

# Central SEND Cluster Panel meeting – minutes

16.10.2025

Via TEAMS

## Meeting objectives

The panel convened to explore more responsive and collaborative approaches to supporting children with SEND. The current system, heavily reliant on ACPS and EHCP processes, was deemed too slow. The group agreed that the aim is to reduce EHCP reliance by identifying quicker, collective solutions and sharing professional expertise.

Funding available for the academic year includes:

- £210,000 revenue funding across 29 schools, one FE college, and one special school.
- £175,000 capital funding, with up to £15,000 per school for environmental adjustments (e.g. sensory spaces, lighting).

## Meeting progress

A school leader will act as Cluster Panel Chair to facilitate meetings. Decisions will be made via polling, with majority votes determining outcomes. Feedback from other areas and professionals will inform funding priorities and delivery models, with an emphasis on collective training and solution-focused approaches.

## Cluster values and ways of working

As part of the opening exercise, attendees were asked to share three words they wanted to bring into the meeting space. Common themes included Hope, Trust, and Honesty. These values were used to set the tone for the session, encouraging respectful engagement across diverse settings and roles.

The group agreed that the cluster should foster:

- A safe space for challenging conversations.
- A culture of professional challenge and constructive feedback.
- Recognition of the diversity of settings and the need for equitable participation.

A commitment to solution-focused collaboration, where schools and professionals work together to identify and implement practical support strategies.

## Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference for the Cluster Panel were co-produced by a group of SENCOS to ensure relevance and ownership across schools. While the document itself was not read aloud, it was acknowledged as a guiding framework for:

- Decision-making processes.
- Roles and responsibilities of panel members.
- Funding allocation principles.
- Expectations around attendance, confidentiality, and professional conduct.

The group agreed that the Terms of Reference would be revisited periodically to ensure they remain fit for purpose and reflect evolving needs.

## Finance update

The finance update confirmed that no cluster budget had been spent to date. Attendees were reminded of the importance of:

- Tracking agreed allocations and ensuring transparency in spending.
- Recording decisions accurately to support audit and reporting requirements.
- Aligning spending with strategic priorities, including early intervention, inclusion, and sustainability.

The panel discussed the need for a simple mechanism to monitor expenditure and outcomes, possibly through a shared spreadsheet or dashboard. It was agreed that finance updates would be a standing item at future meetings.

## Proposal discussions: group and cluster-wide proposals

### Case 1 – Smallthorne Primary School

Smallthorne presented a detailed case outlining increased demand in their early years provision. Staff are stretched despite appropriate ratios, and two children are currently on reduced timetables. The school has invested in professional development and training but is struggling to meet the intensity of need.

They requested £14,000 to:

- Recruit an additional staff member.
- Create sensory spaces.
- Purchase specialised equipment.
- Increase flexibility in staff deployment.

Discussion Points:

- K Amison highlighted the availability of SENIF funding, which could support the request without drawing from cluster funds.
- D Lindop explained that group SENIF applications are possible and more efficient than individual submissions.
- D Marson suggested exploring strategic support options, including specialist visits and transition planning.
- SLA representatives confirmed they could offer generic support visits for group settings.

**Decision: Majority voted no to the funding request. C Reed and D Marson will explore alternative packages and report back at the next meeting.**

### Case 2 – Forest Park

Forest Park described challenges in recruiting staff to support high-needs pupils. Communication interventions cost £40 per child per term, and staff need training to support pupils working outside their year group curriculum. They noted that while their school has some resources, others may struggle to afford intervention packs costing £500–£700.

Discussion Points:

- D Dyke offered to liaise with the MPFT team for training support.

- D Lindop suggested using Inclusive Learning Services for in-house modelling and training.
- R Rawlinson highlighted the availability of the SLCM team and speech and language specialists, which could be better utilised.

**Decision: Deferred. The Speech and Language team will present tiered support options and bespoke training at the next meeting.**

### Case 3 – EBSNA Horizons Partnership Proposal

The proposal was for a £15,000 two-year e-learning package focused on Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA). Developed by psychologists, the package includes:

- Unlimited access for school and LA staff.
- Video-based learning modules.
- Resources for planning and intervention.
- Coverage for both primary and secondary age groups.

Discussion Points:

- R Rawlinson shared positive feedback from PEGIS parent forum.
- The group discussed how the package could support pupils with mental health challenges and improve attendance.

**Decision: Undecided. The group agreed to revisit the proposal next meeting after confirming school interest and budget implications.**

## Individual case discussions (solution circles)

P Beeson introduced “solution circles” as a method to help schools move forward with complex cases. One example involved a reception child exhibiting violent behaviour, leading to class evacuations and a reduced timetable. The group discussed working with parents, identifying strengths, and aligning expectations across home and school.

## Capital funding discussions

### Case 4 – Hanley St Luke’s

Hanley St Luke’s presented a proposal to install a dedicated sensory room to support pupils with SEMH needs and autism. The school currently has some sensory and safe spaces, which have proven beneficial for pupils who are able to self-regulate. However, these spaces are not sufficient for children who require more intensive adult support and structured sensory input.

The proposed sensory room would provide a calm, low-stimulation environment tailored to individual regulation needs. It would be used to support de-escalation, emotional regulation, and sensory processing, particularly for pupils who struggle in mainstream classroom settings.

The school emphasised that the space would be designed to complement existing provision and would be accessible to a wider group of pupils with complex needs. The funding requested would contribute to equipment, environmental adaptations, and installation costs.

Decision: **The panel agreed that the proposal had merit and should proceed to internal council review for formal approval. It was agreed to allocate up to £10,000, subject to the school providing a detailed feasibility study to support the grant agreement process.**

### Case 5 – Etruscan Primary School

Etruscan Primary submitted a request for capital funding to improve provision for a group of highly dysregulated pupils. The school described significant challenges, including incidents of biting, hitting, and room destruction. These behaviours are linked to SEMH and communication needs, and the pupils are currently taught in a mobile classroom with no access to an outdoor area.

Eight pupils are currently placed in a low-stimulus environment with a high staffing ratio. The school is seeking funding to purchase appropriate equipment and create a safe outdoor space to support regulation and engagement.

The panel acknowledged the severity of the needs and the limitations of the current environment. However, concerns were raised about the scope of the request and whether the proposed solution would be sufficient or sustainable.

Decision:

**The proposal was not approved at this stage. D Marson (LA) committed to visiting the school to assess the wider SEND provision and explore alternative or complementary solutions that may better meet the needs of the pupils and align with cluster priorities.**

### Future meeting schedule

The next meeting is scheduled for 11th December 2025, ideally face-to-face. Hazel Trees was suggested as a venue, pending availability.

### Close

KP thanked all attendees for their time and closed the meeting.