

The SEND Challenge

A Collaborative CMAT Solution

Across Trusts Not Joint Trusts



Who Are We?



Gemma Ackred, CSEL – Assisi Catholic Trust - gackred@assisicatholictrust.com
1 secondary school and 8 primary schools

Joanna Seymour, CSEL – Christus Catholic Trust – csel@christus.org.uk
1 infant school and 6 primary schools

Heather Westrop, Head of SEND and Inclusion for the Assisi and Christus Catholic Trusts –
hwestrop@christus.org.uk

Where Are We?

Our CMATS serve the Catholic schools along the north shore of the River Thames,
from the M25 to Shoeburyness, Canvey Island and up to Billericay in Essex.

We cross three local authorities – Thurrock, Essex and Southend,
but all within the Diocese of Brentwood.

We are a total of 1 infant school, 14 primary schools and 1 secondary school.



Trust Head of SEND and Inclusion Role

How Does Employment Liability and Management Work?

Employment liability is held by the Christus Catholic Trust

Full Time - Three Year Fixed Term Contract

CES Contract and Salary on par with a deputy head role

50/50 time split across Trusts

Performance Management is a shared activity

Strategic planning is held within each Trust

Strategic direction and daily operational planning is held by the
Trust Head of SEND and Inclusion

Reporting and Accountability to Trustees is carried out in each Trust by the
CSEL and the Trust Head of SEND and Inclusion



Why Did We Do It?

This was a very intentionally strategic decision not a reactive one.

Neither Trust could afford the role on their own.

It was a risk, but a very carefully planned one, ensuring we continued to put the pupils at the centre of all we do, sharing the light Christ asks us to be.

We had a rapidly rising number of pupils with SEND, particularly those with complex needs.

A skilled SENDCO and senior leader at one of our schools and leading by example and on secondment supporting a school which had recently been graded inadequate.

We didn't have access to all the information surrounding SEND funding and grants and needed longer term financial sustainability for SEND.

We had limited reporting into the Trusts around the extent of SEND needs within our schools.

We needed a voice on every forum – with time poor SENDCOs in our schools we needed a knowledgeable expert to represent our faith communities preventing us being sidelined by non-faith MATs that surround us.



How Did We Do It?

A defined job description.

A national advert – which produced lots of interest.

A robust shortlisting and interview process.

We appointed the best, most skilled person for the job. It wasn't a given!

Was There Resistance?

Yes! Heads and SENDCOs needed it but at the time thought they didn't want it.

Heads wanted more money and more time not 'another SENCO' or someone they thought would tell their SENCO's they weren't doing a good job.



What Is The Need Across Our Trusts?

There are over 1.7 million SEND children across England, with numbers rapidly rising, alongside the complexity of need; of these 1.7 million children, we support almost 1000 across both the Assisi and Christus Catholic Trusts.

It's about the growing complexity of need, not just the percentage of need.



	EHCP Average %	SEND Support Average %	Total SEND Average %
Primary National Average	3.5%	14.8%	18.3%
Assisi Catholic Trust	2.6%	13.2%	16.8%
Christus Catholic Trust	4.3%	13.4%	17.8%
Secondary National Average	3.1%	13.4%	16.5%
Assisi Catholic Trust	4.6%	8.1%	12.7%





School	Number on Roll	EHCP	EHCP %	SEN Support	SEN Support %	Total SEND	Total SEND %
Assisi Catholic Trust							
Holy Family Primary	212	9	4.2%	31	14.6%	40	18.8%
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary	457	4	0.8%	61	13.3%	65	14.2%
Our Lady of Ransom Primary	421	6	1.4%	66	15.6%	72	17.1%
Sacred Heart Primary	429	16	3.7%	48	11.1%	64	14.9%
St George's Primary	209	7	3.3%	38	18.1%	45	21.5%
St Helen's Primary	419	10	2.3%	65	15.5%	75	17.8%
St Joseph's Primary	192	8	4.1%	26	13.5%	34	17.7%
St Teresa's Primary	197	8	4.0%	28	14.2%	36	18.2%
St Thomas More High School	1,206	56	4.6%	98	8.1%	154	12.7%
Total:	3,742	124	3.5%	461	13.2%	585	16.8%
Christus Catholic Trust							
Holy Cross Primary	218	23	10.5%	23	10.5%	46	21%
St Anne Line Infants	261	5	1.9%	29	11.1%	34	13%
St Joseph's Primary	194	12	6.1%	31	15.9%	43	22%
St Mary's Primary	229	11	4.8%	29	12.6%	40	17.4%
St Peter's Primary	419	9	2.1%	47	11.2%	56	13.3%
St Teresa's Primary	219	10	4.5%	20	9%	30	13.6%
St Thomas' Primary	533	20	3.7%	100	18.7%	120	22.5%
Total:	2,073	90	4.3%	279	13.4%	369	17.8%

What Is The Local Context?

Thurrock LA is bankrupt, receives high needs block funding for the national average of 5.3% of EHCP plans but must distribute this across the 6% of plans it has.

SEND funding is issued in hours at a cost of £11.30 per hour, for a maximum of 20 hours.

This does not meet the national living wage of £12.21+ on costs.

Essex LA was the worst LA in the country for EHCP's, with only 1% being met on time in the 20-week process. In September 2025 there were still 1,300 EHCP's (expected to increase) in the backlog and some children have been waiting between 70-90 weeks for a plan.

Southend LA in 2024 had an 11 million pound SEND underspend and were only producing 3% of EHCP's on time.



Thurrock Banding

Average banding given to schools is between 5-10 hours

Hours	Value
2.5 hours	£975
5 hours	£1,955
7.5 hours	£2,925
10 hours	£4,120
12.5 hours	£4,875
15 hours	£6,075
17.5 hours	£7,450
20 hours	£8,240

Essex Banding

Average banding given to schools is between Band 2 and Band 5

Band	Value
1	£1,800
2	£2,700
3	£4,800
4	£7,500
4+	£8,000
5	£10,000
6	£15,000
7	£20,000
8	£25,000
9	£30,000
10	£40,000

Southend Banding

Average banding given to schools is between Band 2 and Band 5.

Band	Value
1	£2,065
2	£3,602
3	£5,034
4	£7,889
5	£8,703
6	£10,195
7	£11,638
8	£13,124
9	£14,238
10	£18,163



Group Discussion

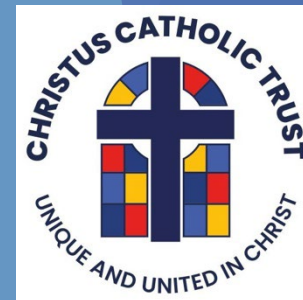
The NFER MAT Factor Report – April 2024: Exploring how multi-academy trusts are supporting pupils with SEND had 8 key findings that have supported in developing the role of the Trust Head of SEND and Inclusion.

In groups look at the 8 key findings and discussion how they relate to your CMAT.

1. MATS and schools are facing significant challenges around SEND provision.
2. There is no single template for the role MATs play in supporting SEND provision.
3. MAT SEND leaders play a pivotal role in SEND provision.
4. SENCOs valued the collaboration, learning opportunities and additional resources that MAT membership offered.
5. MAT-level monitoring and evaluation of SEND provision is perceived as valuable and constructive.
6. Both mainstream and specialist provision can benefit from a 'blended' MAT approach
7. School SEND provision benefits from access to a strong MAT and a strong LA.
8. The full potential of the MAT model for SEND provision is still to be unlocked.



What Does The Head of SEND and Inclusion Actually Do?



Strategic	Operational
Attend 'train the trainer training' e.g. positive handling and deliver across the trust, highly tailored and coached to each school.	SENCO caseload supervision: Managing difficult cases within each school, that takes head/SENCO's away from supporting children – appeals, tribunals, complaints.
Attend LA SEND and funding forums, National MAT SEND Leaders forum and CMAT Network Education Leads Best Practice Meeting.	Model and empower SENCO's to continue to write successful EHCP requests that need to meet ever stricter LA guidelines or respond to EHCP consultations based on SEND Law.
Develop the SEND strategic vision for each trust and ensure it is delivered for our children working with the central team.	Model and empower teachers and support staff in delivering adaptive teaching and meeting needs.
Attend heads, governor and trustee meetings keeping them up-to-date with key national and local SEND information and changes.	Create and support the implementation of each Trust SEND policy and information report and other related SEND policies.
Ensure all SEND funding available is applied for & that SEND funding is spent effectively.	Talent spotting future SENDCOs and working on their CPFD.



What Are The Challenges Of The Role?

- Two different Trusts, with the same end goal but different directions of travel.
- Building relationships and re-defining relationships.
- This can be a lonely role – not a SENCO or a Head, no set base or team.
- Time management.
- Balancing strategic vs operational.
- The expectation from Heads to step in when a SENCO leaves.



What Has Been The Impact So Far?

SEND pupils who belong, achieve and thrive in our schools, regardless of the politics.

A development of adaptive teaching in each school so pupils can be supported well, without needing to be at SEN Support or requiring an EHCP. However, those that do are well supported and EHCP requests are successful.

Reduction in tribunals, changes of placement, suspensions and parental complaints.

A significant increase in the level of funding (over half a million pounds) to support pupils with SEND in our CMATS.

Leaders and SENDCOs have an increased confidence in their strategic planning for SEND in their schools resulting in more effective use of resources and independent pupils.

We have a voice in every Local Authority serving our CMATS, making sure decisions at this level consider the implications for our pupils/schools.

Increased wellbeing of the SENDCOs having an expert who they have access to readily.

All staff having access to high quality training when they need it and this being financially efficient and sustainable.



What Do Our Schools Say?

“I didn’t know I needed her, until I needed her”

Headteacher – St Anne Line Infants CCT

“Heather came to us today to train staff on positive handling. She was excellent. Short sessions which gave the staff knowledge, skills and confidence. She also was with the children, demonstrating how to deal with a couple of challenging situations. She’s planning to come back to work alongside staff, with practical advice during challenging transition times. She’s also following up on a shortfall of funding for our Band 9 child. One of the most productive and positive visits we have had for SEN support for a long time. The best SEN Support we’ve ever had”

Headteacher – St George’s Primary ACT

“Heather has trained almost all our staff in positive handling and is excellent”

Headteacher – Holy Family ACT



What Has Ofsted Said?

ACT - St Joseph's, Essex (February 2024)

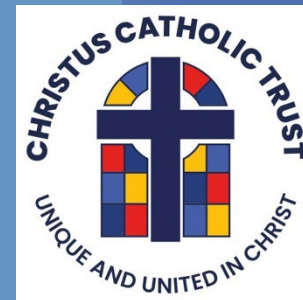
The school has ensured that pupils with SEND are prioritised. Pupils who may need extra help are accurately identified. There are clear plans in place with appropriate targets for pupils to achieve, based on their individual needs. The school regularly checks how well these pupils are learning. The high levels of support ensure that pupils with SEND achieve well, relative to their starting points.

ACT – Sacred Heart, Southend (July 2024)

Pupils appreciate difference. They view pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) as having a 'superpower'. Hence, pupils with SEND are comfortable talking with others about what helps support them.

CCT – Holy Cross, Thurrock (July 2024)

Leaders identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) promptly. Plans for this considerable number of pupils outline the strategies that staff should use to support them. For example, teachers make appropriate adaptations to tasks and activities by giving additional support, enlarging print, or seating pupils in specific places in the classroom. Therefore, most pupils with SEND learn the same curriculum as others. Experienced and skilled adults provide targeted support for individual pupils, particularly those with complex needs. This ensures pupils with SEND learn well.



What Are The Next Steps For Us?

For us this workshop forms part of our own evaluation of what we did, what we are doing and what we do next.

- Developing adaptive teaching and learning within all aspects of each setting to meet pupil needs
- Developing school-based expertise and resources with and beyond the SENCO.
- Succession planning for SENCO's
- Recruitment and training programme for support staff
- Implementing the outcomes of the white paper
- CMAT growth and the strategic implications



What Could Be The Next Steps For Your CMAT?

The action we took was a strategic intention in response to the needs of our pupils and staff – would this suit your CMAT's needs?

Do you know if all the SEND funding you could be eligible for is coming into your CMAT?

Are you confident that all SEND funding is being used to support your pupils? If you are, how do you know?

Do you have staff that are 'train the trainer' trained so you can disseminate training across the whole CMAT?

Are you able to 'talent spot' or succession plan for the next SENDCO's in your CMAT?

Do you have a voice on all the local forums that are involved with SEND and linked to your schools? Can you get one?

How could we support you in answering these questions or in taking your next steps?

