



**RALEIGH EDUCATION TRUST
Conference Programme**

3RD JULY 2026

East Midlands Conference Centre

[#RETBigConversation26](https://twitter.com/RETBigConversation26)

Welcome

Sean Kelly - CEO, Raleigh Education Trust



Dear colleagues,

Welcome to our annual Raleigh Education Trust Conference.

I am delighted to welcome you to our biggest and most ambitious conference yet. This year, alongside a range of inspiring external speakers, I am particularly proud to see so many colleagues from across the Trust leading sessions and sharing their expertise. Their willingness to support and learn from one another reflects the very best of our organisation.

We are also pleased to welcome colleagues from Lady Jane Grey Academy and Ash Lea School, who are already making a positive contribution to our community.

I hope you enjoy the day, make new connections, and leave inspired by what we can achieve together.

Phil Willott, Director of Education and Beth Greville-Giddings, Learning and Development Lead Raleigh Education Trust



A very warm welcome to The BIG Conversation 2026.

It is a pleasure to come together once again for what has become a firm fixture in our calendar. This year it's bigger than ever, as we welcome new schools and guests into our growing community. Your presence reflects the strength, openness and ambition of our trust.

Our overarching theme this year is SEND, a focus that sits at the very heart of our work. It challenges and inspires us to consider how we ensure every child is seen, valued and supported to thrive. We hope today provides space to reflect, to learn from one another and to deepen our collective understanding of inclusive practice across all our settings.

Over the past year, we have continued to see remarkable commitment from colleagues across our schools, going above and beyond to support children and families with care, expertise and compassion. Today is an opportunity to celebrate that dedication, while also strengthening our shared professional learning.

As always, we are delighted to showcase voices from across our trust and to encourage collaboration between colleagues.

We hope you feel inspired, challenged and energised.

Have a fantastic day.



Thank you to our sponsors



The BIG Conversation

Since 2021, 'The BIG Conversation' has reflected on common priorities for each academy within the Raleigh Education Trust and the power of conversations to achieve real changes in teaching practice, improved student outcomes, create better solutions to problems and develop new practice. The day will encourage connection, participation to have a greater impact on learning.

How will the day run?

The day will be held in-person and include a celebration of Raleigh Education Trust. There will be a choice of sessions across this year's theme of SEND.

We have more colleagues joining us than ever and we have allocated you to one of two groups. Whilst one half are in workshops, the other half will be in the conference theatre; before swapping in session 2.

Extended sessions of 60 minutes allow for specialist input and facilitated reflection and discussion on relating your learning to your own context, role, pupils and families.

Colleagues have been sent individual timetables in advance. The RET Education Support Service will facilitate follow up 'Small Talk' sessions (voluntary), in order to reflect, share, discuss, celebrate, problem solve, adjust and/or embed the practice with peers.

Evaluation and feedback

The evaluation form will allow academies to capture a record of the sessions attended by colleagues and is available here:

<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/4LTZqbcPrW>



Structure of the day

Time	Session	Venue
8:30-9:00	Registration and refreshments	Foyer/ Atrium
9:00-9:30	Welcome	Conference Theatre
9:30-10:15	Keynote + Q&A	Conference Theatre
10:15-10:45	Break	Atrium/ Concourse
10:45-11:45	Session 1	Various
11:45-12:00	Movement break	Atrium/ Concourse
12:00-13:00	Session 2	Various
13:00-14:00	Lunch	Atrium/ Concourse
14:00 – approx. 15:30	Celebration	Conference Theatre

Keynote Speaker



Francesca Martinez

The Beauty of Diversity

Instagram: @chessmarti
X: @chessmartinez
www.francescamartinez.com

Francesca will share her own personal experiences of mainstream education, laced with her award-winning humour. She'll also explore how to create a truly inclusive school system and how educators and students can work together to achieve this. After years of struggling to 'fit in', Francesca will explain how a simple shift in perspective led her to radically transform how she saw herself, and how everyone can learn to embrace the positives of disability. She will encourage us all to view our imperfections as superpowers, and how human diversity can make society stronger, richer and more resilient.

A Q&A will follow.

Biography:

'Wobbly' comedian, actor, writer and speaker, Francesca Martinez, launched her career at the Edinburgh Fringe 2000 as the only woman to win the Daily Telegraph Open Mic Award. She has toured globally, made many TV and radio appearances, and won the Edinburgh Fringe Media Network Award. Her best-seller WHAT THE **** IS NORMAL?! was nominated for a Chortle Award. Her National Theatre play ALL OF US in which she starred received standing ovations every night, 5-star reviews and a George Devine Award nomination. A noted speaker, she holds Honorary Doctorates from the Open University and Bradford University.

Session 1 - 10:45-11:45

Group A

Sarah Johnson (Conference Theatre)

Stories to Systems

Values are easy to declare and hard to live. In this session, Sarah Johnson asks what it actually takes to turn neuroaffirming principles into the everyday routines, language, and leadership decisions that shape a child's day. Drawing on Ubuntu, on the relational practice transforming schools across continents, and on her own work in some of the most complex settings, she moves the conversation from aspiration to action. What does belonging look like at the classroom door, in a behaviour policy, in a difficult conversation with a family? Stories tell us who a child is. Systems decide whether they stay.

Group B

Elinor Page (G1)

Writing Without Barriers

Writing Without Barriers is an accessible and actionable session exploring how the new writing framework can be interpreted flexibly to support SEND learners. Together, we'll look at how expectations can be adapted without losing ambition, using engaging, inclusive strategies that work in both mainstream and specialist classrooms. The session will share real-life examples, simple scaffolds and adjustments, and confidence-boosting ideas to help all learners find their voice, take part meaningfully, and experience success as writers.

Tom Endy (C2)

Unlocking Potential: Delivering Duke of Edinburgh with SEND Learners

This workshop explores how the Duke of Edinburgh's Award can be successfully adapted and implemented within a special school environment. Through practical examples, case studies and lessons learned, you will gain insight into creating accessible, person-centred opportunities that enable young people with SEND to develop independence, confidence and life skills. The session will cover overcoming common barriers, building inclusive programmes, evidencing achievement, and celebrating success, ensuring that every young person can participate and thrive.

Michael FitzGerald, Tom Few, Cameron de Vial (Special Olympian), Kerry Neary (Girls in Sport) Jordan Ferrer (Nottingham Forest) (C3)

Inclusion in Sport

This session explores how inclusive sport can transform confidence, belonging and aspiration for young people. Through lived experience, school practice and community partnerships, speakers will share how sport can become a powerful vehicle for equity, identity and opportunity. From personal journeys to practical examples in schools, the session highlights how inclusive approaches enable pupils to participate, connect and thrive, regardless of background or starting points.

Dr Jo Grace (C4)

Hidden Sensory Difficulties

There is increased public awareness of common sensory differences autistic, and other neurodivergent people, may experience especially in relation to tactile and auditory stimulation. But which differences are we not thinking about and how might they be effecting the people we support.

This session will be the opportunity to explore hidden sensory differences, as well as examine their root causes and think about strategies we can put in place to make our environments more sensorially accessible.

Lisa Jacques and Marianne Scahill-Pape (C1)

Creative Inclusion in Practice

Attenborough Arts Centre will share 10 years of action research into how SEND CYP learn through creative practices, and how access to culture and methodologies can become the scaffold for pupils' education and health care planning.

Marianne and Lisa will share the core principles and evaluation framework that supports this work, together with their current inclusion and access work with ChalleNge, (Nottingham's Cultural Education Partnership) and SEND/Galleries group. Sharing Nottingham's Cultural Rucksack and its key principles, which celebrates the rich heritage and cultural diversity of the city.

This will be an informative and reflective session, with a practical workshop to demonstrate and share where strategies and resources can support the cultural learning for all CYP in galleries and school settings and align with the school curriculum.

David Kirtlan and Craig Lewis (G2+3)

Supporting all learning: Accessibility with iPad

In this session we will explore some of the accessibility features built into iPadOS, and look at how we can use them to support the needs of many learners in a classroom. We will also look at some specific SEND support tools, along with real-world examples of how, and when we might use these features.

We will begin by focusing on developing independent learners, by using some of the options built into Safari and Pages, along with tools such as read and speak, and dictation, before exploring using colour filters and tools to support visual impairments. We will also look at how you can learn more and customise your own devices.

Session 2 - 12:00-13:00

Group B

Sarah Johnson (Conference Theatre)

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Group A

Hosted by Sarah Bull (C1)

TeachMeet

Through quick-fire presentations, colleagues will share real examples from their work, offering practical strategies, creative approaches and honest reflections to showcase what works in SEND practice. A great opportunity to gather ideas, build confidence and connect with others committed to inclusive practice across Raleigh Education Trust.

Jenna Jones and Vicky Skillington (C2)

The low demand, right time pedagogical approach, engagement and personalised learning plans

This session explores the principles and practice of a low-demand, right-time pedagogical approach and how it has been implemented at Ash Lea School. It outlines the journey the school has taken to develop this approach and the rationale for moving towards a more responsive, play-informed model that better meets the needs of pupils across both primary and secondary phases.

It will consider how play-based approaches support meaningful learning and sustained progress, and how engagement profiles are used to understand pupils' interests, motivators and barriers to learning. The session also explores how personalised learning plans are used to ensure progression across the curriculum while maintaining high expectations for all pupils. .

Adam Casey, Redford Lee, Hannah Wilson-Bluss, Luke Skillington and Amy Storer. Hosted by Tom Few (C3)

SENDCo Q&A Panel

A SENDCo panel Q&A shaped by questions submitted in advance. Hear from experienced practitioners as they share insights, approaches, and practical strategies to support effective SEND provision.

Dr Jo Grace (C4)

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Speakers



Sarah Bull

Pastoral and Safeguarding Lead, Denewood Academy

Sarah has over 25 years experience of supporting vulnerable families, adults and children in Nottingham. She is a community activist and prides herself on being passionate about social inequality. She is a keen advocate for those whose voices are harder to hear. Since starting at the trust 18 months ago as a supply TA2 she has developed her learning, being successful in gaining a TA 3 post and most recently the role of Safeguarding and Pastoral Lead at Denewood Academy, where she is very proud to work.



Cameron De Vial

Special Olympian

Cameron has been skiing since the age of 14. He skis with Rossendale Special Ski Club and is a member of Special Olympics Great Britain. He has represented his club at a regional levels the North West at National level and Great Britain at World Level. He is now continuing his skiing journey by training to be an assistant Coach and pass on his skills.

Facebook: Rossendale Special Ski Club

Speakers



Tom Endy

Assistant Principal, Westbury Academy

Tom has spent seven years delivering the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at Westbury, developing inclusive approaches that enable SEND learners to succeed. He has created many memorable experiences for young people by adapting activities, expectations and support to meet individual needs. His work focuses on building confidence, independence and life skills through accessible, meaningful challenge.



Jordan Ferrer

**Schools Manager - Nottingham Forest
Community Trust**

Jordan Ferrer is School Manager at Nottingham Forest Community Trust, with over 16 years' experience in community sport, education and social inclusion. He leads school-based programmes that use sport to enhance engagement, inclusion and personal development for young people. Jordan has extensive experience working with schools, partners and national programmes, using inclusive approaches to support diverse needs. A confident facilitator and collaborator, he is passionate about creating opportunities through sport that build confidence, belonging and long-term positive outcomes for children and young people.

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/jordan-ferrer-192658216

Speakers



Tom Few

School Improvement Director, Raleigh Education Trust

Tom Few is an experienced education leader specialising in curriculum, assessment and evidence-informed practice. His work focuses on the intent and implementation of well-sequenced curriculum design, total communication and strong quality assurance. He values professional curiosity, relational practice and collaboration across schools. Alongside his Trust role, Tom serves as Chair of Governors at a mainstream primary school in Derby, supporting effective governance and strategic improvement.

LinkedIn: Tom Few



Michael FitzGerald

Headteacher, Lady Jane Grey Academy

He has worked in education for 28 years, including 20 years as a Headteacher. During this time, he has supported students in their learning and development across a range of educational settings. He has experience working with colleagues, students, and families to help create positive learning environments. He has advocated inclusion for all throughout his career. Over the course of his career, he has developed strong classroom and communication skills, alongside a practical understanding of the challenges and rewards of education. His long-standing involvement in teaching reflects his commitment to supporting young people and contributing to the wider school community.

Speakers



Dr Joanna Grace

Consultant - The Sensory Projects

Dr Joanna Grace is a Sensory Engagement, Inclusion and Belonging Specialist, Author, Researcher, Trainer and Founder of The Sensory Projects. In all she does Jo is working to contribute to a future where people are understood in spite of their differences. She is active across social media and welcomes new inclusive connections.

www.TheSensoryProjects.co.uk/contact



Lisa Jacques

SENsory Atelier Programme Manager/ Inclusion and Access Consultants, Attenborough Arts Centre

Lisa has over 32 years' experience in arts, culture, and education, including 12 years in Further and Higher Education and 20 years in gallery and museum learning. A recipient of the Marsh Award for Excellence in Visual Arts Engagement, she has held roles with Leicester Arts & Museums, Nottingham Contemporary, and as a freelance consultant specialising in play and early years learning. In 2025, she returned to Attenborough Arts Centre to manage the award-winning SENsory Atelier programme, securing funding, presenting at international conferences, and co-authoring a policy paper on SEND education reform. Her work is informed by both professional expertise and lived experience as a parent of two children with SEND.

<https://attenborougharts.com/>

Speakers



Sarah Johnson

Phoenix Education Consultancy

Sarah Johnson is Director of Phoenix Education Consultancy, President of PRUsAP, and a DfE Alternative Provision and SEND Advisor. A Distinguished Fellow of IFIP, she has spent over twenty years leading inclusion across mainstream schools, alternative provision, and hospital education, including seven years heading a Tier 4 psychiatric service. She is a published Routledge author of five books on social, emotional and mental health, a PhD candidate at the University of the West of England researching children's experiences of belonging, and co-host of the Nothing to Bring podcast. Her work begins, always, with the conviction that every child belongs to all of us.

@PhoenixEdSarah
pectech.org



Jenna Jones

Teacher, Ash Lea School

Jenna has been a teacher for 19 years, including 12 years in mainstream KS1 education where she developed and embedded a play-based approach to learning. During this time, she also served as Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning. She has worked for 7 years at Ash Lea School, supporting pupils across all curricular pathways. Jenna is Maths Lead and OPAL Curricular Lead for Play, with a strong belief in play-based learning for all pupils in both mainstream and SEND settings. This ethos has informed a low-demand, right-time approach, now widely used across primary and secondary phases at Ash Lea.

Speakers



David Kirtlan

Apple Professional Learning Specialist, Albion Computers

David has over 25 years' experience in educational leadership. He was previously an Academy Director at Doncaster College and Education Director for Backstage Academy, and led technology innovations with Apple, including the world's first Apple Authorised Training Centre for Logic and the UK's first 1:1 MacBook programme in education, and subsequently with iPads.

As an education consultant, he has supported schools and multi-academy trusts across the UK learning on Digital Transformation in education, spoken at conferences including BETT and GESS, advised governments on curriculum design, and developed digital strategies for organisations including Guide Dogs UK and Family Fund.

<https://www.albion.co.uk/education/>



Craig Lewis

Business Development Manager, Albion Computers

Craig is joining today to support the CPD session and take any questions about how technology can support teaching and learning.

<https://www.albion.co.uk/education/>

Speakers



Kerry Neary

Founder of Girls in Sports

Girls in Sports is a platform dedicated to making sports clubs more visible and accessible to all girls and women across the UK. By connecting communities with local clubs, opportunities, and resources, the platform helps more girls discover, join, and stay involved in sport. Girls in Sports also works to bring communities, clubs, and businesses together by creating opportunities for sponsorship and collaboration that support the growth of grassroots sport. As a one-stop destination, the platform also highlights and promotes women-owned and women-designed sportswear brands, helping to bring greater visibility to female-led businesses within the sports industry.

www.girlsinsports.co.uk



Elinor Page

Assistant Principal (Curriculum, English and Maths Lead) Woodlands Academy

Elinor is an English specialist with 30 years' teaching experience across mainstream and specialist education, spanning primary, secondary, and post-16 settings. She has extensive leadership experience in designing and delivering bespoke, literature-rich English curricula that prioritise engagement, creativity, and meaningful learning. Her work focuses on adapting curriculum and pedagogy to ensure inclusion and access for all learners, including those with complex and diverse needs, especially pupils with autism, using sensory and communication-focused approaches to promote participation and progress while supporting pupils' social and emotional development.

Speakers



Marianne Scahill-Pape

**Learning and Communities Manager,
Attenborough Arts Centre**

Marianne founded Learning and Communities at Attenborough Arts Centre (AAC) and has led inclusive arts programmes since 2012, reaching 26,000 participants in 2025. As Creative Health Lead, she develops learning programmes, teaches third-year medical students on Disability and the Arts, and contributes to research and community wellbeing projects. She leads AAC's Sanctuary Arts provision and The City Classroom, Leicester's Cultural Education Partnership. Marianne co-founded and chairs SENSory Atelier, creating cultural opportunities for children with SEND; the programme won Learning Programme of the Year at the 2025 Museum+Heritage Awards. Her 27-year arts career is informed by both professional and lived experience.



Vicky Skillington

Teacher and Curriculum Lead, Ash Lea School

Vicky has worked at Ash Lea School for 26 years, beginning her career as a Teaching Assistant before training as a teacher. She has worked across all key stages and pathways within the school and is now a class teacher and Curriculum Lead. Vicky has a strong belief in meeting the needs and aspirations of every pupil. This has shaped her work in developing and embedding Ash Lea's bespoke curriculum, ensuring it is broad, balanced and meaningful while preparing pupils for life beyond school. She is particularly passionate about creating personalised learning experiences, using individual motivators to engage pupils and ensuring every pupil can thrive, achieve and reach their potential.

Speakers – SENDCo Panel



Tom Few - Host

School Improvement Director, Raleigh Education Trust



Adam Casey

SENDCo, Westbury Academy [Special School]



Redford Lee

English Lead, Westbury Academy [Special School]



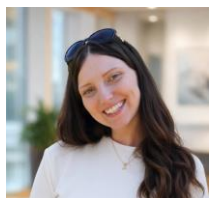
Luke Skillington

Assistant Headteacher, Ash Lea School [Special School]



Amy Storer

Executive Leader, Consultant, Coach



Hannah Wilson-Bluss

SENDCo, Ambleside Academy [Primary School]

TeachMeet

A TeachMeet is an informal, collaborative session where educators share short, practical presentations about ideas, strategies and experiences from their own practice. Designed to be fast-paced and engaging, it offers a supportive space to learn from peers, exchange insights and spark new thinking.

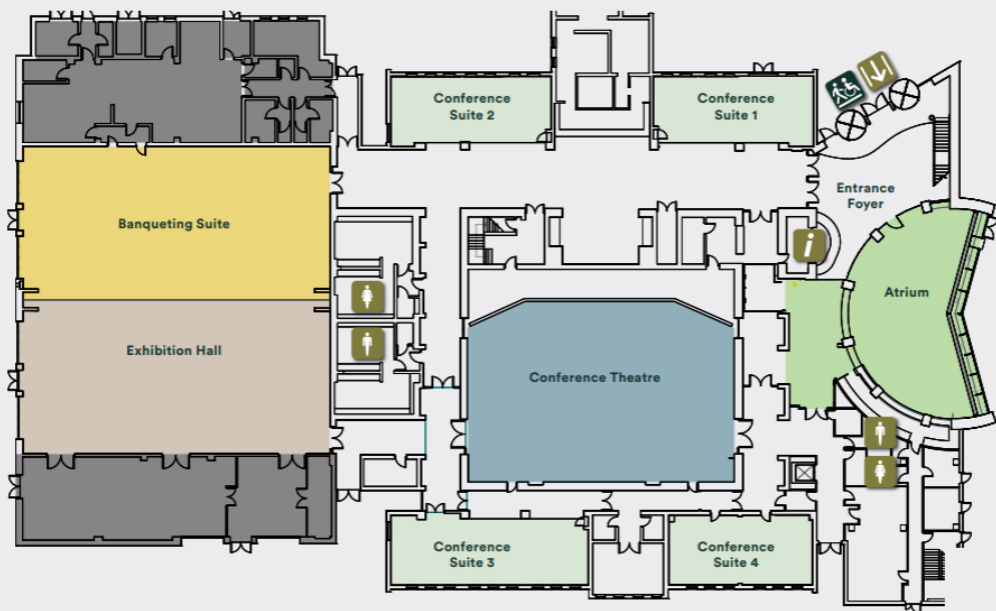
Hosted by Sarah Bull, our TeachMeet has a SEND Focus and will showcase a range of contributions centred on supporting learners, including classroom strategies, resources, case studies and research. Speakers will be selected at random, creating a dynamic mix of voices and ideas. If time allows, the session will conclude with an opportunity for questions and shared reflection.

Look out for future TeachMeet opportunities!

Name	School	Topic of presentation
Saba Maqbool	Westbury	How my own SEND journey shaped my practice
Becky Witts	Ash Lea	Makaton and sign language
Hannah Goode and Kate White	Ash Lea	Strategies we use to support pupils who are blind
Kate Davies	Ash Lea	Development of a whole school language and protocols policy
Al Rea	Woodlands	Preparation for Adulthood
Paul Wyles	Woodlands	Life-Skills – Careers at Woodlands

EAST MIDLANDS CONFERENCE CENTRE

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