Notts Together
For children, young people and families

Experts at Hand Partnership Engagement Event

6th October 2026, 12:30-13:30

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Session Highlights

- **Nottinghamshire's SEND Reform Plan has now been approved by the DfE**. Experts at Hand is a major part of the reform, focused on earlier identification, intervention and improving inclusion.
- **The approach is about a "community of expertise", rather than experts coming in to fix things**. Practitioners, schools, settings, families and partners will work together, bringing different knowledge and expertise around children and young people.
- **Support will be needs-led rather than diagnosis-led**, with a strong emphasis on early intervention, prevention and building confidence and capacity within schools and settings.
- **Recruitment and commissioning are the immediate priorities**. Work is progressing to increase capacity across Educational Psychology, specialist teaching, assistant practitioners, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy, alongside exploration of increased Family SENCO capacity.
- **Five strategic lead areas are being developed**: neuro-affirming practice, social, emotional and mental health, transitions, speech, language and communication needs, and occupational therapy. These roles will help create greater consistency and join-up across Nottinghamshire.

- **Experts at Hand is not intended to create another individual referral system**. The emphasis is on support at group, classroom and whole-school/system level, including coaching, modelling practice and building skills within the existing workforce.
- **The existing Family of Schools model provides an important foundation**. The developing multi-agency inclusion approach will build on Nottinghamshire's existing structures and relationships rather than create something separate.
- **Co-production and ongoing engagement are central to developing the offer**. Feedback from schools, settings, families and partners will continue to shape what practitioners deliver, with a strong focus on practical support that makes a difference on the ground.

"What support would be most valuable through Experts at Hand?"

Communication and Interaction (C&I)

- Increased access to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), particularly in secondary schools.
- Support for expressive and receptive language skills.
- Greater understanding of the links between speech, language, communication and literacy.
- Earlier assessment and support for pupils requiring AAC and assistive technology.
- Support for pupils who mask their needs, particularly autistic girls and young people.
- Better pupil profiles and information sharing to support consistency across staff and settings.
- Neuro-affirming approaches and support for children and young people to understand their neurodivergent identity.
- Better joined-up approaches across communication, interaction and SEMH services.

Cognition and Learning (C&L)

- Practical classroom strategies and modelling of interventions.
- Research-informed interventions for literacy and mathematics.
- Consistent assessment approaches and tools across the county.
- Support for pupils working significantly below age-related expectations, particularly at secondary and GCSE stage.
- Greater awareness and implementation of the Engagement Model for pupils with complex learning needs.
- Inclusive curriculum design, particularly within secondary schools.

- Advice and support that is practical and achievable within mainstream classroom contexts.

Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

- More SEMH specialist support, particularly in secondary schools.
- Earlier intervention and support before needs escalate into crisis, exclusion or persistent absence.
- Trauma-informed, attachment-aware and neurodiversity-informed approaches.
- Better ADHD support and post-diagnosis support.
- Understanding the underlying reasons for behaviour rather than reacting to behaviour alone.
- Support for anxiety, masking, emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) and non-attendance.
- Improved support for pupils at risk of suspension, exclusion and placement breakdown.
- Greater consistency in SEMH support available across Nottinghamshire.
- More support for families managing behaviour and emotional needs at home.
- Better staff understanding of emotional regulation, anxiety-based behaviours and demand avoidance.

Sensory and/or Physical Needs (SPN)

- Improved access to Occupational Therapy (OT) advice and support.
- Sensory assessments and follow-up support within schools.
- Greater understanding of pupils' sensory profiles and sensory processing needs.
- Sensory-friendly environments, including classrooms, regulation spaces and low-cost adaptations.
- Environmental audits and practical guidance on reasonable adjustments.
- Easier access to specialist advice around physical needs, mobility and gross motor development.
- Increased access to specialist equipment, assistive technology and AAC.
- Support around PEEPs, accessibility and inclusive environments.
- Training for school staff to develop confidence in supporting sensory and physical needs.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- Earlier intervention and preventative support.
- More practical, in-person modelling and coaching rather than advice alone.
- Improved multi-agency and cross-service working.
- Easier referral pathways and access to support.
- Better transition support, particularly post-16 and at key phase transfer points.
- Increased staff training and workforce development.
- Improved family support and parental engagement.

- A clearer understanding of what support is available locally and how to access it.
- Greater focus on inclusion within mainstream settings and building staff confidence to meet a wider range of needs.

Question Log

As Experts at Hand or Nottinghamshire's 'community of expertise' is an evolving element of national SEND Reform, some aspects of the model are still being developed. The responses below reflect the information available at the time of the engagement event and will continue to be refined as plans progress.

Question	Answer
Offer	
Will EaH support environmental audits?	Yes, where appropriate. Experts at Hand can support whole-setting approaches to inclusion, so environmental audits could form part of the offer where they help a setting understand and respond to children and young people's needs. The precise approach will depend on the needs identified and how the local EaH offer is delivered.
Will a universal gross motor coordination package be delivered through EaH?	Potentially, yes. The guidance specifically identifies motor skills as an area that can be supported through Experts at Hand, including whole-setting approaches, staff training and group or whole-class interventions. The exact programme or package delivered will be determined through future discussions with Occupational Therapy (OT) practitioners and informed by engagement with schools and settings to ensure support meets local needs.
What will the sensory offer look like under EaH?	Nottinghamshire's SEND Reform Plan includes additional occupational therapy capacity through Experts at Hand, with a focus on earlier access to support within mainstream settings. In line with the DfE guidance, this can include support relating to sensory needs and building the capability of settings to respond to those needs. The detailed local OT and sensory offer, including the specific approaches and resources that will be available to settings, will be developed as part of implementation.

Access and Delivery	
Will more than one service come together to support a child, whole class or setting?	EaH is primarily about supporting groups and whole settings, while responding to the needs of individual children where appropriate. It brings together educational psychology, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and specialist teaching (alongside schools, settings and families). This means that different professionals can contribute their knowledge to support children and young people and the staff working with them. EaH creates an opportunity for joined-up, multidisciplinary support where this is needed.
How will schools access EaH practitioners?	The intention is to integrate EaH practitioners into existing support structures, including the Family of Schools model and Springboard arrangements. Further details will be shared as implementation plans are developed.
Have referral routes between EaH and specialist services been considered?	These arrangements are currently being discussed as part of the wider EaH design and will be considered as implementation progresses.
Are differences in NHS referral routes across Nottinghamshire and Bassetlaw being reviewed?	The EaH support service is a distinct and additional offer for schools and settings, with a strong focus on early intervention, building capacity and whole-class, whole-setting and system-level approaches. We are working towards a consistent universal and early-intervention SALT and OT offer across Nottinghamshire, while recognising and linking with existing services and pathways. We recognise that there are differences in the way specialist support is currently accessed and delivered across Nottinghamshire, including in Bassetlaw. The EaH programme is not intended to replace existing specialist NHS provision or established specialist pathways. Rather, it is intended to provide additional capacity at the universal and early-intervention level, working alongside existing provision and ensuring there are clear links into specialist services where these are required.

Will Mental Health in Schools Team support become available to all schools?	The national ambition remains for all schools to have access to MHST support by 2030. Phases of training and recruitment are continuing towards that goal. Work is underway between the Educational Psychology Service and Nottingham City colleagues to bolster the Senior Mental Health Lead training offer including top-ups for those who trained some time ago and want updates. The goal of this is to facilitate a strong whole school approach to mental health through systems thinking at a leadership level, designed to further strengthen the MHST's goals in this area.
How will FE/Post-16 settings fit within the Family of Schools model?	Arrangements for post-16 and early years settings are still being developed and will be considered as part of the next phase of programme design.
Digital Tools	
Will Verbo be available to schools across Nottinghamshire, and will there be a cost to access it?	The local authority is currently exploring the use of Verbo. Any rollout remains subject to the necessary governance processes. The intention is to explore grant funding opportunities to support access at no additional cost to schools, subject to the relevant approvals being secured.
Will Family Hubs have access to the Verbo offer?	This will be taken away for further exploration.