

## Research into approaches to supporting SEND pupils in multi-academy trusts: information for trusts and schools

### What are the aims of the project?

The project will explore the approaches used across multi-academy trusts (MATs) in supporting secondary pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the extent to which trusts with specialist provision are drawing on this to support their mainstream schools, and the challenges trusts are facing and how these have been overcome.

At a time when schools are increasingly facing challenges in meeting the needs of SEND pupils, this research seeks to fill several critical evidence gaps. The findings will shed new light on how school trusts are meeting SEND pupils' needs and inform policy and practice recommendations on how to better support pupils with SEND.

### Who is conducting the project?

[The National Foundation for Educational Research](#) (NFER) is conducting this research. NFER is the leading provider of independent educational evidence and assessments in the UK. As a registered charity, our mission is to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere and to support positive change across education systems.

### What will the project involve for trusts/schools?

We hope to speak to staff in up to 20 school trusts that have been purposefully selected to identify good or innovative practice examples of trust-led SEN support mechanisms. For each trust, we hope to conduct a 30–40-minute interview with up to three staff members, including:

- The appropriate staff member with trust-level oversight of SEND support (such as the trust CEO or Director of Education)
- Up to two special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) (depending on trust size) from individual secondary schools in the trust.

It may be helpful to speak to additional staff, and we will be happy to take guidance on this from the main contact at each trust. Interviews will be conducted remotely by telephone or via Microsoft Teams at a time that is convenient for each interviewee.

Alongside the interviews, we will also review any relevant trust SEND policy documentation to better understand the approaches and policies adopted by high-performing trusts. This will be a separate desk-based task, based on documentation published on school/trust websites. We do not expect this activity to require any additional time from interviewees.

## Why have you approached my trust/school to take part?

Trusts will be purposefully selected – as far as possible - to identify good or innovative practice examples of trust-led SEN support mechanisms (albeit we recognise that this is challenging to identify via published statistics alone). This will be done by selecting trusts where at least one school has above-average SEND representation. Trusts with both mainstream and special schools will be oversampled. They will be sampled both on the basis of the criteria outlined above and with an additional criterion that all their special schools have at a minimum of a Good Ofsted rating. A stratified sample will be drawn from these trusts to ensure that views are captured across a range of sizes, regions and structures (including by whether or not there is a special school within the trust).

In summary, if you have been approached for an interview then it means we think you are doing excellent work with you SEND pupils, and we would like to find out more about what you are doing!

## How will schools and teachers benefit from taking part in the evaluation?

By sharing your experiences, you will be contributing to the evidence base on how trusts are supporting pupils with SEND, and supporting policy makers to better understand what is working well or otherwise. We anticipate the findings will be of interest to other trusts and groups of schools as well.

You will also be providing insights into what constitutes a 'strong' trust. The Department for Education has identified inclusion and collaboration as key themes for 'strong' trusts, but relatively little is currently known about what this looks like in practice.

In addition, as a thank you for taking part, all interviewees will be offered a £30 Amazon voucher on completion of an interview. Where interviewees agree to accept these vouchers, their names and email addresses will be used to order and send the vouchers, which will be emailed out in December 2024.

The findings of the evaluation will be published in a final report, which will be freely available online, in spring 2024. The interview data will be anonymised and we will not name anyone in the final report. However, participating school trusts will be given the option to be named on an acknowledgements page.

## How will NFER use and protect the data collected?

Full details of how research participants' personal information will be collected, stored and used can be found in our privacy notice, which is on the project web page.

## Who to contact?

For further information about the evaluation, please contact the Project Lead Lillian Flemons at [l.flemons@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:l.flemons@nfer.ac.uk).