



National Association
of Special Schools

2026/7

NASS SENIOR LEADERSHIP COURSE & NETWORK

Closing date for applications: 5pm, Friday 22nd May 2026

Navigating strategic leadership in special schools

Providing ongoing training, educational updates and a professional support network

We are acutely aware of the pressures faced by senior leaders in special and alternative provision (AP) settings, and of how little support there is for their career development, ongoing work satisfaction and well-being.

Our course and network are designed to provide a mix of support, networking opportunities, leadership training, and up-to-date research information. There will be a strong emphasis on developing coaching skills and using these to support colleagues within the network.

Our course tutors already run several successful courses for special school and AP leaders. The success of these courses demonstrates a clear desire among senior leaders to engage in further professional learning and to connect with like-minded colleagues.



Who is it for?

- Headteachers
- Deputy headteachers
- Assistant headteachers

Participants should be working in special schools or alternative provision.

Course and network outcomes

Participants can expect to:

- Create **a network of special/AP school leaders**.
- Access a supportive, reflective **space to develop leadership and school provision** without distraction.
- Develop and use **coaching skills** to strengthen support within the network.
- Receive **specialist input on key current issues in leadership and the running of special/AP schools**. All sessions will include updates on the latest educational policy requirements, alongside the knowledge and skills required to keep educational and leadership practice current
- Gain **awareness of relevant educational and leadership research**, and explore how it can be applied to further develop schools.

Delivery method

The course will run two groups, each participating in:

- **3 face-to-face days** (one per main school term)
- **3 virtual meetings** (held between each face-to-face day)

Face-to-face days

The focus of these days will be on reflection, recharging, leadership and research learning, developing coaching skills and building a network.

We will create a safe space where leaders can talk openly and honestly about their work. At the end of each day you will be part of a triad coaching group, facilitated by an experienced School Improvement Partner. This will create a forum for personal/professional reflection and support.

There will be sessions on current leadership knowledge and recent developments in education policy and practice. Each day will also focus on relevant educational research findings.

Face-to-face venue

The course will be run at the Charney Manor, a stunning Oxfordshire manor house. On-site bed and breakfast accommodation is available for each night prior to the course day. This is not included in the cost of the course.



Face-to-face dates

Group 1

- 14th October 2026
- 10th February 2027
- 18th May 2027

Group 2

- 15th October 2026
- 11th February 2027
- 19th May 2027

Example timetable

9.30am	Check in session
9.50am	Training session 1
<i>10.45am</i>	<i>Break</i>
11.00am	Training session 2
11.45am	National updates
<i>12.00pm</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
12.45pm	Current research
1.30pm	Coaching session
<i>3.00pm</i>	<i>End of day</i>

Virtual meetings

- 3 virtual meetings per year (60–90 minutes each).
- Conducted in the same triads as the face-to-face days and led by the same facilitator.
- These will provide an ongoing opportunity for reflection, providing and receiving support, and joint problem solving.

Costs

NASS members
£1,300 (plus VAT)

Non NASS members
£1,450 (plus VAT)

How to apply

18 places are available for each group. These will be allocated in the order that applications are received.

For more details and an application form, please contact admin@nassschools.org.uk

Deadline for applications is 5pm, Friday 22nd May 2026

Deirdre Fitzpatrick



Deirdre has been a school improvement partner for over ten years and is currently a SIP for over 40 schools. She works with a vast range of schools including all through generic special schools, hospital schools, SEMH, PRUs and APs, residential and mainstream schools as well as schools in the maintained and independent sector. Deirdre also works to monitor schools for a number of organisations including Challenge Partners and Local Authorities. She has been a DfE expert advisor and has supported both free schools and schools in challenging circumstances. She has been a Director of Education, a National Leader in Education, Headteacher and overseer of three Outstanding Special Schools (one of which won TES School of the Year).

Andy Lole



Andy started his career as a mainstream primary school teacher. He has many years of leadership experience in special schools. As a headteacher, his school was judged outstanding by Ofsted. He had led many school to school improvement projects. He was a National Leader in Education, and a lead inspector for Ofsted. He has worked as a SIP since 2007, after being accredited by the National College of School Leadership. He has carried out monitoring and support work on behalf of several local authorities.

Dominic Salles



Dominic was an English teacher for 28 years in five mainstream secondary schools, spending nine years as a senior leader leading on teaching, learning and curriculum in three of those schools. His first four years were spent as a graduate tax inspector. He became obsessed with finding out how educational research can be scaled across a school, writing his first book, "The Slightly Awesome Teacher: where edu-research meets common sense" in 2016, and has since written three more books on education. As a consultant, he helps leaders apply research to improve student progress in a range of schools. He has written over a dozen guides for GCSE students and runs the UK's second largest YouTube channel devoted to English GCSE, with over 105,000 subscribers. 27% of his viewers report improving by at least three grades from their mocks.