
Defining the future of school finances

06/03/2025

The Eastside Rooms
Birmingham



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Welcome

Welcome to the National Fair Funding Conference 2025! This booklet contains all the essential information to help you enjoy and make the most of the conference.

This event has long been a key forum for reviewing practices and discussing policies and issues related to local government funding. As a national event, it brings together colleagues from across the country to share best practices, interact with Department for Education representatives, and collaborate with funding experts. Through networking, attendees can exchange strategies, knowledge, experiences, and concerns. Additionally, we have introduced a focus on funding for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to keep you informed about current thinking and practices in this area.

We hope you find this conference both enjoyable and enlightening. Our aim is for you to leave with valuable insights and practical strategies that you can implement in your work moving forward. Enjoy the conference, and may it be a fruitful experience for all.



Agenda

8:30am - 9:20am

Refreshments & networking

9:20am - 9:35am

Welcome & introduction

Michael Hallick, London Borough of Wandsworth

Featuring a video address from Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister for School Standards

9:35am - 10:15am

Speaker:

Tom Goldman, Deputy Director, Funding Policy Unit, DfE

10:15am - 11:15am

In conversation: The Future of SEND
Expert Insights on School Funding and SEND

Panel:

Hosted by Julia Harnden, ASCL
Ben Bryant, Isos Partnership
Oli Clipsham, Newton Group
Joe Miller, MIME Consulting
Peter Gray, Strategic Services for Children & Young People

11:15am - 11:30am

Refreshments & networking

11:30am - 12:00pm

Speaker:

Jon Andrews
Including Q&A
[Education Policy Institute](#)

12:00pm - 12:45pm

Workshops: Session 1

12:45pm - 1:30pm

Lunch

1:30pm - 2:15pm

Workshops: Session 2

2:15pm - 3:00pm

Workshops: Session 3

3:00pm - 3:15pm

Refreshments & networking

3:15pm - 3:45pm

Speaker:

Dr William Burns, The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

3:45pm - 4:00pm

Plenary & close

Workshops will feature sessions facilitated by:

- The DfE
 - The Access Group
 - MIME Consulting
- [SEND - Mime](#)**

06/03/2025

**The Eastside Rooms
Birmingham**



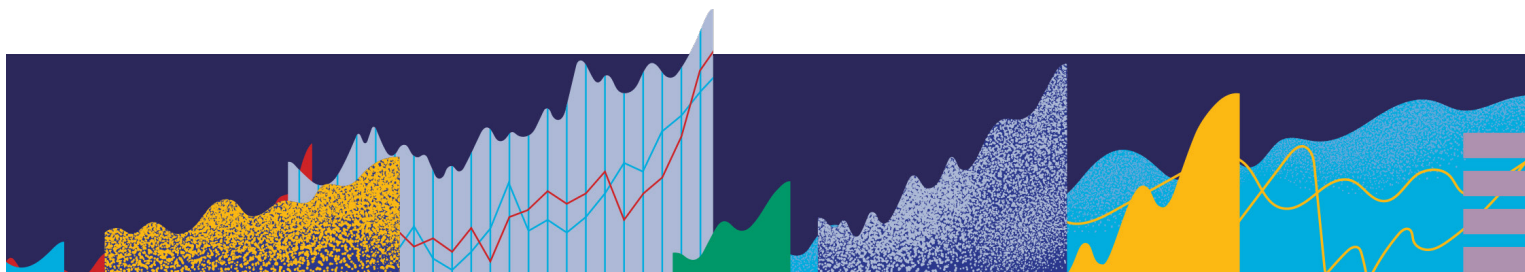
Workshops

		ASSTEAD ONE	ASSTEAD TWO	ASSTEAD THREE	MEETING ROOM FOUR
SESSION 1	12:00 – 12:45pm		Isos Partnership What's so "special" about SEND? Towards a more inclusive approach	DfE The Funding Policy Unit Mainstream school funding	Mime Consulting How to build robust and useful cohort forecasting models
SESSION 2	1:30 – 2.15pm		Newton Group What can be done locally to improve outcomes and financial resilience without waiting for national reform?	DfE The Funding Policy Unit Subject: Early Years	Access Group Subject: AI finance Systems
SESSION 3	2:15– 3:00pm	DfE The Funding Policy Unit Subject: The High Need Block	MIME Consulting How to ensure mainstream schools are inclusive for young people with SEND	SSCYP. Strategic Services for Children and Young People. What is 'ordinarily available provision'? How can it best be defined and funded?	Access Group Subject: AI finance Systems

Finance
Workshop

SEND
Workshop

SEND / Finance
Workshop



Key Note Speakers



Michael Hallick
Director of Business and Resources, Children's Services, London Borough of Wandsworth

Michael Hallick has built a prominent career in the Local Authority, working in a number of operational and strategic roles in Children's Services. His extensive experience includes managing finances within the SEND system, addressing challenges such as the 2014 statutory changes, the growth in children with autism and severe learning disabilities, and post-Covid pressures in early years.

Michael's strategic initiatives in Wandsworth have been particularly impactful. He has used the pressures of falling school rolls to support the SEND system and school budgets, developed ASD and SEMH resource bases, and converted a closed primary school into an expanded SLD special secondary school. These efforts have halted the growth in independent placements and are expected to reduce costs and inflationary impacts on budgets.

Additionally, Michael has been involved in multiple peer reviews, including those for the Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames, Kent County Council, Jersey Councils, Windsor and Maidenhead, and the London Borough of Richmond.



Tom Goldman
Deputy Director for the Funding Policy Unit at the Department for Education

Tom Goldman is the Deputy Director for the Funding Policy Unit at the Department for Education. He oversees work on how the department distributes over £55 billion per annum of revenue funding for the education of 5–16-year-olds (and, for pupils with high needs, 0–25-year-olds), and the early years entitlements for 2-, 3- and 4-year-olds, including the current consultations on proposals for the introduction of a "direct" national funding formula for schools, and updates to the national funding formula for early years. Previous responsibilities have included work on the review of the national curriculum, reform of GCSE and A levels, and the Wolf Review of vocational education. Tom has worked in the DfE (and predecessors) since 1990.

Key Note Speakers



Jon Andrews
Head of Analysis and Director for School System and Performance

Jon Andrews is Head of Analysis and Director for School System and Performance at EPI. He has published a wide range of studies including: 'The performance of multi-academy trusts and local authorities', 'School revenue balances in England', 'Access to special schools in England', and 'Grammar schools and social mobility'. He worked in the Department for Education from 2003 to 2016 as a statistician.



Dr William Burns
Social Care Policy Advisor – The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)

William is CIPFA's social care policy voice, and he runs the Social Care Network. His work focuses on social care reform, and he has produced thought leadership in the areas of charging reform, children's social care reform, Scotland's National Care Service, and social care funding.

Before joining CIPFA, he was Social Care Finance Lead at the Scottish Government where he was involved in costing a range of social care reform policies stemming from the Independent Review of Adult Social Care. William attained a PhD in English Literature from the University of Glasgow and started studying accountancy during the final stages of his PhD.

In Conversation: Panellists and workshop facilitators



Ben Bryant **Director, Isos Partnership**

Ben Bryant is a director of the independent research and advisory organisation, Isos Partnership. Ben specialises in developing approaches to support young people with additional needs. He has undertaken high-profile national research on inclusion, exclusions, AP, additional needs and SEND, and worked with numerous local areas to strengthen aspects of their work around inclusion and SEND. Ben is one of the authors of a major report, published in July 2024 by the Local Government Association and the County Councils Network, on the root causes of challenges within the "SEND system" and what a new approach should look like.



Oli Clipsham **Director, Newton Group**

Oli Clipsham is a Director at Newton. He sits on Newton's Children's and Education Leadership team and is currently leading the delivery of Newton's support to a City Council's Whole Life Social Care transformation programme. Oli led diagnostic work for multiple Local Authorities as part of the Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme.

Newton partner with local government to deliver strategic improvement and innovation. Our partnerships deliver improved resident outcomes and service quality, and significant financial benefit.

In Conversation: Panellists and workshop facilitators



Joe Miller **Associate Director, Mime Consulting**

Joe has been involved in education data and policy for almost a decade. Having previously worked in the Wellcome Trust's education team, he joined Mime in 2019 where he has led projects for a wide range of public sector organisations. Joe has built a strong understanding of the sector and regularly presents to both local and regional government. He is also often approached by senior education leaders for his insight and guidance. Joe led Mime's recent research to better understand inclusion in London's schools, including developing recommendations for the DfE, Ofsted, local authorities, and schools.

Alongside partners in Wandsworth Council, Joe led the development of Mime's SEND forecasting model, which is now used by local authorities across the country. Joe has also led financial projections and scenario planning projects with several local authorities, including those on the DfE's Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes.

Joe is a UKSA accredited researcher and studied Economics at Cambridge University, followed by an MSc in Public Policy.



Rory Nethercott **Consultant, Mime Consulting**

Rory joined Mime in 2021 after working for the NHS and in the third sector on health and social care policy. At Mime, Rory has led several projects for regional partnerships across England, often exploring the growth of SEND needs, as well as implications for funding. Rory brings a strong statistical background and played a key role in the design of Mime's pupil forecasting models. Rory co-authored Mime's recent report, commissioned by London Councils, on inclusion in London's schools.

Rory brings a deep understanding of the wider policy context and wrote our response to the SEND and AP Improvement Plan.

Rory is a UKSA accredited researcher and studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford, followed by an MSc in Experimental Psychology.

In Conversation: Panellists and workshop facilitators



Peter Gray

Director, Strategic Services for Children & Young People

Peter Gray has over 20 years' experience of working with local and national government on complex and challenging policy areas, having played a lead role in the development of Nottinghamshire's strategy for special educational needs in the 1990s. He is known particularly for his work on the effective management of SEND funding and developing more collective systems for managing alternative provision, behaviour and exclusions.

He works with a team of experienced associates who contribute a range of strengths and expertise, which enables the organisation to be responsive to particular consultancy needs.



Emma Slater

Passionate Educator, Consultant and Senior Product Leader in EdTech

An early career in Westminster fuelled my passion for education, people, and big ideas - like marketing Barnsley, the Tuscan Hill Village in 2001. This reinforced my belief in storytelling's power.

As Director of English in inner London, I worked with talented students and educators, shaping policy and practice through collaboration. Moving north, I applied this expertise with PiXL, Star Academies, and Oasis, seeing first-hand that great education already exists in schools.

Now, as Head of Product at The Access Group, I combine education, leadership, and EdTech to drive equity, impact, and access to learning.

In Conversation: The Future of SEND

Organisation	Speaker	Description
Isos Partnership	Ben Bryant	This fireside chat will delve into the evolving landscape of funding within Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), exploring the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.
Newton Group	Oli Clipsham	
MIME Consulting	Joe Miller	
Strategic Services for Children and Young People	Peter Gray	Our expert panel will share their perspectives on policy changes, funding implications, and the impact on educational outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Don't miss this opportunity to engage with thought leaders and contribute to the conversation on shaping our work in response to the demand for access to services.



Workshops: Session 1. / 12:00pm-12:45pm

Organisation	Workshop Title	Description
DfE Speakers: Simon Hampson Niki Mehta	Mainstream Schools Funding	<p>This workshop will provide an opportunity for discussion with DfE policy officials. It will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• overview of recent changes and challenges in LAs' local formulae, in the context of moving local formulae towards the NFF• strategic questions for review in the coming period (including how can the schools formula best help to promote inclusion of pupils with SEND in the mainstream).
Isos Partnership Speaker: Ben Bryant	What's so "special" about SEND? Towards a more inclusive approach	<p>Despite the efforts of many brilliant practitioners and families, the national "SEND system" is not working and needs urgent and fundamental reform. In this session, Ben Bryant from Isos Partnership will talk about his recent report that looks at the scale of the challenges in the "SEND system", the root causes of those challenges, and what is needed to build a new, more inclusive and holistic approach. This session will be of interest to anyone who wants to see reform of the current "SEND system" and wants to join the debate about how to make that happen.</p>

Workshops: Session 1. / 12:00pm-12:45pm

Organisation	Workshop Title	Description
Mime Consulting Speakers: Joe Miller Rory Nethercott	How to build robust and useful cohort forecasting models	<p>This workshop will explore how to produce robust and useful cohort forecasts. Rory and Joe will present data and facilitate discussion of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The key drivers of the size and makeup of the school age cohort2. The key drivers of demand for specific support services, including SEND and social care3. The latest data in your region <p>The workshop will also cover where to access data and how to get the most value from publicly available data sources, for example ONS population projections.</p> <p>In particular, Mime will showcase their SEND forecasting model, built in partnership with Wandsworth Borough Council to help the council with high needs place planning. The tool helped Wandsworth to more proactively plan increasing capacity for SEND places to become less reliant on commissioning expensive independent placements. Rory and Joe will present the findings from Mime's recent project applying the forecasting model to project upcoming SEND need across England.</p> <p>Throughout, Rory and Joe will encourage discussion in breakout groups. This will include exploring analysis of real data from your region, as well as discussion of both the local and national contexts.</p> <p>Attendees should expect to leave with a good understanding of the key factors to consider in cohort forecasts, as well as an understanding of the role of underlying assumptions. Attendees will also leave with a better understanding of the overarching population trends in their area, and the implications this will have on school rolls and service demand.</p>

Workshops: Session 2. / 1:30pm-2:15pm

Organisation	Workshop Title	Description
DfE Speaker: Dorothy Makin	Early Years Funding	<p>This workshop will provide an opportunity for discussion with DfE policy officials. It will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• recent changes to early years funding as the department rolls out of the new working parent entitlements for children aged 2 and under• EY entitlement funding in 2025-26 (including the EY expansion grant).• strategic questions for review for 2026-27 and beyond.
Newton Group Speaker: Oli Clipsham	What can be done locally to improve outcomes and financial resilience without waiting for national reform? Examples from frontline diagnostic and implementation partnerships.	<p>Local area partnerships strive to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people who they support. However, in the absence of immediate national reform, they are faced with significant constraints.</p> <p>This workshop will consider what can be done within these constraints to improve outcomes and put SEN provision on a more financially resilient footing. Alongside colleagues from across the sector, we will share and explore examples of local and national evidence (including from the DfE's Delivering Better Value programme) and how local areas are building on their findings to deliver ambitious visions and practical improvements.</p>

Workshops: Session 2. / 1:30pm-2:15pm

Organisation	Workshop Title	Description
<div>The Access Group</div> <div>Speakers: Emma Slater Steve Parkinson</div>	Smart School Finance: Leveraging AI, Integration, and Industry Expertise for Better Budgeting	<p>As schools and MATs face increasing financial pressures, the need for efficient procurement, strategic financial planning, and AI-driven solutions has never been greater - especially in the context of SEND funding and resource allocation.</p> <p>In this session, Steve Parkinson, an experienced business leader and education finance strategist, will share insights from his Federation's adoption of Access Education Finance products and how wider industry best practices informed his approach to procurement and financial decision-making. The discussion will explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to evaluate and implement finance systems that support operational efficiency and strategic growth.• The role of AI and automation in improving financial planning and SEND funding management.• How Access Education's integrated Suite and common data platform can help schools and trusts streamline financial, HR, and budgeting processes.• Lessons from other industries that schools can apply to enhance procurement and financial decision-making. <p>This session is designed for Education CFO's, Finance Directors/Managers and School Business Managers who want to future-proof their financial operations, ensure fair and efficient allocation of SEND funding, and leverage integrated solutions to reduce administrative burden and improve decision-making.</p> <p>Join us to explore how smarter financial management, AI-driven insights, and an integrated data approach can support schools in navigating an increasingly complex funding landscape.</p>

Workshops: Session 3. / 2:15pm-3:00pm

Organisation	Workshop Title	Description
Mime Consulting Speakers: Joe Miller Rory Nethercott	How to ensure mainstream schools are inclusive for young people with SEND	<p>This workshop will build on Mime's research on the inclusion of young people with SEND in schools. In particular, Joe and Rory will present evidence from a large research project, commissioned by London Councils, which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets out the context, including funding pressures• Exposes the key funding, workforce and accountability challenges faced by local authorities, MATs, schools and families• Outlines a definition of inclusion developed in partnership with young people and families• Presents evidence on the nature of increasing demand for services• Highlights the benefits of inclusion, to young people and their families, as well as schools and local authorities• Building on best practice identified, makes clear recommendations for stakeholders to improve inclusion <p>See the published report, executive summary and infographic here.</p> <p>Rory and Joe will present Mime's analysis of data from the National Pupil Database, outlining what the data can tell us about absence, suspensions and off-rolling. Differences between school types and pupil groups will be discussed.</p> <p>They will also outline the key takeaways from Mime's interviews and focus groups with local authorities and school staff, as well as young people with SEND and their families.</p> <p>Throughout, Rory and Joe will present examples of good practice, including innovative flexible funding arrangements, and will facilitate discussion and debate.</p> <p>Attendees can expect to leave with a stronger understanding of the data on inclusion and some clear examples of good practice.</p>

Workshops: Session 3. / 2:15pm-3:00pm

Organisation	Workshop Title	Description
Access Group Speakers: Emma Slater Steve Parkinson	Smart School Finance: Leveraging AI, Integration, and Industry Expertise for Better Budgeting	<p>As schools and MATs face increasing financial pressures, the need for efficient procurement, strategic financial planning, and AI-driven solutions has never been greater - especially in the context of SEND funding and resource allocation. In this session, Steve Parkinson, an experienced business leader and education finance strategist, will share insights from his Trust's adoption of Access Education Finance products and how wider industry best practices informed his approach to procurement and financial decision-making. The discussion will explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to evaluate and implement finance systems that support operational efficiency and strategic growth.• The role of AI and automation in improving financial planning and SEND funding management.• How Access Education's integrated Suite and common data platform can help schools and trusts streamline financial, HR, and budgeting processes.• Lessons from other industries that schools can apply to enhance procurement and financial decision-making. <p>This session is designed for Education Finance Directors and School Business Managers who want to future-proof their financial operations, ensure fair and efficient allocation of SEND funding, and leverage integrated solutions to reduce administrative burden and improve decision-making.</p>

Workshops: Session 3 continued overleaf ►

Workshops: Session 3. / 2:15pm-3:00pm

Organisation	Workshop Title	Description
DfE Speaker: Russell Ewens	High Needs National Fair Funding	<p>This workshop will provide an opportunity for discussion with DfE policy officials. It will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• possible changes to the High Needs NFF for 2026-27 (including simplifying funding arrangements for special and AP schools; and inter-authority recoupment for LAC)• options for review for 2027-28 and beyond, in the context of anticipated wider reform to SEND.
SSCYP. Strategic Services for Children and Young People Speaker: Peter Gray	What is 'ordinarily available provision'? How can it best be defined and funded?	<p>Ordinarily available provision has emerged as a key concept for trying to define what should be available in all mainstream schools, and articulate more consistent expectations about what they should have done before considering a request for additional or specialist provision.</p> <p>However, how is this defined? By levels of pupil need? or by the nature of interventions/provision already in place? And, with an increasing emphasis from Government on mainstream inclusion, how can funding/support be rebalanced to reflect this expectation? There is talk of adjustments between the relative size of the HN and Schools Blocks, but how can that be achieved when HN spend is not static but substantially increasing?</p> <p>And how can we ensure that any move to funding schools rather than pupils is associated with an appropriate transfer of responsibility?</p> <p>This workshop will explore different approaches to defining ordinarily provision, and some of their strengths and issues. It will also present models that encourage a stronger culture of local collective responsibility.</p>

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About Us



Smart School Services

Smart School Services is proudly backed by Wandsworth Council, combining a wealth of local expertise with a clear purpose: to simplify the complex and create outstanding school environments.

With a deep understanding of the unique challenges schools face, we build strong partnerships with school leaders to ensure every child receives the highest quality education. Drawing on years of hands-on experience, we provide tailored support that inspires confidence, fosters creativity, and enhances your capacity to achieve your school's vision.

Scan the QR code to visit our website:

smartschool.services



Travel Information

Travelling by Train

The venue is conveniently accessible by train. The closest station is Birmingham Moor Street, about a 12-minute walk away. It is part of the Chiltern Main Line, offering services to London Marylebone. Birmingham New Street Station, with extensive rail links across the UK, is approximately a 15-minute walk from the venue.

From Moor Street Station, head to the right and follow Moor Street Queensway. At the crossroads, continue straight onto Jennens Road. The venue is located on Woodcock Street, to the left off Jennens Road. From New Street Station, follow the exit signs for Moor Street Station, which is about a 5-minute walk, then follow the same directions as above.

Travelling by Car

For delegates choosing to drive, the venue is easily accessible via the A38, which connects to the Midlands motorway network. The M6, M42 and M5 are all in proximity. The Sat Nav postcode for the venue is B7 4BL.

The closest car park to the venue is the Millennium Point Multi Storey, located off Howe Street (postcode B4 7AP). It is open seven days a week from 6am to midnight, with overnight parking available. For current charges, please visit the car park's website.



Wi-Fi Information

Connecting to the Wi-Fi Network

The Eastside Rooms operates an open Wi-Fi network that guests can connect to so please do access via your device if needed.

While we understand the importance of WI-FI access, we kindly ask everyone to turn off or silence their mobile phones, laptops, and iPads during all conference sessions as a courtesy to our delegates and speakers.

Hotel Information

Check-in

Accommodation is located at the Aloft Hotel. Please proceed directly to the hotel reception for check-in.

The Aloft Hotel is located next to the venue. Check-ins are available from 3:00pm. For delegates arriving before this time there are luggage storage facilities available at the hotel and venue. Check-out time is at 12:00pm.

Breakfast

Breakfast is served at Tempo! Restaurant from 6:00am to 10:00 during your stay.

Parking

Please note that parking is not available at the hotel.



Where to Eat

If you're attending the conference and looking for a place to eat, there are several dining options available to suit different tastes and preferences.

Browns Birmingham

Located at 7 Spiceal Street, Browns offers a variety of meals including brunch, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner.

Turtle Bay Birmingham

Situated at 81-91 John Bright Street, Turtle Bay serves Caribbean-inspired dishes, including curries and small plates.

Las Iguanas

Birmingham - Arcadian Centre: Found at the Arcadian Centre on Hurst Street, Las Iguanas provides Mexican, Brazilian, and Latin American cuisine.

Asha's Indian Restaurant

Located at Edmund House, 12-22 Newhall Street, Asha's offers Indian dishes in a contemporary setting. The restaurant has received multiple awards.

For a quick fix **Burger King**, located on the High Street is open from 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM on most days.

KFC, situated at 98 Bull Street, Unit 23 Martineau Place is open from 10:30 AM to 11:00 PM daily.

LEON Birmingham New Street Station, located at Unit 25 Birmingham New Street Station, LEON have options for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, including vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free choices. Open from 6:30 AM to 11:00 PM most days.

These fast-food options provide a quick and convenient way to grab a meal near Birmingham Moor Street Station.

Enjoy your culinary adventure.

