



**Nido Volans opening Jan 2025:
Roundtable discussion with Helen Hayes MP**

31 January 2025

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Attendees:

London South East Colleges / London South East Academies Trust:

- Dr Sam Parrett CBE – Group CEO
- John Hunt, Deputy CEO and Chief Finance Officer
- Asfa Sohail – Executive Principal and Chief Learning Officer
- Louise Wolsey – Group Chief Strategy Officer
- Neil Miller – Deputy CEO, LSEAT
- Roseanna Gooder - Assistant Principal, High Needs & Foundation Learning SEND/ESOL
- David Eastgate, Chair
- George Ryan, Governor
- Angela Hands, Governor
- Mark Burnett, Governor

External guests:

- Helen Hayes MP
- Claire Burton, Regional Director, DfE
- Alison Ismail, Director of AP and SEND, DfE
- Abrilli Phillip, Director of Education, London Borough of Lambeth
- Clare Howard OBE, CEO, Natspec

Summary of discussion

Discussion point / question (led by Sam Parrett)	Responses
<p>A Greater Local Focus - Local leadership & Place-Based provision:</p> <p>How can we strengthen collaboration between local authorities, educators, and support services to ensure SEND learners can access high-quality education and therapeutic services within their own communities, throughout their entire educational journey?</p>	<p>Clare Howard (CH): We need to look at how we can avoid waste in the system. Poor collaboration is an example of this, which we have seen over the last few years. Local Authorities often feel that post-16 SEND provision should be led by schools – but we have an FE system that has much expertise to share too. We need to collaborate and link to existing systems, looking closely at transition.</p> <p>Sam Parrett (SP): We have written to Tom Rees, highlighting the lack of FE expertise on the SEND Review panel. Schools in our MAT are working with colleges in Surrey and East Sussex currently, reflecting how a joined-up system can really thrive when you have trust and good relationships.</p> <p>Angela Hands (AH): People (and organisations) need to understand what other people (and organisations do). To make collaboration more effective, more CPD and support is needed to help staff develop a wider perspective and understand different roles, systems and approaches.</p> <p>Mark Burnett (MB): We need to help people see what others do and how things work, without it feeling like a threat.</p> <p>SP: We will always need discrete SEND provision for example, but know that with the right support, many children young people and young adults can thrive in mainstream.</p> <p>Roseanna Gooder (RG): We need to be ambitious and aspirational for all learners – and some will require more support than others.</p> <p>Abrilli Phillip (AP): There is no one size fits all solution for SEND learners. We need to look at every individual to see what the best fit is for them in terms of education and support. We need a more flexible funding model to achieve this, working with schools and employers. This must be needs-driven, adequately funded and inclusive.</p>

SP: Need absolutely varies. AT LSEC, we have had learners coming through our Nido Volan provision and moving into mainstream provision through levels 3, 4 and above. One learner has studied for her degree with us. While this is unusual, it does happen and is certainly possible. Often parents of SEND children can have limited aspirations for them, so it's vital that they are aware of the options that can be available.

Neil Miller (NM): We need to see fairer funding across Local Authorities, with better provision locally. This will enable our young people to stay in their communities and avoid them having to access education and other services, including therapies, out of borough. If we get it right locally, LAs will save money and families (and the young people) will benefit.

SP: Capacity for post-16 SEND learners in FE is also an issue as the sector has not had adequate capital investment. In our own college, to expand SEND provision further will mean having to lose mainstream vocational areas, which would disadvantage other young people. We know where these children are and can see them coming through the system – so why can't there be better planning in terms of need and investment?

CH: This is exactly why the Education Select Committee's recently-launched FE inquiry is so important and must run alongside the SEND one – these areas must be considered together and not in isolation.

David Eastgate (DE): Ensuring continuity through education and beyond into employment is crucial. With colleges now being back in the public sector, we need governing bodies that are prepared to take risks, taking innovative approaches and sticking their heads above the parapet. For example, taking on the failing Michael Tippett College was a risk, but brave decisions and leadership is needed to effect positive change.

Systemic collaboration and progression pathways

How can we improve long-term planning for high-needs provision, ensuring capital investment aligns with demand and that transition pathways are effectively implemented across education stages?

George Ryan (GR): We need to take a longitudinal view – we have the data, we know where the children and young people are, so we need to map this and plan more effectively for them

AP: It can be hard to look at this objectively, but we do have the data. For me, early intervention is key and responding to needs at the earliest possible point. We have an over-dependence on EHCPs; these are not always what a child or young person needs. If needs were identified earlier, an EHCP may not even be needed. Early Years grants can help here, giving children and their families support at an early stage.

SP: There is no equivalent to these grants in colleges – we have to look to LAs, who are busy with schools and have many other funding pressures. FE needs additional budgets for SEND provision.

Asfa Sohail (AS): We have many SEND learners in our mainstream FE provision, and many are progressing well. However, to improve this further, we have committed to ensuring that all our vocational teachers are trained in SEND – so they can better support learners. However, this has a cost attached. We need more advanced planning and a better view of who is coming through, so we can accommodate everyone effectively.

Louise Wolsey (LW): Through the FE post-16 capacity fund we have been able to create a new STEM provision and expanded student numbers. The same concept could be used in a SEND capacity. And the same goes for the effective National Leadership Forum which brings experts together from across the public sector. This could be re-designed with a SEND focus, facilitating planning and collaboration.

3. Parental Choice and Advocacy

What could be changed systemically to achieve more co-operative decision making between parents, LAs and other agencies?

SP: If we get it right with parents, we will get better outcomes. This is about shared decision making.

MB: Again, this is about getting it right as early as possible – in the early years

NM: Getting local provision right is key – and investing in Early Years. Currently EYFS lacks expertise and pays very low wages, and this has to change. Identifying potential SEND issues at age 2 or 3 and putting in support at this stage, can often mean that an EHCP is then not needed.

Using SEND expertise in outreach services is also vital. Keeping more children and young people in mainstream education through early intervention and support reduces exclusions and the need for EHCPs. For example, 75% of the young people our Trust Outreach team work with, will stay in mainstream. This includes working with their families and schools, ensuring everyone is supported.

AP: More investment in EYFS SEND provision is needed for early identification and intervention. Many children won't be ready for primary school or have an EHCP – and will then struggle from the outset. We need to close gaps as early as possible, to give more children the chance to access mainstream with the right support. More creativity and more resources are needed.

SP: We need parents to trust the system and have confidence in it.

4. Inclusion in mainstream education:

What steps can be taken to create a more inclusive accountability framework in schools - one that values vocational and employability skills alongside academic achievement, and prevents the exclusion of SEND learners?

SP: We know that there are perverse incentives in the current school accountability systems. We need to speak to the whole system and not just parts of it – and to do this, we need a more inclusive approach.

NM: League tables and progress measures have stifled inclusion and the Ebacc has led to narrowing of the curriculum in schools. Using the term ‘outliers’ for young people who can’t access an academic curriculum is unfair. We need new accountability measures, which will give a better assessment of the ‘whole’ child and recognises different types of success. Ofsted has said it will measure inclusion in its new inspection framework, but how will it do that?

AH: Progression has to be the key measure for schools and colleges. Ofsted doesn’t really look at this data, but it should be central.

AS: My concern is around assessment and how this affects inclusion. The curriculum assessment reforms will mean that most assessment becomes exam-based – and for many young people, this will mean that they won’t be able to succeed. Moving to an exam-based approach is not inclusive.

AP: League tables have destroyed education and made it non-inclusive. Diversity in the curriculum has been lost and low aspirations are set for children who struggle in academic terms. We need a culture of providing for the bottom 25% and it takes brave leaders to do this, when accountability measures are all about the top 25%. This is not an inclusive system and sets the context for parents to become worried about their child ‘not achieving’ – feeding into the adversarial issues.

SUMMING UP

SP: The passion we have seen in the room today speaks to the fact that we have achieved so much together – but that there is still more to do.

We have sadly run out of time – but the next step in the discussion would be in relation to employment and what we are doing (and can do) to help SEND learners into meaningful jobs and fulfilling lives.

Helen Hayes: It is inspirational to see what can be done, in the heart of a community, to deliver a system that enables every SEND learner to thrive and benefit from opportunities.

As Chair of the Education Select Committee, as well as being the local MP, the insight that has been shared today by so many experts is very helpful in the context of the Committee's work on both SEND and Further Education.

SEND is the single biggest challenge within the education system and our cross-party group of MPs are focused on not only articulating the scope of this challenge to government, but to also come up with solutions.

FE is a crucial part of the system and must be made a priority. We need to break down the barriers for SEND learners, not only in education, but in employment too – and it is great to hear about the success of Nido Volans Lambeth in this regard.