



# KENT CONTINUUM OF NEED AND PROVISION CASE STUDIES: STAFF SKILLS AND TRAINING



By Schools, For Schools

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## Mainstream Nursery and Primary School Case Studies

Northfleet Nursry- Embedding Staff CPD

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### Brief description/ overview

Northfleet Nursery School is Kent's only maintained Nursery school. We currently have a high percentage of disadvantaged, EAL(In excess of 60%) and children with complex SEND needs.

In addition to this when I started my journey as HT in 2021 there was very little dedicated time to staff meetings and CPD opportunities for the staff as a result they had limited skills especially in the area of SEND.

### An overview of what we did

Staff skills and training are pivotal in shaping the quality of care and education in schools. Through engagement and piloting CPD in our school with AET were able to pin-point strengths and challenges.

#### Observation and Analysis:

We evaluated staff's confidence and skills to support their needs For example

- Strengths: We conducted a survey in terms of the CPD staff wanted to undertake in line with the School Development plan in the area of raising outcomes for children who had differences. Most staff wanted to enhance their understanding of SEN Pedagogy/research informed practice.
- Challenges: No dedicated time for staff meetings, so we had to agree on a time that would be suitable to all. This also meant that the budget had to be revised so that staff were paid to attend these meetings/CPD sessions.

#### Findings

Through observations and feedback from teachers and TA's, we considered:

- How we as adults could best support children who were displaying deficits in Social Interaction, Communication and Language and Behaviour?

## Impact

- Improved fostering of social inclusion and adaptation of the curriculum promoted success for autistic students.
- Staff training and professional development ensured that our staff were equipped with the necessary skills to provide high-quality provision. This includes safeguarding, health and safety, child development, and behavior management.
- The school emphasized joint planning, reflective practices, and targeted support for children with. This approach significantly improved children's learning outcomes with deficits in Social Interaction, Communication and Language and Behaviour.
- Through working with the **Autism Education Trust** we Enhanced understanding of Child Development: Well-trained staff could better address children's diverse needs, fostering their growth and learning.
- Consistency in Care: Training reduced staff turnover, ensuring stable and consistent care for children.
- Improved Staff Morale: Weekly staff training afternoons boosted confidence and job satisfaction among staff, leading to a more motivated workforce.
- Improved communication and collaboration with parents and Staff was key to understanding the child's needs and implementing effective measures.

## Sussex Road Primary School – Embedding the EEF 5-a-day approach

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### Brief description/ overview

Community Primary School (420 pupils) Tonbridge Kent

Whole school staff development of our Inclusive practice to secure an effective culture and consistent approaches. This included CPD for teaching staff and teaching assistants.

### An overview of what we did

Following research we used the EEF 5 a day approach to secure consistent approaches to our inclusive teaching practice for all pupils. This model looks at the following elements of teaching: Explicit Instruction, Scaffolding, Metacognition and Cognitive Load, Flexible grouping, Use of Technology

Each element was delivered over a series of weekly CPD sessions. Coaching input used the Walkthru's materials by Tom Sherrington. These have exemplar videos which enabled staff to see how the techniques can be delivered in practice.

SLT monitored the impact with regular drop ins. 'Shout outs' were sent by email regularly to praise and highlight best practice seen in each of the 5 a day principles.

Staff were encouraged to visit each other's lessons to see specific aspects of the principles that they wanted to develop. Teaching assistants followed the same programme in weekly sessions with follow up handouts and practice guides.

The 5 a day principles now form the basis of our inclusive teaching pedagogy.

### Impact

The impact was reviewed through the KILP peer review process and by our School Improvement Adviser. Outcomes were positive in terms of pupils' engagement and access to learning. More consistent approaches were evidenced throughout the school. The effective use of technology was highlighted in both whole class teaching and more personalised approaches.

Comment by SIAP:

"The careful implementation of the EEF's 'Five a Day' has been highly effective in securing the 'why' and 'how' of the curriculum. This has been helped by a clear CPD strategy which has involved both teachers and TAs. As a result, there is a strong shared

pedagogy at all levels. There are plans to embed this work with Step Lab and adoption of instructional coaching.”

## Mainstream Secondary School Case Studies

Canterbury Academy - Building Capacity for Inclusion: Canterbury Academy's Four-Area SEND Leadership Model : a whole-school Case Study

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### Brief description/ overview

#### Overview

Canterbury Academy is a highly inclusive educational institution, serving approximately 2,000 students. This includes 1,000 pupils aged 7 to 11 and 1,000 post-16 learners. The academy places a strong emphasis on supporting students with a wide range of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), with 24% of students receiving SEND support and 153 students holding an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The school hosts three Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs), catering for students with Hearing Impairments (HI), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).

#### Effective Resourcing

Leaders at Canterbury Academy have introduced a range of initiatives to promote inclusion and ensure students with SEND receive targeted support. A key initiative is the development of the Inclusion Hub—a calm, restorative space designed to help students regulate before reintegrating into lessons. The approach, "Rest, Relax, Reset," offers quiet zones and access to supportive adults when needed.

Strategic room configuration further supports SEND students. For example, Student Services is co-located with Safeguarding and Attendance teams to enhance collaboration. Each SRP has been purposefully designed to maximise accessibility to resources and specialist support.

#### Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs)

The academy's three SRPs aim to integrate students into mainstream education wherever appropriate, fostering independence while meeting individual needs: The HI SRP offers access to Teachers of the Deaf, tailored learning environments, and innovative support such as a therapy dog. Staff from this provision contribute to national developments through their involvement in the BATOD deaf curriculum pilot, which promotes understanding of deafness and wider inclusion. In addition, the Cullum Centre (ASD SRP): supports students with ASD, many of whom have co-occurring Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Provision includes

access to a counsellor, a sensory room, and dedicated classrooms with a high staff-to-student ratio (approximately 1:10). A collaborative, team-based approach has led to reductions in both truancy and behavioural incidents. The centre also houses the *Stepping Stones* project, which supports students experiencing emotionally based school avoidance. The SLCN SRP offers speech & language therapist on site giving specialist support and interventions. Using the new Balanced System means whole school strategies are being embedded across the school such as Language through Colour and key vocabulary support list in all subjects using visual images.

#### Nurture Provision

The academy offers nurture classes for students in Years 7 and 8, with plans to expand into Year 9. These classes provide flexible, adaptive curriculum pathways and allow students to transition in or out of groups based on ongoing needs. This responsive approach ensures tailored support throughout the academic year.

#### Teaching and Learning

Leaders have established a strong foundation of best practice in teaching and learning, aligned with the four broad areas of SEND. Non-negotiable expectations for quality first teaching have been clearly articulated. The school engages parents as active stakeholders in SEND review processes, ensuring their voices are heard.

To enhance instructional practice, the academy has developed *Expert Teaching Principles* and *Expert Teaching Assistant Principles*, aligned with the Steplab platform. This system supports ongoing staff development through coaching, regular drop-ins, and personalised feedback based on targeted development goals.

#### Information Sharing

All students receiving SEND support or with an EHCP have a centrally stored *Pupil Passport*, ensuring that effective strategies are easily accessible to all staff. A centralised spreadsheet complements these records by summarising key strategies in line with mainstream core standards.

#### SEND Referral Process

A newly implemented online referral system streamlines SEND support requests, automatically generating a tracking spreadsheet for leaders. This system promotes transparency, enabling staff to see the outcomes of their referrals and understand subsequent actions. EHCPs are also readily accessible via SharePoint, supporting quality assurance and consistent monitoring.

#### Intervention Directory

The academy has developed a comprehensive *Intervention Directory* outlining evidence-based interventions and provisions. This enables leaders to monitor impact and generate automated reports for parents. High-impact strategies include the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), life and social skills programmes, speech and language therapy, animal management, and the *Young Healthy Minds* initiative.

### **An overview of what we did**

Leaders have developed the SEND staffing model in order to better meet the needs of students across the academy through providing more specialised and focused support.

#### Strategic Staffing and Professional Development

Leaders at Canterbury Academy have introduced a new staffing model within the SEND team, aligned to the four broad areas of need. This structure enables the strategic deployment of staff, capitalising on individual strengths and areas of specialism. Each area is led by a qualified SENDCo, who oversees both the relevant Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) and whole-school provision within their domain. This approach has ensured that the high-quality practice embedded within the SRPs is cascaded across the wider school community.

To enhance support staff effectiveness, leaders have developed *Expert Teaching Assistant Principles*, which clearly define effective practice. These principles underpin a coaching model that provides teaching assistants with regular feedback and professional development opportunities. The strong collaboration between the Teaching and Learning and SEND teams has further strengthened staff development, enabling joint planning of training sessions and alignment of key pedagogical strategies.

Ongoing communication and professional learning are promoted through weekly SEND briefings and newsletters, which are used to share best practice and deliver bite-sized training. Staff success is celebrated through a dedicated staff celebration assembly, and positive practice is regularly recognised through shout-outs on the Steplab platform. This focus on professional growth and recognition fosters a culture of high expectations, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

### **Impact**

Leaders have seen demonstrable improvements in behaviour and attendance for students with SEND. There are also significantly higher integration rates for SRP pupils attending mainstream lessons due to improvements in teaching and learning to support their needs. This approach has also supported SENDCo workload.

The Royal Harbour – Effective Staff Development and Deployment: a whole-school Case Study

**Contact Details**

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**Brief description/ overview**

The Royal Harbour Academy (RHA), part of the Coastal Academies Trust, offers a highly inclusive environment tailored to the needs of a vulnerable student cohort. With 63% of pupils in receipt of Pupil Premium funding and 37% identified as requiring SEND support—including 71 students with an EHCP—RHA educates approximately 40% of all secondary-aged mainstream pupils with EHCPs in Thanet.

Universal Adaptive Strategies

To ensure high-quality teaching for all, RHA has implemented a Universal Adaptive Strategies approach grounded in the principle that what is essential for some is beneficial for all. This A4 summary document outlines key classroom practices across four areas:

- Structure and Routine
- Cognition and Metacognition
- Explicit Instruction
- The Thrive Relational Approach

These strategies, rooted in educational research and aligned with the EEF’s “Five-a-Day” framework for SEND, serve as a practical aide-mémoire for lesson planning and adaptive teaching. As a result, lessons are inherently inclusive, reducing the need for additional personalised differentiation, easing teacher workload, and improving outcomes. These strategies are integral to staff induction and feature prominently in ongoing CPD.

Bridging the Gap from KS2 to KS4 – The IBMYP

RHA has adopted the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) for Years 7, 8 and 9 to bridge the transition from primary to secondary. This framework fosters the development of knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding, enabling pupils to succeed academically and personally.

Students are primarily taught by two lead teachers—one for English, history, and ethics; the other for maths, science, and geography—supported by subject specialists for other areas. This model strengthens relationships, promotes

continuity, and enables teachers to closely track and address individual learning gaps, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

#### Pathways for Support and Intervention

A range of bespoke pathways supports student transition and progress at Key Stage 3 and ACES at Key Stage 4. Internal alternative provision, offers targeted pastoral intervention, enhanced by access to Forest School and Family Groups. Systemic Family Practitioner, THRIVE Practitioners and Family Group fosters stronger relationships with families through activities such as shared cooking and interactive presentations.

In addition, Nurture Groups provide a tailored learning environment for students with EHCPs, combining bespoke interventions with access to mainstream learning where appropriate.

#### Embedding a Relational Approach

RHA has embedded a relational ethos across the school, informed by training from Nurture UK and Thrive. With 17 trained Thrive practitioners, the school ensures consistent practice and relational support. Universal Thrive is delivered during tutor time, featuring class-wide screening and individual target setting. This approach has significantly reduced conflict and behaviour escalations, enabling a greater focus on learning.

#### Effective Identification of SEND

Leaders at RHA have developed a robust and systematic approach to identifying SEND, utilising a suite of screeners and checklists across all four areas of need. These tools enable early identification and timely intervention. Weekly inclusion meetings bring together pastoral and SEND teams to coordinate support and ensure a joined-up approach.

#### Accessible Information and Support Tools

To enhance access to pupil information and strategies, RHA uses Edukey Class Charts and Provision Map software. These platforms support staff in accessing key data and evidence-based strategies efficiently. Pupil Passports offer concise guidance on supporting individual students. The system also facilitates the effective tracking and evaluation of interventions, ensuring provision is both targeted and impactful.

#### Prioritising Transition

Leaders prioritise transition at key points to support student success. For primary to secondary transition, leaders have established strong partnerships with feeder

schools to ensure early understanding of pupil needs, enabling careful group placement and curriculum planning. Year 8 to Year 9 transition ensures that enhanced support is provided as pupils move to the upper site. This includes shared teaching staff across sites and a curriculum designed for continuity. Senior leaders work across both campuses, offering additional consistency and care.

Leaders have implemented a highly effective approach to the deployment of staff resources and interventions in order to support any student as necessary.

### **An overview of what we did**

#### Strategic Deployment and Training of Support Staff

Leaders at RHA have adopted a strategic and needs-led approach to the deployment and professional development of support staff, ensuring they deliver high-impact interventions aligned with specific areas of pupil need. Teaching Assistants are allocated across the school based on their expertise and have received targeted training to enable effective support within their specialist domains. Much of this provision is coordinated through The Hub—a dedicated space within the school that offers timely, responsive support for students as required.

Key areas of focus include:

**Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN):** With 25% of the school intake requiring additional support in this area, all students are screened using Secondary Language Link. The resulting data is used to inform targeted next steps. Teaching Assistants are trained and supported by Specialist Teaching and Learning Services (STLS) and Speech and Language Therapists (SALT) to deliver high-quality interventions and pre-teaching.

**Sensory and Motor Skills:** Trained staff facilitate Sensory Circuits that provide purposeful movement breaks, helping students to regulate effectively and re-engage with learning. These activities are carefully structured to meet individual sensory profiles.

**Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH):** A large team of qualified Thrive practitioners supports pupils through reparative practice, small-group Thrive sessions, and therapeutic interventions such as Drawing and Talking Therapy.

Additionally, leaders have ensured that support staff are effectively deployed during unstructured times of the day to provide proactive support and promote student wellbeing. As a result, RHA offers a rich menu of inclusive lunchtime and breaktime

activities, including a Wellbeing Room, Calm Room, Sports Club, Sensory Garden, and Film Club, all designed to meet a diverse range of needs and interests.

**Impact**

As a result of the strategic and effective deployment of Teaching Assistants, students benefit from high-quality, structured interventions delivered by well-trained staff. This has significantly increased the impact of targeted approaches, particularly in areas such as ELSA and Speech and Language support. Consequently, students are making sustained progress both academically and pastorally. They demonstrate greater engagement, purpose, and confidence in their learning. Furthermore, the wide range of support available during unstructured times contributes to a safe, inclusive environment where all students feel secure and are able to enjoy meaningful and positive break and lunch experiences.

## Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School – Bespoke Inclusion CPD

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### Brief description/ overview

Ensuring teaching and support staff have the necessary skills to embed inclusion throughout the school

### An overview of what we did

#### Staff training:

Bespoke training **relevant** to school setting – deliberate steer away from generic training which teaching staff felt was ineffective.

#### Training on:

- Autism in Girls, Dyslexia, ADHD/ADD – focus on key misconceptions and teaching strategies/adjustments relevant to a high performing, fast paced setting
- Executive Functioning – building awareness of executive functioning and how challenges in executive functioning affect pupils’ ability to manage both academic and social demands of school
- Attachment Theory and Trauma - building awareness how attachment and trauma can affect pupils’ ability to engage with school

Each department has a SEN representative. This group meets regularly to discuss inclusion updates, recent research and concerns. This information is then disseminated to departments.

Bi-weekly SEN bulletin contains pupil updates and links to relevant information – short read articles, videos etc

Spotlight on SEN as part of the school observation/improvement process

SEN register contains teaching strategies for each pupil

### Impact

Much greater awareness and capability amongst staff. Greater levels of confidence and Quality First Teaching embedded across the school. Improved SEN pupil performance at GCSE/A Level. PA/EBSA rates significantly improved. SEN and inclusion now a particular focus across the school.

## PRU Case Studies

Birchwood - Developing Staff Skills to Meet the Needs of Pupils- a whole-school Case Study

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**Brief description/ overview**

Birchwood is an 11–16 alternative provision serving the Folkestone and Hythe area. Operating as a dual-roll school, all pupils retain a home school placement while accessing high-quality, short-term support at Birchwood. The aim is clear: to provide pupils with the skills, confidence, and resilience to reintegrate successfully into mainstream education.

Placements are available at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, with a rigorous induction process that prioritises early identification of strengths and needs. On entry, pupils complete a series of GLS assessments—including spelling and reading age assessments, dyslexia screening, and subject-specific assessments in English, Maths, and Science. Alongside this, a Boxall Profile is used to build a picture of social and emotional needs. The information gathered informs a personalised Placement Plan which includes clear objectives, targets, and a review timeline. Student voice is embedded throughout, and plans are created in collaboration with home schools, parents, and external services where appropriate. This rigorous process enables staff to have a clear understanding of how they can support each student.

Birchwood delivers a strong core curriculum, complemented by a broad programme of enrichment and PSHE. External agencies such as the St Giles Trust, Police, and Border Force contribute to sessions, while careers education is a central thread—underpinned by employability qualifications and unit-based courses which can be built into larger qualifications or portfolios. Pupils also access enriching trips and experiences such as visits to Paris, Barcelona, and London theatres, as well as outdoor activities including Duke of Edinburgh and charity fundraising through Bike Ability projects.

At the end of Key Stage 4, every pupil receives a personalised ‘Birchwood Letter’ detailing all the qualifications achieved. This provides a valuable tool to support successful transition to college, apprenticeships, or employment. The school’s commitment to ensuring all children feel valued and prepared for their next steps is central to its ethos.

**An overview of what we did**

Staff Skills and Training

Staff development sits at the heart of Birchwood’s approach, recognising that high-quality provision for pupils depends on highly skilled, confident, and adaptable practitioners. Daily staff briefings ensure a consistent and personalised approach, with information about individual pupils shared openly to support staff in responding to need. Interventions are led not only by teachers but also by HLTAs and TAs, ensuring every adult contributes meaningfully to learning and pastoral care.

Training is carefully aligned to both pupil needs and staff interests. Recent programmes have included whole-school AET training, attachment and demand avoidance, dyslexia awareness, and Zones of Regulation, drawing on expertise from external partners, including Specialist Teaching and Learning Services (STLS). This year, the focus will be on trauma-informed practice and de-escalation strategies. Staff also revisit the fundamentals of assessment and curriculum design—such as GCSE moderation in English and Maths and curriculum-specific training.

Leaders ensure that staff receive bespoke training to meet the contextual needs of individual students wherever possible. This flexible approach means that strategies are continually updated to reflect the challenges and strengths of the cohort, ensuring vulnerable pupils are supported to thrive.

A culture of collaborative learning is evident, with staff delivering training to one another on areas such as Rosenshine’s principles of instruction and effective reading strategies. Investment in professional qualifications further strengthens the team, with staff achieving SENDCo accreditation, Level 6 Careers guidance, Masters-level qualifications, and QTS.

Birchwood leaders consciously prioritise staff wellbeing and cohesion, recognising that a strong team is vital to delivering consistent support for pupils. INSET is delivered flexibly through twilights, and time is protected for professional development. This investment not only builds staff expertise but also ensures that Birchwood can respond flexibly to the unique and often complex needs of its cohort.

The school’s investment in staff development ensures that strategies are not only theory-driven but embedded in practice, creating consistency across the team. As a result, pupils experience a nurturing but structured environment that enables them to succeed academically and socially. Families frequently report a renewed sense of faith in education, recognising Birchwood as the place where their child was given a fresh start and a pathway to future success.

### **Impact**

The impact of Birchwood’s approach is evident in the positive difference it makes to pupils’ lives. Many arrive disaffected and lacking confidence, yet leave with restored trust in education, meaningful qualifications, and renewed aspirations for the future. Pupils transition successfully to college, apprenticeships, or employment, supported

by detailed transition documentation and strong relationships with families and next-step providers.

The school's success lies not only in academic outcomes but also in the enrichment of pupils' lives—through experiences, skills, and personal growth that enable them to thrive beyond their placement. Staff and families alike are united in a shared belief: that every child deserves the chance to feel valued, achieve, and succeed.

## SRP Case Studies

Sir Geoffrey Leigh Academy - Supporting HI Pupils through Training Staff in British Sign Language

### Contact details

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### Brief description/ overview-

Whole staff training at the end of term.

Staff were offered tailored PD sessions to choose from.

I offered BSL lessons on basic signs to help with lessons and to communicate more efficiently with our deaf cohort.

I had 60 teachers sign up over two sessions.

### An overview of what we did

- Planned and prepared a powerpoint and 'do now' tasks on basic BSL signs. This turned out to be incredibly popular and ended up completing the training twice for different members of staff.
- Staff were encouraged to join in and copy the signs then to use them on each other.
- Signs were specific for learning such as stop, hurry up, are you ok? And did you understand? Fantastic work.
- Staff were also given copies of the BSL alphabet to help spell out their names.

### Impact

Staff were very happy with the lessons and HI students have fed back that staff have used BSL which made them feel more included.

## Special School Case Studies

Forelands Field School – Developing Intensive Interaction as a Core Communication Strategy

### Contact

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### Brief description/ overview

To develop Intensive Interaction as a Core Communication Strategy for pupils on the Explorers (profound and multiple learning disabilities) and Adventurers (complex learning disabilities) pathways.

### An overview of what you did

- This was a key Quality of Education Objective in the School Improvement Plan 2022-2023
- 2 Teachers completed the Intensive Interaction Institute ‘Reflective Practitioner’ qualification (Module 2) and 1 teacher completed the ‘Mentoring Practitioner’ qualification (Module 3) – this teacher became the school Intensive Interaction Lead in September 2023
- Whole School INSET day (Nov 22) on Intensive Interaction & Early Play
- Refresher INSET (May 2023)
- Performance management targets regarding Intensive Interaction set for teachers and Teaching Assistants
- Staff formed Intensive Interaction ‘pairs’, to capture evidence of their practice
- A parent event held (Nov 22) to inform families about Intensive Interaction in school
- Video evidence of Intensive Interaction ‘tagged’ in Evidence for Learning (online assessment tool) for monitoring and CPD purposes
- IrisConnect introduced as a tool to reflect on practice
- Weekly Intensive Interaction ‘blogs, hints and tips’ included in staff briefings (2023-2025)
- Intensive Interaction approach extended to incorporate Sherbourne Developmental Movement (July 2023).

## Impact

- Quality Intensive Interaction is visible across Explorers/Adventurers classes and is evident within the wider school
- Every child's communication attempts are valued and responded to
- More pupils within Explorers and Adventurers pathways have made good progress in Communication & Interaction year on year

## Pupils making good progress in Communication and Interaction

(End of Year Data)

Pathway	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024- 25
<b>Explorers (PMLD)</b>	58%	92%	94%	100%
<b>Adventurers (CLD)</b>	No Data (Pathway launched in Sept 2022)	70%	83%	100%

## Goldwyn – Supporting Staff to Sustainably meet Complex Mental Health Needs

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### Brief description/ overview

Brief for Change: Supporting Staff to Sustainably Meet Complex Mental Health Needs

#### Background

Post-Covid, levels of complexity in student mental health needs have risen sharply. In an SEMH context, these presentations are often **extrovert, highly dysregulated, and at times triggering** for staff. Alongside increased demand, staff have reported feeling **exhausted, isolated, and under-equipped** to manage the daily challenges.

#### The Challenge

- Staff wellbeing is under pressure, with fatigue leading to reduced resilience, higher absence, and concerns around retention.
- Isolated responses to challenging behaviour have left staff feeling unsupported and at risk of burnout.
- National workforce surveys (DfE, 2023) highlight mental health as one of the leading causes of stress in education, with SEMH schools facing amplified risk.
- Without change, the cycle of student dysregulation and staff exhaustion undermines both inclusion and consistency of provision.

#### Drivers for Change

- **Legal & Ethical Duty:** Under the Equality Act 2010, schools must make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of students with mental health difficulties. This requires staff who are confident and supported in their practice.
- **Safeguarding:** Ensuring staff are resilient and equipped protects both student safety and professional integrity.
- **Retention & Morale:** High staff turnover directly impacts relationships with students, which are the cornerstone of effective SEMH practice.
- **National Priority:** The DfE attendance and mental health strategies (2024/25) stress the importance of staff training, early intervention, and whole-school approaches to wellbeing.

## Proposed Change

### 1. **Strengthen Staff Support Structures**

- Introduce regular supervision and reflective practice groups.
- Ensure debriefing after high-level incidents is standard, not optional.
- Build peer-support systems to reduce isolation.

### 2. **Targeted Professional Development**

- Training in trauma-informed approaches, de-escalation, and self-regulation strategies.
- Access to external expertise (Educational Psychologists, Mental Health Practitioners).

### 3. **Wellbeing Investment**

- Protected time for staff wellbeing initiatives.
- Clear escalation pathways so staff are not left to “hold” crises alone.

### 4. **Cultural Shift**

- Embed a whole-school ethos that recognises staff wellbeing as integral to student outcomes.
- Leadership visibility: consistent recognition, communication, and presence alongside staff in challenging contexts.

## An overview of what we did

### Circle of Adults Intervention

#### What it is

- *Circle of Adults* is a structured group problem-solving process, developed by Inclusive Solutions, designed to help schools support children and young people with complex social, emotional, and behavioural needs.
- It brings together a group of adults (teachers, support staff, leaders, SENCOs, sometimes external professionals) in a facilitated session to focus on one child who is causing concern.
- The process is strengths-based, highly structured, and relies on **deep listening, empathy, and collective problem-solving** rather than quick-fix solutions.

#### How it works

1. **Set the Focus** – A case is presented: the child’s needs, challenges, and current barriers.
2. **Tell the Story** – Staff share their experiences and feelings, allowing for a deeper understanding of the child’s lived reality.

3. **Build a Shared Picture** – The group maps the child’s situation (strengths, needs, triggers, contexts).
4. **Problem-Solve Collectively** – Through brainstorming, questioning, and reframing, the group generates new strategies and possible interventions.
5. **Action Planning** – Practical next steps are agreed, with shared responsibility rather than leaving the issue with one member of staff.

## Impact

### The Impact in Schools

- **For Staff:**
  - Reduces feelings of isolation, blame, and helplessness when supporting pupils with highly challenging behaviour.
  - Builds empathy and understanding across the team.
  - Encourages collective ownership of strategies, so no single member of staff feels they are carrying the burden alone.
  - Provides a safe space for staff to reflect on emotional impact and build resilience.
- **For Students:**
  - Leads to more consistent, creative, and personalised support strategies.
  - Builds a culture of empathy around the child, focusing on understanding their needs rather than seeing them as “the problem.”
  - Helps identify protective factors and ways to remove barriers to learning.
- **For the School:**
  - Strengthens whole-school capacity to manage complex SEMH needs.
  - Fosters collaboration and shared learning between staff.
  - Contributes to a more inclusive ethos, aligned with Equality Act duties to meet SEMH needs as a disability.

### Evidence & Practice

- Research and case reports suggest *Circle of Adults* interventions often lead to a **reduction in exclusions, improved attendance, and greater staff confidence**.
- Ofsted have highlighted it in some schools as an example of effective inclusive practice and staff development.
- Increased staff confidence and resilience in supporting students with complex needs.
- Reduced staff absence and turnover.

- Safer, more consistent environment for students, improving regulation and learning readiness.
- Stronger sense of community and shared responsibility across the school.

# **A summary of effective strategies evidenced in the Kent Case Studies for Staff skills and training**

## **1. Prioritise Targeted Professional Development**

- Audit staff skills and confidence to identify gaps in supporting pupils with diverse needs, including SEND, SEMH, and EAL.
- Ensure CPD aligns with school priorities, pupil cohort needs, and evidence-based practice (e.g., EEF 5-a-day framework, AET guidance).
- Embed bespoke training alongside whole-school programmes to meet contextual needs, avoiding generic training that may not translate into practice.
- Regularly review staff development plans to respond to evolving pupil profiles and organisational priorities.

## **2. Embed Inclusive Pedagogical Practices**

- Train teaching and support staff in adaptive strategies, such as Universal Adaptive Strategies, Explicit Instruction, Scaffolding, Metacognition, and Flexible Grouping.
- Use practical, classroom-based examples and observation opportunities to ensure learning translates into day-to-day teaching.
- Encourage staff collaboration, lesson visits, and peer coaching to reinforce consistent approaches across the school.

## **3. Develop Specialist Knowledge for Vulnerable Cohorts**

- Provide targeted CPD on key areas, such as:
  - Autism, ADHD/ADD, Dyslexia, and other neurodiverse profiles
  - Executive Functioning, Attachment Theory, and Trauma-Informed Practice
  - Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
- Equip staff to deliver high-quality interventions tailored to individual pupil needs, supported by assessment and diagnostic tools.

#### **4. Strategic Deployment and Utilisation of Staff**

- Allocate teaching assistants and support staff according to their strengths and specialist training to maximise impact.
- Create dedicated support spaces (e.g., The Hub, Nurture Groups, Sensory Circuits) where staff can deliver focused interventions.
- Integrate pastoral and academic support, ensuring staff are available during unstructured times to foster wellbeing and inclusion.

#### **5. Promote Collaborative Learning and Reflective Practice**

- Embed staff discussion groups, SEN forums, and bi-weekly bulletins to share updates, research, and effective strategies.
- Encourage staff-led CPD sessions to promote peer learning and ownership of professional growth.
- Use observation, feedback, and data to evaluate impact and refine CPD approaches.

#### **6. Enhance Communication and Engagement**

- Ensure all staff can access up-to-date pupil information through digital platforms (e.g., Edukey, Class Charts, Provision Map).
- Provide concise guidance such as Pupil Passports and Placement Plans to inform teaching and interventions.
- Maintain strong links with families and external agencies to ensure continuity and alignment in supporting pupil needs.

#### **7. Measure Impact of Training and Deployment**

- Monitor pupil progress academically and pastorally to evaluate the effectiveness of CPD and staff deployment.
- Gather feedback from staff on confidence, skills, and capacity to meet diverse pupil needs.
- Review and adapt CPD and deployment strategies to ensure sustainable improvements in outcomes.