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Service Leads

The national White Paper reinforces what we in Derbyshire have been championing for some time: that high standards and inclusion are “two sides of the same coin,” with belonging and engagement recognised as the foundations for strong academic outcomes.

Our Inclusion Framework and the work of the Inclusion Support Advisory Service (ISAS) already mirror this direction of travel, placing system-level leadership, clear responsibility, and a broad, inclusive curriculum at the heart of school improvement. As we continue to embed the Inclusion Framework through ongoing dialogue with schools and targeted, specialist support, we are exceptionally well-positioned, and genuinely excited to lead these national developments.

The White Paper validates the approach we have been refining, and it opens up an inspiring chapter for ISAS as we support schools to strengthen inclusive practice and demonstrate meaningful impact across Derbyshire.

Please let us know what you'd like to see in future newsletters and/ or join our mailing list using the QR code:



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Using consistent language across all classrooms and routines helps to:

- Reduce cognitive load – pupils don't need to interpret new phrases or instructions when working with a different adult.
- Increase clarity and confidence – pupils know exactly what is expected.
- Support pupils with communication or processing needs – familiar and consistent wording helps them access learning more easily.
- Promote a calm, joined up environment – consistent messages mean fewer misunderstandings.
- Improve understanding and independence which helps to create calmer transitions
- Strengthen routines and expectations.

What this looks like in practice

- Shared wording for instructions e.g. "First... then..." "Your turn, together, my turn."
- Using the same phrases school wide when prompting, praising, or redirecting.
- Simple, verbal and visual cues that help pupils move between tasks or spaces smoothly.

Vision Screening Reminder!

The Vision Impairment Team have been sharing information with regards to the importance of Vision Screening. Typically, Vision Screening was offered to 2–4-year-olds, but these are no longer being offered universally. Consequently, vision difficulties are not being picked up until later in a child's education, often when they have started to fall behind in class.

Please keep in mind that some pupils in school may have a potential vision difficulty that requires a check by a high street optician in the first instance.

Things to consider! Does a child:

- Have frequent headaches
- Squint to read something
- Trips, bumps and falls seem to be happening more than typical
- Unexpected behaviours, perhaps because they cannot read the board and do not know what is happening?
- Misread words
- Have difficulties with colour recognition



Please sign post families to a high street optician to check there are no vision concerns in the first instance.

Any queries please visit the Local offer Page or contact Claire Cotton Principal QTVI claire.cotton@derbyshire.gov.uk

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Forthcoming Events – Spring/ Summer Term

ISAS Webinars – *no need to book, access using the link on the Local Offer*

Supporting ND Adults – Wednesday 25th March – 3.45pm

ND and Hormones – Monday 27th April – 3.45pm

Managing Sensory Needs in the Classroom – Wednesday 13th May – 3.45pm

SENDCO Network - *online*

Summer term dates to be confirmed

SENDCO Development Days – County Hall *please see S4S for content and booking*

Tuesday 10th March, Wednesday 11th March, Thursday 12th March 10-2.30pm

SENDCO Support Programme - *please see S4S for content and booking*

Interventions – Communication and SEMH – Thursday 26th March – 9am-4pm

Attendance Network – *online*

Monday 23rd March 2-3pm or Wednesday 25th March – 3.45-4.45pm

Technology to Support Learning

Using Digital Templates to Support Working Memory

Working memory is the mental “holding space” pupils use to keep track of information while completing a task. When this space becomes overloaded, pupils can lose instructions, forget steps, or become disengaged. Simple digital tools can significantly reduce cognitive load and free pupils to focus on learning rather than remembering.

One helpful approach is providing **digital templates** that structure thinking. Sentence starters and writing frames can be added directly into Word, OneNote or Book Creator giving pupils a clear starting point and reducing the demand on working memory. Dual-coded templates—those that combine simple visuals with text—can make abstract concepts more concrete and support pupils who struggle with language processing.

IPad apps such as Notes and Reminders can be used to help pupils organise information consistently and reduce the effort needed to decide “what to do first.” These small adjustments benefit all learners, but they can be transformational for pupils with ADHD, dyslexia, language needs or anxiety. By building structured digital supports into everyday lessons, we make thinking easier—and learning more accessible for everyone.

Try the Hear Builder apps: Auditory Memory, Following Directions, Phonological Awareness, Sequencing – make sure you click **‘TAKE A TOUR’** on the app home screen for free access. More info via the QR code.



Did you know?... ISAS have created a series of app leaflets to support you in using iPads effectively for learning. Leaflets available for: English, Maths, Sensory and Fine Motor Skills. Ask your ISAT for more information.

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Engagement Team – Outdoor provision

Our team worked with a local infant school to deliver a targeted outdoor intervention to strengthen pupils' social and emotional skills. Over a term, we ran a programme for ten students to support the development of emotional regulation, resilience, communication and social interaction. Sessions included bushcraft, navigation, teamwork challenges and adventurous activities such as ziplining, indoor climbing and stream scrambling. The group started with complex dynamics with challenges in listening, following instructions and managing peer interactions. The initial target was to improve social and emotional skills enough to go off-site and access adventurous activities. There were notable improvements in attention and listening, following instructions and self-regulation and perseverance. Students successfully progressed to challenging off-site activities by the end of the programme.

Support staff commented on improved confidence, communication and trust for many of the students in the school setting, away from the outdoor activities. We trained teaching and support staff to embed approaches across school, providing guidance to help staff continue delivering the intervention internally. We also encouraged teachers to incorporate outdoor learning into everyday practice to embed practice and take advantage of the benefits of taking learning beyond the classroom.

Sustained Delivery and Long-term impact

School are now delivering the intervention independently with ongoing mentoring which will continue to support the SEMH needs of students which builds strong foundations for learning and social development. This foundation helps pupils engage confidently across school life and transition smoothly into junior school.

Wellbeing

Awareness days can be valuable points in the academic year to pause, reflect, and focus on important issues. They can help start meaningful conversations, bring people together and strengthen a sense of belonging across the school or college community. This calendar has been designed by The Mentally Healthy Schools team at Anna Freud to help you make the most of these opportunities throughout the academic year.

[Mental health and wellbeing calendar: spring term 2026: Mentally Healthy Schools](#)

Have you seen the WARMTH Framework? An interesting read that starts with Wellbeing first. The WARMTH Framework focuses on 6 key areas. Wellbeing first, Affirming practice, Relational approach, Mutual understanding, Timely Response and Holistic support. The framework was developed because of the consultation and involvement of over 1,500 stakeholders.

[Barriers to Education – Home](#)



Spring is in the air! It's widely acknowledged that getting outdoors even for a small amount of time can enrich our daily lives, and the lives of our children. Nature creates a calming environment for them, which enhances their learning experiences, sparks joy and arouses curiosity. Checkout the great resources at RHS Gardening.

[Wellbeing benefits of gardening for children / RHS Gardening](#)



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Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

DfE data shows that SLCN is the most common primary need among pupils with SEND, with 25.7% of pupils identified with SEND recorded as having SLCN. In practical terms this equates to at least two children in every class of 30 who may have difficulties with talking, understanding language, or communicating effectively. The Listening to Unheard Children report (Speech and Language UK, 2023) highlights that children who struggle with talking or understanding language are:

- Six times more likely to fall behind in English by age 11.
- Eleven times more likely to fall behind in maths by age 11.
- More likely to struggle with their mental health.
- Twice as likely to be unemployed in adulthood.

In Derbyshire, we have launched a Year of Communication, and many schools have already signed up to take part. As part of this programme, we are beginning training for over 60 Communication Leads in participating schools.

Everyone working with children and young people should be aware of potential indicators of SLCN which may include:

- Difficulty understanding spoken instructions.
- Limited vocabulary and/or limited range of conversation topics.
- Challenges forming sentences or expressing ideas clearly.
- Struggling to follow conversations or take turns in talk.
- Speech that is unclear or difficult to understand.
- Reduced confidence or avoidance of speaking situations.
- Communication breakdowns that may be misinterpreted as behavioural issues.

A useful resource which provides a clear comparison of typical speech, language and communication development from birth to 18 is

[Speech and Language UK - Ages and Stages](#)

EBSA

What is EBSA?

DCC understands the term EBSA to mean "Emotionally Based School Anxiety." It can be described as "children and young people experiencing difficulties in attending school due to emotional distress." This is a broad definition as every CYP experiencing EBSA shows this in different ways.

Key things to remember:

- EBSA is not a diagnosis. It refers to the behaviour we may see on the surface which has underlying factors.
- EBSA does not always = persistent/severe absence. Some CYP may be attending school but be incredibly anxious.
- Look out for early warning signs (separation anxiety/change in behaviour/emotional distress/reluctance etc) and be curious. **Think, could this be EBSA?** The earlier we spot it and intervene, the more chance we have of seeing a positive outcome.
- Build trusting relationships with CYP and their families. Get to know them.
- It's all about the little wins! EBSA seems like such a huge problem that we often think it needs a big solution. Small acts of understanding go a long way to making a difference.

DCC Removing Barriers to Education EBSA Toolkit

[Removing Barriers to Education | Derbyshire Services for Schools](#)

Speak to your ISAT if you would like to arrange EBSA training for your staff.

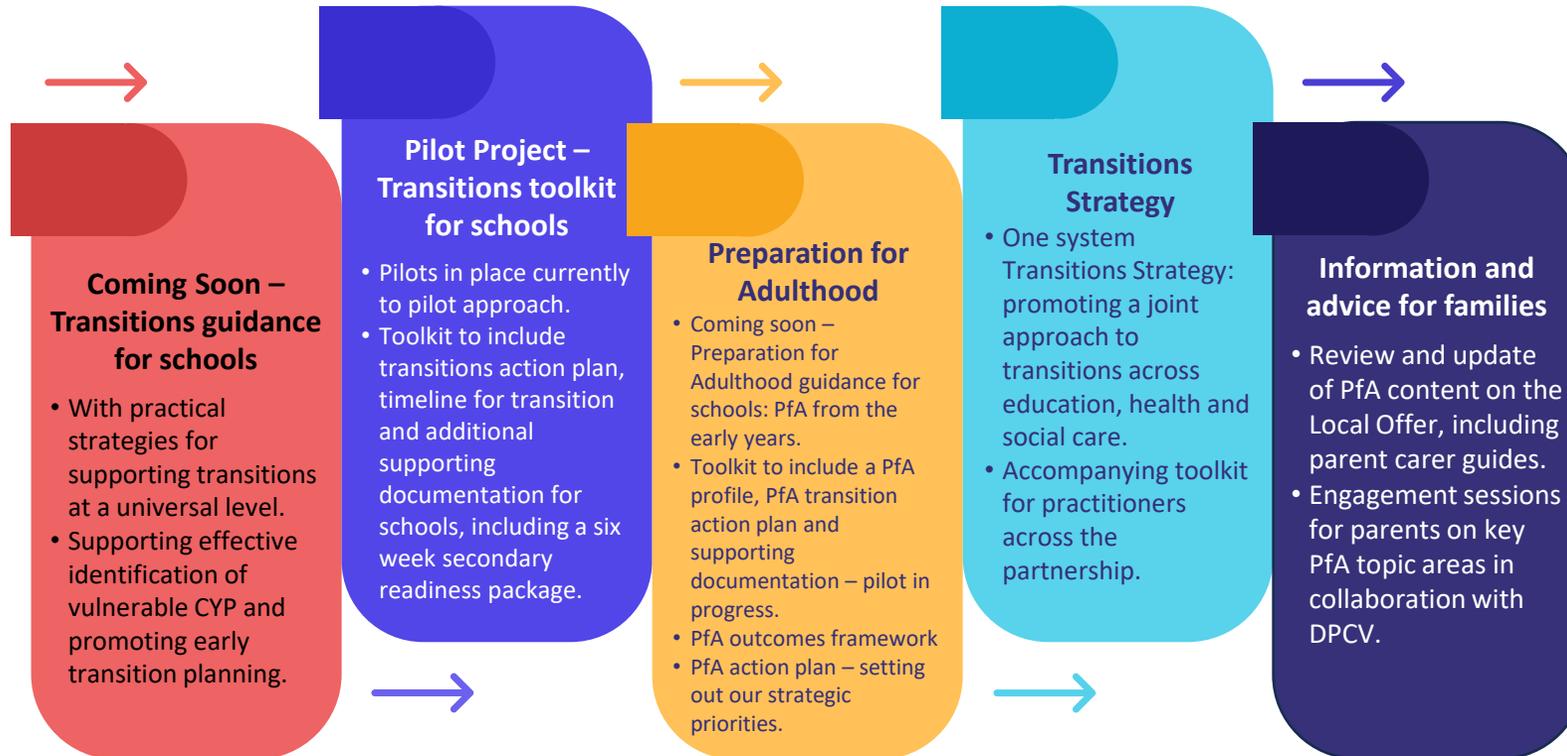


COMING SOON...Derbyshire's Approach to Transitions

We have created this visual guide so you can see all the things we are working on to support Transitions and effective Preparation for Adulthood.

Derbyshire's Approach to Transitions

Promoting a 'one system approach' to transitions across Derbyshire



Collaboration and co-production underpins our approach, and we want to hear from you - please join us at our upcoming session at the SENDCO Development Day on 12th March to learn more about the work we have been doing across the county, and to collaborate with us on the next stage of this project.

We also now offer Preparation for Adulthood training as part of our ISAS core training offer – please speak to your ISAT to book this training for your staff in school.

And don't forget to visit our Local Offer Preparing for Adulthood pages. [Preparing for adulthood - Derbyshire Local Offer](#)

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ND Advocates Relaunch

Since November 2023, over 80% of Derbyshire schools, organised into seven cohorts, have participated in our train-the-trainer model part of our free ND Advocates programme. Altogether, our ND Advocates have delivered either Making Sense of Autism, Making Sense of Neurodiversity or Good Autism Practice to over 10,000 participants in our schools.

Feedback has noted that, over the course of the project:

- Awareness of Neurodivergence has increased
- Identification of needs has improved
- Better understanding of ND-affirming approaches and strategies
- Improved understanding of appropriate ND provision.
- Improved use of ND-affirming language to describe strengths and needs.

We have also taken learning from our PINS – Partnership for the Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools project where we have worked with almost 150 schools across Derby City and Derbyshire to develop strategic approaches to ND inclusion in primary-aged settings.

Our ND webinars for school staff and parent carers continue to be well attended, and we can see your learning during our visits to schools.

We are aware that many of our original Autism Advocates have moved on to new adventures and we want to ensure that every school has access to the project as it continues to develop.

The relaunched offer will include:

- A new module each year for you to deliver in your setting. For 2026-7 we will be offering 'Developing an ND-Affirming Setting' which will support you to consider the seven principles of ND-affirming settings with your staff team.
- Support from your ISAT to develop your ND-affirming practices at a strategic level in your setting.
- Continued ND webinars across the academic year.
- Progression Framework advice and approaches running through all activities.
- Separate Secondary offer

Please watch out for information shared by your ISAT to sign up in the coming weeks.

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Inclusion Framework – Belonging

We're shining a spotlight on *Belonging* within the Inclusion Framework through highlighting simple activities and reflections that help strengthen *belonging* across school communities.

Welcoming Children and Families

Take a brief “walk in their shoes” around school, imagining the experience of a new pupil or parent.

Reflect: *What small changes would help families feel instantly welcome?*

Understanding Suspensions and Low Attendance

Use case studies to explore whether repeated behaviours signal unmet needs.

Reflect: *What might this behaviour be communicating, and what could we do earlier?*

Wider School Participation

Create a simple “participation heatmap” of clubs and groups to identify who isn't getting involved.

Reflect: *Who is missing, and how can we widen access?*

Support at Social Times

A quick 10-minute observation of break/lunch can highlight pupils who may feel isolated or overwhelmed.

Reflect: *Who might need extra support or structure to enjoy social times?*

Staff Wellbeing and Community

Invite colleagues to share small things that help them feel appreciated and supported.

Reflect: *How are we modelling the sense of belonging we want for pupils?*

Accessible Information for Families

Do a five-minute website check: are SEND details, contacts and support links easy to find?

Reflect: *Can a new parent find key information within two clicks?*


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Ofsted Experience (Primary and Secondary)

From 10 November 2025, under Ofsted's new inspection framework, inclusion is a standalone evaluation area on a school's inspection report card. This change puts greater focus on how well schools identify and support pupils who face barriers to learning and/or their wellbeing.

Under Ofsted's 2025 framework, inclusion will be assessed as its own evaluation area – no longer considered under 'personal development and wellbeing'. Each school will receive a separate grade for inclusion, based on the new 5-point scale:

-  Exceptional
-  Strong standard
-  Expected standard
-  Needs attention
-  Urgent improvement

Inspectors look at how well your school identifies and supports pupils who face barriers to learning and/or their wellbeing to promote equality of opportunity for all e.g. pupils with SEND, pupil premium or known/previously known to children's social care.

Key themes:

- How do you as a school know SEND pupils are making progress? How do you track this progress?
- How do you know training that has been delivered to staff is embedded in daily practice? What evidence do you have to show this?
- Pupils who are under social care or disadvantaged - how are their needs met?
- Interventions that are in place - who checks they are in place and tracked?
- Can you give an example of how clubs are catered for and selected for individuals? How do you know SEND pupils are accessing these?
- Describe work with wider agencies and where you get support when an extra support is needed.
- How is PP/SEND funding being spent in your school?
- How do you track destination data for children moving schools in year/end of key stage?


Top Tips
Look at the Inclusion Framework with your ISAT.

Case studies to evidence a range of groups.

Pre and post tracking data available.
