An external review of Whole School SEND activity 2020/21

Research report

March 2021

CooperGibson Research

Glossary of terms

CPD – Continuing professional development

EAL – English as an additional language

ECT – Early career teacher

MAT – Multi-academy trust

SENCO – Special educational needs coordinator

SEND – Special educational needs and disabilities

SLT – Senior leadership team

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Executive summary

The Whole School SEND Consortium is hosted by the National Association for Special Education Needs (nasen) and funded by the Department for Education. CooperGibson Research (CGR) was commissioned to conduct an external review of Whole School SEND activity in 2020/21 (with some consideration to previous years' activity) to assess progress against the four contractual aims of the programme.

Methodology

A mixed-method design was used for the research, incorporating:

- A desk review of Whole School SEND programme documentation and management information.

- 397 online survey responses from community of practice members and wider workforce professionals, accessed via the Whole School SEND newsletter and wider Whole School SEND communications.

- Semi-structured telephone or virtual interviews with:

  - 10 Whole School SEND consortium partners.
  - 13 regional SEND leads and deputy leads, covering all eight Regional School Commissioner regions in England.
  - 24 community of practice members, recruited via the online survey.

Key findings

Engaging with the school workforce

Management information provided by Whole School SEND on activities undertaken in 2020/21 shows that awareness and engagement with the programme resources and training continues to increase. Community of practice membership has continued to grow and since March 2020, 35 regional and 15 national online webinars had been delivered[1]. The SEND Gateway has had over 100,000 views of resources and condition-specific videos, and there has been an increase in Twitter followers and traffic in quarter three (October to December) of 2020.

Regional leads undertook a tailored approach to identify where support could be offered or brokered in their area, with existing local SEND networks utilised as conduits to

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[1] To 14th December 2020.

maximise reach. Overall, regional leads felt the response from local authorities and schools was positive, although staff changes and capacity issues, both at regional Whole School SEND and local authority levels, were challenges sometimes in establishing and maintaining relationships. It was recognised that the relatively recent appointment of second deputy leads would help in terms of capacity issues for regional leads. However, several commented on their activity being somewhat limited by the constraints of the time allocated (one day per week) to the regional lead roles.

Use of the Whole School SEND offer

Awareness and use of the Whole School SEND programme and SEND Gateway was high amongst online survey respondents[2], however interviewees suggested that awareness could be increased further. Additionally, it was felt there was a lack of clarity about the relationship between nasen, Whole School SEND and the SEND Gateway, which impacted upon understanding of the offer. This was further exemplified through survey responses which identified the main barriers to engagement with the programme or the Gateway as being: a lack of understanding of the Whole School SEND offer, lack of time, and use of other resources available elsewhere. Difficulties in navigating or searching the Gateway were also mentioned, suggesting improvements to the usability of the website would be helpful.[3]

Resources: The majority of online survey respondents who had used the SEND Gateway had mostly used it to access specific resources/information, to find out about training or CPD opportunities or to access best practice examples. Community of practice members highly valued the resources available, which were commonly shared or signposted to colleagues.

Webinars: 50 webinars had been delivered between April and December 2020, with 8,363 attendees. Online webinars had the highest levels of engagement amongst survey respondents, followed by face-to-face CPD that was delivered in previous contract years. Community of practice members praised the webinars for their high-quality, relevance, usefulness and the flexibility to access them at their convenience.

Newsletter open rates increased from 13% in 2019[4] to 27% in November 2020[5]. Readership of the newsletters was high amongst online survey respondents who received them[6] and eight out of ten (81%, n=135) readers found them useful, suggesting

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[2] It is likely that awareness and use of the programme and SEND Gateway are higher amongst online survey respondents compared to the wider school and SEND workforce due to the survey recruitment approach (see section 1.2 and 1.3). This finding must therefore be viewed with caution.
[3] Note that the SEND Gateway has recently been revised and relaunched during the time of this review.
[4] UCL Centre for Inclusive Education (2019), Whole School SEND Evaluation: Interim report (Year 1), p.34.
[5] Source: Whole School SEND management information.
[6] The high level of readership is perhaps unsurprising given that recruitment of respondents to complete the online survey was primarily via the Whole School SEND newsletters.

that the content is relevant. Community of practice members valued their easy to read format, providing up-to-date information which was easily accessible and in one place. Newsletters were disseminated more widely by readers to SEND specialist and non-specialist colleagues.

Community of practice membership had grown by 42% from 10,628 members at the end of the 2019/20 programme year[7] to 15,125 by mid-December 2020, according to Whole School SEND management information data. The majority of community of practice members surveyed felt that membership had been useful (72%, n=107), the main benefits being access to up-to-date information, and receiving the Whole School SEND newsletters or other communications. Awareness was the key barrier to community of practice membership, alongside a lack of understanding of what membership involves and a lack of clarity about how their membership could be utilised. Opportunities to network and share practice with other members would be appreciated.

Impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on schools and Whole School SEND has been significant. The predominant focus for Whole School SEND delivery this year has been on webinars. Regional leads adapted their work to utilise remote technology (such as replacing face-to-face training with webinars), which allowed them to work more efficiently.. Some regional leads found it challenging to balance their school and Whole School SEND roles during this time.

The resources developed to support practitioners with their response to COVID-19 received a mixed response from community of practice members – some felt they had helped them address issues arisen due to the pandemic, others felt that they had not offered any additional COVID-specific information. Consortium partners thought that Whole School SEND could play more of a role in supporting the sectors' response to COVID-19.

Perceptions of the Whole School SEND programme

Regional leads were positive about their role in Whole School SEND and identified the key success factors for the programme as being the evolving suite of relevant resources and guides, the regional support model of current school-based practitioners providing bespoke and targeted support, and collaboration with key local stakeholders (such as, local authorities, multi-academy trusts and teaching school alliances).

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[7] Whole School SEND (2020), Whole School Send Consortium 2019/2020 Report, p.3 https://nasen-stage-asset.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/wss_report_2020_web.pdf

Whilst consortium partners were positive about the quality of the training and resources produced, they were less clear on whether it was meeting the needs of the workforce or impacting on practice and they would welcome more robust and structured feedback.

The majority of survey respondents who had engaged with any aspect of the Whole School SEND programme believed that it had impacted positively on their practice.

- Over three-quarters (79%, n=143) of respondents stated that attending a webinar had influenced their practice to a great or moderate extent.

- Contact with regional leads or participation in SEND reviews or SEND reviewer training[8] were noted to have impacted positively on practice, encouraging improvements in strategic focus, reflection on practice, identification of gaps and areas for improvements, and the development of links and collaboration between schools.

- Contact with and influence of local authorities or local networks due to Whole School SEND was relatively low and community of practice members welcomed the opportunity for Whole School SEND to play a greater role in developing and supporting local and cross local authority networks.

The majority who had accessed resources via the SEND Gateway were either already utilising them in their practice, or intended to do so in the future. Gateway resources were used by community of practice members to support or help them improve their practice, deliver CPD or to open up points for discussion with other staff.

Resources which were the most likely to have impacted on practice already were SEND research, SEND review guides, condition specific resources and the SENCO induction pack.

Progress towards the programme's aims

Practitioners were positive about the impact that engagement with Whole School SEND and the SEND Gateway had on their practice and improvements in their setting, demonstrating the progress that has been made towards meeting the four key aims.

Aim 1. Prioritising SEND: 69% (n=221) of survey respondents agreed that their involvement with Whole School SEND had contributed to improvements in the vision and approach to SEND in their setting and 60% (n=185) that it had helped them to prioritise SEND within their CPD and school improvement plans. Community of practice members reported improved empowerment, whole-school focus on SEND and understanding of

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[8] This activity is likely to have taken place prior to March 2020 as involvement in face-to-face SEND reviews or SEND reviewer training has been halted since March 2020 due to COVID-19.

the SENCO role amongst the wider workforce. There was some evidence of facilitation of links between mainstream and special schools, however there is an opportunity for this to be extended further.

Aim 2. Identifying and meeting training needs: 65% (n=211) of survey respondents agreed that their engagement with the programme or SEND Gateway had helped them to identify strengths and areas for improvement. High levels of engagement and positive feedback on the resources and training provided by Whole School SEND demonstrates their value in meeting the training needs of the schools' workforce.

Aim 3. Building skills: agreement that engagement with the programme had contributed to improvements in the knowledge and skills in relation to supporting or teaching children and young people with SEND, was high (75%, n=240). The programme contributed to the improvement of community of practice members' confidence, knowledge about specific conditions, action-planning, evidence-based practice, and the identification, assessment and monitoring of SEND. It was common for learning to be shared with colleagues, extending the reach of the programme beyond those who had engaged directly. Whole School SEND also contributed positively to improved standards for children and young people with SEND (69% agree, n=221).

Aim 4. Filling gaps: Whole School SEND has responded to the changing needs of the schools' workforce through tailored and flexible training delivery. It has also rapidly developed resources and webinars to support schools with their response to COVID-19. There is an opportunity to better understand the support needs of special schools and to further increase links between mainstream and special schools. Consortium partners would welcome the opportunity to play a more active role in shaping and informing the priorities for Whole School SEND.

Areas for development

Whole School SEND has continued to build on the progress of the first two years of the programme and has responded to the needs of the schools' workforce and challenges presented by COVID-19. However, there are potential areas for development, including:

- Greater clarity around the Whole School SEND brand and the relationship between Whole School SEND, nasen and the SEND Gateway.

- Consider the role and remit of Whole School SEND, including its potential to bring greater challenge to the education sector, to take a more active role in supporting the sectors' response to COVID-19 and consider the relevant age range in scope.

- Identify training needs of SEND non-specialists and better understanding the skills and knowledge gaps and needs of special schools and those in the primary phase.

- Improve communication about the programme offer and review the new SEND Gateway site to ensure the platform is optimised and sustainable as it continues to grow.

- Review the role and effectiveness of parental resources/leaflets and blogs to maximise their impact.

- Better utilisation of the community of practice and increase clarity on the benefits of membership.

- Consider the role of consortium partners and potential for further integration with Whole School SEND planning and development work.

- Further strengthen links between mainstream and special schools and improve understanding of how the relationship can be mutually beneficial.

- Review of the contract delivery model to allow for more strategic planning and improved impact assessment.

- Continuous improvement feedback mechanisms to ensure the programme and resources remain up-to-date, relevant and impact is maximised.

1.   Introduction

The Whole School SEND Consortium, which is hosted by the National Association for Special Education Needs (nasen) and funded by the Department for Education, brings together schools, organisations and individuals who are committed to ensuring that every child and young person with special educational needs and disability (SEND) can achieve their potential at school.

The aims of the Whole School SEND programme are to:

- Drive education institutions to prioritise SEND within their continuous professional development (CPD) and school improvement plans including facilitating greater links between mainstream and special schools.

- Equip schools to identify and meet their training needs in relation to SEND.

- Build the skills of teachers working in mainstream and special schools and of SENCOs and teachers of classes of children and young people with sensory impairments, by promoting best practice.

- Identify and respond to any gaps in the training and resources available to schools.

CooperGibson Research (CGR) was commissioned to conduct an external review of Whole School SEND activity undertaken in 2020/21. This report presents the findings of the research.

1.1 Aims and objectives of the research

The aim of the evaluation was to provide an independent assessment of the extent to which Whole School SEND activity in 2020/21 (with some consideration to previous years' activity) has met the four contractual aims of the programme.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Explore the methods of engagement of the school workforce and their effectiveness.

- Identify usage of resources and CPD training.

- Identify successes and areas for improvement in Whole School SEND operational working, and for the wider sector.

1.2 Methodology

A mixed-method design was used for the research, and involved:

- **Desk review** of programme documentation including available management information on numbers accessing training, SEND Gateway statistics, Twitter engagement and feedback from training events.

- **Semi-structured interviews** with consortium partners, regional SEND leads and community of practice members.

- **Online census survey** of community of practice members and wider workforce professionals.

1.2.1 Desk review

A review of Whole School SEND programme documentation and management information was initially conducted to inform design of the survey and interviews. Data included:

- Whole School SEND annual and quarterly reports.

- Previous research and reports (e.g. Driver Youth Trust and EEF reports).

- Management information (e.g. numbers accessing different products, training attendance figures, number of SEND reviews).

- SEND Gateway statistics (e.g. number of page views, views of blogs, clickthrough routes, downloads of resources).

The management information and programme data has been updated and presented within this report to support assessment of progress of the programme against its four aims. The management information data presented in this report is for the period up to 14th December 2020.[9]

1.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

In order to allow in-depth review of the experiences of those involved with the Whole School SEND programme and to evaluate progress of the programme towards achieving its key aims, a mix of telephone and virtual interviews were conducted with:

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[9] Management data periods varied depending on the nature of the data, ranging from April, September or October 2020 to 14th December 2020.

- **10 consortium partners** with a mix achieved across:

  - Organisation types, including charities, not-for-profit organisations, educational institutions, national associations, and training providers.
  - Type of contribution to the Whole School SEND programme, including those who had developed different types of training, resources and SEND Gateway content, and impact steering group members.
  - Contract year, including partners who had developed content for 2020/2021 and those who had developed content in previous years.

- **13 regional SEND leads and deputy leads** across all eight Whole School SEND regions.

- **24 community of practice members** with a mix achieved across:

  - Type of organisations, including local authorities, local authority maintained schools, multi-academy trusts, single academies, special schools and independent consultants.
  - Roles, including SENCOs, school improvement advisors, school senior leaders, SEND advisors.
  - Phase, including those working in primary, secondary and all through schools.

Interviews were conducted between November 2020 and January 2021.

1.2.3 Online survey

An online survey was distributed to community of practice members and wider workforce professionals via the Whole School SEND newsletter, and other Whole School SEND and nasen communications. In total, 397 survey responses were received between 12th October 2020 and 4th January 2021.

Two out of five respondents were employed as SENCOs and almost a quarter were members of school senior leadership teams (SLT). The remaining respondents were primarily a mix of other school staff (middle leaders, teachers and teaching assistants), local authority staff, and SEND or school improvement advisors (see Appendix 1). Almost seven out of ten (69%, n=273) described themselves as a SEND specialist.

Survey respondents were employed by a range of organisations, with the majority employed either by mainstream schools (54%, n= 212)[10], a local authority (26%, n=104) or another educational setting (11%, n=43).[11]

The majority (84%, n=335)[12] of survey respondents were working within schools, with almost half in the primary phase, almost a third in the secondary phase and just under one in ten were working across all phases. A minority worked in early years or further/higher education (Table 1).

Table 1: School phase

	Number of responses	**% of responses**
Primary	182	46%
Secondary	121	30%
All through	31	8%
Early Years	3	1%
HE/FE	2	1%
Not answered	1	<1%
Not applicable	57	14%

Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All respondents 397.

Responses were achieved across all eight Whole School SEND operating regions in England (see Appendix 1), with the highest number of responses from South East England and South London (20%, n=78) and the lowest from Lancashire and West Yorkshire (5%, n=21).

1.3 Methodological considerations

There are four important methodological considerations to note when considering the findings provided in this report:

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[10] Multi-academy trust 31%, n=122, local authority maintained school 15%, n=59, single academy 8%, n=31.

[11] Other organisation types mentioned: self-employed consultant (3%, n=10), alternative provision (1%, n=3), pupil referral unit (1%, n=3), education charity (1%, n=3), initial teacher training provider (<1%, n=1), other organisation (4%, n=17).

[12] Respondents were asked what school phase they work in. It is possible that some have indicated working in a school which is not their main employer.

- **Timing of evaluation:** the COVID-19 global pandemic caused the closure of all but essential services in March 2020, including the transition to remote learning for most pupils. This had a significant impact on the planned development and delivery of the Whole School SEND programme, with some activities being re-purposed to support schools in their response to COVID-19. There were also delays to some aspects of the Whole School SEND programme during the evaluation period. Since the evaluation was short-term, some programme activities were therefore, not implemented or delivered at the time of data collection. This presented a challenge in evaluating the 2020/21 activity against the four key aims within the timescales of the research, as much of the activity was scheduled to take place after the fieldwork had been conducted. The contribution of 2020/21 activity towards the four key aims has been identified where possible, supported further by evidence from previous years.

- **Generalisability of findings**: to ensure we could gain feedback on the content and delivery of the Whole School SEND programme and SEND Gateway, the online survey sample focussed on those with whom Whole School SEND were already communicating with or reaching in some way. The survey was disseminated via the their newsletter, email and social media communications. As such, the survey was not accessible to all of, or a representative sample of, the school or SEND sector workforce as a whole. It therefore, has not been possible to obtain an absolute measure of awareness or reach of the programme or Gateway and caution should be exercised when interpreting levels of engagement.

- **Self-selection response bias:** response to the online survey was voluntary, and as such the findings may be subject to self-selection bias. For example, it is possible that those who responded to the online survey were those who were more engaged with Whole School SEND. Furthermore, the community of practice members who took part in the in-depth interviews had volunteered by indicating in the online survey that they would be willing to be contacted, which again suggests they are likely to be more engaged with Whole School SEND than the wider school and SEND workforce.

- **Sample size for sub-group analysis:** analysis of sub-groups was conducted for Whole School SEND region, organisation type and role. However due to the small base sizes achieved in some of these sub-groups, it was not possible to robustly and confidently identify statistical differences between the sub-groups. Further analysis was conducted by combining sub-groups (e.g. north versus south regions, local authority versus mainstream school or college). Although a minority of differences could be observed at this level, it was not possible to robustly and confidently conclude the extent to which these differences were attributable to region or organisation type rather than other properties of the sample. As such the

sub-group analysis undertaken by region, organisation type and role has not been included in this report.

2.   Engaging with the school workforce

This section provides a brief contextual overview of the reach and range of Whole School SEND activities taking place in 2020/21.

2.1 Reach and communication activity

There have been a number of activities taking place in 2020, building on those of previous years. These are designed to raise awareness of the Whole School SEND offer and to encourage engagement with the resources and training available. A summary of key activities is provided below.

Figure 1: Whole School SEND management information on key activities

Twitter	SEND Gateway	Newsletter
An increase in followers to @WholeSchoolSEND in quarter 3 (Oct-Dec 2020) • 10.7k followers, an increase from 9.8k in Q2 • Traffic has increased to 2.5k clicks (2.3k clicks in Q2)	27,278 views of resources page (22,840 unique views) between 1st April and 14th December 2020. • Condition-specific videos - 51,299 views (42,047 unique views). 22,043 views via the YouTube channel	Open rate for the newsletter • 30% in September 2020 (2,412 out of 8,498) • 30% in October 2020 (2,669 out of 9,172) • 27% in November 2020 (2,521 out of 9,797)
National webinars	**Regional webinars**	**Community of practice**
15 consortium-led CPD events delivered (Apr-Dec 2020)[13] • 1478 attendees (99 per event on average) • 7 contributing consortium partners • 19 accompanying resources (blogs, video, leaflets, handbook, guide, report, PowerPoint slides)	35 CPD events delivered (Apr-Dec 2020)[14] • 6,885 attendees (197 per event on average) • Highest engagement – West Midlands (1042), East North East London (1025) and South West (1000) • SENCO (1880), senior leader (1546), teacher (1194), teaching assistant/support (896)	15,125 community of practice members (up to 14th Dec 2020): • 10,344 receive newsletter • 5,423 have consented to contact from a regional lead • 5,147 have consented to contact from a regional lead and receive newsletter

Source: Whole School SEND Management Information as of 14th December 2020

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[13] From April 2020 to end February 2021,18 national consortium-led events were held with 1,611 attendees.

[14] From April 2020 to end February 2021, 43 regionally-led CPD events were held with 9,330 attendees.

2.2 Regional lead activity

A key role of regional leads is to increase the awareness and reach of Whole School SEND in their area. During the interviews, regional leads spoke of using a bespoke approach to engaging local authorities, schools and their staff in Whole School SEND. Their aim was to understand how best to utilise existing local SEND networks as a conduit for Whole School SEND activity. Typically the regional leads contacted key local authority SEND staff to promote the Whole School SEND programme and discuss potential support. It was common for regional leads to draw on local and national data to better understand the needs of the local authorities and schools and they often used such data in their discussions with SEND staff. For local authorities that had written statements of action, the regional leads worked with local authority SEND staff to understand where they could broker support to meet the actions required.

Most regional leads felt that local authorities and schools responded well to the programme and the offer of support; whilst recognising that some were more receptive than others.

> Once the local authorities and schools know who we are and what we're about, they've been really receptive. It helps when they understand that there is funding from the DfE to help meet some of the actions and deliverables required. (Regional lead)

Where the regional leads had found engagement more challenging this was often due to changes or instability in SEND staffing. Local authorities that were offered support after a statement of action were sometimes reluctant about engaging due to concerns that they were being reprimanded for a poor SEND review.

The networks and contacts that regional leads had developed in local authorities were often reliant on strong relationships having been developed between key local authority or school staff and the regional leads. In cases where regional leads had changed over the course of the programme, it had been necessary for further development work to re-establish those networks and contacts.

The 2019 interim evaluation report[15] identified that regional leads 'probably needed more than one day a week' to spend on Whole School SEND. Regional leads reported continued limitations to what they could achieve because of the constraints of the time allocated. Time constraints often limited their ability to pursue local authorities who were not engaging. However, regional leads were realistic about the extent to which they could engage extensively with all local authorities and schools within their regions and most

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[15] UCL Centre for Inclusive Education (2019), Whole School SEND Evaluation: Interim report (Year 1), p.33.

mentioned that the introduction of a second Deputy regional lead role would be helpful in reducing capacity issues.

2.3 Awareness and engagement with Whole School SEND and the SEND Gateway

To add context to the survey findings and provide an indication of the level of awareness of Whole School SEND and the SEND Gateway, the survey asked respondents if they had heard of the Whole School SEND programme and if they were aware of the SEND Gateway.

- Three-quarters of survey respondents had heard of the Whole School SEND programme (75%, n=297) [16] and of these, the majority said they use it as a source of information or support (81%, n=242).[17]

- Over eight out of ten responders to the online survey were aware of the SEND Gateway (82%, n=324) and the majority of these had used it (79%, n=256)[18].

Awareness therefore, was high among survey responders. In particular, awareness of the Gateway was significantly higher amongst SEND specialists (85%, n=233) compared to non-specialists (73%, n=91). The high level of use of the SEND Gateway amongst those aware suggests that it provides relevant and useful resources for the audience.

However, as noted in section 1.3, it is likely that those who responded to the online survey were more engaged with Whole School SEND than the wider school and SEND workforce, due to the recruitment approach used for this review. Teacher Tapp data included in the previous final evaluation report (2020) measured the awareness of Whole School SEND amongst a nationally representative sample of teachers in England at 22%.[19] This is significantly lower than identified in the current review, which suggests that those who responded to the online survey were likely to have been those who were more engaged with Whole School SEND.

Qualitatively, there was feedback from community of practice members that awareness of Whole School SEND could be higher and perhaps there was some disparity in awareness across local authorities and schools. This reflects the difficulties reported by

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[16] There were no significant differences by phase (primary 73%, n=132, secondary 73%, n=88).

[17] A similar response was seen from those working in primary (79%, n=104) and secondary (80%, n=70) phases. There were no significant differences.

[18] In terms of those who had used the Gateway, there was no statistical difference between those working in primary (74%, n=112) and secondary (84%, n=76) phases.

[19] Driver Youth Trust (2020), Evaluation of the Strategic Support to The Workforce in Mainstream and Special Schools contract 2018-2020: Final Report, p.4-5.

regional leads in engaging certain local authorities and in the variation in community of practice members across the regions (see Appendix 1).

> Awareness is a key challenge, some schools just don't know...it always surprises me when people say they don't know about Whole School SEND. (SEND Consultant)

Furthermore, two thirds (66%, n=264) of those who responded to the online survey were aware of both the SEND Gateway and the Whole School SEND programme, whereas almost a quarter (23%, n=93) had only heard of one of them. This suggests there is a lack of clarity about the link between Whole School SEND programme and the SEND Gateway. It was noted by community of practice and consortium partner interviewees that there was some confusion about the relationship between nasen, Whole School SEND and the SEND Gateway. This confusion was also noted in the 2020 final evaluation report.[20] Furthermore, community of practice members were sometimes unclear about where the information and support they had accessed had originated from (see section 3.2 for further discussion).

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[20] Driver Youth Trust (2020), Evaluation of the Strategic Support to The Workforce in Mainstream and Special Schools contract 2018-2020 Final Report, p.5.

3. Use of the Whole School SEND offer

The Whole School SEND programme offers a wide range of resources, communications and CPD activities. This section explores how those involved in the research have engaged with Whole School SEND and in particular, their use of the SEND Gateway, the newsletters, and their involvement in the community of practice. It starts by looking at the range of sources used to access information and support about working with and supporting children and young people with SEND.

3.1 Sources of information and support used most often

Online survey respondents were utilising a range of sources for information and support to help with supporting children and young people with SEND. The most commonly mentioned sources used were nasen and the SEND Gateway, closely followed by local authorities and colleagues. These sources were also cited as those being used most often (Figure 2). SEND specialists were significantly more likely than non-specialists to use the SEND Gateway[21] and nasen[22] as sources of information and support.

Figure 2: Sources used to access information/support about working with and supporting children and young people with SEND
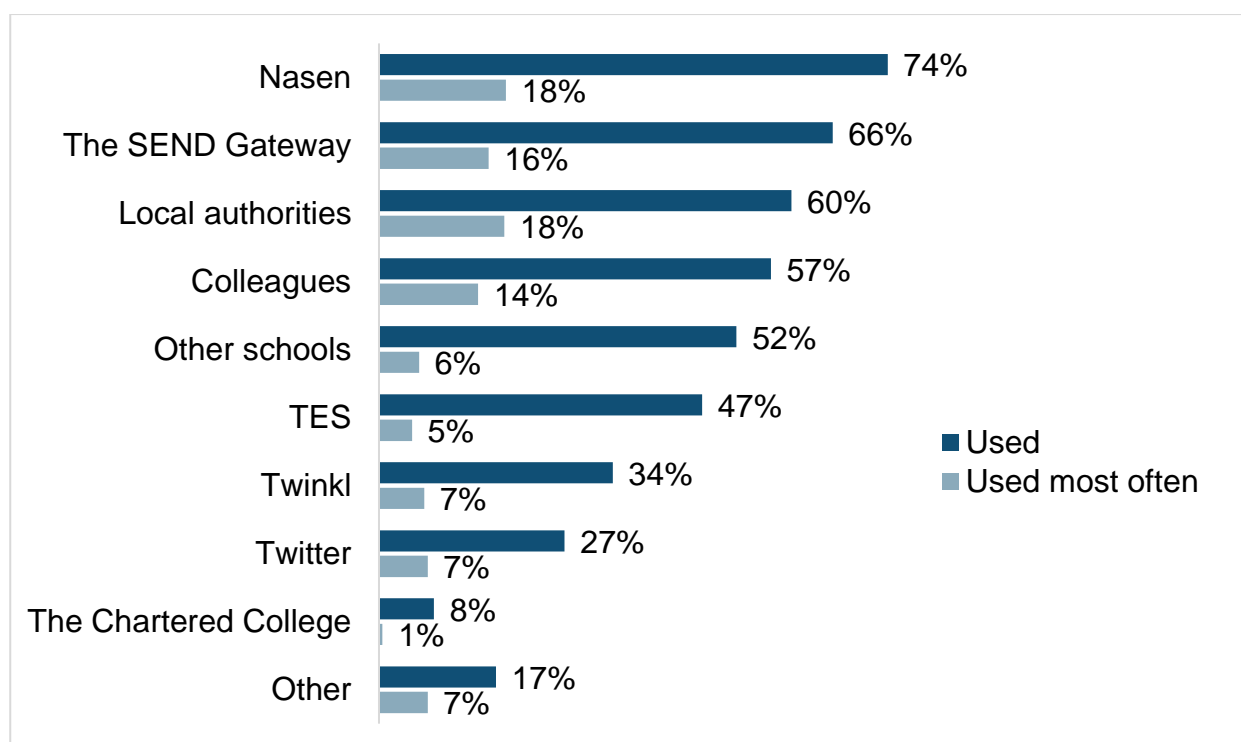
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All respondents 397.

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[21] SEND specialists 70%, n=191, non-specialists 56%, n=68.
[22] SEND specialists 77%, n=211, non-specialists 67%, n=82.

Just over half (52%, n=204) of responders to the online survey sourced information and support about SEND from other schools. Other sources mentioned included a range of more general teaching sources as well as SEND specialist sources (Figure 2 and Table 2).

Table 2: Sources used to access information/support about working with and supporting children and young people with SEND – Other mentions

	Number of mentions
Other SEND organisations/associations/websites	28
Academic resources	11
General online searches	9
Other social media	9
SEND forums/groups/networks	8
Educational Psychologists/specialist therapists	6

Source: Whole School SEND survey. Less than five mentions not shown. Base: All respondents 397.

3.2 Use of the SEND Gateway

Figure 1 indicates that there has been considerable activity on the SEND Gateway during 2020, with over twenty seven thousand views of the resources page and over fifty thousand views of the condition-specific videos since 1st April 2020.

The majority of online survey respondents who had used the SEND Gateway had mostly used it to access specific resources/information, to find out about training or CPD opportunities or to access best practice examples (Figure 3). There were differences in who was using the Gateway:

- Those working in the secondary phase (88%, n=67) were significantly more likely to have used the Gateway to access specific resources/information than those working in primary school (75%, n=84).

- SEND specialists (55%, n=103) were significantly more likely to have used the Gateway to find out about training or CPD than those who were not specialists in SEND (38%, n=26).

Figure 3: What do you mostly use the SEND Gateway for?

Category	Percentage
For specific resources/information	80%
To find out about training / CPD opportunities	50%
To access best practice	43%
To read blogs	12%
To go on the forums	9%
Other	2%
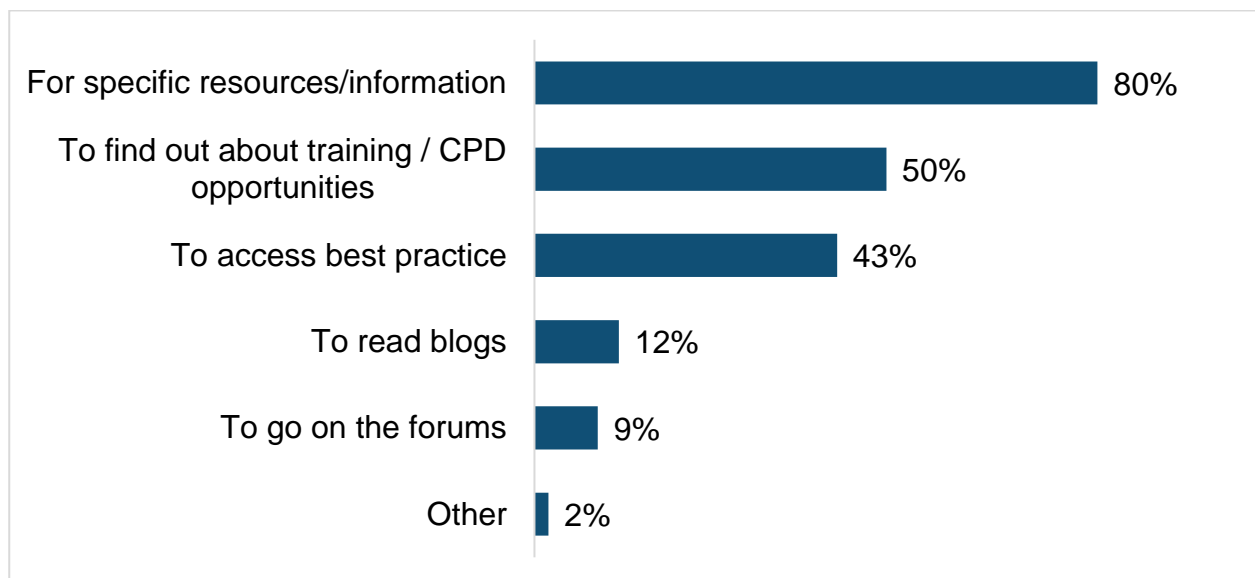
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: Used SEND Gateway 256.

Community of practice interviewees valued the resources accessed through the Gateway, mentioning their usefulness, relevance and how easy they were to use, particularly because the resources are editable. Although they could not always remember which specific resources that they had accessed through the Gateway, most thought it was a useful 'go to' place for resources that they used on a regular basis. It was common for community of practice members to signpost their colleagues to appropriate resources on the Gateway and there were examples of this both between local authorities and schools and also within schools. However, some mentioned difficulties in navigating or searching for specific topics in the Gateway.

Use of the Gateway to read blogs or access the forums amongst survey respondents was relatively lower (Figure 3).

3.2.1 Barriers to using the Whole School SEND programme and SEND Gateway

One in ten (10%, n=31) survey respondents who were aware of the Whole School SEND programme indicated that they did not use it as a source of information or support, primarily because they were unsure about what the programme offered (Figure 4). This suggests that improved communication about the Whole School SEND offer could increase engagement once practitioners are aware of the programme.

Figure 4: Reasons for not using the Whole School SEND programme or SEND Gateway

Whole School SEND programme	SEND Gateway
• I am not sure of what the WSS offers (55%) • Not enough time (39%) • Use other sources for information and support (39%) • Lack of useful / relevant information and support (19%) • Other (3%)	• Not enough time (60%) • I can find the information elsewhere (24%) • It is difficult to find the information I need on the Gateway (13%) • Lack of useful/relevant information (3%) • Other (26%)
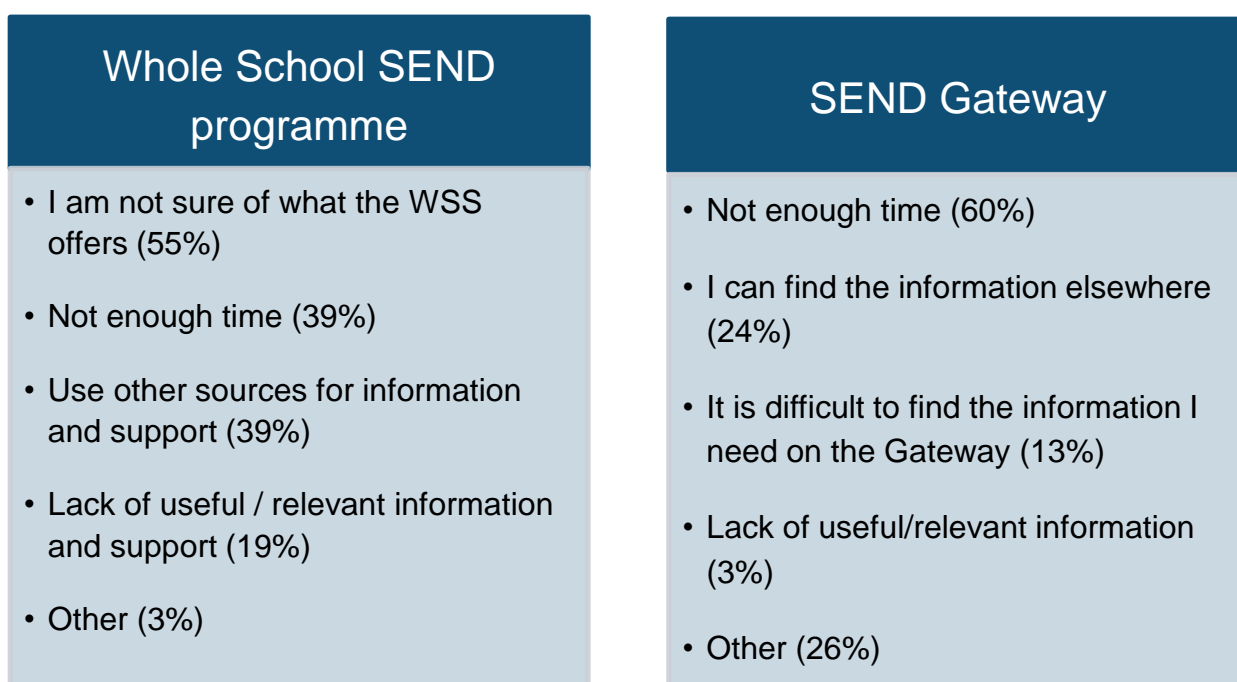
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All who don't use Whole School SEND programme31[23], all who don't use the SEND Gateway 68[24].

Amongst those who were aware of the SEND Gateway but had not used it (21%, n=68), the main barrier was a lack of time (60%, n=41). This was also cited as a barrier for using the Whole School SEND programme by almost two out of five survey respondents (Figure 4).

Just over one in ten (13%, n=9) felt that it was difficult to find the information they need on the SEND Gateway. Regional leads recognised in the interviews that the SEND Gateway could be difficult to navigate, which could make it challenging for users to find the resources and information that they needed from it. This was also reflected in the views of some community of practice members who also felt that improvements to the navigation of the SEND Gateway would be helpful.[25]

Very few survey respondents cited a lack of useful or relevant information or support as a reason for not engaging with the programme (19%, n=6) or the Gateway (3%, n=2) which

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[23] Low base (less than 50). One respondent felt that as an experienced SENCO, it was not necessary to use Whole School SEND.

[24] Other responses included that the Gateway was not at the top of their minds as a source of information (seven mentions), lack of awareness of what the Gateway offers (three mentions), lack of opportunity to access it as yet (three mentions), the need to use the Gateway had not arisen as yet (two mentions) and one respondent has experienced problems accessing the Gateway. One respondent did not answer the question.

[25] At the time of the research taking place, the SEND Gateway was being updated and redesigned.

supports the view that Whole School SEND is meeting the needs of the majority of people who engage with it.

3.3 Newsletter reach and readership

There is evidence that engagement with the Whole School SEND newsletters has increased from a 13% open rate in 2019[26] to 27% in November 2020 (see Figure 1).

Overall, just under four out of five (78%, n=233) survey respondents who were aware of the Whole School SEND programme were aware of the E-news newsletters. However, over a quarter (28%, n=67) of those who were aware of the newsletters did not receive them, indicating there is potential to communicate the benefits of the newsletters to expand their reach further.

Amongst those who recalled receiving the newsletter (n=166), readership was high (read always or often 82%, n=136). However, this high level of readership is perhaps unsurprising given that recruitment of respondents to complete the online survey was primarily via the Whole School SEND newsletters.

Awareness and engagement with the newsletters was significantly higher amongst SEND specialists (SEND specialists 83%, n=172, non–specialists 68%, n=61) although it is positive that readership amongst non-specialists was still high (read always or often by SEND specialists 86%, n=105, non-specialists 70%, n=31).

Eight out of ten (81%, n=135) newsletter readers found them useful (Figure 5), suggesting that the content of the newsletters is pertinent to this audience.

Figure 5: How useful do you find the E-news newsletter?
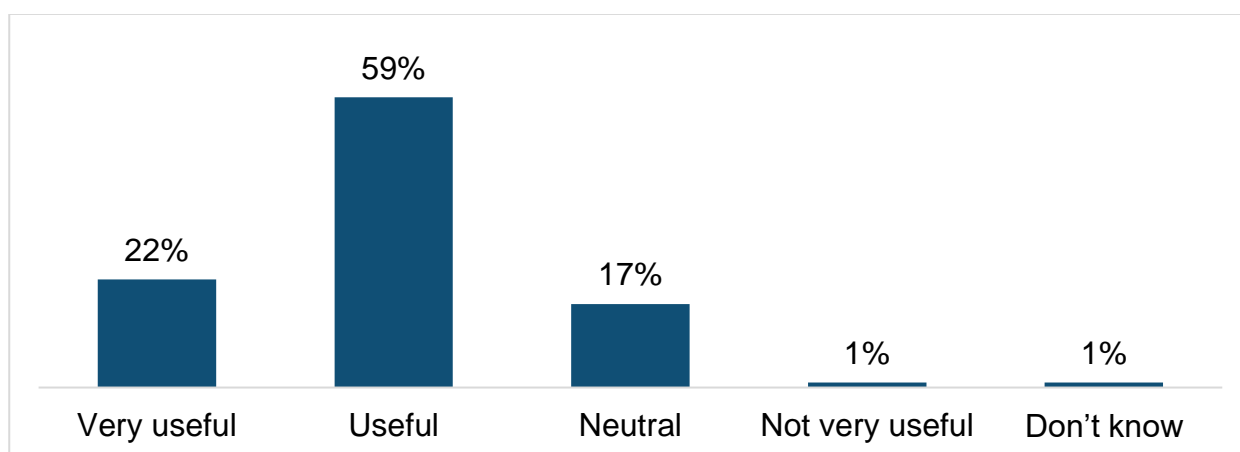
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: Received E-news newsletter 166.

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[26] UCL Centre for Inclusive Education (2019), Whole School SEND Evaluation: Interim report (Year 1), p.34.

Where the newsletters were mentioned, community of practice interviewees said they were useful, accessible and in an easy-to-read format. Concerns raised around the newsletter length and over-use of jargon reported in the 2019 interim evaluation report[27] appear to have been remedied as this was not highlighted as a problem by interviewees in 2020. Members valued having the information all in one place, so that they did not have to seek out the information themselves. Community of practice members also disseminated the newsletter to other professionals within their setting, including both SEND specialists and non-specialists.

3.4 Community of practice membership

Community of practice membership[28] had grown by 42% from 10,628 members at the end of the 2019/20 programme year[29] to 15,125 by mid-December 2020 (Figure 1).

Just under half (46%, n=148) of survey respondents who were aware of the SEND Gateway said that they had signed up to be a community of practice member. A third (34%, n=109) had not joined the community of practice and around one in five (21%, n=67) said they were unsure or it was not applicable.

Over a third (35%, n=52) of the members of the community of practice had joined in the last six months, further demonstrating the increased reach of the programme in 2020 (Figure 6).

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[27] UCL Centre for Inclusive Education (2019), Whole School SEND Evaluation: Interim report (Year 1) p.34.
[28] Prior to January 2021, membership of the Community of Practice was an optional signup process offered when engaging with WSS outputs. Upon joining, members could opt-in to receiving the Community of Practice newsletter and/or receiving direct contact from their Regional Leads but this was not mandatory. This could account for some of the survey respondents who were aware of the WSS programme but did not receive the newsletter. Joining the Community of Practice was also not required in order to access WSS outputs, including resources, events and content hosted on the SEND gateway, which possibly accounts for the survey respondents who were aware of the gateway but had not joined the Community of Practice.
[29] Whole School SEND (2020), Whole School Send Consortium 2019/2020 Report, p.3 https://nasen-stage-asset.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/wss_report_2020_web.pdf.

Figure 6: How long have you been a community of practice member?

Less than a month	1-3 months	4-6 months	7-12 months	1-2 years	Over 2 years	I can't remember
7%	14%	14%	14%	22%	18%	11%
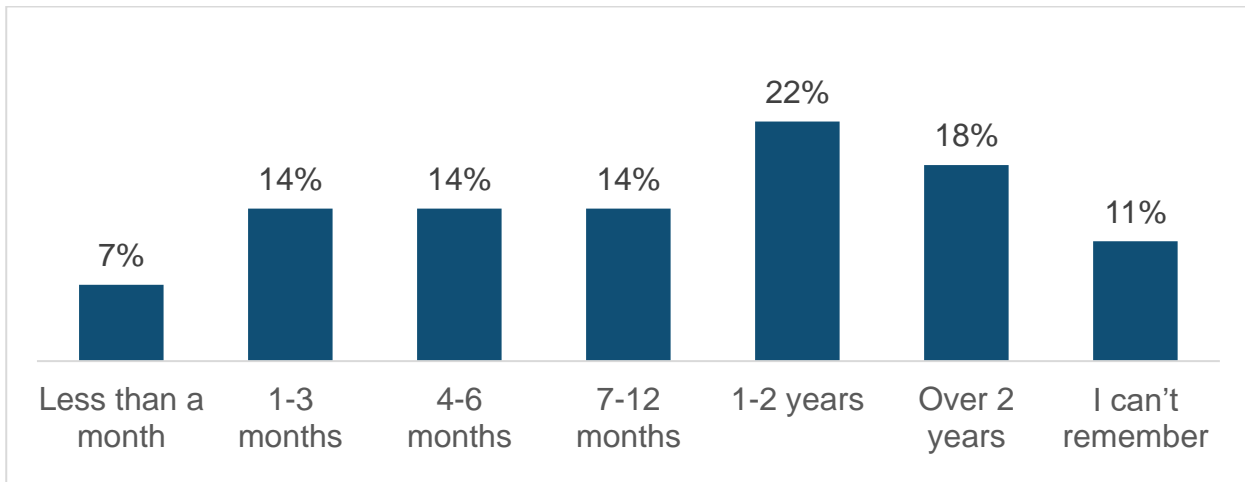
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: community of practice members 148.

The majority of community of practice members surveyed felt that membership had been useful (Figure 7). The main benefits of membership were access to up-to-date information (74%, n=109) and access to the newsletters or other communications (63%, n=93). Contact with a regional lead was mentioned as a benefit by 15% (n=22) of community of practice members.

Figure 7: How useful has it been to be a community of practice member?

Very useful	Useful	Neutral	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Don't know
25%	47%	20%	5%	1%	2%
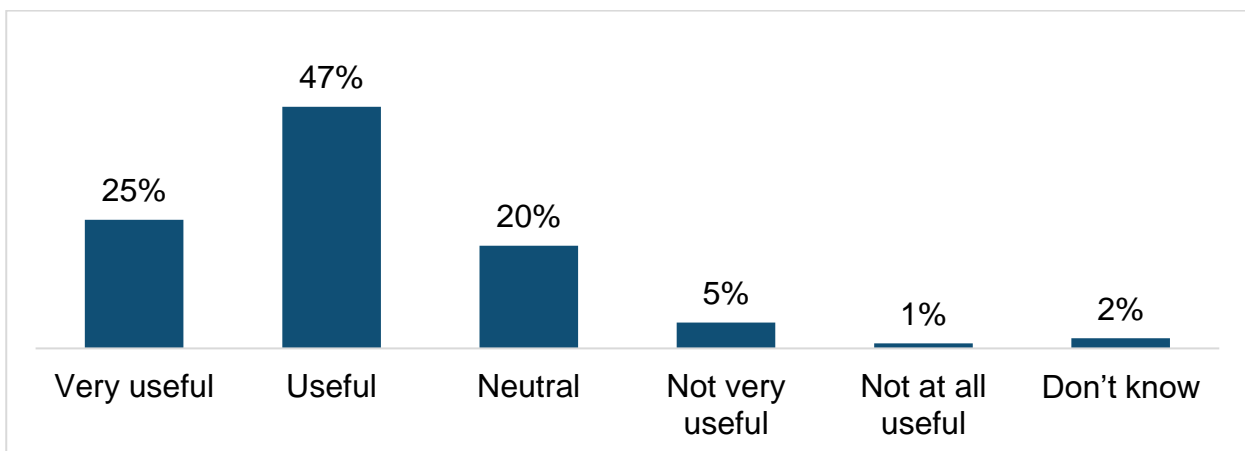
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: community of practice members 148.

The main barrier to membership was lack of awareness of the community of practice (69%, n=74). Lack of understanding of what membership involves (31%, n=33) was also mentioned as a barrier[30] and 7% of community of practice members felt that they had not experienced any benefits of membership. This was supported qualitatively.

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[30] Other reasons mentioned, each by one respondent: time, preference not to receive email communications, relevance, not yet joined community of practice and not needed to due to current COVID commitments.

It was identified in the 2019 interim evaluation report[31] that there was a lack of clarity about the purpose of the community of practice and this was highlighted again by interviewees in 2020. A small number of community of practice members felt that they were unclear on how they could utilise their memberships and would welcome some guidance on this from Whole School SEND. Suggestions included being able to know who else was a member in their area so that they could contact and share practice.

> I've signed up for the community of practice but I don't know what that looks like on the ground. It leapt out as something to sign up for, but I'm not seeing any communication from that. (SENCO, Secondary multi-academy trust)

Other improvements suggested by a small number of community of practice members included more opportunities for networking and sharing of practice across areas and regions, and increasing the availability of training opportunities.

3.5 Impact of COVID-19

According to regional leads, COVID-19 has had a direct impact on their ability to continue some of their face-to-face, work, such as SEND reviewer training, with local authorities and schools. Whilst they were hopeful that such work would be able to restart, the predominant focus in the current year of this review had been on planning and hosting webinars.

Although regional leads cited some benefits in terms of being able to establish more efficient partnership working and infrastructure development through remote technology, there had been some negative effects. For some, it had been challenging to balance their school role with the regional lead role in difficult circumstances.

Community of practice members and regional leads identified other challenges that had emerged as a result of COVID-19 including:

- Having to adapt provision for pupils with SEND in school (e.g. reduction in intervention groups) to adhere to Government guidance (e.g. reducing contact between pupils and staff, constraints of bubbles).

- An increase in pupils presenting with social, emotional and mental health issues e.g. anxiety and sensory seeking behaviours.

- Gaps in learning, and skills loss for some pupils.

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[31] UCL Centre for Inclusive Education (2019), Whole School SEND Evaluation: Interim report (Year 1), p.35.

- Difficulties in providing appropriate online learning for pupils with SEND because of challenges around personalisation and feedback.

3.5.1 Impact of COVID-19 on use of the SEND Gateway

Responses to the online survey suggest that the period of remote learning due to COVID-19, from March to August 2020, may have triggered a change in how some of the schools and SEND workforce accessed or used sources of information about SEND. Although just under a quarter said they used the Gateway less during this time, just over a quarter said they had used it more (Figure 8). During the interviews some community of practice members said that they had more time to use the Gateway.

Figure 8: Impact of school closures and lockdown (March-August 2020) on the frequency of using the SEND Gateway
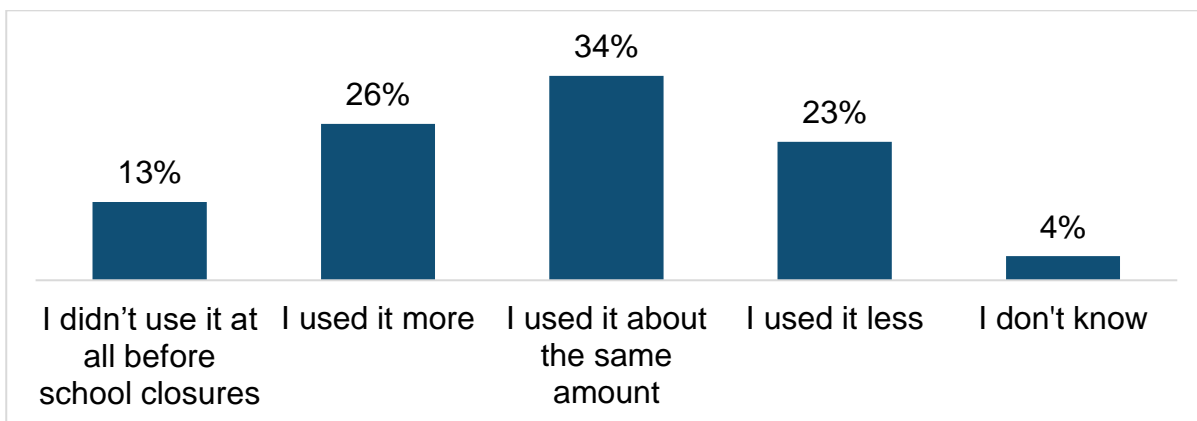
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: Used SEND Gateway 255.

4. Perceptions and impact on practice

This section provides a summary of overall perceptions of Whole School SEND and explores how resources and activities provided by the programme influence practice.

4.1 Perceptions of the Whole School SEND Programme

Regional leads were positive about their role in raising awareness of the Whole School SEND programme and the SEND Gateway, and in their ability to engage with a wide range of professionals at a strategic and operational level across local authorities and schools. They identified features of their approach, and the approach of the Whole School SEND programme more widely, that facilitated the success of the programme. These included:

- An evolving suite of resources and guides.

    > It's good that there are people within the consortium who are developing guides and resources, and that it's an ongoing and evolving suite of resources to make sure these stay relevant. (Regional lead)

- The development of strong relationships with local authorities, and also with multi-academy trusts and teaching school alliances, to identify opportunities for collaboration within existing work streams and focus.

- A regional model of support, with the regional leads being current school-based practitioners which was felt to aid their engagement with schools.

- The ability to be reactive and responsive to different structures and engagement at a local authority level, followed by the ability to provide bespoke and targeted support to meet local needs and requirements.

Consortium partners felt less able to provide their views on the Whole School SEND programme. All spoke positively about the quality of the resources or training that they had produced. However, partners were less clear on whether the product they had produced was meeting the needs of the workforce. Most were able to provide anecdotal feedback to suggest that the resources and training had been well-received by the intended audience, however were not able to comment further on whether use or involvement had contributed to improvements in practice.

> We have created something I know has gone into a guide, but I don't know where it has gone and how it has been used. (Consortium partner)

> As an organisation we know what they do and what the key
> programmes are, but I wouldn't know much more. You get
> commissioned to do a piece of work, but you don't necessarily have a
> vision of how that works and how it is being used more widely.
> (Consortium partner)

4.2 Whole School SEND support influencing practice

Overall, just over half (56%, n=222) of online survey respondents had engaged with the Whole School SEND programme, primarily via accessing online or face-to-face training.

Figure 9: Positive influence on practice of engagement with aspects of Whole School SEND programme
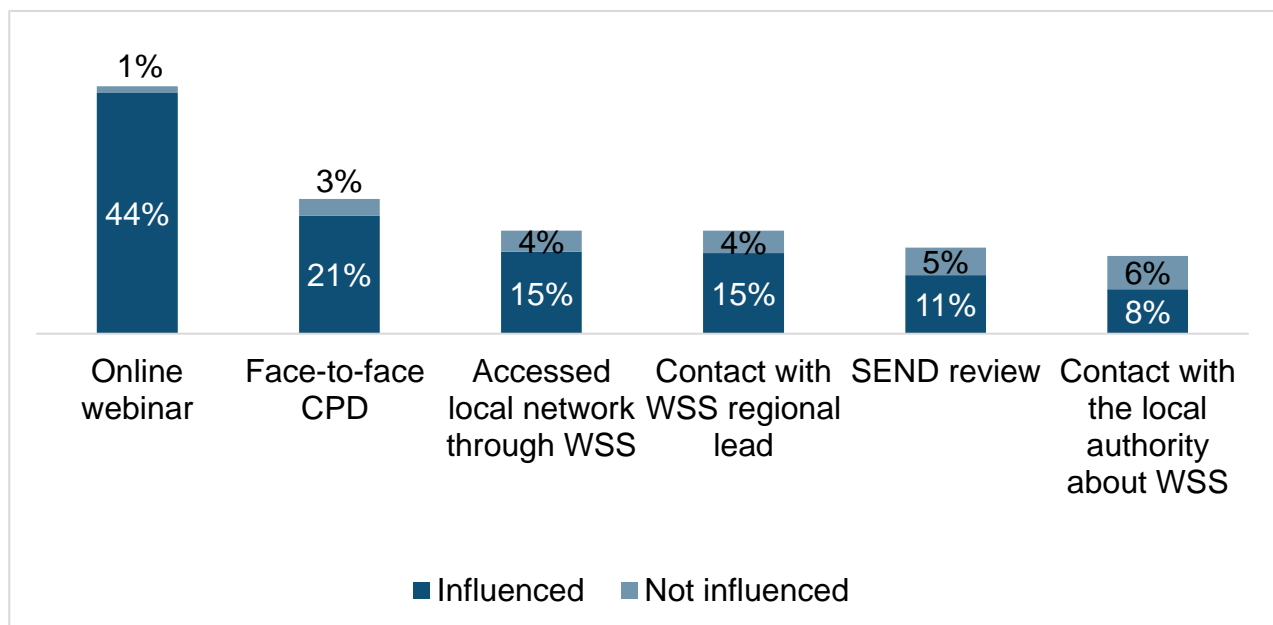
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All respondents 397.[32]

The majority of survey respondents who had engaged with any aspect of the Whole School SEND programme believed that it had impacted positively on their practice. The extent of positive impact on practice amongst those who had engaged with each aspect is explored in more detail below (see also Figure 10).

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[32] Figures not shown = not involved with this, don't know or not applicable.

Figure 10: Positive influence on practice of engagement with aspects of Whole School SEND programme

	Online webinar	Face-to-face CPD	Contact with WSS regional lead	SEND review	Accessed local network through WSS	Contact with the local authority about WSS
Don't Know	1%	3%	6%	5%	6%	8%
Not influenced	3%	12%	20%	31%	19%	39%
Small extent	17%	15%	19%	15%	29%	26%
Moderate extent	40%	31%	25%	22%	32%	18%
Great extent	39%	39%	29%	28%	14%	8%

■ Great extent ■ Moderate extent ■ Small extent ■ Not influenced ■ Don't Know
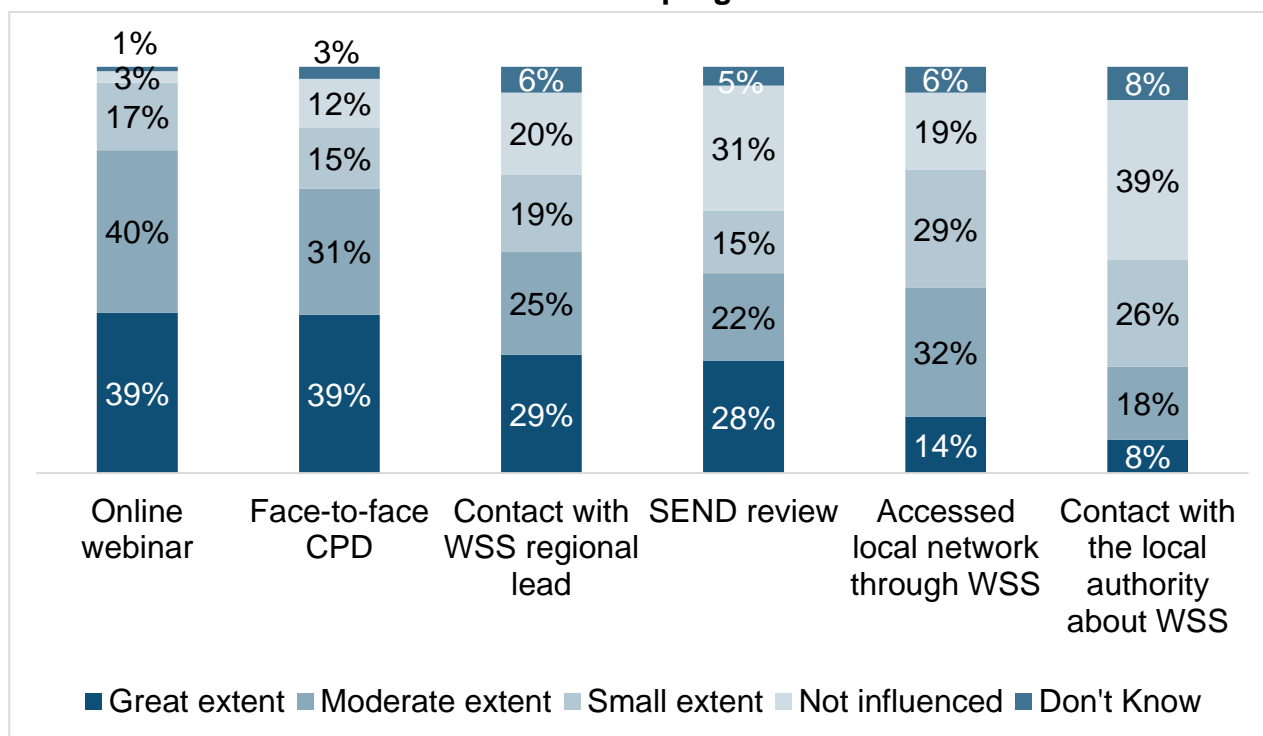
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All who engaged with each aspect 180/100/79/65/79/61.

4.2.1 Webinars and CPD

The final evaluation report for 2020[33] identified that there was high uptake of training, with courses quickly becoming fully booked. This demand for CPD continued in 2020/21 (see Figure 1). Similarly, the highest levels of engagement amongst responders to the online survey was demonstrated for the online webinars, followed by face-to-face CPD[34] (Figure 9). The online webinars were more likely to have had an influence on practice than other Whole School SEND activities (44%, n=173) (Figure 9) and were perceived to have had the greatest influence on practice compared to other aspects of the Whole School SEND programme (79% positive influence to a great or moderate extent , n=143), closely followed by face-to-face CPD (Figure 10).

Regional leads spoke positively about the use of webinars since the COVID-19 outbreak which they felt had allowed them to reach more professionals using an efficient and

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[33] Driver Youth Trust (2020), Evaluation of the Strategic Support to The Workforce in Mainstream and Special Schools contract 2018-2020 Final Report, p.9.
[34] Face-to-face training is likely to have been received prior to March 2020 due to the restrictions on working and face-to-face meetings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 onwards.

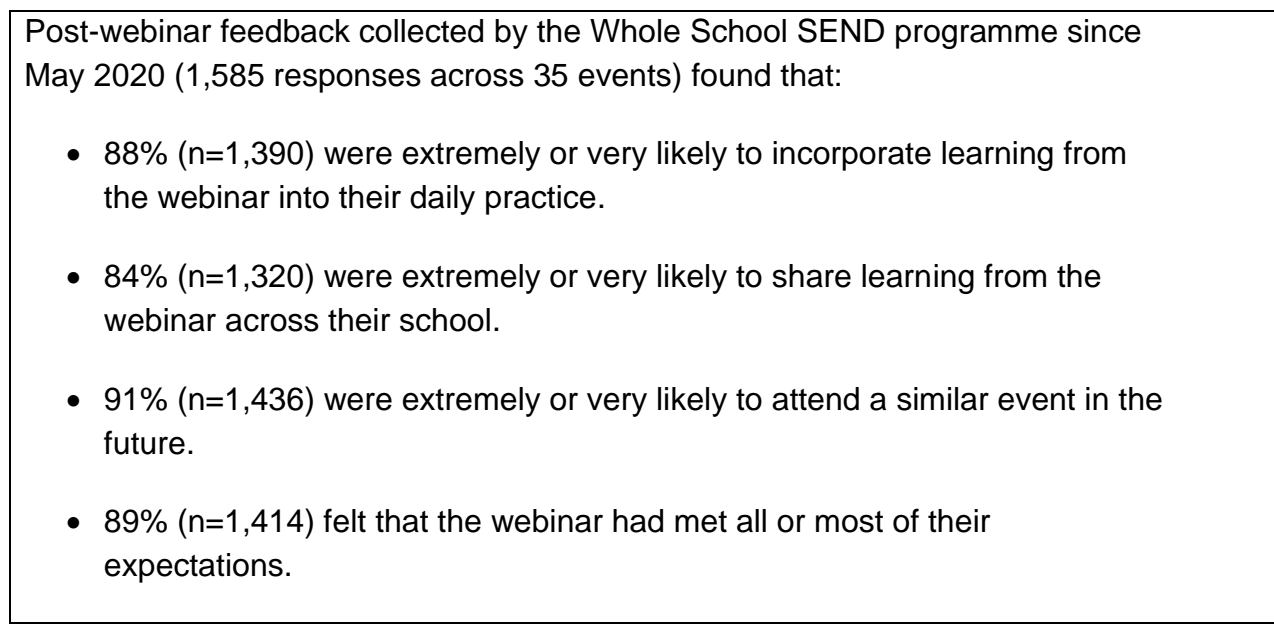accessible approach, with high attendance. They were able to tailor webinars to particular audiences (e.g. Headteacher, ECTs), with a focus if needed on topics or areas that had become more pertinent through COVID-19 (e.g. dealing with trauma through evidence-informed approaches), and with content focusing on practical and real-life examples. Regional leads reported that engagement with the webinars had remained high after schools had re-opened indicating an ongoing interest amongst professionals. This is supported by Whole School SEND's post-webinar feedback, which found that the vast majority of attendees were satisfied that the webinars had met their needs and indicated that they would attend again in the future (Figure 11).

> With webinars it was first time we had done anything like that. The feedback suggested that people wanted principles they could chew over and apply to settings but also real case studies and how to use those principles in practice...explain how they used it, what worked, what hadn't, challenges and how they overcame them. (Regional lead)

Online and face-to face training were felt to have had the greatest impact on practice, with almost two out of five stating that their engagement with these aspects had impacted positively to 'a great extent' (Figure 10). This supports the findings from the post-webinar feedback collected by Whole School SEND, which indicated that the majority of attendees valued the training and expected to utilise it within their daily practice (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Whole School SEND management information on webinar activity

Post-webinar feedback collected by the Whole School SEND programme since May 2020 (1,585 responses across 35 events) found that:

- 88% (n=1,390) were extremely or very likely to incorporate learning from the webinar into their daily practice.

- 84% (n=1,320) were extremely or very likely to share learning from the webinar across their school.

- 91% (n=1,436) were extremely or very likely to attend a similar event in the future.

- 89% (n=1,414) felt that the webinar had met all or most of their expectations.

The positive response to webinars identified by Whole School SEND in their internal post-webinar feedback was mirrored by the community of practice interviewees, who were very positive about their experience. Members valued the opportunity to access high-quality CPD, particularly during the period of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and commented on the usefulness and relevance of the content. Community of practice members cited the benefits of the webinars including building their skills around specific aspects of SEND, utilising elements of what they had learnt in their practice and, being able to signpost the webinars to other colleagues. This again supports the findings from Whole School SEND's post-webinar feedback, which indicated that the majority of attendees would share their learning across their school (Figure 11).

> They have been excellent. I've been a SENCO for a number of years and they have reminded me of things to get my thinking in the right place and were also useful as a tool to share with other schools as well. (Primary School Improvement Advisor)

> I've accessed some online training recently about autism which was really interesting and helpful. It reinforced for me what we do well and allowed us to develop some new areas. (SENCO, Secondary Academy)

Community of practice members particularly valued being able to access the webinars flexibly at their convenience, either because they were able to watch the recording of the webinar at a suitable time, or because of the time that was saved from not having to attended face-to-face training.

> Webinars are really helpful and that is a really good thing to have come out of the whole COVID situation. Instead of having to set aside half a day for training you can just put headphones on and do it. (SENCO)

4.2.2 Contact with regional lead and involvement in SEND Reviews

Where there had been contact with a Whole School SEND regional lead or where a SEND review had taken place, a positive impact on practice was reported (Figure 9). Due to the COVID-19 outbreak it is likely that involvement in this type of activity took place prior to March 2020. The majority of face-to-face delivery including the SEND reviews or the SEND reviewer training had been halted since March 2020 due to COVID-19. However, there were a small number of community of practice members who mentioned that some SEND reviewer training had continued via webinars, or they had been able to continue their contact with the regional lead virtually.

Community of practice members, particularly at a local authority level, spoke positively in the interviews about their contact with the regional leads. They mentioned being assisted in a number of ways, including signposting to resources and demonstrating how they could be used. Community of practice members gave examples of regional leads presenting at local networks and conferences (in person prior to March 2020, and virtually since then), which helped to enthuse staff to improve SEND provision in their setting. The opportunity to discuss local needs or challenges with regional leads in relation to SEND was valuable to local authority community of practice members who often saw the regional leads as playing a supportive, but critical friend role.

There had a been a considerable focus prior to March 2020 on regional leads providing training for SENCOs to become SEND reviewers. Those who had contact with a regional lead through the SEND review process had either accessed SEND Review training, participated in a SEND review or they had used the SEND review guidance within their own setting. Community of practice members who had been involved in these cited the following strengths of the SEND reviews:

- Encouraged strategic thinking about SEND within the setting.

- Helped identify gaps and areas for improvement in SEND provision and shaped thinking about required changes.

- Highlighted different ways of working and encouraged reflection on their own practice.

- Supported the development of links and collaboration across schools – particularly where peer-models of SEND reviews had been established.

Those who had been trained as SEND reviewers were encouraged to utilise the resources to review the SEND provision in their own school. This helped them to identify areas of weakness, unmet needs and strengths, with the aim of them being able to influence decisions and practice within the school. Regional leads spoke about an ambition to move on to a school-to-school peer support model, establishing local networks of SEND reviewers that were able to review provision in each other's settings.

Direct involvement with a regional lead or through a SEND review had encouraged community of practice members to increase their strategic focus on SEND within their setting. At a local authority level, there were examples of approaches to assessing SEND provision in schools being strengthened. A local authority SEND advisor provided an example of the Whole School SEND review materials introduced to them by the regional lead. They said this was fundamental to adapting their approach to assessing SEND

provision in schools, allowing them to better target schools for support and improve their approach to SEND within the school.

> I have gone back since and I can see impact from the action plan on what they have identified and worked on, it has had positive outcomes on progress. There is a more effective use of additional adults, the parent home school partnership is stronger and there are more positive responses from parents. (Independent inclusion consultant)

Case study 1: Strengthening a local authority's strategic approach to SEND

The SEND advisor's role is to support SENCOs in school with the identification and support of pupils with SEND.

Engagement with Whole School SEND

The local authority became involved with Whole School SEND after they had a SEND inspection and were required to produce a written statement of action to improve provision. As a result, the local authority were offered up to three days of support through Whole School SEND. This included SEND reviewer training for a number of SENCOs, with the aim that the SENCOs would conduct SEND reviews in other schools.

The local authority adopted an approach which used key statements from the self-evaluation form available in the SEND Review Guide. All schools in the area were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to ten in terms of their SEND focus, provision and vision. Using this, the local authority were able to identify how schools were rating themselves in terms of school improvement and the areas where SENCOs needed support. This identified areas of weaknesses and strengths in schools, and identified which schools were potentially in need of more support.

Impact

The local authority's adoption of the principles in the SEND Review Guide have been instrumental in the local authority identifying a more meaningful way of assessing SEND provision in schools.

The use of the SEND Review Guide helped the local authority to identify that in a number of schools, there were issues around the identification of SEND. As a result of this the local authority has revised their core standards of identification to include a statement about the definition of high-quality teaching and learning for pupils with SEND and what is meant by wide-spread quality teaching. The local authority has used

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this data to inform the categorisation of schools in the local area regarding their support needs and the quality of their SEND provision.

The SEND advisor reported that this process had supported them in their strategic approach to supporting schools around SEND provision. They felt that this enabled them to work towards their ambition to equip schools to better support pupils with SEND in mainstream provision.

SEND advisor, local authority

4.2.3 Contact with local networks and the local authority

Overall, 15% (n=58) of survey respondents said that their access to a local network through Whole School SEND had positively influenced their practice (Figure 9) and of those, 46% (n=36) said it had a great or moderate positive influence (Figure 10). Community of practice members interviewed felt there was an opportunity for Whole School SEND to widen the role they played in developing and supporting local and cross local authority networks. Some community of practice members would welcome knowing how to make links with other SEND professionals locally, or the opportunity to make links with other local authorities from whom they may be able to learn from their practice.

Impact on practice was least likely to be mentioned by those who had been in contact with the local authority about Whole School SEND (Figure 10).

4.3 Whole School SEND materials influencing practice

Broadly, survey respondents who had engaged with aspects of the SEND Gateway had already utilised the resources in their practice, or intended to do so in the future (Figure 12). Furthermore, very few said that any of the aspects they had engaged with had not influenced their practice, reinforcing that the SEND Gateway is useful and relevant for the audience.

Aspects of the SEND Gateway which respondents were most engaged with included SEND research, SEND review guides and resources, with a third or more already using them in their practice. The SENCO induction pack was also already being used in practice by a third of survey respondents (Figure 12).

Qualitatively, the resources from the Gateway were being used for multiple purposes. Community of practice members were using the resources in their own practice, or they had used the resources to reflect on their own practice i.e. they

were using the resources to identify whether there were improvements that they could make to their existing practice. Furthermore, there were examples of them being incorporated into CPD, or as a discussion point with other staff members.

Figure 12: Positive influence on practice of engagement with aspects of SEND Gateway

	Currently using	Intend to use	Not influenced	Seen but not read
SEND research	33%	34%	5%	16%
SEND Review guides	36%	31%	5%	13%
Resources	37%	29%	5%	12%
Find out about courses / webinars	31%	24%	7%	15%
SENCO Induction pack	33%	15%	7%	11%
COVID-19 resources and info.	28%	18%	6%	14%
Condition specific videos	23%	25%	6%	13%
What works resources	20%	23%	6%	14%
SEND forums	14%	17%	5%	20%
Parental resources / leaflets	13%	20%	6%	15%
Blogs	3%	11%	7%	22%
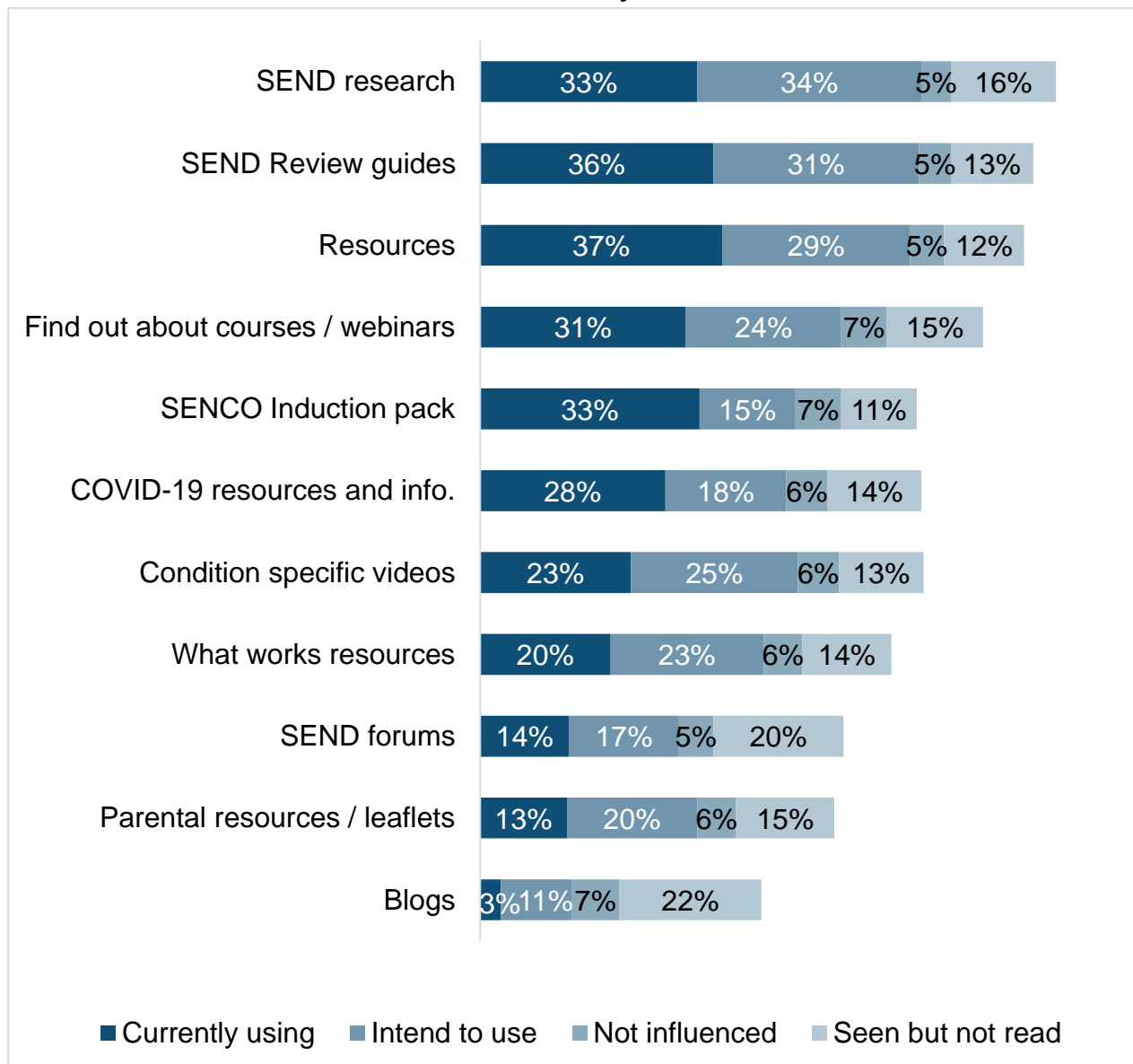
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All who engaged with SEND Gateway 287.

Survey respondents had a positive view of resources released to support them with their response to COVID-19. Over a quarter (28%, n=81) of SEND Gateway users said they had already used the COVID-19 resources and information in their practice and a further 18% (n=53) intended to do so in the future (Figure 12).

Case study 2: Using Whole School SEND resources to adapt school systems and approaches

Engagement with Whole School SEND

The SENCO has used lots of the resources on the SEND Gateway including the [Teaching Assistant Deployment Review Guide](#) and the [Demonstrating Inclusion Tool](#). Most recently the SENCO has used the [COVID-19 SEND Review Guide](#). They also attended some of the webinars including 'SEND in a nutshell'. The school was developing a three-year strategic plan and this webinar had informed the SENCO's thinking about which data could be used in the plan.

As a result of using the [COVID-19 SEND Review Guide](#), the SENCO identified that although as a school they had provision in place to support pupils' emotional wellbeing, this was an area that needed further development, particularly to meet the emerging needs of some pupils returning to school in September 2020. As a direct result of this, the school commissioned an art and movement therapist to provide one-to-one support for pupils who were having specific difficulties (e.g. self-harming and family separation).

Impact

The SENCO felt that using the Whole School SEND resources had contributed to SEND being placed more centrally within school processes and systems. They had also contributed to establishing whole-school accountability for SEND.

SEND had become more fully integrated into key discussions and the SENCO was being invited to school-level meetings (e.g. senior leader meetings). The SENCO commented that teachers were more aware of the importance of their role in supporting pupils with SEND and they had seen a change in teachers' approach to planning, with more focus on incorporating the needs of pupils with SEND. The school plans to undertake further work with teachers to help explain why they are best placed to support pupils with SEND, and to support the teachers with appropriate training so that they can fulfil that role effectively.

After using the [Teaching Assistant Deployment Review Guide,](#) the school reviewed how they used support staff in school, with a focus on upskilling teaching assistants. Previously they deployed support staff by key stage. Using the guide, they mapped SEND needs by individual class, and have moved to an approach where teaching assistant support is deployed according to the needs of classes, rather than taking a blanket approach based on year group.

Inclusion manager and SENCO, primary maintained school

Resources such as the SEND forums, parental resources or leaflets[35], and blogs were less likely to have been accessed or used in practice thus far (Figure 12), which may suggest that their role could be reviewed to better understand why and whether they could be developed further to be made more relevant or useful.

The proportion of online survey respondents who said they were already using aspects of the SEND Gateway in their practice was very similar across those working in the primary and secondary phases. However, those working in the secondary phase were significantly more likely than those in primary to say they were intending to use the following aspects:

- SEND review guides (secondary 42%, n=36, primary 28%, n=36).

- Parental resources/leaflets (secondary 31%, n=26, primary 17%, n=21).

- COVID-19 resources and information (secondary 28%, n=24, primary 14%, n=18).

- SEND forums (secondary 26%, n=22, primary 13%, n=16).

4.4 Further information and support requested

Survey respondents indicated that they would like to receive more information and support for working with children and young people with SEND across a range of areas. The most common areas were: teaching and learning approaches, how to use resources efficiently and assessment and identification of children and young people with SEND (Figure 13).

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[35] It is acknowledged that the parental resources and leaflets were not targeted at survey respondents (who were primarily working within schools) and therefore these resources may not necessarily be expected to have impacted upon practice.

Figure 13: Areas where more information or support is needed in terms of working with children and young people with SEND

Area	Percentage
Teaching and learning approaches	63%
Efficient use of resources	57%
Assessment and identification	54%
Leadership of SEND	42%
How to work with parents/carers	40%
Statutory and legal responsibilities	39%
Other	3%
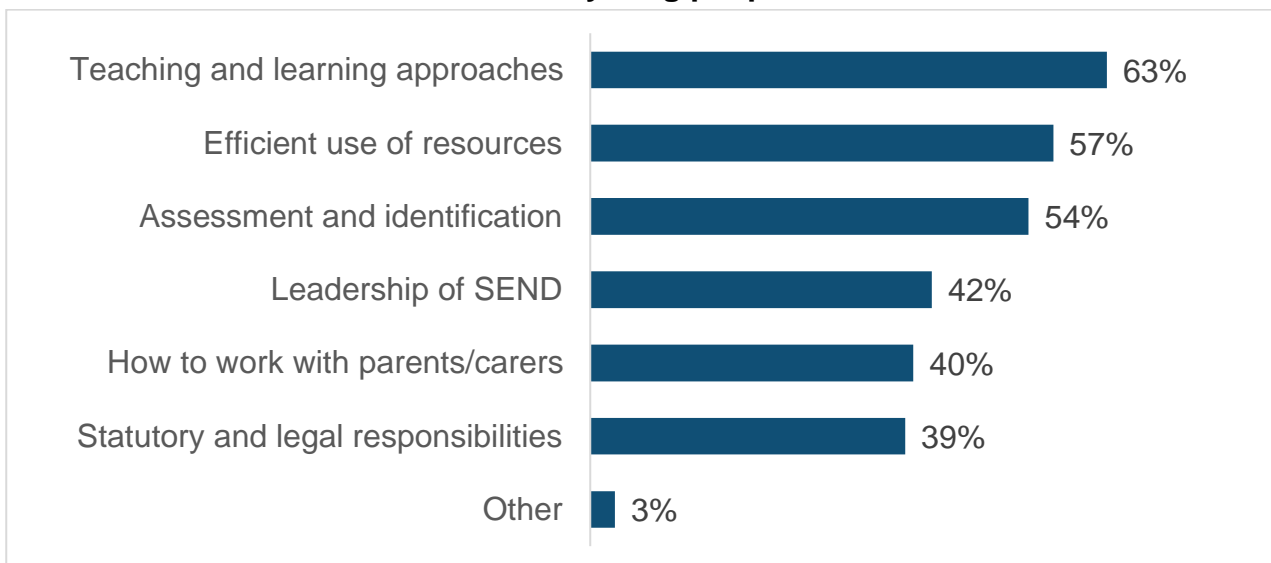
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All respondents 397.

SEND non-specialists were significantly more likely than specialists to request further information and support on:

- Teaching and learning (non-specialists 76%, n=90, specialists 62%, n=161).

- Assessment and identification (non-specialists 71%, n=85, specialists 50%, n=128).

- Efficient use of resources (non-specialists 70%, n=83, specialists 55%, n=142).

- Working with parents/carers (non-specialists 55%, n=66, specialists 35%, n=91).

Other areas suggested by consortium partner interviewees related to widening Whole School SEND's remit. These were: widening of the age range focus (for example, post-16), and ensuring there was effective coverage and support for prevalent SEND conditions (for example, speech, language and communication).

Consortium partners thought that Whole School SEND could play more of an active role in supporting the sectors' response to COVID-19. They suggested that Whole School SEND could develop more support and resources to help schools support pupils with SEND, and to address the gaps that have been widened through lockdown. Additionally, a few suggested that Whole School SEND could play a role in lobbying Government around the issues that remote learning has caused for pupils with SEND.

Amongst those survey respondents who requested any further information or support about SEND, online resources (79%, n=303) and webinars (78%, n=300) were the preferred channels. Two thirds (67%, n=258) would like to access this information and

support through best practice guides. Almost two-fifths (38%, n=144) of respondents requested networking opportunities and a third (31%, n=119) requested face-to-face CPD opportunities.

5. Progress towards key aims

This section provides an overview of the evidence around progress towards Whole School SEND's four key aims (refer to Section 1).

5.1 Progress towards Whole School SEND key aims

Survey respondents were positive about the contribution that their engagement with Whole School SEND had made to improvements in their setting across all aspects (Figure 14). These responses, along with feedback from interviewees, demonstrate the overall positive progress that Whole School SEND has made towards meeting its four key aims. These are explored in more detail below.

Figure 14: Agreement that involvement with the Whole School SEND programme or engagement with the SEND Gateway had contributed to improvements in setting
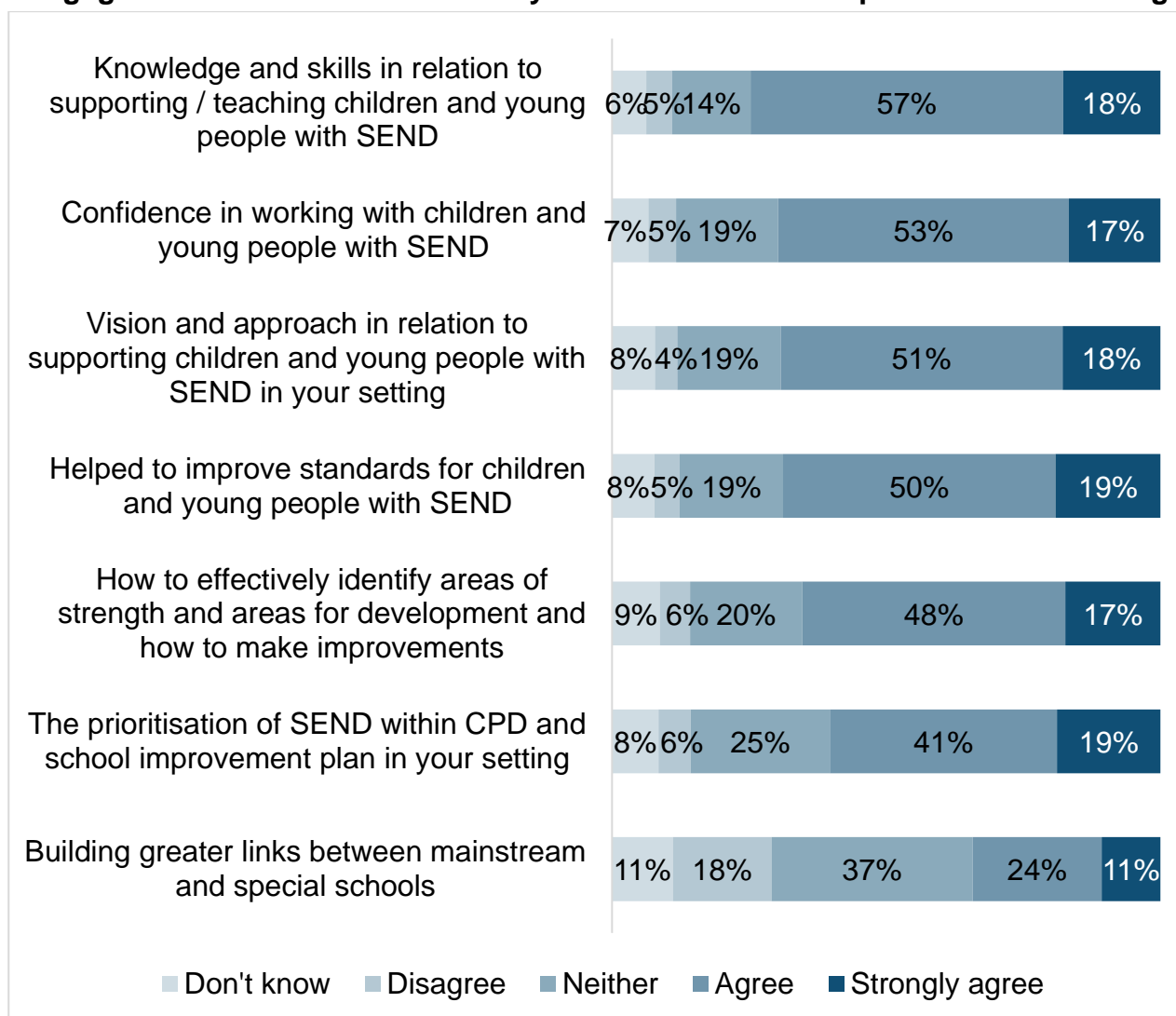
Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All excluding not applicable for each statement 321/317/319/324/323/307/289.

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5.1.1 Prioritising SEND

Aim 1: Drive education institutions to prioritise SEND within their continuous professional development (CPD) and school improvement plans including facilitating greater links between mainstream and special schools

It was identified in the 2020 final evaluation report that engagement with Whole School SEND had increased the profile and priority of SEND in many settings and that practitioners noted a 'shifting' mind set around SEND in the school leaders they were working with.[36] Improvement in the priority of SEND within organisations continues to be an important impact of the programme in 2020/21.

The majority (69%, n=221) of online survey respondents indicated that their involvement with Whole School SEND had contributed to improvements in the vision and approach to SEND in their setting. Furthermore, three out of five (60%, n=185) agreed that Whole School SEND had helped them to prioritise SEND within their CPD and school improvement plans (Figure 14).

Interviewees reported that involvement with Whole School SEND had contributed to improvements in the strategic focus on SEND within their settings and SENCOs in particular felt more able to have strategic influence. As previously mentioned (section 4.2.2), involvement in the SEND review process, had empowered community of practice members. This feeling of increased empowerment was also noted in the 2020 final evaluation report.[37]

Case study 3: Supporting SENCO development and influencing wider school approaches

The SENCO has overall responsibility for EAL and line manages the teaching assistants. They also have strategic responsibility for ensuring that teachers understand that 'all teachers are teachers of SEND', with operational responsibility for staff development and ensuring that staff are equipped to be able support pupils with SEND.

Engagement with Whole School SEND

The SENCO has used the SEND Gateway to find out general information about SEND. They have also used a number of the resources, and does have aspirations to use them within school but has not been able to do this yet.

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[36] Driver Youth Trust (2020), Evaluation of the Strategic Support to The Workforce in Mainstream and Special Schools contract 2018-2020 Final Report,p.6 and p.10
[37] Driver Youth Trust (2020), Evaluation of the Strategic Support to The Workforce in Mainstream and Special Schools contract 2018-2020 Final Report, p.10

The SENCO has also attended face-to-face Whole School SEND training last year that was focused the five pillars of leadership of SEND.

Impact

The SENCO identified a number of benefits of being involved in the Whole School SEND leadership training. It was particularly useful in setting out a structure for the SENCO in terms of how they should be strategically implementing SEND in school, rather than just considering it from an operational perspective. Following the training, the SENCO relayed the information and their learning back to both governors and the leadership team to emphasise the importance of adopting a more strategic approach. As a result, the school designated a lead governor for SEND, which had not been in place previously.

Although the impacts had not been immediate, the SENCO felt that being able to use the SEND Gateway and resources, in combination with the training, would impact in the long-term on how much influence they would be able to have in their role within school. The SENCO was more confident that they would be able to ensure that SEND was a priority across all areas and policies within school.

On a personal level, the SENCO felt that using the SEND Gateway had built their own skills and knowledge and had assisted in them being able to complete their SENCO award.

SENCO, secondary school

Community of practice interviewees gave a number of examples of how the strategic focus on SEND had been improved through their involvement in Whole School SEND including:

- Increased understanding of the role of the SENCO amongst the wider school workforce.

- Increased focus on whole-school responsibilities of leadership and teaching staff around SEND.

- Empowering SENCOs to have conversations with other staff, particularly at senior management and governor level, about the focus of SEND within the school.

- Use of resources like 'SEND in nutshell' to provide data in an accessible and clear format, utilised in discussions with other staff.

For several community of practice members, involvement with Whole School SEND had led to them adapting or introducing new systems or procedures within their setting.

Examples included approaches to recording and tracking the interventions and progress of pupils, more effective action planning, and devising systems to monitor support and the associated costs. Deployment of support staff had changed as a result of using the Teaching Assistant Deployment Review Guide (see example in case study 2).

There is some evidence that Whole School SEND has played a role in facilitating links between mainstream and special schools. A third of survey respondents agreed that their involvement with Whole School SEND had contributed to improvements in this area (Figure 14). Interviewees provided some examples of links being built between mainstream and special schools, including staff from special schools being involved in SEND review training, and undertaking peer reviews within mainstream schools.

Regional leads gave examples of building links with specialist teaching school alliances with the aim of further exploring the potential relationships that could be developed between leaders and teachers in mainstream and special schools. Regional leads felt it was important that this was done in a meaningful way and in a way that maximised the value of any work streams for both parties.

However, overall this was the area of lowest impact suggesting there is opportunity for this to be extended further. Regional leads recognised that it was challenging to build links between mainstream and special schools within regions, and this had been made more difficult by COVID-19 due to the constraints around face-to-face work and visiting other schools.

5.1.2 Identifying and meeting training needs

Aim 2: Equip schools to identify and meet their training needs in relation to SEND

There were high levels of engagement and positive feedback on the SEND Gateway resources and webinar training opportunities provided by the programme (sections 2 and 3). This demonstrates the extensive work that Whole School SEND has undertaken to equip schools to identify and meet their training needs in relation to SEND provision. As mentioned in section 4.2.2, SEND reviews were noted to be particularly successful in supporting schools and local authorities to strengthen their ability to assess SEND provision in schools and identify areas of strength, weakness and gaps. Regional leads also played a role in this, often drawing on local and national data to facilitate discussions with local authorities and schools about key priorities and needs within their setting.

Regional leads spoke about a pre-COVID-19 focus on encouraging local authorities to set-up school-to-school SEND review processes. The aim of establishing such a model was to embed a sustainable approach to both improving SEND provision at an operational level but also to assist schools to continually review where further training may be needed.

Many community of practice members spoke positively about both using the resources and training opportunities on the Gateway themselves, but also in signposting colleagues to appropriate resources and training. Case study 4 provides an exemplar of how a member of staff has accessed training specific to their needs, used their learning and shared it with colleagues.

The success of this work is borne out in survey respondents' perceptions of the contribution of their engagement with Whole School SEND to improvements in this area. Almost two thirds (65%, n=211) of survey respondents who answered agreed that their engagement with the programme or Gateway had helped them to improve how they identify strengths and areas for improvement (Figure 14). SEND specialists were significantly more likely to agree with this statement compared to non-specialists (strongly agree SEND specialists 18%, n=48, non-specialists 6%, n=8).

Case study 4: Accessing training opportunities and enhancing practice

The inclusion lead's role is to oversee all pupils with SEND and the provision they are receiving and to ensure they are able to access mainstream education.

Engagement with Whole School SEND

The inclusion lead had engaged with Whole School SEND through a number of mechanisms. They received the newsletters, and have accessed a number of webinars since March 2020. The inclusion lead has been particularly interested in accessing the webinars that have focused on speech and language as this has been a focus of their role for the year. They also accessed a webinar about the identification of pupils with SEND.

Impact

The inclusion lead believed that their involvement with the webinars had had a direct impact on their practice. The webinars on speech and language needs had opened up training opportunities that may not have been possible in other circumstances because of the associated costs. As a result of engaging with the training, the inclusion lead felt that the provision they were providing to pupils with speech and language needs was more well-rounded and evidence-based and it was informing the way they were designing provision for these needs. The inclusion lead was also able to disseminate the key information from the webinars to other staff, with the intention that it would also impact on their practice.

Inclusion lead and senior leader, secondary school

5.1.3 Building skills

Aim 3: Build the skills of teachers working in mainstream and special schools and of SENCOs and teachers of classes of children and young people with sensory impairments by promoting best practice

It is clear that despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/21, Whole School SEND continued to develop and deliver training and resources to engage the schools' workforce and to build their skills and confidence (sections 2 and 3).

Agreement that engagement with the programme had contributed to improvements in the knowledge and skills in relation to supporting or teaching children and young people with SEND was high, with three quarters (75%, n=240) of survey respondents who answered this question agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 14).

During the interviews, community of practice members provided examples of how their involvement with Whole School SEND had enhanced their knowledge and skills. SENCOs and inclusion leads gave examples of their action-planning having improved, or that involvement had increased their knowledge about a particular SEND condition which had then strengthened their practice in that area. Others mentioned their approach becoming more evidence-based and well-rounded as a result of using the resources.

> One thing that changed and refocused my view was the MAT assessor training, the deliverer was awesome in terms of what we need to be thinking about. It got me thinking in different ways, I was being challenged. It really sharpened my view about things and I reflected on what was my purpose in helping these schools. (SENCO, Alternative Provision)

Other community of practice members discussed having their practice challenged through the training they had accessed or resources they had used; encouraging them to think in different ways, or to reflect on their existing practice.

Community of practice members also gave examples of Whole School SEND contributing to the better identification of pupils with SEND within their setting. At a school level, involvement with Whole School SEND had assisted in increasing staff awareness about how pupils may present SEND issues.

> It's had a huge impact, it has helped to raise awareness of how pupils may present in the class. We have a lot of ECTs and we have been able to support them to identify SEND and share information so they can support pupils. (SENCO, primary maintained school)

Case study 5: Strengthening the identification and tracking of pupils with SEND

The SENCO oversees all aspects of SEND provision including statutory assessments and reviews, and liaison with external agencies. The SENCO organises whole school training to ensure staff have greater understanding of the needs of pupils with SEND across the school.

Engagement with Whole School SEND

The SENCO has attended Whole School SEND training. The training focused on how to support teachers to be better equipped to work with and support pupils with SEND. The school has also had two SEND reviews conducted and have undertaken some peer-to-peer SEND reviews within their multi-academy trust.

The SENCO receives the newsletters which are helpful for finding out about any policy changes. Where appropriate, the SENCO summarises information from the newsletters and forwards this to teachers.

Impact

The SENCO felt that their involvement with Whole School SEND through the training, SEND reviews and receiving the newsletters had contributed to improving the approach to identifying and tracking pupils with SEND. For example, as a result of the training they have embedded the use of evidence sheets online which has been rolled out across the Trust. These encourage teachers to record their input with pupils with SEND and their assessment of them. This allows the SENCO to be more informed about the work that has taken place with pupils, and also allows for more informed and collaborative discussions with the teachers.

As a result of their involvement with Whole School SEND training, they have also developed referral forms for pupils with SEND. The SENCO felt that their referral process had been strengthened with them finding that they now have more pupils that are referred following the correct method and the evidence and information that is provided is more concise and follows correct processes. The SENCO felt that teachers' awareness about their responsibilities relating to SEND was improving, but that it is an ongoing priority for the school.

The SENCO also used the literature from the Whole School SEND training to identify and justify to the senior leadership team key priorities for training across the workforce.

<div align="right">SENCO, secondary multi-academy trust</div>

There were also examples of local authorities strengthening their approaches to assessing SEND provision in schools (refer to case study 1).

> The self-evaluation process that we adapted from the Whole School SEND materials showed that across a number of schools there were issues around identification of SEND. (Local authority SEND advisor)

The impact of Whole School SEND on skills and knowledge extends beyond those who have engaged directly with the programme, as evidenced by the responses from survey respondents, interviewees and Whole School SEND's own post-webinar survey data. The vast majority of webinar attendees surveyed by Whole School SEND agreed that they would share their learnings across their school and many community of practice interviewees mentioned sharing key learnings from the newsletters, webinars and Gateway resources. This sharing of resources and best practice was also identified as a key impact of the programme in the 2020 final evaluation report.[38]

Another positive outcome of engagement with Whole School SEND was improvement in the confidence of practitioners in working with children and young people with SEND (70% strongly agree/agree, n=221, Figure 14). Furthermore, the impact was particularly felt by SEND specialists, who were significantly more likely to strongly agree with this statement compared to non-specialists (strongly agree SEND specialists 17%, n=46, non-specialists 6%, n=7). Qualitatively, the feedback from community of practice members, particularly SENCOs, shows that their involvement with Whole School SEND had helped build their confidence in working with children and young people with SEND. There were examples of community of practice members feeling empowered to influence changes to their SEND provision or feeling more confident to facilitate professional dialogue with colleagues about their views on the priorities or focus for SEND in their setting.

There is also evidence that this upskilling of the workforce has improved standards for children and young people with SEND, with almost seven out of ten (69%, n=221) of survey respondents agreeing that their engagement with Whole School SEND had contributed positively to improved standards (Figure 14). SEND specialists were significantly more likely to agree that their engagement had contributed to improvements in the standards for children and young people with SEND compared to non-specialists (strongly agree SEND specialists 18%, n=50, non-specialists 10%, n=12).

However those working in the primary phase (strongly agree primary 10%, n=18 versus secondary 19%, n=23), and SEND non-specialists (non-specialists strongly agree 7%, n=9, versus SEND specialists 18%, n=48) were somewhat less positive about the impact

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[38] Driver Youth Trust (2020), Evaluation of the Strategic Support to The Workforce in Mainstream and Special Schools contract 2018-2020 Final Report, p.10.

on their skills and knowledge, suggesting that there is an opportunity to better understand their skills gaps and training needs.

5.1.4 Filling gaps

Aim 4: Identify and respond to any gaps in the training and resources available to schools

As highlighted in section 3, Whole School SEND has utilised a range of approaches to identify and respond to the training and information needs in relation to SEND. Regional leads have responded flexibly to the needs of schools by adapting and delivering training tailored to the needs of different groups, such as local authorities, SENCOs and SLTs.

Furthermore, the response to COVID-19 demonstrates how Whole School SEND has identified and responded to emerging gaps. A range of COVID-19 resources and training were developed and adapted rapidly in response to the pandemic and subsequent remote learning. Overall these were positively received by the community of practice interviewees who had used them, with their use contributing to the transition back into school for teachers, pupils and parents. The transition from face-to-face training to delivery via online webinars was highly valued by practitioners, particularly during the period of remote learning for most pupils. The ongoing high levels of engagement with the webinars, and the support for the flexible nature of accessing such training indicates strong support for a continued need for training to be offered through this means.

However, consortium partners felt that Whole School SEND could play an even greater role in the recovery from COVID-19, particularly in developing more resources and support to address gaps for pupils with SEND. They also felt that widening the remit of Whole School SEND would help plug some of the gaps that still existed in resources and training.

Consortium partners would like to play a more active role in shaping and informing the priorities for Whole School SEND. They felt that Whole School SEND sometimes lacked understanding about the remit, resources and provision offered by partners. Addressing this would help ensure that work was not duplicated, but also that partners could be used more strategically to meet outstanding training or resource needs.

Regional leads clearly recognised that there was still some work to do in forging links between mainstream and special schools. To a wider extent feedback from a number of special school community of practice members suggests that the Whole School SEND offer, both in terms of training and resources, was less relevant to their setting and was more mainstream focused. For example, a senior leader at a special school commented on attending training that had been marketed for special schools, but where the content

was actually mainstream focused and therefore suggested that greater clarity in who training events were targeted at was needed.

> I've looked at the materials but there's quite a mainstream bias, it's not sophisticated enough for us…I got quite excited and did look [at the new resources], but because they are not relevant I have become less engaged and now when emails come through I feel it is another spam email and I don't look at it. (Headteacher, Special school)

6. Improvements

This section provides an overview of potential improvements that were highlighted during the survey and interviews.

6.1. Improvements and opportunities for the Whole School SEND programme

Interviewees suggested a number of opportunities for improvement for the Whole School SEND programme.

- **Increase the reach and scope** of Whole School SEND, including increased involvement of local authorities and mainstream schools, and building links with teacher training providers. It was also suggested that post-16 provision would benefit and that effective coverage and support for prevalent SEND conditions (e.g. speech, language and communication) should be ensured.

  > Whole School SEND needs to know its markets and needs to be flexible enough to support its market, and perhaps think more strategically about how it could target its resources more effectively to local authorities or schools that are most in need of support. (Consortium partner)

- **Increase capacity and/or refining the focus** of the regional leads' roles - to cover smaller geographical areas, which would allow them to increase the level of engagement with local authorities and schools within their area.

- **Clearer Whole School SEND vision** via clearer messaging and communications on its aims and purpose, along with greater clarity around the remit of the different agencies, particularly at the points of access to the programme e.g. the SEND Gateway.

  > It's really difficult to unpick nasen…the community of practice…the Gateway, and I'll say to people go on the website to find an event and then I go on there and it's not there. So I think that platform, that initial point of contact, if somebody Googled 'Whole School SEND', what does it take you to, what needs does it meet? (Consortium partner)

- **Longer term delivery model**. Move to longer-term, more strategic needs-led projects to increase the likelihood of being able to measure more observable impacts in relation to the aspirational aims of the programme.

- **Greater communication about available training opportunities and resources.** This includes improving the structure and format of the Gateway, to ease navigation and access to relevant information.

  > Just making it clearer what can I tap into, I want to use the tool as much as possible but feel I am missing out as I don't know what is there. (Inclusion Lead, Maintained school)

- **More focus on the support needs of special schools** (see section 5).

- **Clarity around the role of the community of practice,** including how membership can be used, the benefits and access to a membership network locally to share best practice.

6.1.1 Role of consortium partners

It was identified in the 2019 interim evaluation report that programme contributors had an appetite for working more closely with Whole School SEND and each other[39] and this desire continued to be expressed by the consortium partners interviewed in 2020. Consortium partners felt there would be a benefit in working in partnership with Whole School SEND, to enable them to contribute towards the shaping of programme delivery and to ensure duplication of resources was minimised. Undertaking a mapping exercise at a programme level regarding the consortium's resources, provision and offer would assist in reducing duplication. They expressed a desire to have more regular meetings and increase links with regional SEND leads. Regional leads also reflected this view, commenting that consortium partners could be better used within the delivery of the Whole School SEND offer in the regions.

Partners also mentioned that they would welcome greater flexibility within the specifications for commissioned work to ensure the potential reach of the work was not limited. For example, there was some feedback from partners that the parameters of the specifications meant that they were not always able to open up training to a wider audience who may benefit from it.

A number of the small organisations interviewed felt that it was difficult for them to bid for work through the consortium against larger organisations. Therefore they would welcome more opportunities for this to happen.

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[39] Whole School SEND (2020), Whole School SEND Evaluation: Interim report (Year 1), p.26-28.

6.1.2 Feedback and evaluation

Consortium partners and regional SEND leads felt that there would be benefit in improving the feedback and evaluation mechanisms for the programme. This would help to develop a clearer understanding of how their work has been received, how it has been implemented, impact on schools, and ways to improve (refer to section 3.1 for further detail of consortium partner messages around evaluating their contributions).

Regional leads in particular felt that it was difficult for them to gain sight of the impact of their work on practice, settings or pupils, although it is something they would value. This was felt to be due to the limitations of their contract time, but also that their work was often focused at a strategic level or related to networking, leaving them a step removed from front line practitioners.

Regional leads would also value more involvement with the central Whole School SEND team. They would welcome more opportunities to know about the development work that was undertaken by the central Whole School SEND team, and would welcome the opportunity to feed into this work where possible.

> Part of the commissioning process could include talking to the regions in a little bit more detail. This would perhaps give a richer and more contextualised picture of needs going forward. If we are going to affect something we need to know what it is that needs to be affected. (Regional SEND lead)

7. Conclusions and areas for development

Overall, Whole School SEND has continued to build on the progress of the first two years of the programme and has adapted to the unexpected challenges presented by COVID-19. Whole School SEND has developed resources and delivered training which responds to the needs of the schools' workforce and practitioners report that their engagement with the programme continues to have a positive impact on practice.

7.1 Key messages: successes

Community of practice membership has increased by 42%[40] to 15,125 members in December 2020. Members particularly valued being able to access up-to-date information on working with children and young people with SEND.

The **SEND Gateway** continues to be an important source of information about SEND. The resources page has been viewed over twenty seven thousand times and condition-specific videos have been viewed over fifty thousand times since 1st April 2020.

The **E-news newsletters** are a key channel for communicating with practitioners and previous concerns about the length and language appear to have been addressed successfully. Increased open rates and positive feedback from community of practice members indicates that the newsletters are relevant and useful. Members also shared the newsletters or content with colleagues, which means their reach extends beyond their recipient.

Access to **online webinar training** opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly valued and regional leads have reported high levels of attendance and positive feedback. Future Whole School SEND CPD should continue to include a significant webinar element as the flexibility and minimal time for attendance makes it much easier for the schools' workforce to attend.

Whole School SEND has continued to make **progress towards meeting the four key aims**. For the majority of practitioners surveyed, involvement with the programme has contributed to improvements in practice in relation to supporting and teaching children and young people with SEND, in particular their:

- Knowledge, skills and confidence.

- Strategic vision and approach to SEND.

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[40] Initial figures provided in, Whole School SEND (2020), Whole School Send Consortium 2019/2020 Report, https://nasen-stage-asset.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/wss_report_2020_web.pdf.

- Standards for children and young people with SEND.

- Effective identification of strengths and areas for improvement.

- Prioritisation of SEND within their CPD and school improvement plans.

7.2 Key messages: areas for development

A number of potential areas for development were identified.

- Greater clarity around the Whole School SEND brand and the relationship between Whole School SEND, nasen and the SEND Gateway would be welcomed and would help to strengthen the organisation's position as the 'go to' resource for information and training on SEND. Whilst there were positive responses from those contributing to this review, evidence suggests there is still potential for raising awareness of Whole School SEND and the Gateway across the schools workforce.

- Consideration of the remit of Whole School SEND would be beneficial, including its potential role in bringing greater challenge to the education sector and taking a more active role in supporting the sectors' response to COVID-19. Also, it would be pertinent to consider widening the age range focus to include post-16s, identifying training needs of SEND non-specialists and better understanding the skills and knowledge gaps and needs of special schools and those in the primary phase.

- Improvements to the usability of SEND Gateway was noted as a key area for development given the importance of access to the resources and information it contains. The Gateway has now been re-launched, and it will be important to review the new structure and functionality of the site to ensure the platform's usability is optimised and sustainable as it continues to grow. Improved communication about the resources and opportunities that are available through the Gateway would further support the re-launch and extend its reach.

- There is also an opportunity to review the role and effectiveness of parental resources/leaflets and blogs as they are currently the least likely to have been accessed or to have impacted upon practice[41].

- The community of practice is an underutilised resource and members lack clarity on what the benefits of membership are. Increasing opportunities for members to network directly with each other, share best practice and provide training and

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[41] Although it is acknowledged that the parental resources and leaflets were not targeted at survey respondents (who were primarily working within schools) and therefore these resources may not necessarily be expected to have impacted upon practice.

support for each other would further build on progress towards meeting Whole School SEND's key aims.

- Consideration should be given to the role of consortium partners and the potential for working in partnership with Whole School SEND, to enable them to better contribute towards the shaping of programme delivery and respond to the needs of the sector. It would be advantageous to explore further how teacher training providers and teaching schools alliances could be integrated further into the programme.

- There is an opportunity to further strengthen the links between mainstream and special schools as this is the aspect of the programme's aims that engagement with Whole School SEND was least likely to have impacted upon. It would be beneficial to consider the relationship between mainstream and special schools, how the knowledge and skills of special schools can be better utilised and how the relationship can be mutually beneficial.

- Consideration should be given to the contract delivery model to allow for longer-term, more strategic needs-led projects and greater flexibility within specifications to ensure impact can be maximised and measured. This would include consideration of the regional lead model and contract length, to increase their capacity and improve relationship building.

- Improvements to the mechanisms for feedback and evaluation of resources and training developed for the programme would help to provide clearer understanding of how it has been received, implemented, and the impact on schools, practice and on children and young people with SEND. These feedback mechanisms should allow for continuous improvement of the resources and training to ensure they remain up-to-date, relevant and their impact is maximised.

Appendix 1: Survey sample details

Table 3: Main employment role

	Number of responses	% of responses
SENCO	159	40%
School senior leader	95	24%
School improvement advisor/consultant	33	8%
Teaching Assistant / Learning Support	23	6%
School middle leader	18	5%
Other local authority staff	16	4%
Governor/trustee	12	3%
Classroom Teacher	8	2%
Trainee teacher	2	1%
Newly Qualified Teacher	1	0%
Other[42]	30	8%

Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All respondents 397.

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[42] Other roles mentioned include advisory teacher, specialist teacher, SEND leader/manager, SEND administrator/officer, educational psychologist or other leader/manager.

Table 4: Main employment organisation type

	Number of responses	% of responses
Multi-academy trust	122	31%
Local authority	104	26%
Local authority maintained school	59	15%
Single academy	31	8%
Special school	17	4%
Independent school	10	3%
Self-employed consultant	10	3%
Early years setting	8	2%
Sixth form/further education college	5	1%
Alternative provision	3	1%
Pupil referral unit	3	1%
Higher education institution	3	1%
Education charity	4	1%
Initial teacher training provider	1	<1%
Other[43]	17	4%

Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All respondents 397.

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[43] Other organisations mentioned included SEND specialist support organisations, publicly funded organisations, private companies and education specialist organisations.

Table 5: Region

	Number of responses	% of responses
North of England	53	13%
Lancashire and West Yorkshire	21	5%
East Midlands, South Yorkshire and the Humber	39	10%
West Midlands	49	12%
East of England and North East London	60	15%
South Central England and North West London	34	9%
South East England and South London	78	20%
South West of England	63	16%

Source: Whole School SEND survey. Base: All respondents 397.