

Strategic SEND Leader programme

Advancing Neuroinclusive Practice

Funded through the Growth and Skills levy



Welcome to the Strategic SEND Leader programme

Transform SEND provision in your setting through strategic leadership, operational excellence and embedding a culture of continuous improvement.

Through this Improvement Leader apprenticeship, you will transform your SEND and Inclusion team from a reactive function to a strategic, proactive and evidence-driven team.

You will enhance your leadership skills, develop your team and harness advanced data analytics and Lean process optimisation to drive meaningful and sustained whole-school impact.

A key output of this programme is the planning and delivery of an Inclusion-focused improvement plan, directly tackling a challenge within your setting.

The Strategic SEND Leader programme has been endorsed and approved by The Institute of Leadership, offering you a 2 year membership to their professional body. As an Associate member, you will have access to additional learning and mentoring opportunities, digital credentials to share on social media and post-nominal letters after your name (AIoL).

At a glance:

 **Duration:** 15 months + 4 month End-Point-Assessment period

 **Study method:** Blended learning

 **Qualifications:** Level 6 Improvement Leader apprenticeship

 **Delivery:** Delivered by ESF Apprenticeships



Who we are

ESF Apprenticeships are an innovative Ofsted 'Outstanding' apprenticeship training provider, that creates opportunities and raises aspirations through apprenticeship pathways. Founded in 2011, we have deep roots within education and partner with schools, Multi-Academy Trusts and colleges to help build successful and effective teams.



SEND and Inclusion experts from our sister company Real Training have co-developed this programme with us, bringing together the very best of our collective expertise.



Programme content

Phase 1: Understanding and setting SEND vision: Strategic thinking and development

Phase 2: Preparing To Drive Improvement: Process understanding and Lean Application

Phase 3: Driving Change and Improvement: Project Management

Phase 4: Review and Evaluating Impact



Meet your Curriculum Lead

“ The true value of this course lies in its ability to bridge the gap between policy and practice. By leading a culture of improvement, we will equip leaders with the tools to build sustainable, high-impact SEND provision. This investment delivers immediate returns, not just in organisational efficiency, but, in creating a supportive environment where every family feels heard and every pupil is on a trajectory to achieve their full potential. ”

David Payne



Through this comprehensive programme, you will:

Transition from reactive management to strategic planning. Anticipate future trends, scan the horizon and drive sustainable change through robust planning



Plan, implement and review a high-impact, Inclusion-focused Improvement plan to addresses a real-life challenge within your setting



Develop strategic leadership competencies: Learn how to free-up time spent on administrative tasks using “Lean” principles and develop competencies such as benchmarking, understanding and using data to make decisions



Gain the knowledge and skills to lead a confident, high-performing SEND and Inclusion team. Develop your emotional intelligence, coaching and leadership skills to support staff wellbeing, manage difficult conversations sensitively, lead effectively and get the most out of your team



Gain practical experience of high-level strategy and improvement tools: Create a long-term vision for and optimise your SEND initiatives



Elevate your professional standing as a SEND Leader: Join a global community of 50,000 and solidify your experience with status as an Affiliate member of The Institute of Leadership



Your Strategic SEND Leader programme

Expert-led, person-centred leadership development

This programme is delivered by a team of experienced tutors, with backgrounds in senior leadership across the SEND and Inclusion landscape including, education, local authorities and national policy development. They offer a strong mix of strategic insight and practical understanding to drive inclusive practice and improve outcomes for young people with SEND.

How will I study?

The programme runs for 15 months during which you will participate in a variety of activities through our blended learning model:



Online learning

Study flexibly at a time and place that suits you



Online progress reviews

One review per term with your apprenticeship tutor and in-school mentor



Live online workshops

Mandatory workshops with SEND and Inclusion experts, plus follow-up discussions and opportunities to share good practice



Organise a visit to a high-performing setting

To observe and identify best practices



Deliver an improvement project

Identify a key challenge in your setting to tackle over the duration of the programme. From planning to implementation and review, this project will deliver whole-school positive impact



Self-directed project work

Apply new knowledge and skills through practical projects and research in your setting. Build a portfolio for immediate learning and impact



Leadership coaching

One-to-one leadership coaching sessions with your dedicated coach

The Learning Journey

PHASE 1

Understanding and setting SEND vision: Strategic thinking and development

- Understanding your setting and the SEND landscape.
- Horizon scanning and process optimisation.
- Strategic process and relational leadership in SEND.
- Predictive optimisation through data.

PHASE 2

Preparing to drive improvement: Process understanding and Lean application

- Root cause analysis of SEND gaps.
- Team leadership and dynamics in SEND.
- Applying Lean methodology to transform SEND leadership and operational efficiency
- School visit: Benchmarking excellence in practice.

PHASE 3

Driving change and improvement: Project management

- Implementing your SEND improvement project.
- Managing the improvement portfolio and risk.
- Team working and coaching others to embrace change.
- Strategic thinking for SEND Leaders: Mastering A3, critique and coaching

PHASE 4



Reviewing and evaluating impact

- Measuring impact.
- Stopping problems before they start and safety.
- The Improvement Leader: Embedding continuous improvement.

GATEWAY MEETING AND END POINT ASSESSMENT PERIOD

Dyslexia - The pupil may have difficulty with:


- > Colouring neatly and using scissors
- > Remembering sequences, for example the alphabet, days of the week and months of the year, as well as dates in History for example
- > Time, both in telling the time and knowing which part of the day it is. Following a timetable and being in the right place - didn't even know there was one!
- > Concentrating, remembering messages and following instructions

Attachment versus ASD




- The differences are subtle. Take time to observe with fresh eyes.
- ASD - more cognitive, more systematising behaviours
- Attachment disordered - more emotional, care seeking, seeking of social approval
- What works for both? Structure, routine, learning the child, teaching social and emotional skills
- See The Coventry Grid.



People with **dyslexia** are just as intelligent as we are. And we're fully aware that other people can read and write more easily than we can. So **we feel stupid** compared to other people. As Albert Einstein said:

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life thinking it's stupid."



A comment made by a child in Year 6,
"I'll be a nothing."

(Reay & Williams, 1999)

Exclusive invitations to SEND Masterclasses

Available to all ESF apprentices, our online masterclasses will develop knowledge and understanding of supporting children with SEND.

Our SEND Masterclasses are delivered by experts in their field, offering a unique blend of specialist knowledge, practical strategies, and real-world experience.

With a focus on current research and inclusive practices, these masterclasses offer invaluable professional development tailored to the evolving needs of the SEND community. They provide educational professionals with the tools and confidence to support all learners effectively.

Attendance of the SEND Masterclasses is optional, and recordings are made available to those unable to attend the live sessions.

Topics include:

- Autism Spectrum Conditions
- Behaviour and barriers to learning including mental health
- Challenges related to accessing Maths
- Communication needs
- Dyslexia & practical tips to support pupils
- Executive functioning and concentration difficulties (including ADHD)
- Speech and Language delay
- Supporting and understanding attachment disorder
- Trauma
- Understanding and supporting learners with sensory and visual needs



Learn about the experts who deliver our SEND Masterclasses

95%

of learners rate our SEND Masterclasses as 'Excellent' or 'Good'



Assessment

You will have termly progress reviews in which you'll celebrate your growth and successes and discuss challenges you have been facing. These will be scheduled with your mentor and apprenticeship tutor at a time that is convenient for you.

The final progress review is combined with a Gateway meeting. Once this is completed, you will enter your End-Point Assessment period. You will write a 4,000–4,500 word dissertation which relates to the initial key challenge you identified.

Throughout your time on the programme, you will also compile a portfolio of evidence demonstrating you have achieved the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by the apprenticeship standard. This portfolio is not assessed, but underpins the professional discussion you will have with your Assessor during the final assessment.

The results from these assessments are then combined to form your overall apprenticeship grade (fail, pass, merit or distinction).

Whilst nerves are always to be expected when being assessed, your apprenticeship tutor is on-hand to support you in the run up to the End-Point Assessment. We'll ensure that you have everything you need to approach it with confidence!



Off-the-job training

Off-the-job training is a key part of your development. This means dedicated time during your normal working hours to focus on learning and applying new skills related to your apprenticeship.

Think of it as your chance to dive deeper, expand your knowledge, and grow professionally.

All of the required learning during the programme (asynchronous learning, workshops, webinars, leadership coaching and progress reviews) count towards your Off-the-job time. It can however also include a variety of other activities, such as:

- Reading relevant articles or publications and staying up-to-date on education or leadership trends and developments
- Applying your knowledge to real-world projects, solidifying your leadership skills and confidence
- Networking with peers and education leader

- Spending time learning from colleagues and leaders across your setting
- Setting personal and career objectives and reflecting on progress
- Research and revision
- Coaching and mentoring with both your apprenticeship coaches and your in-school mentor

Essentially, any activity that helps you develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviours outlined in your apprenticeship standard counts as "off-the-job" training. This dedicated learning time is crucial for your success and will help you become a skilled and competent leader in your setting.





Eligibility

The Strategic SEND Leader programme is for ambitious SEND and Inclusion leaders who are looking to build their operational and leadership skills and knowledge within SEND.

You might be working as a SENCO, Head of Inclusion in a School or across a Trust, or be a member of the Senior Leadership Team looking to shape and drive SEND and Inclusion improvements.

- You must be employed at least 16 hours a week and spend at least 50% of your working hours in England
- Your employer must agree to appoint a workplace mentor to attend the termly progress reviews

Please note: This programme is open to participants in England only.

- You must have lived in England for the last three years and have the right to work in the the UK



How does the funding work?

The Strategic SEND Leader programme can be fully funded using the Growth and Skills Levy. In line with government apprenticeship funding bands, the cost of the full training package is £15,000.

- If your employer (school, nursery, MAT, or local authority) has a salary bill of over £3 million, they will be a levy-paying organisation, which means 100% of the cost of the programme can be funded from the employer's levy pot. Levy paying employers can access their funds through the central Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS).
- Local Authority schools contribute to a large levy, known as a shared levy pot. Funding can be accessed even if your school payroll is below the £3 million levy threshold and this can be requested via the Local Authority's Apprenticeship Levy Manager.
- Where a maintained school sits within a Local Authority levy arrangement, ESF Apprenticeships can work with the Local Authority to explore procurement processes.
- Non-levy paying employers (i.e. with a salary bill of under £3 million) are required to contribute 5% to the cost of the programme – this is £750. Where this is the case, ESF Apprenticeships can work with your employer to seek support from a levy transfer partner with the aim of alleviating the fees, however this cannot be guaranteed.

For further information about funding this programme (including frequently asked questions), please visit our dedicated webpage.



How to apply

1

[Click here to register](#)

Programme: Level 6 Strategic SEND Leader

Cohort: Choose your preferred start date

You'll then complete our registration form and will receive a confirmation email, a welcome email and your login details for ESF Learn, our online learning platform where you will continue your application.

2

Complete your Applicant registration form

Enter your personal details, contacts, tell us about your role and confirm your eligibility for the programme

Upload Photo ID

Share your reasons for choosing this programme and initial ideas for your Improvement project

Confirm the point of contact at your school (the person who will approve your application)

3

We'll contact your employer using the details you provide, to confirm their support for your application and funding arrangements

Our online dashboard will guide you through each step of the process.



Frequently asked questions

01. Can I complete an apprenticeship as a part-time member of staff?

You need to be employed for a minimum of 16 hours per week to undertake the apprenticeship and will need to attend all the synchronous training events as outlined in the calendar. It is likely that the duration of the apprenticeship will be extended so that you have longer to complete the evidence tasks and asynchronous learning.

02. How do I know if my school pays into the apprenticeship levy?

If your employer (school, nursery, MAT, or local authority) has a salary bill of over £3 million, they will be a levy-paying organisation, which means 100% of the cost of the programme can be funded from the employer's levy pot.

Non-levy paying employers (i.e. with a salary bill of under £3 million) are required to contribute 5% to the cost of the programme - this is £750. Where this is the case, we can work with your employer to seek support from a levy transfer partner with the aim of alleviating the fees, however this cannot be guaranteed.

03. What if my school is a local authority school and doesn't have a payroll of £3 million?

Local Authority schools contribute to a large levy, known as a shared levy pot. Funding can be accessed even if your school payroll is below the £3 million levy threshold and this can be requested via the Local Authority's Apprenticeship Levy Manager.

Most Local Authorities have a list of the apprenticeship providers they work with. If you let us know which local authority you fall under and we can check whether we are already on their list or work with your Local Authority to explore procurement processes.

04. What commitment do I need to make during my time at work in order to fulfil the requirements of the apprenticeship? Do I need to be 'off the job' 1 day per week?

Off-the-job training is dedicated time, during your normal working hours, in which you focus on learning and applying new skills related to your apprenticeship.

All of the required learning during the programme (asynchronous learning, workshops, webinars, leadership coaching and progress reviews) count towards your Off-the-job time.

Additional activities such as project work, shadowing colleagues, wider reading and research all count. Via our online platform, ESF Learn, we're able to sign-post a number of opportunities which count as Off-the-job. During your enrolment meeting we can discuss how this can work alongside a busy job role!

05. If I move school halfway through the apprenticeship, is it transferrable to my new employer?

Yes, it is possible to change schools and continue on the apprenticeship. You'll need to speak to your apprenticeship coach if this situation occurs so that we can ensure your new employer is suitable.

06. How can I apply for this programme?

Please see the 'How to Apply' page for a breakdown of the application steps. These will be completed online. You will be required to upload photo ID - you might like to look this out early on in the application process.



Contact us:

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