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## Utilising WSS resources to strengthen inclusive practice in mainstream schools in an LA

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## Utilising WSS resources to strengthen inclusive practice in mainstream schools in an LA

Whole School SEND Resources, Peer Mentoring, Professional Development Groups and SEND Review Guides

### Introduction

The Local Authority (LA), the region's second largest, serves approximately 170,000 children. In 2022, SEN data showed that 29% of learners with EHCPs were attending mainstream settings – significantly below the national average of 39%. Therefore, the LA SEND team identified the need to ensure that leaders and staff in mainstream settings were confident and skilled to embed inclusive practices and cultures across the schools.

This case study shows how a WSS Regional SEND Lead (RSL) supported the local authority to embed the use of USS professional development materials across the school workforce to ensure effective provision for pupils with SEND was in place in mainstream settings across the county.

### Implementation

The LA had identified four areas for improvement and, through discussion with the WSS RSL, recognised the need for training across all roles within the school workforce. This would include raising awareness and understanding of their responsibilities towards pupils with SEND and developing inclusive practice to support these learners effectively.

#### Areas Identified for Actions:

- **The local area's relationships with education providers** – the LA were keen to establish a more productive and meaningful relationship with their schools. The LA hosted CPD sessions for all school leaders to attend and introduce the USS CPD offer. The LA also provided schools with a strategic framework for evaluation, using the WSS SEND Review Guide as a template.
- **Strengthen collaboration and sharing of best practice** – it was recognised that there were pockets of very effective practice in both mainstream and special schools in the LA. The LA introduced a model of Peer Review to share this expertise and provide school-to-school support. They seconded a number of "SEND Review Coordinators" whose role was to promote, and support SEND Reviews, coordinate the process to ensure that schools evaluate their own provision and participate in a peer review. The LA runs termly SENCO Hub meetings, where SENCOs are updated with up-to-date opportunities available through USS.

## Implementation (continued)

### Areas Identified for Actions:

- **Quality assurance systems** – the LA aimed to have a shared understanding amongst all stakeholders of what high quality SEND provision in schools looks like. To support this, the WSS RSL provided input at the CPD session for school leaders and attendance at WSS webinars was encouraged. The most popular webinars in the area were:
  - Is Ofsted a force for improving education for all learners with SEND? (2022)
  - Ensuring accurate identification of SEN in school and college settings. (2022)
  - Embracing Inclusion: Supporting learners with more complex needs in the mainstream classroom. (2024)
- **Prioritise SEND in school improvement** – it was recognised that embedding SEND within school improvement cycles was necessary to effect change in practice in schools. The increased focus on SEND provision in the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (2019) was used to emphasise the importance of building inclusive practice and outcomes for learners with SEND into school improvement activities. Schools were encouraged to join WSS professional development groups to access support from the WSS RSL in implementing SEND improvement projects in their settings.

All the schools in the local authority area, received invites to the online CPD sessions hosted by the LA, over 300 participants attended. All schools in the local authority area are involved in the SENCO Hub model although levels of engagement vary.

## Outcomes and Impact

The WSS SEND Review Guide has become the accepted tool for quality assuring provision in schools, staff use the qualitative statement descriptors and rag rate their provision against them. A shorter adapted version has been developed for schools to use on an annual basis when they have had a Peer Review, and the foci is upon the improvement points picked up at review stage.

- In 2019, the local authority had to prepare a Written Statement of Action following the CQC / Ofsted Inspection. When the LA was re-visited in, there was 'Significant progress made in 6/8 areas. The report commented that "The SEND training offer has been expanded. WSS training has been completed in 25 schools and a further 200 have accessed the virtual training at this stage. School leaders recognise the work of area leaders."
- Staff remain actively engaged in enhancing their knowledge and expertise. In September 2024, over 300 Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) attended the SENCO Hub, where Whole School SEND (WSS) provided an update on available resources and support. This event has significantly increased engagement with the Universal SEND Services Programme.
- Approximately 450 staff members within this local authority area are actively involved with WSS, representing the highest rise in participation rates across the region. In line with this, 70 staff members attended the responsive webinars, while 196 delegates participated in the online units and Specialist Spotlight sessions - an increase from 52 in June 2023.

## Outcomes and Impact (continue)

- Engagement in WSS professional development groups has also grown, and 102 attendees from the county took part, a substantial rise from 27 attendees in June 2023.
- Of the 489-state maintained primary and secondary schools inspected and rated Requires Improvement (RI) in 2023, 215 had SEND as an area for improvement – only 1 was in this county. This suggests that the training undertaken, has been successful in supporting improvements in SEND provision across mainstream schools in the LA area.

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## Key Learning

Launching this initiative with Headteachers has led to a greater distribution of the leadership of SEND beyond the SENCO, leading to a more inclusive culture across the schools. Headteachers have also been supportive in facilitating the secondment of their SENCOs to the SEND Review Co-Ordinator posts.

For impact to be maintained, there needs to be investment from all the stakeholders. Key messages need to be constantly reinforced and revisited as personnel change in schools so that lessons can be learned from previous practice.

<sup>3</sup> [Education inspection framework \(EIF\) – GOV.UK](#) 



More inclusive high-quality teaching



More inclusive ethos/culture in the setting