Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy

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1. Policy statement and scope

Apex Collaborative Trust believes that all children and young people (CYP) are entitled to an ambitious, high-quality education that enables them to achieve their best, become confident individuals and make successful transitions into adulthood. We will remove barriers to learning through evidence-informed practice, early identification, adaptive teaching and targeted interventions.

Our approach is encapsulated by our mission statement:

Creating opportunity. Inspiring excellence. Shaping tomorrow.

Building on our mission, we have an ambitious vision for our young people and for the Trust:

Through a child-centred approach and exceptional educational experiences we will inspire excellence from all, develop independence, build confidence and ensure readiness for tomorrow.

Our three core values underpin all trust decisions and policies and are at the heart of school life:
Ambition - we strive to always push the limits of possibility with staff and students. We encourage aspiration and innovation and have the courage to take risks to inspire positive change. We resist complacency, take all opportunities, see failure as a chance to learn and persevere when the going gets tough.

Collaboration - we know we are stronger together and always seek opportunities to collaborate to improve provision for our students. We work alongside all stakeholders in our communities to develop effective partnerships and enhance what we do.

Trust - we value everyone equally and show this by acting with respect and integrity and ensuring we are inclusive at all times. We have high standards in all areas and foster a culture of personal growth where everyone takes responsibility for their actions and is encouraged to engage in self-reflection. We do the right things in the right way for our stakeholders.

This policy sets out the Trust-wide framework and expectations. School-specific arrangements, including provision, interventions and local processes, are published separately through each school's SEN Information Report and reviewed annually.

2. Legal and regulatory framework

- Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3).
- SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (January 2015, current statutory guidance).
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 and 2024 Amendment Regulations (NPQ for SENCOs).
- Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.
- School Admissions Code (2021).
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) current version.
- Ofsted Education Inspection Framework and school inspection toolkits (from November 2025).

This policy should be read alongside Trust policies for:

- Safeguarding/Child Protection,
- Behaviour,
- Attendance,
- Accessibility,
- Data Protection,
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions,
- Suspensions and Exclusions,
- Physical Intervention and Complaints.

3. Definitions

SEN
A pupil has special educational needs (SEN) if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision. Disability has the meaning in the Equality Act 2010: a physical or mental impairment with a long-term and substantial adverse effect on normal day-to-day activities. Needs are considered across four broad areas: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health; and sensory and/or physical.

Inclusion
Inclusion at Apex Collaborative Trust means creating environments, cultures and practices in which all children and young people feel they belong, are valued and can participate fully in the life and curriculum of their school and beyond into adulthood.

Inclusion is underpinned by the belief that difference is expected and respected, and that barriers to learning, participation and wellbeing should be anticipated, identified and removed wherever possible through high-quality teaching, reasonable adjustments and targeted support.

Inclusion applies to all pupils, including (but not limited to) those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), disabilities under the Equality Act 2010, children looked after or previously looked after, pupils with English as an additional language, those with medical needs, and other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

At Apex Collaborative Trust, inclusion does not mean treating all pupils the same. It means equity of access, high expectations for all, and adaptive practice that enables every learner to achieve ambitious outcomes, develop independence and make successful transitions.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Trust Board
- Sets strategic direction and holds executive leaders to account for the quality and impact of SEND provision across the Trust.
- Approves this policy and receives termly assurance on SEND outcomes, statutory compliance and resource deployment.
- Ensures that inclusion and SEND are integral to Trust improvement planning and risk management.

Local School Committees (LSCs)
- Monitor school-level implementation, including SEN information reports and accessibility plans.

- Designate a ‘SEND Champion’ to provide effective oversight and challenge.
- Ensure that schools prepare appropriately for admissions, reasonable adjustments and accessibility.

Chief Executive Officer and Executive Team
- Ensure adequate resourcing and capacity for SEND leadership (including SENCO time).
- Oversee Trust-wide systems for identification, data, and quality assurance (QA).
- Ensure staff have access to high-quality professional development on SEND and adaptive teaching.

Headteachers
- Lead inclusive culture, ensure high-quality teaching for all and curriculum access for CYP with SEND.
- Publish and annually update the SEN information report (school level detail) and accessibility plan (school level detail).
- Ensure staff understand pupils’ needs and implement agreed support; report impact to the LSC.

SENCO
- The SENCO operates as a strategic leader, influencing teaching practice, curriculum access and professional development, rather than solely managing processes or documentation.
- Work with staff, families and external agencies; maintain accurate records.
- Analyse identification patterns and outcomes, advising SLT on improvement actions.
- Mandatory qualification: complete the National Professional Qualification (NPQ) for SENCOs within 3 years of appointment, unless exempt (see transitional arrangements).

Teachers and Support Staff
- All teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress, engagement and outcomes of pupils with SEND in their classes, regardless of the level of support provided or the involvement of additional adults.
- Implement adaptive teaching and reasonable adjustments; use assessment to refine support.
- Record and review plans and targets with the SENCO and parents/carers.

5. Identification of need and graduated approach (APDR)

- Assess – Identification of SEN is based on persistent barriers to learning despite high-quality, adaptive teaching, informed by assessment, professional judgement and discussion with families, early, accurate identification using classroom assessment, standardised tools where appropriate, and professional dialogue; consider the four broad areas and strengths. (See Appendix 1)
- Plan – co-produce SMART outcomes and support with CYP and parents; agree adaptations, interventions and review date; share with relevant staff.
- Do – class teacher remains responsible; deliver evidence-informed support; coordinate with support staff; SENCO provides guidance.
- Review – Progress is reviewed at least termly, focusing on impact against agreed outcomes rather than the presence of strategies or paperwork. Provision is adjusted, replaced or concluded where it is not demonstrably improving progress, participation or confidence. Where progress remains limited, consider specialist involvement or statutory assessment. (See also Section 8: Working with CYP and families)

6. Adaptive teaching and curriculum access (trust standards)

Inclusion is the default at Apex Collaborative Trust. The primary means of meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND is high-quality, adaptive teaching within the classroom, with targeted interventions used where necessary to secure impact. Where high-quality, adaptive teaching alone does not secure sufficient progress, targeted and time-limited interventions are implemented and reviewed for impact through APDR.

Adaptive teaching ensures equity of access without lowering ambition. Schools will work collaboratively to develop expectations and share adapted resources and effective practice. The following practices are Trust standards:

- Anticipate barriers and plan adaptations (e.g., chunked instructions, models, scaffolds, visual supports).
- Pre-teach vocabulary and key concepts; build retrieval and overlearning where memory/processing needs exist.
- Offer alternative ways of responding (oral, digital, structured writing) while maintaining the same learning goals.
- Minimise sensory barriers and support regulation through (as practicably as possible) predictable routines and calm transitions.

Primary phase examples (non-exhaustive)
At Apex Collaborative Trust, adaptive teaching in primary schools ensures equity of access and high expectations for all pupils, while maintaining shared learning intentions and ambitious outcomes from the Early Years through to Key Stage 2.

- **Early reading and phonics**
  Explicit teaching with *consistent routines*, additional modelling and repetition; use of visual prompts, sound mats and manipulatives; pre-teaching key sounds and vocabulary for pupils who require additional processing time.
- **Reading comprehension**
  Texts broken into manageable sections; adult or peer-supported reading; pre-teaching background knowledge and vocabulary; scaffolds such as story maps, sentence stems and guided questioning to support inference and recall.
- **Writing**
  Shared and modelled writing; clear success criteria and worked examples; chunked tasks with oral rehearsal; use of writing frames, word banks, alternative recording methods (e.g. dictation or technology) while working towards independent writing.
- **Mathematics**
  Concrete–pictorial–abstract (CPA) approaches; use of manipulatives and visual representations; step-by-step worked examples; overlearning and retrieval for number facts; opportunities to explain reasoning orally as well as in writing.
- **Foundation subjects (science, humanities, RE)**
  Vocabulary pre-teaching and visual glossaries; timelines, diagrams and graphic organisers; practical, hands-on learning with clear modelling; alternative ways to demonstrate understanding (e.g. presentations, labelled diagrams).
- **Speech, language and communication**
  Clear, concise instructions supported by visuals and gestures; reduced language load where appropriate; structured talk opportunities; repetition and checking for understanding.

- **Attention, regulation and sensory needs**
  Predictable routines; movement breaks; calm transitions; adaptations to seating, noise or lighting; use of visual timetables and now–next boards to support focus and self-regulation.
- **Assessment for learning**
  Frequent checks for understanding; responsive teaching in the moment; adaptations made based on pupils' responses without lowering expectations for learning outcomes.

These approaches are implemented by the class teacher as part of high-quality teaching for all pupils, with additional guidance and support from the SENCO where required

Secondary subject examples (non-exhaustive)
- English: vocabulary glossaries; guided questions; chunked texts; oral rehearsal for extended writing.
- Mathematics: worked/part-worked examples; step-by-step flowcharts; accessible representations; graphing tools.
- Science: scaffolded practicals with visual safety cues; visualiser modelling; alternative evidence formats (labelled diagrams/structured templates).
- Humanities: timelines, maps and graphic organisers; structured note-frames; choice of task format with identical learning outcomes.
- MFL: phonics rehearsal; vocabulary mats; sentence-building scaffolds; pronunciation practice.
- Practical subjects: adapted equipment and rules (PE); templates and jigs (DT); colour-coded notation or slowed tracks (Music); visual exemplars (Art).

7. Strong Foundations in Language, Reading, Writing and Mathematics

Strong outcomes for children and young people with SEND depend on secure foundations in **language, reading, writing and mathematics**. At Apex Collaborative Trust, securing strong foundations in language, reading, writing and mathematics is a core inclusive strategy, enabling pupils with SEND to access learning across the curriculum and reducing reliance on differentiation or intervention over time. For pupils whose primary needs relate to communication, sensory processing, regulation or social and emotional development, strong foundations also include explicit teaching of self-regulation, communication and independence skills alongside academic learning.

A strong focus on these areas supports access to the wider curriculum, promotes independence, and reduces the risk of pupils falling further behind over time.

Language and communication
Spoken language underpins learning, relationships and wellbeing. Across the Trust, schools prioritise:

- Language-rich classroom environments with clear modelling of vocabulary and sentence structures
- Explicit teaching and repetition of key vocabulary and concepts
- Structured opportunities for talk, discussion and oral rehearsal
- Adaptations to reduce language load where necessary, without lowering expectations

Identification of speech, language and communication needs is timely, and support is planned within classroom practice alongside targeted interventions where appropriate.

Reading
Reading is fundamental to inclusion, access and future life chances. Strong foundations in reading are secured through:

- High-quality, systematic phonics taught with fidelity in the early years and Key Stage 1
- Swift identification and support for pupils who do not make expected progress in reading
- Regular, well-structured opportunities to develop fluency, comprehension and vocabulary
- Appropriate adaptations to texts and tasks while maintaining ambitious learning intentions

Reading support is closely monitored, and pupils requiring additional practice or intervention receive it early and consistently.

Writing
Strong writing foundations enable pupils to express ideas, demonstrate understanding and participate fully in the curriculum. Trust expectations include:

- Explicit teaching of transcription skills (handwriting, spelling and sentence construction)
- Clear modelling of written language through shared and guided writing
- Structured scaffolds such as sentence stems, writing frames and worked examples
- Opportunities for oral rehearsal and alternative recording as stepping stones towards independent writing

Adaptations are used to remove barriers while maintaining shared learning goals and high expectations.

Mathematics
Secure mathematical understanding is critical for confidence, problem-solving and progression. Across Apex Collaborative Trust:

- Teaching emphasises conceptual understanding as well as procedural fluency
- Concrete–pictorial–abstract (CPA) approaches are used to support understanding
- Mathematical language and representations are explicitly taught and revisited
- Additional opportunities for overlearning, retrieval and practice are provided where needed

Pupils are supported to explain their thinking using appropriate representations, orally and in writing.

Consistency, monitoring and impact
Strong foundations are secured through consistency and careful monitoring. The Trust ensures that:

- Curriculum and teaching approaches are evidence-informed and aligned with core practice development
- Assessment is used to identify gaps early and inform responsive teaching
- Leaders monitor the impact of teaching and interventions on progress, engagement and confidence
- Support in foundational skills is reviewed regularly and adjusted where necessary

By prioritising language, reading, writing and mathematics, Apex Collaborative Trust strengthens inclusion, reduces barriers to learning and supports all pupils, including those with SEND, to achieve ambitious outcomes.

8. Working with CYP and families (co-production)

- Children, young people and parents/carers are partners in assessment, planning and review, contributing to outcome-setting and evaluation of impact; communicate using clear, jargon-free language. This includes respectful engagement where views differ and ensuring parental and pupil perspectives inform decisions even when they cannot be fully agreed.
- Provide at least three opportunities each year for parents of CYP on SEN support to discuss progress and plans.
- Establish parent/carer forums and pupil voice mechanisms; publish co-production routes in the SEN information report (or *Inclusion Strategy* from 1/1/2027).

9. Involving specialists and external partners

Schools in the Trust:

- Seek specialist advice when progress remains limited or where needs require specialist assessment/intervention.
- Work collaboratively with health, social care, specialist teachers, educational psychology and voluntary sector partners.
- Engage with the Local Authority (LA) on the Local Offer and joint arrangements.

10. Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment and plans

- Where a CYP's needs cannot reasonably be met from normally available resources, the school, with parents, may request a statutory EHC needs assessment from the LA.
- Parents/carers and all professionals should contribute timely, high-quality information to assessments and annual reviews; co-produce outcomes with CYP and families.
- Ensure that class teachers and support staff know the provisions and implement them; review impact at least termly and at annual review, or sooner if statutory guidance changes.

11. Children with specific circumstances

- Children Looked After/Previously Looked After (CLA/PLAC): prioritise close coordination between Designated Teacher, SENCO and Virtual School; priority access to pastoral/academic support.
- English as an Additional Language (EAL): we do not assume SEN; we assess in context of language acquisition; provide targeted language support.
- Medical conditions and disability: we follow DfE guidance; ensure equal access to curriculum, trips and PE through risk assessment and reasonable adjustments.
- Attendance issues and any alternative provision: we maintain safeguarding oversight; ensure academic work and support continue; review placements regularly.

12. Admissions and reasonable adjustments

- We will not refuse admission on the grounds of actual or perceived SEND and will comply with EHC plan naming of the school.

- Admission arrangements and oversubscription criteria are fair, clear and objective; no practices that disadvantage disabled pupils or those with SEN.
- Make reasonable adjustments and provide auxiliary aids/services to prevent substantial disadvantage for disabled pupils.

13. Transition between phases

- We recognise that transition points, including nursery to Reception, between key stages and between schools or settings, can pose additional challenges for children and young people with SEND.
- Transitions are planned proactively to ensure continuity of support, reduce anxiety and maintain positive outcomes. Schools work with pupils, parents/carers and relevant professionals to share key information about needs, strengths and successful strategies.
- For pupils on SEN support or with an EHC plan, transition planning forms part of the assess–plan–do–review cycle to ensure provision remains appropriate and inclusive as pupils move between phases.

14. Safeguarding and wellbeing

- CYP with SEND can face additional safeguarding risks including online; all staff follow KCSIE and the Trust Child Protection policy.
- DSL and SENCO work together to ensure early help and appropriate support; record-keeping is robust and transfer of files timely.
- Reasonable force/restraint follows Trust policy and statutory guidance; incidents reviewed with SENCO to reduce recurrence.

15. Assessment, data, and record keeping

- We track progress towards ambitious outcomes; analyse gaps and trends; devise and implement strategies to address areas for development.
- Schools maintain accurate SEN registers and provision maps; keep records secure in line with Data Protection policy. Systems for recording SEN support are designed to be purposeful, proportionate and focused on action, avoiding unnecessary duplication or excessive paperwork.
- On transition, relevant information is transferred promptly and securely to the next provider.

16. Funding and resources

- Schools deploy notional SEN funding and wider resources to meet needs ordinarily available, including staff training and targeted interventions.
- Where provision exceeds the nationally prescribed threshold, the responsible LA provides top-up funding through the EHC process.
- Trust and school leaders will monitor efficient, equitable deployment of resources and impact on outcomes.

17. Inspection readiness (Ofsted 2025 framework & toolkits)

- Inclusion (including SEND) is evaluated as a discrete area and is threaded through all other areas. Leaders will evidence early identification, adaptive teaching, and impact on belonging, behaviour, attendance and achievement.

- Schools will be prepared for case sampling and learning walks that focus on disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND and those known to social care. SENCOs will take part in inspection activities as required.
- We will use Ofsted's inspection toolkit for self-evaluation; documentation will be limited to what is used in normal business and statutory requirements.

18. Publication, Local Offer and transparency

- Each school publishes an annual SEN information report (Section 69, Children and Families Act) and its accessibility plan). From 1/1/2027 this will become the *Inclusion Strategy*.
- We contribute to the LA Local Offer and ensure information is accessible, up-to-date and jargon-free.
- This policy and the SEN information report will be reviewed annually and updated promptly when national guidance changes.

19. Complaints, disagreement resolution and tribunal

- Concerns should be raised with the class teacher, SENCO or Headteacher. If unresolved, follow the Trust Complaints Policy.
- Information about disagreement resolution services and SEND Tribunal routes will be provided to parents/carers where relevant.

20. Monitoring, governance and review

- Trust QA will include learning walks, work reviews, curriculum access reviews, data analysis and pupil/parent voice. Quality assurance activities explicitly evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' learning, participation and wellbeing, and findings inform professional development and improvement planning.
- The Trust Board and Local School Committees receive regular assurance reports on implementation of this policy and outcomes for pupils with SEND, providing appropriate challenge to ensure improvement priorities are addressed.
- Policy review: annually each spring term, or earlier if there are material changes in law or national guidance.

21. Preparing for SEND Reforms 2026

The SEND system is undergoing significant national reform, with changes expected from 2026 designed to improve consistency, inclusion, early intervention and confidence in mainstream provision. Apex Collaborative Trust is committed to proactive preparation so that children and young people with SEND, and their families, experience continuity, clarity and high-quality support throughout any period of system change. Preparation for reform does not replace current statutory duties, which remain fully in force until formally amended.

Strategic principles
In preparing for SEND reforms, the Trust will be guided by the following principles:

- Inclusion as the default – strengthening mainstream practice so that more needs are met effectively and early through high-quality, adaptive teaching.
- Early identification and intervention – reducing reliance on late or crisis-led statutory processes by improving assess–plan–do–review (APDR) practice.

- Consistency and transparency – ensuring coherent systems, language and expectations across all schools within the Trust.
- Co-production and trust – working in partnership with children and young people, parents/carers, local authorities and health partners.
- Evidence of impact – focusing on outcomes, participation, attendance and wellbeing, not only processes or plans.

Trust-wide preparation actions
To ensure readiness for national reforms, Apex Collaborative Trust will:

- Review and refine SEND and inclusion policies, guidance and practices to reflect emerging national direction and statutory updates.
- Strengthen adaptive teaching as universal provision, reducing variability in classroom practice and dependence on individualised paperwork.
- Ensure APDR cycles are robust, purposeful and outcome-focused, with clear entry and exit criteria for SEN support.
- Improve data quality and transparency, including patterns of identification, provision, exclusions, attendance and outcomes.
- Maintain strong SEND leadership capacity, including protected SENCO time, professional development and Trust-level quality assurance.
- Align Trust systems with any revised national SEND descriptors, banding or funding frameworks, where applicable.
- Ensure schools are prepared for changes to inspection, accountability or local authority processes linked to SEND reforms.

Workforce development
The Trust recognises that reform will require confident, skilled staff. We will therefore:

- Prioritise SEND and inclusive practice within professional development, including induction and early career support.
- Ensure all SENCOs meet statutory qualification requirements and have access to ongoing leadership development**.**
- Support teachers and support staff to understand their role in meeting SEND needs, reinforcing that all teachers are teachers of pupils with SEND.
- Develop shared Trust resources to support consistency in strategies, language and expectations.
- Trust-wide sharing of expertise, resources and effective practice

Working with children, families and partners
As reforms are implemented, the Trust will:

- Communicate changes clearly and accessibly to parents/carers and pupils, avoiding unnecessary jargon.
- Continue to embed pupil voice and parent/carer voice in planning, review and evaluation.
- Work collaboratively with local authorities, health services and other partners to support timely assessments, reviews and transitions.
- Monitor the impact of reforms on equity, inclusion and trust in the system, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils.

Monitoring and review
Preparation for SEND reforms will be overseen through Trust governance and quality assurance processes. The Trust will:

- Review progress regularly through Trust QA, APEX Together networks and leadership reporting.
- Respond promptly to statutory changes, updated guidance or local authority expectations.
- Update this policy and associated guidance to ensure continued compliance and best practice.

This policy is reviewed annually and updated earlier where statutory guidance, inspection frameworks or national SEND reforms require.

Appendix 1: Flowchart of identification and graduated approach

