



Case Study:

REAch2 Academy Trust





Background information

Trust: REAch2 Academy Trust

Head of SEND: Rachael Stevenson

About the trust: Founded in 2012, REAch2 Academy Trust is the largest primary-only academy trust in the country. It is made up of 62 academies across England, educating 21,804 pupils.

SEN pupils: 19%

Percentage of disadvantaged students: 39% of pupils are eligible for pupil premium.

Percentage of students speaking English as an additional language: 34%

Key stage 2: 62% of pupils achieved the expected standard in all three of reading, writing and maths.

All data is accurate at time of publication (July 2025).

Why is this important?

The mission at REAch2 Academy Trust is to provide the best possible education for its young people.

“We want every one of our schools to be a great school,” says Cathie Paine, REAch2 CEO. “Great schools need great teachers. And a great teacher has to be a great teacher of SEND.”

Looking at what strategies would make the biggest difference at scale, REAch2 leaders recognised that if they made the teaching of vulnerable children – including children with SEND – more effective, that would result in more effective teaching for all children.

The specific challenges to inclusion faced by REAch2 include:

Demographics: REAch2 educates high numbers of disadvantaged children. The proportion of children with SEND and who have an education health and care plan are in line with the national average.

Children with complex needs: The trust supports increasing numbers of children with significant and complex needs, who would have previously been educated in a specialist setting.

Lack of early information: Many children have not seen health visitors or attended a nursery. Not all early-years settings receive the professional advice needed to identify early concerns.

Understanding need early: Some pupils will not present with any apparent special needs, and will seem to be performing and managing well in class. However, there may be small problems – such as struggling to understand subtleties in language or facial cues – that if not addressed immediately could become a much greater problem later on.



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Cathie Paine, REAch2 CEO.





What challenges were you trying to address?

The trust believes that the needs of the vast majority of learners can be met in mainstream classrooms. Pupils with autism, ADHD or a learning gap of around two to four years are supported through adaptive teaching, with additional personalised adjustments.

REAch2 has therefore adopted adaptive teaching as a trust-wide pedagogical approach, introduced across the trust by the central maths lead, working in partnership with Rachael Stevenson, the Head of SEND. Together, they began by identifying the needs of REAch2 pupils and articulating what high expectations for those pupils would look like.

The approach is twofold: adaptive teaching to meet the vast majority of pupils' needs, and bespoke support for the handful of pupils who require more tailored assistance. To ensure that staff are able to provide this assistance where needed, they are offered half-hour bitesize training sessions.

"We understand why the phrase 'The system is broken' is being used," says Ms Paine. "And we 100% support the need for reform.

"But saying something is broken doesn't do any good for the children. We have to act within the system there is, until there's a new system. Our approach has come out of that."

What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

The approach:

Rolling out adaptive teaching across the trust meant providing staff with additional training, to ensure they all had the relevant skills. It also meant creating a culture where there was an expert in every school, allowing for horizontal improvement across the trust. This required a structure for cascading learning down from the central team through school leaders to middle leaders and classroom teachers.

So, at every point when a new training session is delivered, it is given first to the trust's education team. A recording of this session is then shown to headteachers in cluster meetings. There will be opportunities in these meetings for heads to stop and discuss what they are learning.

Meanwhile, each school has identified a lead practitioner: a strong teacher who could model great teaching and learning

and offer support to colleagues. In most cases, this is a deputy head or senior leader.

The headteachers' training session takes place on a Monday; on the subsequent Wednesday, the lead practitioners receive an all-day training session. (Some schools choose to send two representatives to these sessions: the lead practitioner and also a teaching assistant.) The lead practitioners gather in person, in cluster groups, but the training itself is delivered remotely by the trust's Head of Maths together with Mrs Stevenson.

The lead practitioners are then taken to see adaptive teaching in practice in one of the trust schools. So, for example, if a training session has focused on high expectations, lead practitioners would be looking at language use – how children are spoken to and about – during their learning walk. Afterwards, they would

discuss and analyse their observations. Then the afternoon would be devoted to looking at implementation using the EEF implementation cycle. Each subsequent session then begins with a discussion of how the previous session's implementation process has gone and what progress has been made.

Lead practitioners take their expertise back into their own schools, training middle leaders and classroom teachers.

The trust has allowed three years for the adaptive-teaching strategy to become embedded in schools.



What does it look like in practice?

1. Adaptive teaching

The trust has created a flow chart of adaptive teaching. This begins with anticipating barriers and planning strategies to address these, including the use of pre-teaching. Teachers are expected to ask themselves questions such as: “What might my pupils need in this lesson? What could I prepare for them if they need this topic to be broken down for them?”

The next step is modelling and direct instruction, followed by chunking progress and assessment for learning. The premise of the latter is that unless teachers know how children are keeping up, they cannot adapt for them in the moment.

The final step is in-the-moment adaptation. Teachers ask themselves: “How can I adjust the scale of this challenge? How can I rephrase this? Can I elicit understanding via questioning? What resources can I give this child?”

“We don’t talk about children by their ability any more,” says Mrs Stevenson. “We talk about attainment, because attainment can be changed. It’s basically that belief that every child can learn and they can make progress.”

What the teacher offers will depend on the need of any particular child at any particular moment. For example, adaptive teaching can include small-group work, in which the teacher breaks down a topic or reteaches it with a handful of children. The trust prefers the group work to be led by the teacher – as the most experienced practitioner in the room – while a teaching assistant monitors the rest of the class.

The trust provides model action plans for its schools – though schools will modify these, depending on their own requirements. Schools will go at their own pace, according to staff need – some will be considerably ahead of





What does it look like in practice? (continued)

1. Adaptive teaching (continued)

others. Some might break the action plan down into parts, starting with just one aspect.

Headteachers are given regular self-evaluation surveys, which they fill out on behalf of their school. The trust uses this to learn about individual staff members' expertise, as well as to design bespoke training to meet each school's needs.

"Where it is effectively implemented, adaptive teaching moves towards true inclusion," says Mrs Stevenson. "We're giving every child what they need in the moment. Then you can't necessarily identify children with SEND, because they're engaged, learning and included."

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Mrs Stevenson, REAch2 Head of SEND.

What does it look like in practice? (continued)

2. Bitesize CPD

The trust recognises that if adaptive teaching reaches perhaps 28 pupils in a class, there are still two for whom something more is needed.

REAch2 therefore set up its own CPD training course. Alongside these more formal sessions, it also started to run weekly half-hour CPD sessions, designed to help staff support children's specific needs. Individual sessions cover topics such as the following:

- Emotional-based school avoidance
- Supporting hearing impairments in the classroom
- Girls with autism
- Precision teaching
- Speech and language classroom strategies

These bitesize sessions are not intended as an in-depth, research-led examination of a topic – instead, they provide an instantly accessible introduction, intended primarily for classroom

teachers and support staff. Each session is divided into smaller sections: an introduction to the theory; the reasons for doing it; the tools to help you do it. Each session ends with examples of good practice, which attendees can take away and implement for themselves.

Bitesize sessions dealing with specific conditions look at presenting needs that can help with identification. This is followed by: how do we support that child? What strategies can we use? (Because diagnosis can involve lengthy waiting lists and procedures, the trust works with presenting needs instead. This emphasis on presentation has also helped staff to identify more subtle conditions, such as autism in girls, who may mask their need in school.)

Where there are other bitesize sessions relevant to a given topic, the speaker will signpost participants to online recordings, thus directing them to the tools they need to support a child.





What does it look like in practice? (continued)

2. Weekly bitesize CPD sessions (continued)

Sessions are run by the central SEND team, made up of former Sencos and school leaders. And they will include guest speakers drawn from school staff with specialist training and knowledge in the relevant area. For example, one teaching assistant who had attended numerous training sessions on an intervention to support sentence construction led a CPD session on the topic. “This training is upskilling all our staff,” says Mrs Stevenson. “It increases outcomes for children and reduces costs for us as a trust.”

The trust occasionally brings in charities and specialist organisations to conduct the sessions – or the SEND team will use online resources provided by these charities to inform the sessions. These resources will be downloaded for session attendees and shared on the trust intranet, so as to reduce the time school staff spend searching for them.

Each weekly CPD session is recorded and made available on REAch2 intranet, along with any relevant resources. The aim is that if a member of school staff is suddenly confronted with an unfamiliar need or condition, they will easily be able to find the information, tools and resources they need.

What does it look like in practice? (continued)

2. Weekly bitesize CPD sessions (continued)

“We were a little bit worried about attendance at the live sessions, because people aren’t always able to be there in person,” says Mrs Stevenson. “But through our surveys, through seeing how many times the videos are watched, we know that they’re getting used – and that they’re hitting the spot.

“Now if someone comes to me and says, for example, ‘I’ve got a child that needs sensory circuits. Where do I start?’, the SEND central team will signpost them to the recording first. Whereas before we would have gone individually and worked with each school. So we’re using our time more efficiently now.”

For the 2025-26 academic year, the trust will run bitesize sessions once a fortnight, rather than weekly. But it will complement them with new webinar recorded sessions, aimed at supporting Sencos with their role and with their leadership of SEND. These sessions

will tackle how-to questions – an early webinar, for example, will look at how to plan an annual review.

Meanwhile, drawing on the success of the bitesize CPD sessions, in the 2025-26 academic year, the trust has decided to offer similar sessions on aspects of adaptive teaching. Schools will be able to use these either as an introduction to a topic, or as a quick refresher.

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Mrs Stevenson,
REAch2 Head of SEND.



What has been the impact?

Prior to introducing adaptive teaching and bitesize CPD, the SEND central team at REAch2 had been hearing a consistent message from school staff, in relation to SEND: “They’re saying they feel overwhelmed, that they can’t do the job,” says Mrs Stevenson.

“But once we discuss it further, it often comes down to the fact that they’re not confident. They might not have the skills or the knowledge to know what they’re doing or how to support the child.”

Once staff had been given the tools to support children in the classroom, their attitudes changed considerably. “We’ve seen real empowerment and real changes to the way staff have worked with children,” says Mrs Stevenson. “The attitude has changed from ‘I can’t – or shouldn’t have to – do this’ to ‘Actually, I can do this. This is what I’m doing. This is why I’m doing it.’ It’s made a massive difference.”



What has been the impact? (continued)

Similarly, teachers who had previously said that they didn't think they could teach children with significant levels of need are now saying that they have the right training and skills to do so.

And staff are very clear about what is making the difference. "On a school visit, if I ask what's helping them, the first thing people say is adaptive teaching," says Andrew Rigby, National Director of Education.

Adaptive teaching has meant that many schools report positive progress data for pupils with SEND. One primary reports that adaptive-teaching strategies have ensured curriculum access and progression for all pupils – and particularly those with SEND: "We are witnessing increased engagement and task completion, and improved outcomes on targets in individual SEND plans."

Schools have also spoken about how the bitesize CPD sessions have enabled them to identify and support children's needs. For example, following training on Paediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS), one school successfully identified a potential case.

Using knowledge acquired during the session, a member of staff initiated discussions with parents, provided supporting documents for the child's GP and liaised directly with the paediatric unit. The child is now under medical review and being monitored for PANDAS.

"It's not a different job to teach children with SEND – and one that they're not qualified for," says Ms Paine. "SEND is not a mysterious, difficult thing. You just need the tools of the trade and the confidence that comes with that. And that's what this training gives them."



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Mrs Stevenson, REAch2 Head of SEND.



What are the key factors involved in making it successful?

The key element, the trust says, is one of the hardest to find: time. Research takes time, as does putting together good-quality presentations and resources. But the scale and national spread of the trust means that there is a range of staff expertise to draw on, wherever schools are based.

The professional dialogue that emerges from collaboration between schools feeds innovation. And collective working reduces the isolation that Sencos often feel. Many Sencos say that they find the workload challenging, and appreciate speaking to someone who understands the specific challenges and frustrations of their role – sometimes they just need to offload at the end of the day.

“Having training and resources developed by the experts across our trust – which everyone can access – makes a massive difference for our Sencos,” says Mrs Stevenson.

Cross-trust working also allows the education team to seek constant feedback from schools – complemented by staff surveys and questionnaires. “It’s making sure we capture their voices and that we respond to the needs that are emerging,” says Mrs Stevenson. “Or that we’re pre-empting and preparing for what’s on the horizon.

“We’re just trying to give every child every opportunity to succeed. There is always more we can do with what we’ve got – we’re always aiming higher.”



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Mrs Stevenson, REAch2 Head of SEND.



Resources

- [REAch2 SEND strategy](#)
- [Adaptive-teaching strategy](#)
- [Transition blueprint](#)



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