

ANNUAL SEN CONFERENCE 2026

Supporting Learners with Complex Needs



3 February 2026 – MORNING PROGRAMME

8.00	Registration, Refreshments & Exhibition
9.00	Welcome <i>Joan Kavanagh, SEND Teams Service Delivery Manager, LCC</i>
9.05	Opening address <i>Ed Whiting, Chief Executive, Leeds City Council</i>
9.15	A trauma-informed approach to sequencing support in complex situations <i>Tessa Burnard, Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist (Compassionate Leeds Programme Team), Leeds EPT</i> <i>Tessa will share a trauma-informed framework which enables the sequencing of support based on an unpicking of unmet need.</i>
10.25	Impact of effective inclusion – voices from Leeds young adults <i>Hashim Mahmood combines his studies in MSc in Football Business with being a Squad Lead Coach, a Foundation Degree Mentor, a member of the England Deaf football team and represented England at the Deaf Olympics in Japan this year.</i> <i>Ese Aigbe is a doctor at Pinderfields Hospital in the Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust. Ese was not diagnosed as deaf until she was 11, shortly after her family migrated from Italy to the UK. Ese acknowledges the contribution of supportive teachers, specialist provision, and learning to advocate for herself to her success.</i>
10.45	Refreshments & Exhibition
11.15	Wellbeing Woven In: Making Care Part of Everyday <i>Deb Park, Headteacher Support Co-Ordinator</i> <i>Deb will explore the culture of care as a proactive and supportive approach to enabling support.</i>
12.00	Lunch, Refreshments & Exhibition Two Sitings : 12.00 Blue lanyards 12.35 Red lanyards

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3 February 2026 – AFTERNOON PROGRAMME	
1.15 Workshop Session 1	a) Creating sensory safety through universal provision <i>Inclusion Advisory Team</i>
	b) SLCN within the ARC framework – causes, identification and classroom strategies <i>Anna Lees-Gray, Director of Interactions SLT</i>
	c) Attunement in Practice: Building Connection and Understanding <i>Educational Psychology Team</i>
	d) Relational Approaches and Co-Regulation from Early Years to Post 16 <i>Inclusion Advisory Team</i>
	e) Developing Sustainable SEND Provisions Beyond the Classroom to Foster Independent Inclusion <i>Natasha Harrison, Associate Assistant Principle and Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Coordinator, Morley Academy</i>
2.15	Refreshments & Prize Draw
2.30 Workshop Session 2	Workshop Sessions A to D repeated as above
	2e) Possums, Porcupines and Pufferfish: Behaviour as survival adaption <i>Tessa Burnard, Senior EP & Dr Penny Netherwood, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Compassionate Leeds</i>
3.30	Evaluations and Close

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The theme this year considers how we can support learners with complex needs in mainstream. The term “Complex Needs” can mean different things to different people or professionals. The Compassionate Leeds Programme proposes a definition offered by the Anna Freud Centre where Complex Needs in a young person are defined as multiple needs which interact and intersect, resulting in a complex situation. Inevitably, such situations call for multiple supports and interventions which can be overwhelming and leave practitioners without clear direction.

KEYNOTE

A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO SEQUENCING SUPPORT IN COMPLEX SITUATIONS

*Tessa Burnard, Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist
(Compassionate Leeds Programme Team), Leeds EPT*

Tessa Burnard from the Compassionate Leeds Programme team will share a trauma-informed framework which enables the sequencing of support based on an unpicking of unmet need. The Attachment Regulation and Competency (ARC) Framework was originally developed as an intervention for developmental trauma. The framework has been adopted by various local authorities to support understanding and interventions relating to the complexities surrounding trauma and SEMH needs. In Leeds, it is now being adopted as a multi-agency approach to supporting children and young people whose complex needs can intersect with adversity and trauma.

Tessa is a Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist hosted by Leeds City Council EP Team as part of the Compassionate Leeds Programme Team. Tessa and the team are committed to delivering the ambitious vision of the Compassionate Leeds Strategy: embedding trauma-informed culture and practice across multi-agency partnerships. Using strategies that enable all practitioners to realise and recognise the presence of adversity and trauma, they aim to enable trauma-informed responses to complex situations, promoting healing and reducing future adversity.

DEB PARK PRESENTATION

WELLBEING WOVEN IN: MAKING CARE PART OF EVERYDAY

Deb Park, Headteacher Support Co-Ordinator

Deb Park, Headteacher Support Co-ordinator, with a focus on staff wellbeing. With the current complexity of situations our settings are asked to support, demands on staff and the emotional drain placed on them are of increasing concern. Whilst caring for staff is one aspect of this challenge, our children and young people also need staff who are well, a fundamental piece of the jigsaw that is the ARC framework. Instead of adding wellbeing as an extra demand, we will explore how to embed a culture of care into everyday structures. Deb will explore the culture of care as a proactive and supportive approach to enabling support.

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Workshops

WORKSHOP 1A & 2A

CREATING SENSORY SAFETY THROUGH UNIVERSAL PROVISION

Inclusion Advisory Team

This practical and interactive session is designed to deepen understanding of the eight senses and sensory processing. Participants will explore how sensory experiences influence behaviour, learning, and emotional regulation.

Using the **graduated approach model** through the **ARC (Attachment, Regulation, Competency) framework**, we will examine ways to create inclusive environments that support sensory needs. The session **covers universal provision strategies**, identifies **priority actions**, and shares **everyday practical approaches** that can be applied across settings to promote engagement and well-being.

The session includes **20 minutes of reflective discussion**, offering time to consolidate learning, explore resources, and exchange ideas with peers. This collaborative element ensures participants leave with actionable strategies and a clear understanding of how to apply sensory-informed practices in their work.

WORKSHOP 1B & 2B

SLCN WITHIN THE ARC FRAMEWORK - CAUSES, IDENTIFICATION AND CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Anna Lees-Gray, Director of Interactions SLT

This workshop will provide insight into various domains of SLCN such as social communication and interaction and narrative skills, and how they can be affected by adverse childhood experiences and developmental trauma. In this accessible and engaging session, participants will gain a better understanding of the complex intersection of communication and trauma, and come away with strategies to support children in the classroom.

Anna Lees-Gray is Director of Interactions SLT and a specialist speech and language therapist with 19 years' experience working in mainstream and special schools across Leeds and Yorkshire. She has a special interest and qualifications in sensory inclusion and regulation and trauma informed practice.

WORKSHOP 1C & 2C

ATTUNEMENT IN PRACTICE: BUILDING CONNECTION AND UNDERSTANDING

Educational Psychology Team

For some time, we have understood that the experience of trauma can physically alter the way our brains process our environments, experiences and emotional responses and the resulting developmental trauma can impact many areas of a young person's life including relationships, wellbeing, and learning. Critically, the ability to monitor and regulate one's emotional state in order to manage the task of learning can be especially difficult for children and young people exposed to early adversity and trauma. This workshop will unpick and make sense of the development of executive functions in early childhood trauma and how strategies need to be developed through a co-regulating approach in the classroom focusing on trauma-informed principles of trust, transparency, collaboration, peer support, cultural humility and empowerment.

WORKSHOP 1D & 2D

RELATIONAL APPROACHES AND CO-REGULATION FROM EARLY YEARS TO POST 16

Inclusion Advisory Team

This workshop explores relational approaches and co-regulation from Early Years to Post-16, with a focus on understanding how adults' own regulation influences the children and young people they support.

Participants will examine behaviour as a form of communication and consider the importance of responding with empathy and connection. The session highlights the power of co-regulation in fostering emotional safety and models of person-centred practice across age groups. Practical strategies and real examples will be shared to support implementation in everyday settings. Time for reflection and questions will allow participants to consider how these approaches can be applied within their own roles

WORKSHOP 1E

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SEND PROVISIONS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM TO FOSTER INDEPENDENT INCLUSION

*Natasha Harrison, Associate Assistant Principal and Special
Educational Needs & Disabilities Coordinator, Morley Academy*

This workshop examines the development of structured and effective provisions operating outside the mainstream classroom to enhance students' capacity for students with SEND to thrive, and drive independent engagement within the classroom, thus developing the preparation for adulthood and hopefully reducing the need for additional adults in the classroom.

Drawing upon evidence-based practice implemented in a secondary school context— with approaches easily adaptable across primary and post-16 phases— it will explore how targeted interventions can address barriers to learning and can equip students with the tools and confidence that promote sustained inclusion.

The session will focus on the design and implementation of communication and SEMH interventions that have demonstrated measurable impact on emotional literacy, anxiety reduction, social interaction, and sensory regulation. Data on improvements in attendance, behaviour, and preparation for adulthood will be discussed, illustrating the effectiveness of this model in supporting holistic student development.

Delegates will gain insight into practical strategies for establishing and maintaining such provisions within the constraints of mainstream settings (including staff and space), offering scalable approaches to meet the increasing complexity and prevalence of SEND needs in schools.

WORKSHOP 2E

POSSUMS, PORCUPINES AND PUFFERFISH: BEHAVIOUR AS SURVIVAL ADAPTATION

*Tessa Burnard, Senior EP & Dr Penny Netherwood, Consultant Clinical
Psychologist, Compassionate Leeds*

In this workshop we will move beyond thinking about behaviour as communication to considering behaviour as adaption - as a front for unmet needs or as an attempt to survive real or imagined danger (and feel safe again). Without fully understanding how behaviour makes sense we cannot respond effectively and yet we recognise that the young person often does not "know" why they have done something. During this session, we will look at a practical tool to understand and get in front of behaviours that challenge using a trauma-informed lens.