

Term 1 Countywide SENCO Forum

Tuesday 22nd September
2026

Operational Updates

SENCO Forum TERM 1

Siobhán Price

Assistant Director

Welcome back and updates

Welcome and updates

- Kent Local Area Ofsted Inspection Report – [50312596](#)
- Thank you to all partners who took part in the inspection. Focus on the experience of children and families.
- Validation that while there is still work to do, the system is moving in the right direction.
- National SEN reforms are still to be announced. Improvements identified through the Ofsted inspection will be addressed in the context of the national reforms.

Over the next 3 years the strategic priorities are...

- Embedding the CoS and PRG model in line with national reforms
- Developing mainstream capability by considering our plan for Experts at Hand. [Experts at Hand & Local Authority SEND Transformation Fund: funding for local authorities 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#) – evaluation of PRG.
- Embedding the Continuum of Need and Provision as a framework for Inclusion – National Inclusion Standards. [Kent Continuum of Need and Provision - KELSI](#)
- Developing the strategic role of the SENCO and leading Inclusion strategically.
- Working with schools to understand proposed funding changes from 2028/2029 - [Inclusive mainstream fund for schools: methodology 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)
- Supporting schools to develop their inclusion strategy
- Embed, evaluate, improve
- Prepare the system for legislative change 2029-2030.

CoS

- Updated operational guidance - [Communities of Schools Documentation – KELSI](#)
- New chairs – welcome
- Slight increase in budgets
- Monitoring of outcomes – Page 11
- Reminder of what to consider before and after making requests – pages 6&7.
- Strengthened governance and accountability – page 25
- Operational process – page 41
- Communication – page 46
- Escalation – page 42 – 45.

Moderation exercises and findings

- Initial report December 2025
- High level Spring report 2026
- Area test process – chairs meeting in July 2026. Process will need refinement for 2026-2027.

High Level Findings for 2025-2026

- 2,002 requests submitted.
- 1,542 approved
- £14.85m requested by schools.
- £6.24m approved to date.
- More than 93% of requests relate to financial support.
- 8,779 pupils identified within applications.
- Uneven demand across communities, suggesting differing levels of inclusion pressure and local capacity.

Approximately:

82% of identified pupils were at SEN Support.

18% had an EHCP.

Initial Area Moderation Findings

East Kent - broadest spread of pressure, significant activity across Canterbury, Thanet and Swale communities. The combination of Sheppey, Sittingbourne and Ramsgate hotspots suggests sustained demand across multiple localities rather than a single pressure point.

- Highest volume of complex communication and interaction needs.
- Large number of requests linked to autistic spectrum conditions and specialist-style provision within mainstream schools.
- Significant investment in nurture pathways, engagement curriculums and resource-base style models.

South Kent - covers Ashford, Dover and Folkestone & Hythe and appears to experience substantial demand linked to early intervention, staffing support and complex need.

- Most acute EYFS pressure.
- Large numbers of requests describing pupils working significantly below developmental expectations on entry.
- High prevalence of toileting, sensory, communication and safety concerns.

West Kent - greatest concentration of established CoS communities and some of the highest-requesting communities in the dataset.. This indicates significant pressure around maintaining inclusion within mainstream settings.

- Strongest concentration of SEMH and EBSA-related requests.
- Higher number of cases involving anxiety, school refusal, attendance concerns and emotional regulation.
- Frequent requests linked to funding discontinuity following EHCP issue dates.

North Kent - pressure across Dartford, Gravesham and Sevenoaks North communities, with LMN Care and Sevenoaks 3 featuring among the stronger-demand communities. Growth, mobility and vulnerability factors are likely contributing to demand.

- Strong demand around classroom capacity and staffing.
- Growing use of nurture approaches and targeted intervention groups.
- More requests focused on maintaining inclusion within mainstream settings.
- **Why is this important? This will support information to PRG as to where to target resources and priorities. Will support data improvements**

CoS Operational Guidance (1)

Related Documents, Links and Key Contacts (Pg 56/57)

- CoS operational queries: cosadmin@kent.gov.uk
- (New) EHCP funding queries: hnf@kent.gov.uk
- Locality Model strategic queries: (inc. for CoS, PRG, governance) localitymodel@kent.gov.uk
- PRG Link Practitioner details: [Professional Resource Group - KELSI](#)
- School Advance and CoS Overview Statement queries: schoolfunding@kent.gov.uk



The Balanced System[®] for Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Elizabeth Pole
Lead SLT for The Balanced System[®]

see [KELSI The Balanced System[®] in Kent](#)

What schools told us

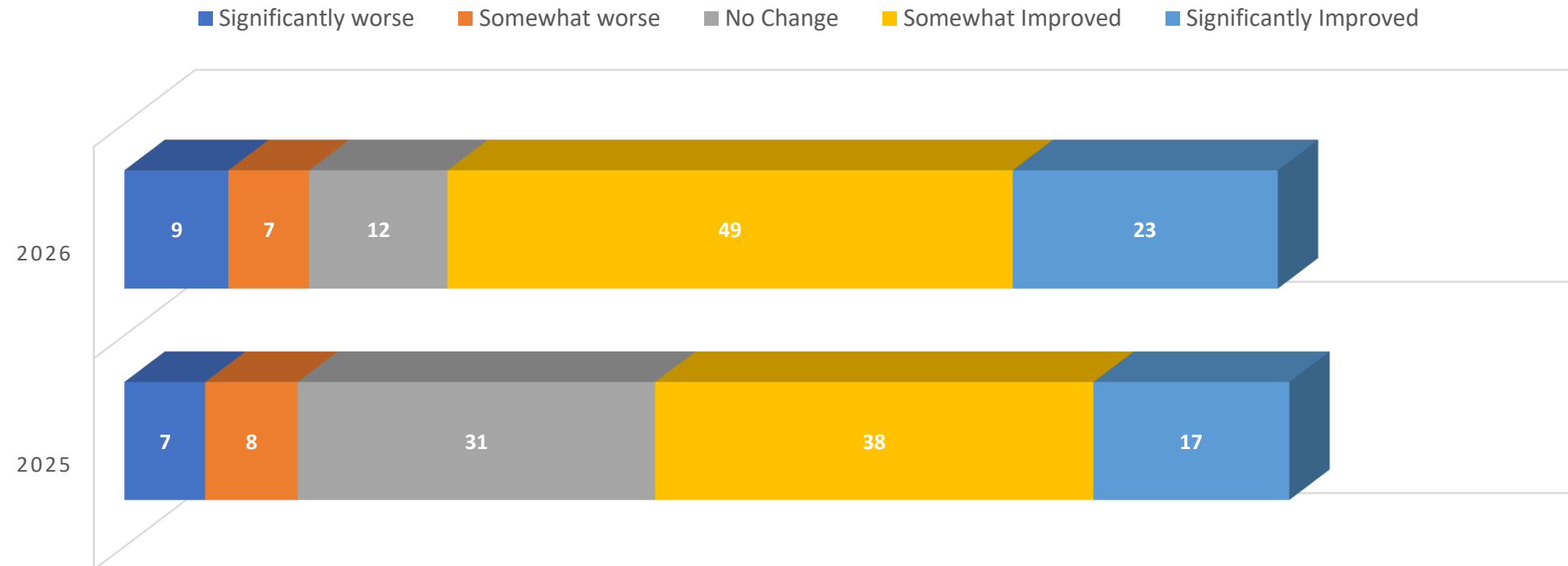
- 116 responses to Balanced System survey to schools in June 2026 compared with 163 in 2025
- This analysis was also combined with themes from the 242 PRG survey responses
- Focus: Progress, what is working and where challenges remain
- Remember: A whole system approach



Improvement is increasingly visible

- Schools reporting improved SLCN support rose from **55% to 72%** = a clear positive shift.
- However, some schools continue to experience no improvement or worse access.

% OF SCHOOLS RATING IMPROVEMENT TO SLCN SUPPORT

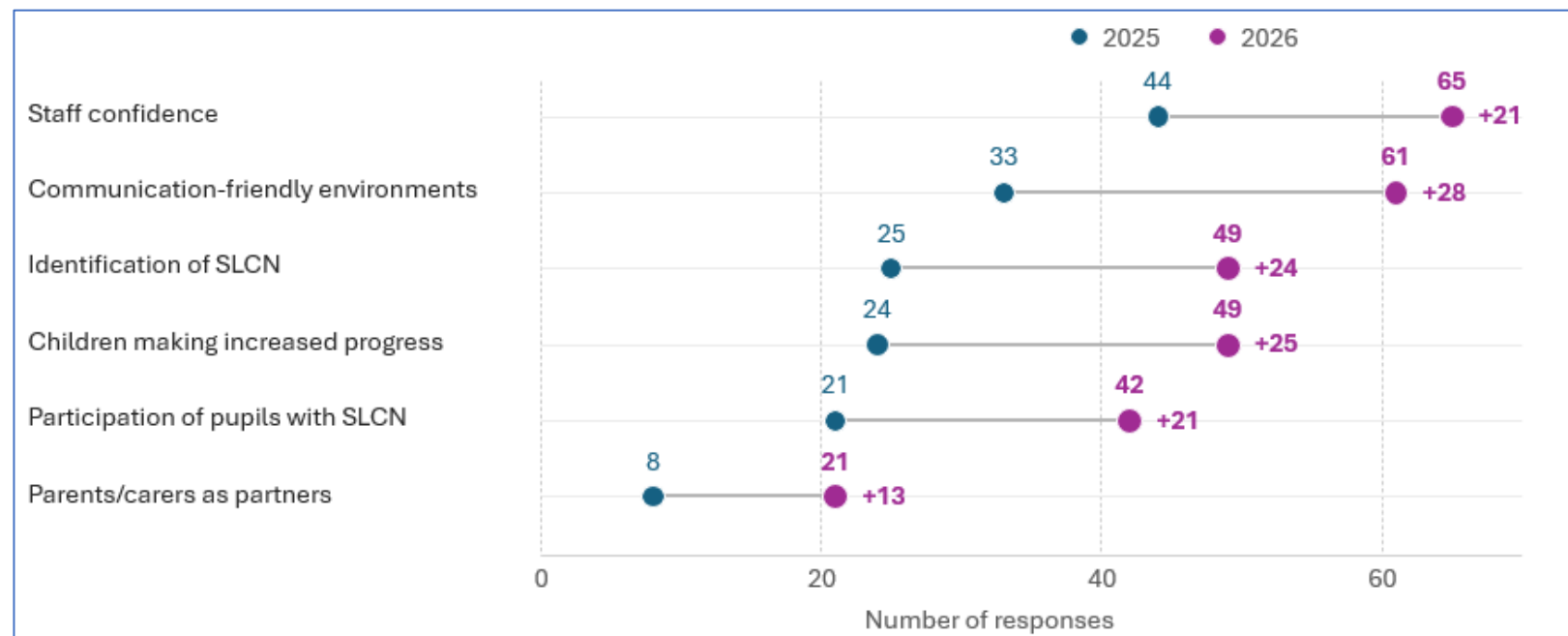


The approach is becoming more embedded

“Too early to see impact” responses fell from **45 to 18**, alongside increases across every reported impact measure.

- Increased activity across identification, intervention, environment and workforce development.
- Staff confidence: **44 → 65 responses**.
- Communication-friendly environments: **33 → 61**.
- Identification of SLCN: **25 → 49**.
- Children making increased progress: **24 → 49**.
- Children making increased progress: **24 → 49**.
- Participation of pupils with SLCN: **21 → 42**.
- Parents/carers as partners: **8 → 21**.

Upskilling more TAs to run SALT intervention has ensured that we are able to reach more pupils with targeted intervention.



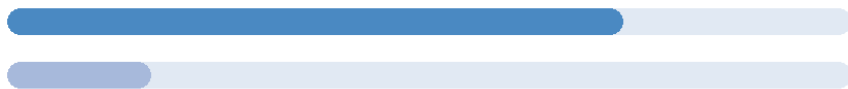
Regular link therapist contact makes a difference

- Schools with positive experiences of the Balanced System were around **three times more likely** to have had three or more meetings: **73% versus 17%**.
- Around **four in five** schools positively rated their link therapist in relation to collaboration, understanding of context, follow-through and meaningful improvement.
- Key message: consistency and relationships matter.

They don't always just answer the question but train me in how to develop my skills.

HAD THREE OR MORE MEETINGS

73% vs **17%**
positive experience comparison group



POSITIVE LINK THERAPIST RATINGS

≈ **4 in 5**



collaboration • context • follow-through • improvement

What is link therapist support enabling schools to do

- Strengthen universal whole-school approaches — **69 responses**.
- Build staff confidence and shared language — **60**.
- Clarify SLCN priorities — **55**.
- Improve identification process — **43**.
- Schools describe reaching more by upskilling staff and embedding strategies.

This has enabled us to identify speech, language and communication needs much more quickly and put appropriate support in place

What working with a Link Therapist helps schools to do

115 schools answered • multiple responses allowed



What still needs work

- The strongest criticism is **access and capacity**, rather than the quality of therapists.
- Schools continue to express concern about whether children with the most complex needs can access sufficient specialist input, assessment and ongoing support.
- Experiences remain inconsistent between areas; broad-area positive responses ranged from **60% to 94%**.
- Schools and parents need a clearer explanation of the Balanced System®.
- Early Years transition and information-sharing remain concerns (issue not specific to SLCN)

Key updates...

- Balanced System® Free Tools demo session for any schools who have not yet accessed these: **Wednesday 30th September 1.30 to 2.30pm**
 - NB: Not for schools who have a Balanced System® Scheme for Schools account
 - **Microsoft Teams meeting**
 - **Join:** [LINK TO JOIN MEETING](#)
 - Meeting ID: 334 849 511 577 04; Passcode: vh3nd3C8
- Top tips to share with parents to help them support speech, language and communication at home [SLCN Social Media Toolkit – KELSI](#)
 - Contact slcn@kent.gov.uk if you would be happy to complete a pre- and post-survey to help us measure impact!

For Secondaries and Post 16



[Talk for Work - Speech and Language UK](#)

- 13 week group intervention for pupils with SLCN aged 14-18 helping them to be ready for the workplace and culminating in a workshop delivered to local employers
- One day training for practitioners (at least 2 per school, one leader/SENCo plus staff who may deliver the programme e.g. HLTA)
- Cost £250 just to cover your manuals/resources from Speech & Language UK – enabling schools to run the programme over and over again.
- Potential to offer training **Term 2 or 3** if enough interest.