Southwark Schools HR Bulletin

6th November 2026

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Update from the Local Authority

Dear Headteachers and SENCOs

Update from the Speech and Language Therapy Delivery Group

We are writing to update you on the work of the Southwark Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) Delivery Group and to ask for your support with an important piece of information gathering.

The SaLT Delivery Group brings together representatives from schools, health services, Southwark Council and commissioning teams. The group's purpose is to address current challenges in Speech and Language Therapy provision and to develop a more sustainable, effective and joined-up approach for children and young people in Southwark.

Since the group's formation, we have:

- established a shared programme of work and governance arrangements;
- reviewed current challenges in provision, including capacity, consistency and access to services;
- established funding to increase assessment capacity to support Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs);
- begun work to understand current demand, workforce capacity and expenditure across the borough; and
- started planning future commissioning arrangements that better reflect the needs of children, young people and schools.

What schools will see over the coming months

The Delivery Group is focused on both immediate improvements and longer-term system change. As this work progresses, schools should expect to see:

- Improved oversight and accountability for Speech and Language Therapy provision across Southwark.
- Greater transparency about what support is available, how services are accessed and what schools can expect from providers.
- Better coordination between education, health and commissioned providers.
- Continued work to increase assessment capacity and address delays associated with EHC needs assessment processes.
- A clearer understanding of the Speech and Language Therapy workforce and provision available across the borough.
- Future commissioning arrangements that are informed by the needs of children and young people, the experiences of families and the realities of provision in schools.
- Opportunities for schools to shape future developments through ongoing engagement and feedback.

While some improvements are already underway, the wider programme of work will continue over the coming year and we are committed to keeping schools updated on progress.

Request for information

One of the key findings from the work to date is that we do not yet have a complete picture of the Speech and Language Therapy provision being delivered across Southwark. Many schools commission additional support directly from providers alongside centrally commissioned services.

To support this work, we are asking all schools to provide the name(s) of any Speech and Language Therapy provider(s) you commission directly. At this stage, we are not asking schools to provide detailed financial information. The information you provide will help us develop the first borough-wide picture of Speech and Language Therapy provision across Southwark. This will enable us to identify gaps, duplication, good practice and opportunities to make better use of the expertise and resources already available within the system. Once we have collated the information received, we will contact providers directly to gather further details about the services they deliver to Southwark schools. This approach is intended to minimise the burden on schools while ensuring we have the information needed to plan effectively for the future.

Please send the requested information to chloe.apter@southwark.gov.uk by 17 November 2026.

Thank you for your support with this important work. We recognise the pressures schools are currently facing and are grateful for your continued engagement as we work together to improve outcomes for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

Kind regards

Chris Clark

Interim Director of Integrated Commissioning

Southwark Council and South East London Integrated Care Board

and

Cathrine Milmine

Assistant Director for SEND

Southwark Council and South East London Integrated Care Board

New Guidance for Schools: Trade Union Access Requests and Meetings with School Staff

New provisions relating to trade union access to workplaces and communication with workers mean it is important that schools have clear and consistent arrangements in place for responding to requests from trade unions.

To support schools in responding consistently and appropriately to access requests, Southwark Schools HR has developed new guidance:

Trade Union Access Requests and Meetings with School Staff: Guidance for Maintained Schools and Academy Trusts.

The guidance sets out:

- The legal and industrial relations framework relating to trade union access.
- How schools should consider and respond to requests from recognised and non-recognised trade unions.
- Safeguarding, educational and operational factors that schools may legitimately take into account when determining requests.
- Good practice principles for constructive engagement with trade unions.
- Template letters and decision-making tools to support school leaders.
- Guidance on when restrictions or refusals may be justified and when they are unlikely to be appropriate.

A key principle of the guidance is that schools should adopt a presumption of constructive engagement and seek to facilitate reasonable requests wherever practicable, whilst maintaining their responsibilities for safeguarding, pupil welfare, educational provision and operational effectiveness.

Action for Schools

- Review the new guidance with Headteachers, School Business Managers and senior leaders responsible for employee relations.
- Ensure local arrangements for responding to trade union access requests are consistent, documented and understood by relevant managers.
- Familiarise yourself with the template letters and decision-making checklist before responding to future requests.

- Seek advice from Southwark Schools HR before significantly restricting or refusing a request from a trade union.

The guidance is intended to help schools navigate the evolving industrial relations landscape while maintaining positive and constructive relationships with recognised trade unions and workforce representatives.

Have you implemented the updated Sexual Harassment and Third-Party Harassment policies we issued in September?

Legislative changes introduced in October 2026 have strengthened employers' duties to prevent sexual harassment and introduced greater responsibilities in relation to third-party harassment. Schools should ensure that their policies, procedures and local arrangements reflect these changes and that staff are aware of how concerns can be raised and addressed.

Schools' HR subscribers can access the updated policy suite, including:

- Schools HR Model Policy – Grievance
- Respect at Work Model Statement
- Schools HR Model Policy – Sexual Harassment
- Schools HR Model Policy – Third Party Harassment, Abuse and Inappropriate Behaviour
- Choosing the Right Policy Guidance]

These documents were updated and introduced in September to support schools in meeting current legal requirements and promoting safe, respectful and inclusive working environments.

What Schools Should Do

- Review the updated harassment policies and supporting guidance.
- Ensure the Schools HR Model Policy – Sexual Harassment and Schools HR Model Policy – Third Party Harassment, Abuse and Inappropriate Behaviour have been formally considered for adoption through the school's local governance arrangements.
- Communicate reporting arrangements to staff and ensure managers understand their responsibilities for responding to concerns appropriately.
- Include these documents within your 2026/27 policy review programme if they have not yet been reviewed and adopted.

If you require advice on implementing these policies or reviewing local procedures, please contact the Schools HR Team.

REMINDER: Employment Service Passport: Recognition of NHS Service

Have you recruited, or are you planning to recruit, a member of staff from the NHS?

Schools are reminded that the Employment Service Passport arrangements apply to maintained community and voluntary controlled schools where Southwark Council is the employer. The agreement enables eligible NHS service to be recognised when employees transfer directly from an NHS organisation to local government employment, helping to support movement across London's public sector workforce.

What does this mean for schools?

Where an employee joins a maintained community or voluntary controlled school directly from an eligible NHS employer, with no break in service of one clear week or more, their previous NHS service must be recognised for certain contractual benefits. [southwark-...epoint.com]

Recognised service will count towards:

- Occupational sick pay.
- Occupational maternity pay.
- Occupational shared parental leave pay.
- Contractual annual leave entitlements linked to length of service.
- Other contractual leave provisions where entitlement increases with service.

What is not covered?

The agreement does not apply to:

- Redundancy payments.
- Contractual severance payments.
- Pension rights or pension scheme membership.
- Statutory employment rights that depend on continuity of employment, including qualifying service for unfair dismissal claims.

The arrangements are intended to remove barriers to movement between the NHS and local government, helping employers attract experienced candidates from across the wider public sector workforce.

School Action

Schools should ensure that recruitment and onboarding processes identify employees joining from eligible NHS organisations and verify previous service so that contractual entitlements can be applied correctly from the start of employment.

If you are unsure whether previous NHS service should be recognised under the Employment Service Passport arrangements, please contact the Schools HR Team for advice.

Multi-academy Trusts / Academy: Updates to the Academy Trust Handbook

Supply staff, energy, MIS contracts

The Academy Trust Handbook has been updated with requirements covering supply staffing, energy contracts and Management Information Systems (MIS).

Supply staffing (2.28): Trusts must use the Government Commercial Agency's Supply Teachers and Education Recruitment agreement for their supply staffing requirements, unless they already have an alternative compliant agreement in place with rates that do not exceed those available through the framework.

Energy (2.29): Trusts must use the DfE Energy for Schools service or a DfE approved energy deal, as shown under Energy on Get help buying for schools, unless an alternative agreement with comparable pricing has been sourced. This will apply when energy contracts are renewed.

MIS contracts (2.30): Trusts must ensure that all Management Information System (MIS) contracts are awarded under DfE's MIS framework as soon as practicable after its launch (planned for September 2027).

For questions about these requirements, contact maximising.value@education.gov.uk

School Estate Management Standards annual return

Complete the form by 23 November

The School Estate Management Standards annual return became available on 22 September 2026 and must be completed and submitted by 23 November 2026.

All Responsible Bodies eligible for annual DfE capital funding are expected to complete and submit the return. This includes:

- local authorities
- multi-academy and single-academy trusts
- dioceses with responsibility for voluntary-aided schools
- sixth-form colleges

The return must be completed at Responsible Body level, rather than separately by individual schools or settings. Individual schools and governing bodies may need to provide information to support their Responsible Body's submission.

Before starting, Responsible Bodies should ensure that the correct organisation and the MYEE service are linked to their DfE Sign-in account, relevant colleagues have access, and all relevant schools and settings are correctly linked.

The return contains 28 multiple-choice questions across six areas of estate management. The questions can be reviewed in advance so that Responsible Bodies can identify who needs to contribute and gather the information required.

No supporting documents need to be uploaded, and completion will not affect DfE funding allocations.

Start your School estate management standards annual return

Manage your education estate

Manage your education estate (MYEE) is the Department for Education's digital service designed to support responsible bodies, schools and colleges in managing their estates effectively.

Watch the video below for an overview of the service, including how to access MYEE using DfE Sign-in and the key features available to users.

You'll learn how to:

- access estates guidance, tools and support
- view condition and funding data
- explore capital funding opportunities and programmes
- access estate management information and insights
- stay up to date with the latest education estate updates
- contact the Department for Education with enquiries

To access condition and funding data, and to submit your estate management standards return, ensure your account is connected to your responsible body organisation.

Find out more about Manage your education estate and explore the service today.

DfE approved frameworks for your networks

Get support with your buying

School business professionals can access a range of buying options and frameworks under browsable categories on our Get help buying for schools page, - including recruitment, energy, banking, estates and more - depending on what type of procurement support your school is after right now.

On the Horizon: Upcoming changes from April 2027

The Government has confirmed that a new day-one right to bereavement leave will be introduced in April 2027. Eligible employees will be entitled to take up to two weeks' unpaid leave following the death of a close family member or pregnancy loss before 24 weeks. The leave can be taken flexibly and employees will not be required to provide evidence of bereavement.

Schools HR Action

We will be reviewing and updating our leave of absence policy and procedure.