



# NASS

National Association  
of Special Schools

# Belong here

## Our 2024 Impact Report



✓ Be informed    ✓ Be recognised    ✓ Be represented

Belong at [nassschools.org.uk](https://nassschools.org.uk)





Gretton School won the 2024 Outstanding Impact Award for its work to embed a Relational Practice approach to reduce or eradicate physical intervention, demonstrating commitment to the Restraint Reduction Network.

This approach supports emotional regulation for autistic children and, as the school roll doubled, physical interventions more than halved. By focusing on understanding and support rather than fixing and changing, Gretton replaced its traditional behaviour policy with one centred on positive relationships, reflection, restoration and aspiration. Gretton evidences that this innovative approach has been life-changing for learners, families and staff, redirecting students from exclusion and criminality to positive futures, with achievements including GCSEs and university offers.

**Read more:** [www.nasschools.org.uk/news](http://www.nasschools.org.uk/news)

Our vision is for all non local authority special schools to be centres of excellence, delivering and evidencing the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

# Welcome

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**It has been another busy year for the NASS Team. We have campaigned our way through a General Election, held our first ever one day online conference and spent the final quarter of the year supporting schools to prepare for VAT registration. At the start of the year, only one of those three things was planned for!**

It's the nature of our work that we have to react quickly to external changes that impact on our schools and respond in ways that inform, shape practice and support. We take pride in doing this well and in making a difference to special schools. It has been particularly pleasing to see our membership grow so much this year and to know that we are representing such a large proportion of special schools outside of local authority control.



## Did you know?

In 2024, our special school community **grew by 18%**.

We proudly **welcomed 69 new member schools** this year, further strengthening our collective voice and impact within the sector.

This year, we have loved making opportunities to celebrate the work of our schools, through our conferences, the NASS Awards and new developments such as our regular blogs. In particular, our annual conference in Leeds felt like two days of celebrating our sector and its achievements. As a result, I think the event had one of the biggest senses of community that I have experienced in my time with NASS and I am looking forward to us building on this further for 2025.

2025 bring us our first Education Bill in many years, which will inevitably keep us on our toes. We also continue to wait with bated breath for the

Government's first policy pronouncements on Special Educational Needs and we anticipate ending the year with a clearer sense of the changes that they plan to make. We are, of course, braced to react by sharing all the latest information with you and then to respond by helping you plan for any upcoming changes with our tailored advice and guidance.

It's definitely going to be a year when there's going to be strength in numbers! We look forward to having you with us on our team.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Claire Dorer'.





## Rosie and Quality of Life: Next Steps + Beyond!

I continue to make positive progress every day

independence

I solve my own problems now!

and I ask for help when I need it.

Our 2024 NASS Conference took place in Leeds. It was one of our largest to date with **186 delegates** from NASS member schools joining us.

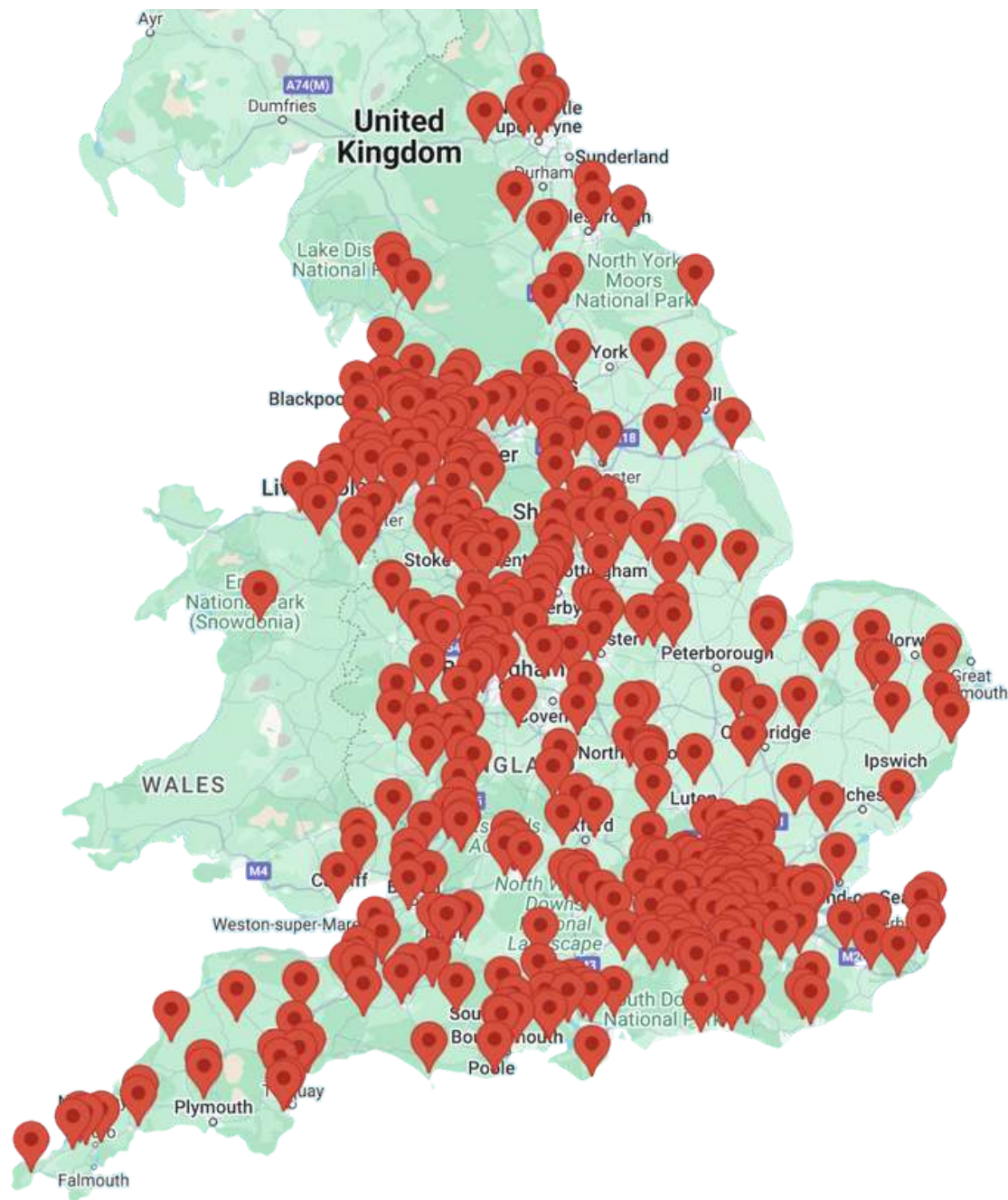
We kicked off the conference with Rosie's inspiring journey from student to staff member at Peterhouse School. Her story set an uplifting tone for the event, showcasing the transformative power of the right support in the right setting.

*It is, without doubt, the best conference of the year. I can't think of a single way it could be improved. It's relevant, informative, fun and collaborative.*  
**2024 conference delegate**

# A growing community of special schools

Our community includes **449 special schools and organisations\*** encompassing **non-maintained special schools, independent special schools, special academies** and **multi-academy trusts** with special schools.

*\*As of 31st December 2024*





# Belong here

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**Founded in 1998, NASS is a membership organisation representing special schools in England and Wales providing support, advice, information, events, training and a strong voice for non local authority maintained special schools.**

NASS helps to support and shape the provision of this vital special education, placing the choices of children, their families and carers at the heart of our education system.



NASS has **449** members across England and Wales.



NASS offers a diverse range of tailored training and learning opportunities designed specifically for special schools. We unite the NASS community through two annual conferences and host termly special interest groups to foster collaboration and shared expertise.



NASS provides its members with expert guidance and advocacy at both national and local levels. In addition, we deliver personalised, tailored advice to address the unique needs and challenges faced by each member, ensuring they receive the support necessary to thrive.



NASS promotes sharing of best practice between schools and leads on insightful campaigns and research initiatives.

## Our vision

For all non local authority special schools to be centres of excellence, delivering and evidencing the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

## Our mission

- We **inform and support** our members, enabling them to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- We **represent** our members, influencing policy and practice as the voice of non local authority special schools.
- We **research and share** approaches that deliver positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.



The 2024 Breaking Barriers NASS Award winner was Treloar School, who through their participation in Dance Live 2024 set new benchmarks for accessibility and inclusivity in performance spaces.

Their journey to the stage was anything but straightforward, requiring determination, creativity and collaboration to overcome significant accessibility challenges. The result was an inspiring performance that showcased the talent and resilience of their students, while also paving the way for lasting change.

Read more: [www.nasschools.org.uk/news](http://www.nasschools.org.uk/news)



# Informing you

**While 2024 brought big political changes, the special school sector continued to grapple with all too familiar challenges - financial pressures, local authority issues, workforce concerns, and ongoing delays and uncertainty around the Change Programme.**

**Through it all, NASS remained committed to informing, guiding and supporting our members every step of the way.**

A clear example of this came in the final months of 2024 when we swiftly responded to the introduction of VAT on independent and NMSS school fees, offering vital support to our members. Collaborating with NASS partner and law firm VWV, we delivered webinars and created valuable resources to help our member schools navigate the complexities of the change against a very tight timeframe.

We ramped up our information-sharing efforts, reaching both existing and new members through a variety of platforms. In addition to our fortnightly NASS News, we published over 20 blogs, guest articles, and interviews, as well as timely briefings to keep our community updated on key sector, government and Ofsted developments.

In 2024, we also expanded our training and webinar offerings to offer more events and a broader range of topics. These included joint sessions with Ofsted, discussions on AI in special education, critical safeguarding updates and

also practical guidance on contract law and fee setting. We were thrilled to see that this increased range of topics led to a record number of NASS members attending over 50 webinars, training events and leadership programmes.

In 2025, we aim to strengthen our role as a trusted source of information and support. As the special education landscape evolves, we remain committed to equipping our members with the knowledge, tools and confidence they need to tackle emerging challenges and seize new opportunities.



## Did you know?

Attendance at our termly Special Interest Group meetings nearly doubled in 2024 with close to **400 education professionals** attending. The meetings have proven to be an invaluable space for members to connect, exchange ideas, and discuss the specific issues affecting their roles.



# Recognising you

**Central to our mission is for special schools to be centres of excellence, delivering and evidencing the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND.**

**NASS takes immense pride in recognising, enabling and sharing excellence from across our membership.**

Our annual NASS Awards are a powerful reminder of the transformative impact our member schools have on the lives of their learners. To mark our 25th anniversary, we enhanced the awards with an independent judging panel, sponsorship and added a new 'Special Contribution' category. We received a record number of entries and

12 finalists across the four categories were celebrated at our NASS Conference in Leeds. Their achievements continue to be showcased through regular features on our online platforms, inspiring a wider audience.

We continued our investment in building a strong network of high-quality NASS School Improvement Partner (SIPs) to support our member schools. Sponsored by NASS to take part in training with The Mulberry Bush, they are able to offer three days of SIP support without charge to a fellow NASS member. In addition, we worked with

trusted partners like Caboodle Education to deliver bespoke programmes tailored to the unique needs and challenges of special school leaders.

For 2024, we launched an exciting new initiative in partnership with SAILS and Glass House Lab aimed at tackling the key challenges of attrition, retention and recruitment in schools. The six-day course, which kicked off at the end of 2024, is designed to empower schools to identify and address the specific workforce gaps in their organisation.



**Aurora Hanley School**

**Gretton School**



**Jenny McConnell**

**Treloar School**

## **Congratulations to all the winners and shortlisted nominees in the 2024 NASS Awards**

Breaking Barriers winner: **Treloar School**  
Innovation winner: **Aurora Hanley School**  
Outstanding Impact winner: **Gretton School**  
Special Contribution: **Jenny McConnell, Principal, Dawn House**

# Representing you

**We're committed to ensuring our special school community is effectively represented and has a strong voice in the decisions that matter.**

**Recognised by the Department for Education and Ofsted as the key sector body, NASS strives to influence policy and drive change on behalf of our members.**

Ahead of the 2024 General Election, we launched a manifesto for special schools, urging the next government to take six urgent actions within their first 100 days to remove barriers and build a better SEND system. To amplify our message, we sent postcards highlighting our manifesto's key priorities to MPs.

Following the election, we engaged with new MPs,

starting with congratulatory postcards and progressing to detailed parliamentary briefings. These briefings, also shared widely with all MPs, reinforced our manifesto's priorities and outlined actionable ways MPs could support us. This has led to developing positive relationships with several MPs, resulting in meetings and written Parliamentary Questions on our behalf.

We also worked to shape policy and practice through ongoing dialogue with the Department for Education. We were invited to speak at two of the three ministerial roundtables we attended and were among 60 stakeholders

consulted for the National Audit Office's report on support for children and young people with SEN.

On behalf of NMSS members, we successfully influenced HM Treasury's VAT policy, which will allow schools to recover, on average, in the region of £100k a year.

NASS CEO Claire Dorer was invited by Ofsted to join its 'Early Years Regulation and Social Care' external reference group, offering recommendations and advice. These groups were established in response to feedback from Ofsted's Big Listen consultation.



## Did you know?

2024 was a bumper year for Government consultations, call for evidences, Committee inquiries and Ofsted consultations. On behalf of our membership, NASS submitted **13 responses** in England and Wales.





Preparing Cheesecake



Making bolognese



Aurora Hanley School's Children's Community Cooking Project, tackling food waste and food poverty, won the 2024 Innovation Award.

Based in an area of high deprivation, Aurora Hanley has been working towards making students more aware of sustainability and community issues. It developed an innovative project to collect waste food from local shops and supermarkets, transforming them into nutritious meals for those in the local community facing food poverty.

As of June 2024, the project had provided over 290 meals and not only fostered students' cooking skills but also their community engagement and real-life application of academic skills. Students participate in every stage, from designing the project logo to preparing meals, gaining independence and a meaningful sense of purpose through hands-on learning and positive community action.

Read more: [www.nasschools.org.uk/news](http://www.nasschools.org.uk/news)

# Championing our sector

In 2024, NASS worked hard to amplify the unique strengths, needs and voices of our members with key stakeholders



**3 ministerial roundtables with speaking slots, and 15 meetings with MPs** to represent NASS membership.



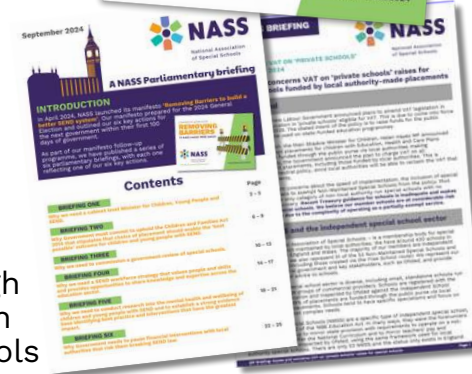
We corresponded with over **400 MPs** including **every new MP** elected to the new parliament and **every MP with a NASS member school in their constituency**, offering an opportunity to meet and discuss the key issues for our sector.



**11 consultations, calls for evidence and Committee inquiry responses** submitted on behalf of our membership including Gender Questioning Children (March), Ofsted's Big Listen (May), VAT on Private school fees (July), Curriculum and Assessment Review (November), the PAC inquiry on support for children and young people with special educational needs (November) and Education Committee inquiry into Children's Social Care (December). In addition, we submitted **2 consultation responses to the Welsh government**.

NASS developed impactful resources to raise awareness, address challenges and foster collaboration.

- **Working Stronger Together** - a thought piece exploring the current and possible relationship between the state and independent special schools
- **REMOVING BARRIERS** to build a better SEND system - a manifesto for special schools
- **NASS briefings** - a suite of briefings for all MPs following the General Election. Additionally, we represented our members' views through briefings on issues such as VAT on private schools





# Knowledge and connections

**1,591 members attended 50+ webinars, events, training and leadership programmes**



**23 editions of NASS News** sent fortnightly to **1,120+** staff in NASS membership.



**20+ blogs, guest blogs and interviews** published covering issues such as the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, Ofsted's Big Listen, new recycling legislation, employment law and school leadership wellbeing.



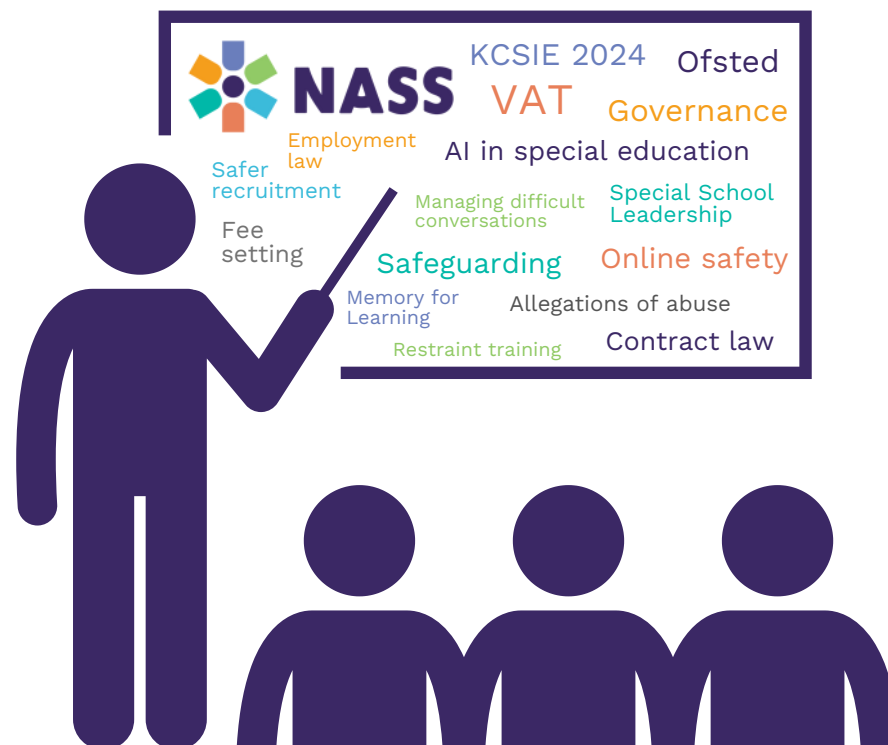
**13 NASS member briefings** covering issues including funding announcements, VAT guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 and Children's Social Care Reform.



**391 members** attended **17 Special Interest Group** meetings for Academies, HR, Finance, Heads of Care, Speech & Language Therapy, Teaching & Learning, and Heads, Principals & CEOs.



**18 leaders** supported through **2 NASS sponsored programmes**.



**812 members** attended **training and webinars** covering a broad range of topics.

**370 members** joined us for our inaugural **online conference** in July and **#NASSConf2024** in Leeds in October.

# Collaborations

**NASS works closely with leading organisations and maintains strong connections with Ofsted, central government and local authorities.**

Our focused expertise enables us to provide valuable insights, share information and influence opinions to shape the future of special education. In 2024, we collaborated with a wide range of organisations to advance our mission and support our community of special schools.





# New partnerships

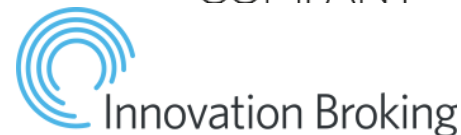
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**In 2024, we transformed our approach to collaborating with organisations to enhance support for our NASS members, their learners and the broader SEND community.**

NASS partners provide our members with exclusive, tailored or discounted access to a diverse range of products, services and solutions.

Over the past year, our partners have made significant contributions to our mission and to supporting our members. These efforts include creating expert resources on critical topics, offering practical guidance on complex issues such as VAT and delivering free webinars designed to enhance our members' knowledge and skills.

By the end of 2024, we had nine NASS partners. Looking ahead, we are excited to continue collaborating with our partners to deliver even greater value to our members. We remain committed to forging new partnerships with like-minded organisations that share our values and can provide innovative, practical, and impactful solutions to meet the evolving needs of our membership.



Part of **HOWDEN**

# Making a difference



## Did you know?

The NASS team responds to around **13 member queries daily**, providing tailored support and expert advice to meet their needs.

Through our 2024 membership survey, event and training feedback, this is what our members said:

### Our vision and impact of our work

- 98%** said we are achieving our vision.
- 100%** said that NASS has represented members well through our lobbying activity, close involvement with key government bodies and key SEND organisations.
- 100%** said that NASS has recognised our members well through the work we do and initiatives we have undertaken.
- 98%** said NASS has kept them either well or highly informed on issues, policies and changes affecting the special school sector.
- 93%** highly valued the expert guidance and support from the NASS team.

### Events and training

- 99%** rated #NASSConf2024 as excellent or good.
- 97%** rated NASS training events as excellent or good.
- 99%** rated our training event presenters as excellent or good.
- 93%** rated the quality, structure, networking and invited speakers at our Special Interest Groups as excellent or good.





# Member voices over the last year


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 NASS is always at the forefront of any areas of change that will affect schools, colleges or children's homes. **You are our eyes and ears!**

 As a school **we would be lost without the breadth of services support and guidance you issue.** We would pay the fee just for the seminar delivered on legal challenges related to school fees.

Brilliant conference - good range of speakers, **inspirational content and lots to take back to improve our offer for young people** - thank you Team NASS 

I totally trust NASS as they are highly informed people who give us such detailed information that **helps us run our schools with greater positivity and impact.** 


 I think the work you're doing is excellent and we are glad to be members. **Especially as a fairly new head teacher, I find the group membership comforting** and the more experienced members always very supportive.

 Many of us are small schools that do not have internal specialists or the capacity to see what DfE, Ofsted or local authorities are up to, NASS does! **NASS helps us with sharing this information and offering guidance on how to navigate through things.**

The course was **well designed, interesting and engaging.** It gave relevant realistic examples. 

NASS do a great job of supporting the SEND sector and **it means a lot to me and our organisation to be a NASS member.** 

The course has given me **skills to progress in my role,** I now feel more confident and guided in the work I do.



The Children's Trust School's Sensory Careers Project (SCP) was a finalist in the 2024 Innovation Award. It was established to provide realistic and meaningful career and work-related activities for learners with PMLD and complex medical needs.

By aligning with the Gatsby Benchmarks, the SCP reintegrated PMLD students into the community after long periods of shielding from COVID-19, offering sensory-rich experiences and challenging preconceptions about their workforce capabilities. Innovative methods like pop-up shop market research inform classroom activities where sensory products are crafted using accessible methods, leading to a sustainable income (£4,283.42 by June 2024). Monitored through EHCPs and ASDAN qualifications, the SCP enhances aspirations, prepares students for adulthood and celebrates their unique career paths focused on happiness and wellbeing.

Read more: [www.nasschools.org.uk/news](http://www.nasschools.org.uk/news)



# Our strategic aims

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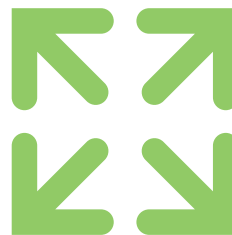
**Special schools are an important part of our education system and NASS is privileged to work with 449 member schools that provide specialist provision for thousands of children and young people with SEND.**

We remain committed to championing high-quality, specialist provision within a modern, inclusive education service that respects the choices of children, their families and carers.

The work we do is underpinned by our four strategic aims:



To position NASS and its members as powerhouses of sharing 'what works for children and young people with SEND' in light of the SEND Review.



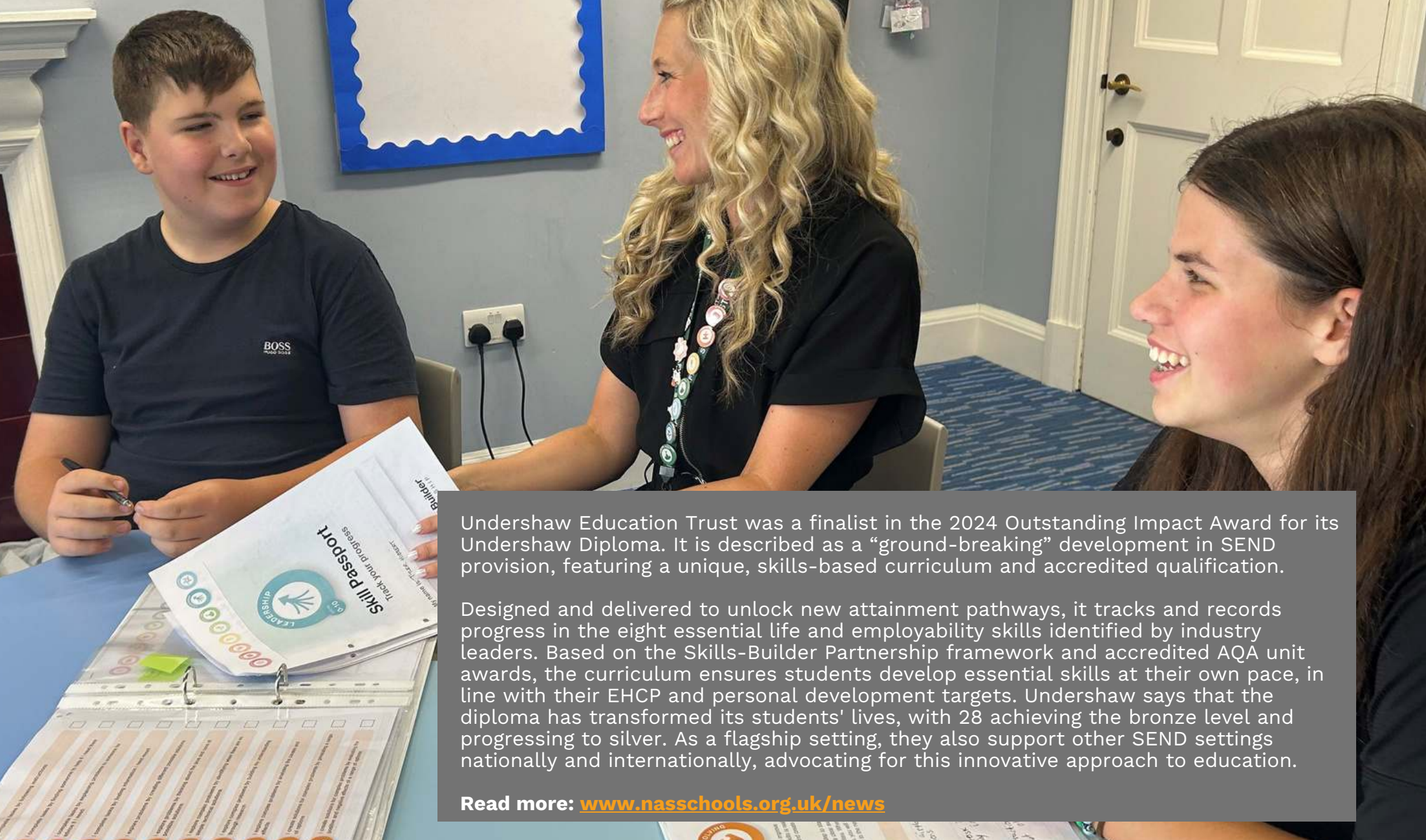
To grow and broaden our membership to include more academies and free schools, to increase our reach and influence.



To develop an evidence base of how member schools improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.



To demonstrate the value of the non local authority special sector through conducting research and running projects that strengthen and promote the sector.



Undershaw Education Trust was a finalist in the 2024 Outstanding Impact Award for its Undershaw Diploma. It is described as a “ground-breaking” development in SEND provision, featuring a unique, skills-based curriculum and accredited qualification.

Designed and delivered to unlock new attainment pathways, it tracks and records progress in the eight essential life and employability skills identified by industry leaders. Based on the Skills-Builder Partnership framework and accredited AQA unit awards, the curriculum ensures students develop essential skills at their own pace, in line with their EHCP and personal development targets. Undershaw says that the diploma has transformed its students' lives, with 28 achieving the bronze level and progressing to silver. As a flagship setting, they also support other SEND settings nationally and internationally, advocating for this innovative approach to education.

Read more: [www.nassschools.org.uk/news](http://www.nassschools.org.uk/news)

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