



NASS

National Association
of Special Schools

Belong here

Our 2025 Impact Report



Be informed

Be recognised

Be represented

Belong at nasschools.org.uk



Our vision is that every child and young person with SEND receives the education and support they need to achieve their best possible outcomes.

Children and young people with SEND are supported by a diverse range of specialised provision, in and from special schools, with the capacity and quality to meet their needs.

Our year: in focus

2025 felt like a busy year for the NASS team and it's good to have this validated through this collection of our work across the year!

'Uncertainty' was the key word of the year, with much hinted at and little tangible delivered on SEND reforms. There is a danger that continued uncertainty leads to paralysis with schools and organisations scared to try new things in case they don't fit within the new SEND system. Much of our work this year has involved encouraging our school members to continue and celebrate their existing work, using NASS to find as many ways as possible to promote the ongoing role of special schools with Government and other stakeholders. Whilst new legislation will likely impact on schools, it won't change that core purpose of offering expertise, support and hope to children, young people and their families.

Whilst we await the SEND reforms, there has been plenty to keep us busy with changes to employment law and the passage of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill through Parliament. It has been a good year for building NASS's links with Parliamentarians and for maximising our influence through our membership of wider lobbying groups.

It has also been a year where we have seen media interest in special schools rocket. We have seen much criticism aimed at independent special schools – generally without much grounding in evidence. I am pleased that we have been able to give counter arguments and, in some cases, changed journalists views about the sector.

A strong national voice for all special school

In 2025, our special school community **grew by 6% to 475 member schools and organisations.**

We proudly **welcomed 23 new member schools** in 2025, further strengthening our collective voice and impact within the sector.

The team is looking forward to working with you in 2026 as NASS further establishes itself as the voice of special schools. This looks like being a year where a strong collective voice for the sector will be particularly important and we look forward to hearing from you and representing you.

claire dorer

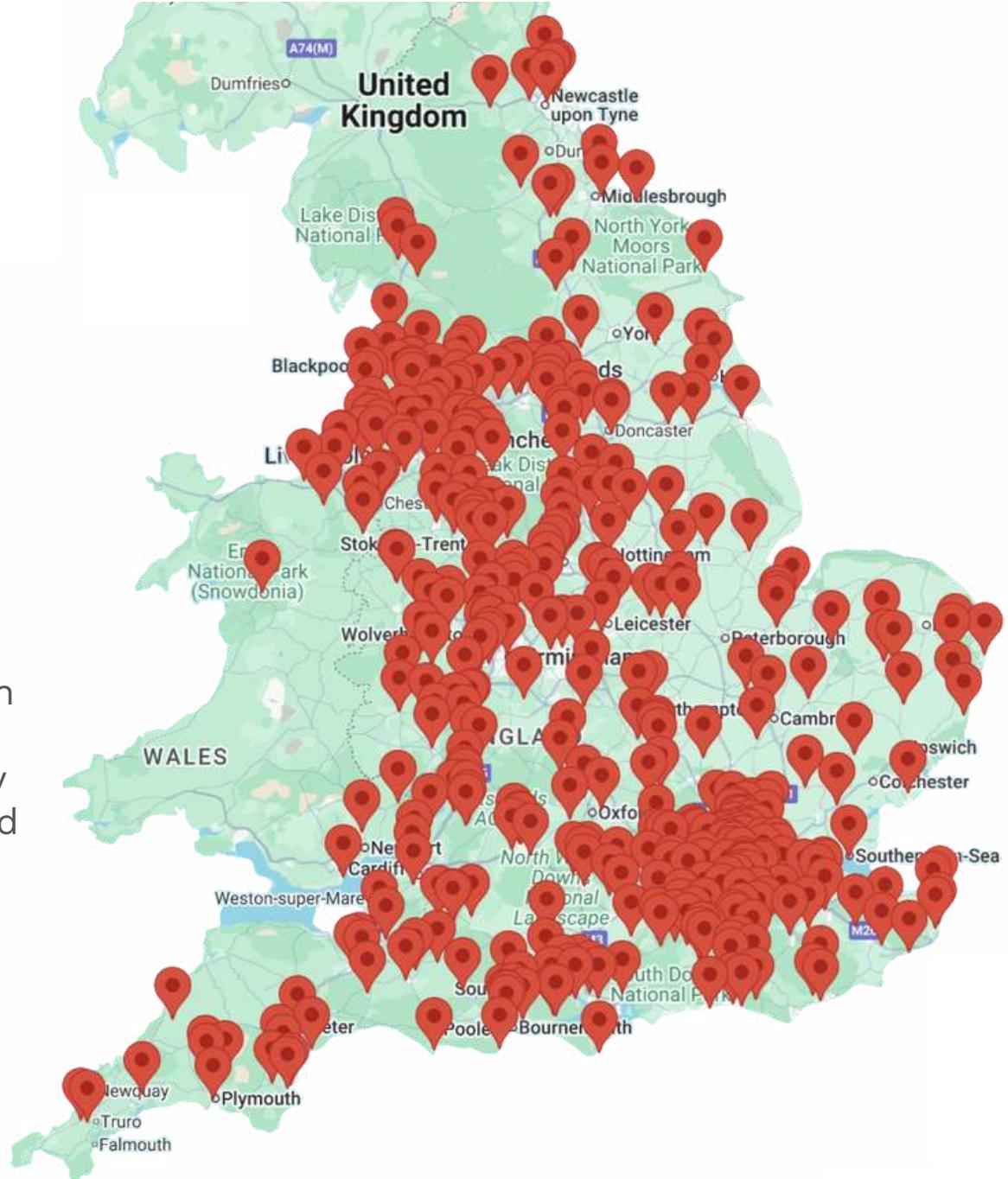
**Clare
Dorer OBE**
CEO, NASS



A growing community of **475*** special schools and organisations

We welcome every type of special school in our membership – independent special schools, special academies, multi-academy trusts with special schools, Non-Maintained Special Schools and maintained special schools.

We provide support, advice, information, events, training and a strong national voice for our members.



*As of 31st December 2025



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Describing the experience as transformative isn't an overstatement.

The course encouraged deep reflection and strategic thinking, helping me reframe workforce development as a strategic lever for school improvement... [it's] helped us move beyond surface-level fixes to address the root causes of workforce challenges.

Nicky McGarry, Head of HR and Finance at Forest Bridge School

”

In 2025, NASS partnered with The Glass House Leadership Lab to help member schools tackle the pressing challenges of staff attrition, retention and recruitment. Four leaders from NASS member schools took part in a “transformative” five-day course designed to build practical skills and strategic insight.

Through hands-on tools, collaborative design sessions and insights from leading frameworks, participants explored strategies to recruit, build and retain high-performing teams. The course equipped special school leaders to align workforce planning with evolving educational needs, address systemic challenges and foster environments that retain talented staff. By the end of the programme, each participant had a clear, actionable roadmap to transform their workforce strategy for lasting impact.

Several participants shared their experiences and the results of the changes they implemented at NASS's annual conference in October 2025, demonstrating the real-world difference the programme has made within their schools, including savings of over £250,000 and attrition rates going from 36% to 2%. Building on this success, a second cohort launched in November 2025.

Delivering impact for special schools



Be informed

We offer expert advice to members on issues, policies and changes affecting the sector. Members receive regular newsletters, briefings and have access to events and training on topics vital to delivering excellent SEND provision. Our team is also available to provide individual guidance and support.

We unite the NASS community through our online platform, two annual conferences and termly special interest groups, fostering collaboration, shared expertise and peer learning.

Through our partnerships with organisations, members gain exclusive access to expertise on key issues as well as special rates on a wide range of products, services and solutions.

Be recognised

Central to our mission is helping special schools become centres of excellence, delivering and evidencing the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND. We recognise, enable and share excellence from across our membership, investing in initiatives that provide long-term value and supporting members' development through bespoke leadership programmes.

We also celebrate our members publicly, including showcasing their achievements on our website, social media and through the annual NASS Awards.

Be represented

We work hard to ensure our special school community receives proper representation. We are recognised by the Department for Education and Ofsted as the key sector body for special schools and seek to influence and push for change on behalf of our members. We respond to all key government consultations, ensuring that the views and concerns of our members are not only raised but also heard.

Our representation extends to all key working groups and forums, including the Special Educational Consortium and National SEND Reference Group.

Our vision & mission, evolved

In October 2025, our members voted to update our vision and mission to reflect the evolving needs of the schools we serve.

Since 1999, we have grown into a strong national voice for special academies, Non-Maintained, independent and now maintained special schools, deepening our role in shaping specialist education for children and young people with SEND. The refreshed vision and mission ensure NASS remains a future-ready, member-led organisation — inclusive, responsive and supporting all types of special schools.

Our new vision

Our vision is that every child and young person with SEND receives the education and support they need to achieve their best possible outcomes.

Children and young people with SEND are supported by a diverse range of specialised provision, in and from special schools, with the capacity and quality to meet their needs.

Our new 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 special schools.

We **research and share** approaches that deliver positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

We **create networks and communities** of schools that enable the growing and sharing of effective practices for schools.





The 2025 Breaking Barriers & Inclusion NASS Award winner was Wings School, Notts, for their innovative and inclusive approaches to incorporating physical activity and sport into the daily curriculum, making a significant impact on pupils and the wider community.

Their bespoke hybrid PE curriculum, shaped using the national curriculum of England and Wales, emphasises physical literacy and transferable life skills such as resilience, determination and understanding health and wellbeing. PE, school sport and physical activity are used as distinct but connected tools to support holistic development, focusing on participation at each pupil's own level and pace. Changes like introducing a relaxed sports style uniform have helped remove barriers and increase engagement. As a Youth Sport Trust Lead Inclusion School for Nottinghamshire, Wings supports inclusive practice across the county. Their work has been recognised through the Gold School Games Mark and the Outstanding Inclusive Practice award. The approach is having a clear impact, with the school reporting boosted pupil confidence, increased physical activity and new opportunities for leadership and wellbeing.

Read more and watch a video about this: www.nasschools.org.uk/news

Informing you

In 2025, special schools faced a barrage of consultations, reviews, inquiries and bills.

From the Curriculum and Assessment Review and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to the Employment Rights Act, Ofsted's new inspection framework and the Education Committee's inquiry into Solving the SEND Crisis - there was a lot to take in. Alongside this sat ongoing uncertainty around the Schools White Paper and the

Government's thinking on SEND. While no SEND reform plans materialised, occasional hints about what might be coming offered little clarity and, for many, increased anxiety.

Against this backdrop, our members looked to NASS as a trusted source of information. Throughout the year, we focused on sharing clear, practical and timely updates to help schools stay informed.

In our five termly Special Interest Groups, attended by



314 members, we had 40+ invited speakers talk on issues including assistive technology, procurement, VAT, crisis management and workforce development.

Over 20 briefings delivered the latest developments straight to members' inboxes, often on the same day announcements were made. We also expanded our programme of webinars and training sessions to reach more staff across member schools, covering topics including AI, SEND law, safeguarding, employment law and complaints.

At our conference in Bristol, we ran our largest ever programme of workshops.

These sessions drew on the experience and expertise of member schools alongside invited specialists, offering practical insights and ideas that leaders could take back into their settings.

Mindful of the pressures facing school staff, wellbeing remained an important focus. Over the year, we introduced menopause support meetings, held a retreat for special school leaders, and embedded wellbeing-focused elements, such as supervision, into our conference programme.

With SEND reforms expected in 2026, we will continue to inform our members as they navigate what lies ahead.

Fully briefed

In a year packed with consultations, reviews, announcements and upcoming reforms, NASS sent over **20 briefings** to our members. Key updates, such as Ofsted's new framework, the Spending Review and the Curriculum and Assessment Review, arrived in members' inboxes on the same day they were released.



Recognising you

In 2025, special schools across our membership continued to inspire through innovation, dedication and impact. NASS was proud to recognise and showcase the achievements of schools making a real difference for children and young people with SEND.

As ever, a highlight of our year was the annual NASS

Awards. We had more entries than ever before, with judges commenting on the breadth and high-quality of submissions. This year's shortlisted entries shine a light on everything that's special about our member schools and the people who make them exceptional.

The winners reflected a wide range of work, from creative ways of embedding physical activity and sport into the

daily curriculum, to a new outcome-measure tool assessing therapy impact on learners' quality of life, and an innovative, tailored careers programme. Our winners were celebrated at the NASS Conference in October 2025, with their achievements shared widely through our online platforms and SENDcast podcast sessions, hosted by NASS partner B Squared. All entries play a vital role in NASS's narrative as we promote the contribution and value of special schools with Government and other stakeholders.

2025 also saw two significant collaborations designed to support leadership capacity and innovation across

member schools. The Glass House Leadership Lab programme supported four member schools to tackle staff attrition, retention and recruitment through a transformative five-day course. Our NASS AI pilot programme supported 11 member schools on their AI journey, helping reduce administrative burden, enhance resources and improve data analysis. Insights from the pilot have been shared more widely through reports, workshops, and training sessions.

We also continued to support special school leaders through our leadership development programmes, in partnership with Caboodle.



Congratulations to all the winners and shortlisted nominees in the 2025 NASS Awards

Breaking Barriers & Inclusion winner: **Wings School Notts**

Innovation winner: **Northern Counties School**

Outstanding Impact winner: **William Henry Smith School and Sixth Form**

Special Contribution: **Kerry Taylor, Principal, Highgate Hill House School**

Representing you

Throughout 2025, we worked hard to ensure the unique strengths, priorities and views of our members were heard by the people who shape education policy and used to increase public understanding. Through targeted advocacy, media engagement, and collaboration across government and sector networks, we represented special schools and the vital work they do to make a measurable difference nationally.

Over the year, we responded to 13 consultations, calls for evidence, and committee

inquiries, such as the Local Government Pension Scheme, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, revised guidance on restrictive interventions, the Education Committee inquiry on Solving the SEND Crisis and the Law Commission's review of Disabled Children's Social Care. We actively participated in pre-White Paper engagement events, both in-person and online, ensuring that members' views were fed directly into discussions.

Our advocacy included ministerial roundtables and

meetings with MPs and officials, giving special schools a seat at the table on issues such as SEND reform, workforce pressures, funding sustainability and accountability. We presented at 11 conferences and sector roundtables, contributed to parliamentary roundtables, and were invited to give oral evidence to the Education Committee's inquiry into the SEND crisis and were the only witness to talk about SEND at the Covid Inquiry.

In the last year, there was a notable increase in the interest in special schools, which was, at times, critical. Alongside addressing misconceptions through MP and journalist briefings and

interviews, we also highlighted the achievements, innovation and vital work of our members, helping ensure their contributions were recognised nationally.

We remained actively involved in sector networks and advisory groups, including the Special Education Consortium, the Council for Disabled Children, the National SEND Reference Group, and multiple Ofsted consultative and reference groups. Meetings with DfE SEND advisors and other key stakeholders also ensured that members' expertise, concerns and achievements were represented thoughtfully and consistently in national discussions.



In the News

In 2025, the NASS team gave more interviews and journalist briefings than ever. We spoke regularly to national papers and platforms such as Bloomberg, BBC Radio 4, ITN, Schools Week, tes magazine, The i Paper, Special Needs Jungle, The Times, Observer, Telegraph and The House magazine.



Northern Counties School won the 2025 NASS Innovation Award for its new outcome measure tool to measure the impact of therapy on learners' quality of life and access to education.

It developed the groundbreaking tool to measure therapy outcomes for children with complex needs. Adapting the national Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMs), they created the Paediatric Learning Disability and Complex Needs MDT scale, designed for learners with profound disabilities, sensory needs, and communication challenges.

Therapy Outcome Measures is used across a range of services in NHS teams, special schools, local authorities and national charities and the tool captures real changes in wellbeing, independence and learning. Its accessible format supports families, guides therapy and informs commissioners. Now published in the TOMs manual, it is embedded across the school and gaining national recognition through conference presentations, training programmes, and professional publications.

Read more and watch a video: www.nasschools.org.uk/news

Championing our sector

Behind every meeting, briefing and presentation was a dedicated effort to amplify member voices, raise key challenges and showcase the vital work of special schools nationwide



Proactive engagement with **ministers, MPs and peers** to champion our members' issues through briefings, correspondence, event invitations and roundtables.



13 consultations, calls for evidence and Committee inquiry responses submitted to champion the views of all types of special schools. NASS was also invited to represent special schools by giving oral evidence to the Covid Inquiry and Education Committee inquiry into Solving the SEND crisis.



17 media interviews and journalist briefings with outlets including Schools Week, The Times, The i Paper, TES, House magazine, BBC Radio 4, The Telegraph, ITN, Observer and Bloomberg.



11 speaking slots at conferences and roundtables including Ofsted Social Care Conference, National Children's Commissioning Conference and IGPP National SEND Conference.

We represented special schools through numerous SEND forums, national reference groups and regular meetings with key advisors from DfE and Ofsted. We also collaborated with a wide range of organisations to advance our mission and support our community of special schools.



Knowledge and connections

1,140+ members attended 48 webinars, events, training and leadership programmes



24 editions of NASS News sent fortnightly to **1,610+** staff in NASS membership.



22 blogs, guest blogs and interviews published covering issues such as leadership, AI and SEN, safeguarding, allergen guidance, workforce development, RSHE, investment, menopause and SEND reforms.



20 NASS member briefings on topics including KCSIE 2025, Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, Ofsted consultation and framework, Law Commission Disabled Children's Social Care, Education Select Committee's Solving the SEND crisis, Curriculum and Assessment Review, Spending Review, Core school budget grant and Post 16 education and skills white paper.



314 members attended **15 Special Interest Group** meetings for HR & Finance, Heads of Care, Speech & Language Therapy, Teaching & Learning, and Heads, Principals & CEOs.



30+ members supported through **4 NASS initiatives and sponsored programmes**



90+ participated in wellbeing sessions at our conference, through webinars and at a leadership retreat.



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



300+ members joined us for NASS Connect, our **online conference** in June and **#NASSConf2025** in Bristol in October.

Exploring the use of AI in special schools

In 2025, NASS launched a six-month AI pilot programme in collaboration with AI expert Darren Coxon. The programme supported 11 NASS member schools to explore how artificial intelligence could be used responsibly and practically within special school settings.

What schools explored

The pilot was shaped by early conversations with participating schools and focused on day-to-day challenges across three main areas:

- Administrative support
- Teaching and learning
- Data and insight

Schools were supported through training, practical resources, prompt libraries, draft policy templates and guidance on safe, age-appropriate and GDPR-compliant tools.

What was learned

The pilot showed that, when introduced thoughtfully, AI can help reduce administrative workload, support personalised learning and improve data-informed decision-making. Success depended less on the technology itself and more on the conditions around it: strong leadership, realistic expectations, protected time to learn and clear governance frameworks. Schools that adopted AI gradually, with space for discussion and ethical reflection, saw the greatest benefits.

Sharing the learning

Learning from the pilot has been shared across NASS member schools. The interim and final reports offered practical insights and helpful resources, and at NASS Conference 2025, one of the pilot schools led a workshop to talk about their experiences, challenges and successes. At the end of the year, NASS ran three training sessions for teachers, therapists and leaders, giving more staff the chance to benefit from the learning. Additional support and resources will continue in 2026.



The pilot showed that AI can reduce workload and improve personalisation in special schools when implemented with strong leadership, realistic expectations and clear governance.



The William Henry Smith School and Sixth Form won the 2025 Outstanding Impact Award, recognising the exceptional quality and innovation of its careers programme. It reflects a whole-school commitment to supporting every learner, regardless of need, to develop ambition, confidence and a meaningful future.

Designed for students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, the programme offers highly personalised guidance and real-world experiences. Fully embedded across the school, sixth form and residential provision, and aligned with all eight Gatsby Benchmarks, it enables learners to explore possibilities and progress towards positive destinations.

The impact is clear: in 2024, 100% of leavers secured a post-16 placement. Students access diverse opportunities including internal roles, external placements and employer encounters, supported by trauma-informed, sensory-aware practice and innovative systems. This award-winning programme is central to the school's ethos, transforming aspirations into achievable futures.

Read more and watch the video: www.nasschools.org.uk/news

Our NASS partners

At the end of 2025, NASS was proud to work with 18 partners from across a wide range of industries and sectors.

Our partners play a vital role in the NASS ecosystem. In addition to providing members with exclusive, tailored or discounted access to high-quality products, services and solutions, they make a meaningful contribution to advancing our mission.

Through event sponsorship, the delivery of expert resources, and the sharing of practical guidance on critical and often complex topics, our partners help equip members with the knowledge, confidence and tools they need. We are deeply grateful for their generous and ongoing support.

By the end of 2025, the number of partners we work with had doubled compared to the previous year. This growth reflects both the strength of the NASS network and the power of collaboration in supporting a diverse and evolving membership.

Looking ahead, we are excited to deepen these relationships and work alongside our partners to deliver even greater impact. We remain committed to building new partnerships with like-minded organisations that share our values and can offer innovative, practical and impactful solutions to meet the changing needs of our members.



Listening to our members



Connecting our community

Members told us they wanted a dedicated online space to connect with peers. In September 2025, we launched the NASS Community Platform creating a new way for our special school community to connect, support and learn from one another.

What members value most about NASS membership and the work we do

- 100%** highly valued the expert advice and support from the NASS team.
- 89%** said they greatly value being part of a supportive community.
- 98%** said NASS has kept them either well or highly informed on issues, policies and changes affecting the special school sector.
- 88%** said that NASS has recognised our members well through the work we do and initiatives we have undertaken.
- 95%** said that NASS has represented members well through our lobbying activity, close involvement with key government bodies and key SEND organisations.
- 86%** said we are achieving our vision.

Insights from our training and event feedback

- 92%** rated #NASSConf2025 as excellent or good.
- 99%** rated NASS training events as excellent or good.
- 99%** rated our training event presenters as excellent or good.
- 93%** rated the quality, structure, networking, discussions and speakers at our Special Interest Groups as excellent or good.

In their words



I am so delighted to be a member of NASS - genuinely. It is probably the first time in my professional career that I have felt **so fully represented and informed** by a group of like-minded and passionate people who believe in the improvements of provision for SEND children. Both as a professional and a parent, I cannot tell you how important your organisation is. Please don't stop doing what you're doing.

I think what NASS does for the sector is huge and I know how reassuring it is to me and my team that **the sector's voice is represented**.



Training was extremely helpful and purposeful. The trainer was extremely knowledgeable, and the **training is always thought provoking** and certainly is **relevant to our school setting**

We greatly value our membership of NASS and know it is a **broad church of views** which can only be enriching.



We are proud to be **NASS members** and the support that I personally received during Covid has changed my entire career path. I always recommend membership to new schools in our area

This was a **fantastic and relevant course** which was so beneficial. In addition, the presenter was brilliant and had just the **perfect skills to match all our needs**.



Since moving in to this sector I have seen the **vital role that NASS play**. From the NASS conference, to news updates, the Caboodle training course, and knowing they are keeping across details that affect this sector, I am **incredibly appreciative of the impact they have had on my career progression**.

NASS provides a high level of **valuable support to SEN schools**. Thank you all for your work in supporting schools and protecting our sector.



We left the conference feeling really positive and renewed. It was **fantastic hearing from such knowledgeable and inspiring speakers** and how other schools are navigating the current SEND landscape.





Swalcliffe Park School



Acorn Park School



West Kirby School and College



The Children's Trust School



Quorn Hall School



Tram House School

We're proud to champion and support the incredible work of our special school community, which educates and cares for tens of thousands of children and young people with SEND.

Every day, these schools make an extraordinary impact, driven by the passion, creativity and commitment of their staff.



Orchard Education

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