executive headteacher of a special school with an outreach provision. He is currently the executive principal at Octavia House Schools in London, a specialist provision with

multiple sites, supporting pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs, many of whom have experienced adverse childhood experiences.

In addition to his leadership role, Dr. Ho serves as a governor at Beaudesert Lower School in Bedfordshire, where he is a member of the School Improvement and Finance committees. He also supports the development of the school's SEND and inclusive practices.

Emily Rattenbury- Barlow

Emily joined Octavia House Schools, an independent group of sector-leading therapeutic schools, when it opened in 2013. She is responsible for establishing practical models - rooted in the most up to date research - and structures to support staff, alongside creating a culture that is always therapeutic and trauma responsive, ensuring that it is an environment where all pupils can thrive when this was not possible in mainstream or other alternative educational settings.

Emily is also a senior trainer and regional lead for Trauma Informed Schools UK (TISUK), training senior leaders, teaching staff, educational psychologists and CAMHS practitioners in a trauma-informed model.



Seminar Speakers

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Miriam Carrion Benitez

Miriam is a leading barrister in education law, specialising in Special Educational Needs, Human Rights, and Equality. She heads the Education Law team advising mainstream, special, and alternative provision schools, as well as higher education institutions. With extensive experience across tribunals, courts, and judicial review, Miriam is a trusted adviser to major education providers and local authorities.

She is known for her work on complex issues including admissions, Ofsted complaints, safeguarding, SEN funding disputes, and discrimination claims. Miriam has appeared in over a thousand SENDIST appeals and led

landmark cases such as Michaela School and Robert Sharp v Office of Schools Adjudicator. Her expertise also spans safeguarding audits, Equality and Human Rights Act claims, and university regulation.

Julie Clarkson

Head of Mathematics at More House School, the UK's largest SEND specialist independent school, Julie brings a unique blend of industry and educational experience to her role. After a 20-year career in accountancy, she retrained as a teacher and spent seven years in state schools, where she developed a deep interest in supporting pupils who struggle with numerical understanding and processing. Outside of school, Julie co-authored the content for Everybody Counts, a global online maths programme for children. Since joining More House School in 2015, she has specialised in inclusive teaching and dyscalculia, including completing training with the Dyscalculia Association. Julie is also the Mathematics lead within the school's training and outreach programme, and contributed to the development of More House School's Beyond the Label approach to teaching and learning, which provides evidence-based strategies and tools to support colleagues and education professionals in other settings to create inclusive learning environments.



Seminar Speakers

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Dina Foster

Dina is an experienced, former secondary school Deputy Head teacher and the Head of Educator AI Training at Educate Ventures Research. She gained an MA in Education and Technology and also holds a Masters in Teaching, both from the Institute of Education, University College London. Dina is particularly interested in supporting school leaders with the development and implementation of successful digital strategies and leveraging AI to address school priorities.

Christine Freestone

Christine Freestone has a broad experience of education and social care. She is former head teacher, inspector, nurse, and senior leader for children in care with a particular passion for working with SEND. Chris works alongside leaders in supporting them to work within the legal frameworks, always with the child at the centre.

She understands the vital role of front-line processes in education settings in keeping children safe and supporting staff in doing so. Her style is one of supporting reflective practice and practitioner/leadership development.



Claire Ginty

Claire is a highly experienced and registered Consultant Occupational Therapist specialising in children, young people, and families, with a strong focus on sensory integration, attachment, and trauma-informed care. Claire holds a BSc (Hons) in Occupational Therapy, a Postgraduate Certificate in Systemic Family Therapy and Sensory Integration, as well as an MSc in Attachment. Claire is dedicated to supporting children's development from a whole-child perspective. Her work emphasises the critical early years of development, the impact of trauma on the nervous system, and the importance of authentic, relationship-based approaches to learning and well-being. Claire integrates current neuroscience,

sensory integration theory, and attachment research to foster inclusive learning environments that promote resilience, self-regulation, and positive developmental trajectories for all children.

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Seminar Speakers

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With over two decades of clinical experience, Claire has worked extensively within community, acute, education, and social care settings across multiple UK local authorities and international locations. Her practice encompasses assessment, intervention, and training related to a broad range of needs.

Claire is also deeply involved in professional development and education, providing clinical mentorship for sensory integration, lecturing internationally, and supporting occupational therapy student placements in the UK and abroad. She has actively contributed to research on physiological regulation in children with attachment difficulties and has led regional initiatives for evaluating sensory integration approaches.



Emma Lewry

Emma, is an experienced school leader, she has been Headteacher of three Primary schools, and School Improvement Officer and Early Years Lead for a Primary MAT. She is an Early Years specialist, supporting schools to develop autonomy, independence and play for both children and staff.

Emma works with Leaders on EYFS and Continuous Provision consultancy and curriculum development support. She leads training and key notes focussed on developing autonomy, connection and creativity within the Primary phase and a wide range of Early Years focussed workshops.

Emma is the creator of the C.O.O.L curriculum, a continuous provision based curriculum and pedagogical approach for KS1 and beyond, currently in its exciting trial phase with 5 UK schools. Emma has a Masters in Educational Leadership and Management, is a National College expert, has written Focus Education and the Chartered College Impact Journal and is a content reviewer for The Key.

Natalie Packer

Natalie is an Independent Education Consultant, specialising in SEND and school improvement. She develops and delivers a wide range of training and support, including SEND Reviews, to schools and multi-academy trusts. She is an associate for national organisations nasen, Whole Education, Forum Strategy and Leadership Matters. Natalie is the author of The Perfect SENCO and The Teacher's Guide to SEN, co-author of Beyond Boundaries: Leading Great SEND Provision across a Trust and series editor for the All About SEND publications.



Seminar Speakers

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Lisa Pinkerton

Lisa has recently joined the Widgit Team, having been an avid symbol user and enthusiast throughout her 26 years of teaching in the primary sector. Until recently, Lisa was a Deputy Head Teacher and Inclusion Lead at a large primary school. Alongside this, she worked as a SEND Consultant for Alternative Provisions, and as a qualified Specialist Teacher for Literacy-Related Difficulties. Lisa's lifelong passion has been for effective inclusion for all pupils regardless of their background, needs or abilities. She continues to share this enthusiasm by acting as a Lead Facilitator for the NPQSENCo award with the Best Practice Network.

Dr Katharine Sharpe

Dr Katharine Sharpe is a Chartered Educational Psychologist, experienced educator, and Director of Sharpe Psychology Ltd. She has extensive expertise in psychological assessment, consultation, training, and teaching.

After completing her degree in Psychology, she began her career as a primary teacher before qualifying as an Educational Psychologist (EP). Katharine spent 15 years working as an EP within a large local authority, including seven years as a Senior EP, managing a large locality team of psychologists. She then moved into the independent sector as Head of Learning Support and Assistant Head (Pastoral) at a prep school, while continuing to run her private EP practice. She holds a Doctorate in Educational Psychology from UCL.



Now working full time in private practice, Katharine supports schools, pupils, and families across both local authority and independent sectors. She is an experienced conference speaker, formerly served as IAPS SEND Subject Adviser, and currently sits on the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Cross-Association SEND Advisory Group

Keynote Sessions

SEND Conference 2025



Keynote 1: What real inclusion looks like; A neurodiversity panel

Katherine Bluck will be chairing an inspiring and thought-provoking panel discussion exploring the power of neurodiversity in education and professional development. Featuring Kate, Samantha and Victoria this session will delve into how we can better support neurodivergent individuals through inclusive learning environments, behaviour strategies rooted in empathy, and a deeper understanding of cognitive diversity.

Our panellists bring a wealth of experience and insight from their respective fields, offering practical approaches and personal perspectives that challenge traditional narratives and champion strengths-based thinking. Whether you are an educator, leader, or SENDCo, this conversation will leave you equipped and empowered to foster truly inclusive spaces.

Keynote 2: The relationships-first approach

In the upcoming keynote session, Emily and Kief will explore the complex landscape of trauma and its profound impact on young people, particularly when emotions arise without the skills to manage them. Drawing on lived experience and professional insight, they will guide us through a powerful narrative of hurting and healing, emphasising the fundamental need to feel that we matter and belong. At the heart of their message is a "relationships-first" approach, rooted in both ideology and practical application, that champions connection, empathy, and consistent relational practice as the foundation for meaningful support and sustainable change.

Seminar Session 1

SEND Conference 2025



Using PACE and emotion coaching to build connected, regulated and emotionally healthy schools - Kief Ho and Emily Rattenbury-Barlow

In this practical seminar, we will explore how prioritising relationships can transform school culture and pupil wellbeing. Drawing on the principles of Dr Dan Hughes' PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy) and John Gottman's Emotion Coaching, this session offers tools to support emotional regulation, increase connection, and foster a psychologically safe, nurturing environment for all. Whether you're working with individual pupils or shaping whole-school approaches, this seminar will empower you to create emotionally healthy spaces where both children and adults can thrive.

Navigating the links with families of Safeguarding and SEND pupils - Christine Freestone

In an increasingly complex safeguarding 'world' the decisions made as safeguarding professionals need to take into account many factors. This session will explore the role of defensible decision making in safeguarding and some of the issues we need to take into account.

Inclusive learning environments and equal access for all: turning vision into action - Lisa Pinkerton

This session aims to develop an understanding what inclusive spaces mean beyond physical access. Participants will explore the barriers faced by learners with SEND and discover strategies to promote accessibility and inclusion in educational and communal environments. It will provide an opportunity to share best practices and create actionable steps to implement change.

Using solution focused thinking and approaches to work with key stakeholders - Katharine Sharpe

During this seminar, you will discover how solution-focused thinking can transform your response to complex situations, whether you are working with pupils, parents, colleagues or external professionals. We will explore strategies to build shared understanding, clarify best hopes, and identify exceptions. Powerful tools such as the 'miracle' question and scaling techniques will also be examined to demonstrate how they can assist in identifying solutions when progress feels challenging and when people are struggling to express their views. By adopting solution-focused approaches, you can more easily navigate challenging conversations, foster genuine collaboration, and empower all key stakeholders to work together towards shared goals.

Seminar Session 2

SEND Conference 2025



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.

Maths teaching to support SEND learners - Julie Clarkson

Discover how inclusive, evidence-based strategies can transform mathematics education for students who find it challenging. Mrs Julie Clarkson, Mathematics subject lead at More House School (the UK's Largest independent SEND specialist school) will reflect on 50 years of progress in the teaching of mathematics. She'll highlight the power of manipulatives and the benefits of the C.P.A. (Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract) approach in building conceptual understanding. Learn how the L.A.M.P framework (Language, Attention, Memory, Processing) empowers educators to look beyond diagnostic labels and deliver truly inclusive teaching. An inspiring session for anyone committed to making mathematics meaningful and accessible for all learners.

How to be 'The Perfect SENCO' (taking a whole school approach so you're not alone!) - Natalie Packer

This session will focus on the important role of the SENCO in school. Sharing information and practical ideas from her experience as a consultant and from her book 'The Perfect SENCO', Natalie will consider how to develop a whole school approach to SEND, where responsibility and accountability is shared. Within the context of the current national picture for SEND, she will explore development of an inclusive culture and implementation of high quality teaching for all. Natalie will also share practical ideas for supporting SENCO workload through a strategic approach.

The overlap effect: where disability meets SEN - a legal perspective - Miriam Carrion Benitez

This insightful session explores the complex intersection between disability and SEN through a legal lens. Miriam Carrion Benitez will unpack the nuanced distinctions and overlaps between these two classifications, shedding light on key legislation, case law, and statutory guidance that shape educational provision and rights.

Seminar Session 3

SEND Conference 2025



Inclusive practice and the use of continuous provision in our EYFS and into KS1 - Emma Lewry

This workshop explores how continuous provision can be a powerful pedagogical approach for creating inclusive, purposeful learning environments in both the EYFS and KS1. Drawing on a wide range of educational research and recent case studies, we will examine how carefully planned provision supports all learners, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities, by combining structure with freedom, and rigour with joy.

Research in child development and cognitive science shows that when children are given choice, ownership and a sense of belonging, they are more motivated, resilient, and able to make meaningful connections in their learning; continuous provision provides this balance. This approach supports memory, executive function and wellbeing, while also creating equitable access for children with diverse needs.

The session will invite participants to reflect on their own practice and practical strategies will also be shared for thinking about provision design, from small adaptations to whole-classroom models, offering support for schools at any stage of their journey.

The power of perspective: a whole-child approach to inclusive learning - Claire Ginty

This presentation draws on Claire's extensive knowledge in neurodevelopment, sensory processing, and trauma-informed care to explore how understanding the complex interplay of sensory, emotional, and cognitive factors can transform educational practices and support truly inclusive learning experiences.

The Neuroscience of Neurodiversity - Victoria Bagnall

In this talk, we'll explore how brain development and executive functions shape thinking styles, underpinning the rich tapestry of neurodiversity. Attendees will gain practical insights into recognising and supporting diverse cognitive strengths in children and young people, helping to foster inclusive classrooms where all learners can thrive.

An evidence-led approach towards AI for SEND - Dina Foster

In this session we will explore how AI tools and technologies can be leveraged to support SEND provision. Considering both learners and educators, we will examine the potential for AI in education to achieve greater levels of personalisation, widen access and reduce workload. Drawing upon research, use-cases and robust AI safeguarding principles we will evaluate the impact of AI for SEND education and consider how AI can be implemented safely and effectively in schools.