

# SEND Newsletter

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LearningGrowing  
ConfidenceWorking  
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Futures

Support | Inclusion | Opportunity | Community

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growing for the future

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11<sup>th</sup> September 2026

## Welcome to our first SEND newsletter of the year!

Welcome back to a new school year. We wanted to use our first newsletter to introduce our SEND and Inclusion team, share some of the exciting work happening across school and let you know about some useful support available to families.

Our aim is simple: **to make sure every child feels included, supported and ready to learn.**

## Meet the Inclusion Team

### Mrs Antoinette Starmer-Smith – Head of Inclusion & SENCo



I wanted to start by reintroducing myself and the team.

I am Antoinette Starmer-Smith and I have been working at St Nicholas since 2019. I qualified as a SENCo here and am now our **Head of Inclusion**.

My role covers a number of areas across school. I am our SENCo, a Designated Safeguarding Lead and Designated Teacher for looked-after children, as well as managing our wonderful team of Teaching Assistants.

I also support Mr Dale as Chair of a Community of Schools in Canterbury, working with other schools to share ideas and develop good practice.

### Mrs Claire Gunn – Learning Mentor



Many of you will already know Mrs Gunn, who has been part of the St Nicholas community for a long time! I'll leave it to her to decide exactly how long...

Claire's role as Learning Mentor is wonderfully varied. She supports children in their classrooms, helps children settle into school at the gate and provides emotional support when children need a little extra reassurance.

Claire leads our **Nurture Provision**, and we are delighted to have our new space, **The Nest**, now up and running in the cabin on our school grounds.

Claire is also a qualified **ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant)**, so some of you may know her through this work.

### Mrs Kirsty Smith – Learning Mentor



Mrs Smith joined us as a Learning Mentor last year and brings a wealth of experience to our team. She has also qualified as an **ELSA**, increasing our capacity to provide emotional and pastoral support for our children.

You will see Mrs Smith supporting children at the gate and in classrooms, as well as running our **Sensory Circuit** sessions. She also works in our Breakfast Club.

This year, Kirsty is particularly excited to establish a **Forest School**, giving us another opportunity to support children's wellbeing, confidence and learning outdoors.

## What are we working on?

There are some significant changes taking place across England in the way we think about and support children with SEND.

The government has set out its long-term plans and aspirations, and Kent County Council has already begun preparing for new ways of working. Over the coming year, I will share updates with you and highlight anything that may be particularly relevant to our families.

One of the key areas of focus is ensuring that children's needs are supported effectively within mainstream schools wherever possible.

At St Nicholas, we are therefore continuing to focus on **removing barriers to learning** by adapting our classrooms, curriculum and teaching approaches so that children can access learning successfully.

### Helping children to understand what they need.

You may have noticed that each classroom now has a bank of resources that children can access when they need them. These include:

- Fiddle objects
- Ear defenders
- Chair bands
- Wobble cushions
- Other resources to support focus, movement and sensory needs

The aim is for children to learn to recognise what helps them to be **ready for learning** and to increasingly make those choices for themselves.

This is an important part of developing independence and helping children understand their own needs.

**A little reminder:** please don't send fiddle toys or other similar resources in from home. We will provide these in school so that we can make sure they are safe and appropriate for use in the classroom, and to avoid disappointment if something becomes lost or damaged.

Thank you for your support with this.



### A Spotlight on Staff Training: What does good inclusion look like?

We started the school year with a training day focused on **best practice in inclusion**.

We were delighted to welcome a guest speaker who worked with us on what effective inclusion can look like in a typical classroom.

In a nutshell, our goal is to **remove barriers to learning by making sure every child has the tools and support they need to be successful**.

This might include:

- Adapting work so that children can access the learning taking place in their classroom.
- Providing additional resources such as counters, shapes or money in maths.
- Using word lists, sentence starters or other prompts to support language and written work.
- Providing laptops or other technology where appropriate.
- Using pencil grips, fiddle objects or chair bands to support movement and concentration.
- Providing movement breaks or sensory circuits to help children regulate and feel ready to learn.
- Using wobble cushions or other seating options where appropriate.
- Giving children opportunities to work with a partner or in a small group to build confidence and develop skills.

- Breaking tasks into smaller steps.
- Supporting children to identify and use key words.
- At times, an adult may support a child by recording their ideas for them so that they can demonstrate what they know.

These are just some examples. **Inclusion doesn't look the same for every child**, and we will continue to work with children, staff and families to understand what helps each child to thrive.



## Resources for Families

We know that finding the right support and information can sometimes feel overwhelming. Here are some organisations and resources that you may find useful.

- ❖ **Kent County Council – SEND** [Support for parents with SEND children - Kent County Council](#) Information about SEND services, support and advice available to children and families across Kent.
- ❖ **Speech & Language Link –** [Schools Supporting Families - Speech & Language Link](#) We use Speech & Language Link in school to help assess speech and language difficulties. Their website also provides free advice, activities and resources for parents and carers.
- ❖ **Kent Autistic Trust** [About Autism | Kent Autistic Trust](#) Local information, advice and support for autistic children, young people and their families.
- ❖ **Community Paediatrics** [Community paediatrics](#) Support and information relating to areas including autism, ADHD, sleep, behaviour and eating.
- ❖ **Children and Young People's Mental Health Service (CYPMHS)** [Children & Young People's Mental Health Service \(CYPMHS\) - Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust](#) Support around children's and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health, as well as advice relating to autism and ADHD.
- ❖ **British Dyslexia Association** [British Dyslexia Association](#) Information and advice about dyslexia and dyscalculia.

## A final thought...

Please remember that you don't have to have all the answers. If you have a question, concern or simply want to talk something through, please come and speak to us.

We are here to work **with you and your child** to help them feel happy, included and successful at school.

**Mrs Antoinette Starmer-Smith**  
Head of Inclusion & SENCo  
St Nicholas CE Primary Academy

ST NICHOLAS CE PRIMARY ACADEMY  
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Coming Up:  
**SEND**  
Coffee Morning

Monday 5th October | 8:30am

We would love to see you at our first **SEND Coffee Morning** of the year.

This will be an informal opportunity to:

- Meet members of the Inclusion Team
- Ask questions
- Share ideas or concerns
- Meet other parents and carers
- Connect with people who understand your experiences

A place for everyone

Good conversation brighter tomorrows

All parents and carers welcome!

Just follow the SEND Coffee Morning sign at drop-off.

We look forward to seeing you there!

We highly recommend this fantastic upcoming course featuring Dr Georgia Pavlopoulou and Pete Wharmby. They will be discussing the emotional impact school can have on autistic children and young people, offering practical strategies for both families and schools to help them thrive. Spaces are limited, so please click the link to book your place.

[https://www.autismcentral.nhs.uk/events/when-coping-school-comes-cost-home?utm\\_source=Schools+in+Mind&utm\\_campaign=58913d5c79-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2025\\_09\\_10\\_08\\_12\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-ab0d002b89-147855321](https://www.autismcentral.nhs.uk/events/when-coping-school-comes-cost-home?utm_source=Schools+in+Mind&utm_campaign=58913d5c79-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2025_09_10_08_12_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-ab0d002b89-147855321)