

**Case Study:**

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# **The Compass Partnership of Schools**





# Background information

**Trust:** The Compass Partnership of Schools

**Director of SEND:** Beth Tanton (Trust SEND Lead) and Joshua Garrett-Smith (Special School Assistant Head Teacher)

**About the trust:** Founded in 2016, the Compass Partnership of Schools has 13 mainstream primary schools and 2 special schools. Based in Greenwich and Essex, Compass schools serve a total of 4,900 children. Many of their schools serve under-resourced communities with high numbers of children with SEND.

**SEN pupils:** 20.8% SEN in mainstream schools (16.5% SEN Support, 4.3% EHCP)

**Percentage of disadvantaged students:** 32% pupil premium

**Percentage of students speaking English as an additional language:** 32%

**Key stage 2:** 78% of pupils meeting expected standard in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2 (2025 provisional)

Data has been taken from <https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables> at time of publication (October 2025) and updated with trusts as needed for accuracy. Definitions of categories are also available through the same site.



# Why is this important?

Inclusion has always been at the heart of the Compass Partnership of Schools' mission. They aim to provide great schools that serve their local community, placing the highest value on pupils and families feeling that they belong and matter.

## What challenges were you trying to address?

In response to the growing complexity of needs in mainstream schools, the trust recognised that it needed to adapt to ensure staff had the necessary knowledge and resources to help every child succeed.

Compass has created a SEND Parent and Carer Forum to support this ambition. Working collaboratively with this group ensures that the trust understands families' perspectives and that their views inform trust decision-making. This partnership has strengthened relational practice and influenced broader strategic priorities, including the development of a tiered model of support that bridges expertise from the trust's special schools into mainstream settings.

This case study focuses on the trust's work to develop inclusive practice in partnership with parents and carers.

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*“We saw the changing needs of our children as an opportunity to drive innovation in our practice and pedagogy and to collaborate across and beyond our trust. We recognised that we could leverage the expertise within our specialist schools to bring the most effective practice into mainstream schools.”* **Beth Tanton, Trust SEND Lead**





# What does it look like in practice?

## SEND Parent-Carer Forum

The SEND Parent-Carer Forum comprises parents and carers from schools across the trust, including special schools. The forum serves as a sounding board for the trust to hear the perspectives of parents and carers on a range of issues, policies and practices. It is also an opportunity for parents and carers to bring things to the trust. To ensure the issues being raised are representative, the trust also runs a survey of parents and carers across all its schools.

Beth shared, “Having a parent’s perspective on our decision-making helps us to understand what we do through their lens, so that we get it right more often. The parents of children with SEND can often face specific challenges and difficulties, and on the other hand, they are often incredible advocates, empathetic, resourceful, and resilient. They are the experts on their child, and sometimes they have researched any diagnosis that affects their child in detail. There is so much we can learn from listening to parents.”

“I joined the SEND parent and carer forum as I feel navigating a child with SEN through mainstream school requires a combined effort from both the school setting and family. I wanted to see (and contribute to) proactive practices that could be put in place to help our children (and the staff) thrive.”

Parent

## What does it look like in practice? (continued)

### SEND Parent-Carer Forum (continued)

Some of the early themes that emerged from the trust's work with the SEND Parent Forum focused on how it feels to be the parents and carers of children with SEND. For example, some parents told the trust that it can be isolating, and they can feel judged and misunderstood. This led the trust to ask every school to consider how it could ensure that parents and carers of children with SEND feel understood and connected to the school, as well as to other parents and carers.

This work with parents and carers has led to many initiatives across the trust, including:

- Increasing the presence of staff in the playground at the beginning and end of the day to build connections with parents and carers.
- Ensuring that parents and carers' first experience of the school celebrates inclusivity – for example, through introducing the SENCO.
- Offering 'tea and chat' sessions to parents of children with SEND joining Nursery or Reception classes to ensure that support and connection were established from day one.
- Facilitating introductions between parents to develop supportive networks - in some schools, SEND Parent 'Champion' roles have been created to lead this.
- Offering coffee mornings, stay-and-play sessions, or walk-and-talk sessions to parents of children with SEND.
- Inviting external agencies and specialists, such as Educational Psychologists and Speech Therapists, to lead workshops developed around the interests of parents.
- In Compass special schools, training and support have been provided for grandparents in recognition of the vital role they can play in families.
- Sibling networks have also been established to provide opportunities for siblings of children attending special schools to come together, meet each other, have fun, be themselves, and create their own support networks.



*“The SENCO Coffee Meet Ups have been a really good way to meet other parents with children with SEN needs and be able to talk to the SENCO in a relaxed informal meeting.”*

**Parent**

*“We have an open-door policy, so parents can call us anytime. They can call into school at any time if they want a cup of tea or a chat with any member of staff.”*

**School Leader**



## What does it look like in practice? (continued)

The parents on the SEND Forum also shared with Compass how important it is for the whole community to understand the trust's inclusive values, and to see how these are brought to life. The IncludEd Newsletter was created to support this. It is a termly publication that celebrates inclusive practices across the trust, highlights successes, includes voices from parents and pupils, and shares updates happening nationally and within the schools' regions. Initially, it was circulated to all staff and trustees to foster connections and share best practices across schools. The trust then produced a family edition, which concentrates on community activities, what families can do, and the additional support available.

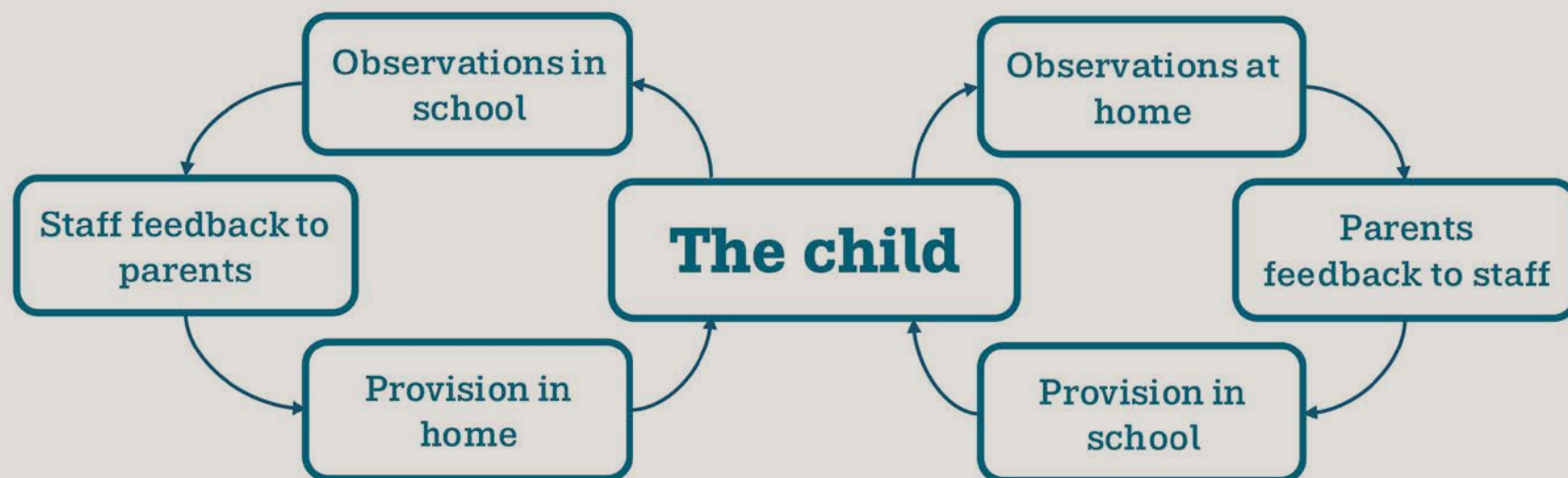


## What does it look like in practice? (continued)

### Relational practice with parents and carers

Relational practice is embedded across the trust, with staff encouraged to build strong, empathetic relationships. When ECTs join the Compass Partnership, they participate in a training session that focuses on the experiences of parents and carers with SEND. They are introduced to a communication framework called the Pen Green Loop, which encourages school staff to share observations with parents and ask them to share observations from home – creating a positive loop of knowledge sharing and a richer, more accurate understanding of the child.

### The Pen Green Loop





## What does it look like in practice? (continued)

### Relational practice with parents and carers (continued)

Beth shares, “A great, and incredibly simple, script that I encourage teachers to use is ‘I have noticed this. What are you noticing at home? It’s about being curious, humble and recognising that parents are the experts on their child and hold all this information, and we’ll be able to do much more to support outcomes if we can share information well.’” The trust is working to continuously deepen staff understanding of relational practice, believing that a deliberate focus on this will directly impact the engagement and achievement of children.

“It is often the simple things that can really make people feel a sense of belonging – I think our parents feel valued when we ask their opinion and really listen. Focusing on this has informed our practice and improved our strategic thinking,” says Beth.



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**Beth Tanton, Trust SEND Lead**





# What has been the impact?

**Children achieve well at Compass schools, with outcomes that are significantly above the average for all children, including those with SEND, and robust evidence of children making good progress from their individual starting points.**

Relational practice is a strength, with over 95% of Compass parents surveyed reporting that they feel welcomed by their child's school and that their child's teacher respects and values them.

Recent OFSTED reports have all highlighted that inclusion and SEND practice are significant strengths in Compass schools.

Compass's staff retention figures are above the national average. Leaders believe that staff feel empowered to support children with more complex needs because of the trust's tiered model of support.

Suspensions are very rare at Compass schools, and again, this is likely due to leaders feeling empowered to support a range of SEN needs successfully.

**“***“As a parent of a child with ASD, I’ve never felt more supported or understood. The school’s approach has made such a difference to both my son and us as a family. We have felt truly supported by the school, particularly by the SENCO who is always proactive and is available whenever I require information or help. From day one, the staff have shown patience, understanding, and genuine care for my son’s needs. They see beyond his diagnosis and celebrate his strengths, which means so much to us. We are very grateful to be part of such a nurturing SEND environment.”*

**Parent at Compass School**



# What have been the key factors that make it work?

**The trust's commitment to parental engagement is championed at the highest levels of leadership. Trust senior leaders ensure that insights from the SEND Parent-Carer Forum are actively shared with key stakeholders across the trust. This senior-level advocacy ensures that parental voice informs school-level initiatives and achieves meaningful change.**

Collaboration between the special and mainstream schools has long been a strength of the trust, but the introduction of two strategic SEND leadership roles has significantly deepened and accelerated this impact. These roles bridge the gap between mainstream and specialist settings, ensuring that best practice flows both ways. As a result, staff across the trust feel more confident and supported, and children with complex needs benefit from more inclusive, informed, and responsive provision.

Structuring the trust offer to mainstream schools using a tiered universal, targeted, specialist approach has maximised the impact, as every school in the trust now receives professional guidance through workshops or the universal offer, which reduces demand at the specialist level.



## What advice would you give to other school leaders?

**Joshua said**, “I think what’s been great is that we’ve opened opportunities for leaders to come together. Sharing best practice and having an open, supportive network allows people to learn from each other and find solutions together.”

**Beth says**, “We understood that getting it right for children with the most complex needs meant getting it right for everyone. We viewed the growing complexity of needs in our schools as an invitation to become more expert, and this approach has been key to the development of practice across the trust, ultimately benefiting every child.”

## Where can others go to find out more?

- [Teacher Handbook: SEND | Whole School SEND](#)
- [The-Pen-Green-Loop.pdf](#)
- [Willow Dene School - Sibling Support](#)



[inclusioninpractice.org.uk](http://inclusioninpractice.org.uk)

