EXPERTS AT HAND
Frequently Asked Questions

Earlier Support. Stronger Inclusion. Better Outcomes.

Experts at Hand is a new approach to supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Hammersmith & Fulham.

Being developed as part of the Government's proposed national SEND reforms, the programme will bring specialist expertise closer to mainstream education settings. Working alongside schools, early years' providers and post-16 settings, specialists - including Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and Specialist Teachers - will help identify needs earlier, strengthen inclusive practice, build staff confidence and improve outcomes.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Experts at Hand complements existing SEND support; it does not replace statutory services. If your child or young person has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the support set out in that plan will continue. The programme is designed to strengthen the support around children and young people through earlier intervention, closer collaboration and greater access to specialist expertise.

About the programme

What is Experts at Hand?

Experts at Hand is a partnership model that brings specialist expertise closer to the places where children and young people learn every day. Rather than focusing solely on individual referrals, it aims to strengthen the capability of whole schools and settings, helping needs to be identified earlier and support to be provided more effectively.

The model is designed to build capacity in mainstream education settings so that children and young people can receive timely support in familiar environments - without necessarily waiting for a diagnosis or formal assessment.

Experts at Hand specialists will work alongside settings to:

- Observe and understand emerging needs and barriers to learning
- Provide practical advice, coaching and guidance to staff
- Support targeted, short-term interventions
- Build workforce confidence, capability and specialist knowledge
- Strengthen collaboration with parents and carers
- Share expertise from specialist provisions and Alternative Provision settings
- Promote inclusive practice across the education system

What could Experts at Hand mean for my child?

As the model develops, children and young people may benefit from:

- Earlier identification of emerging needs
- Faster access to support within their education setting
- Closer collaboration between education, health and SEND professionals
- More confident and better-equipped staff
- Improved inclusion and participation in everyday learning
- Reduced reliance on escalation to specialist services where needs can be met earlier

A diagnosis is not required. Children and young people can benefit from the advice and support available through the Experts at Hand approach without having a diagnosis.

Will Experts at Hand replace EHCPs or other SEND support?

No. Experts at Hand is intended to enhance and strengthen support within mainstream education settings. It sits alongside existing statutory SEND arrangements and does not replace EHCPs, statutory assessments or existing SEND services. If your child or young person has an EHCP, the provision and support specified in their plan will continue.

Can parents or carers refer directly to Experts at Hand?

No. Experts at Hand is not a referral-based service for individual children and young people. Specialists will work directly with schools, early years providers and post-16 settings to build their knowledge, skills and confidence in supporting children and young people with SEND.

If you have concerns about your child or young person's needs, please speak to your school's SENCo or SEND lead in the first instance.

Does my child need a diagnosis?

No. A diagnosis is not needed for a school, college or other education setting to benefit from the support, advice and expertise available through Experts at Hand. The model is designed to enable earlier support and intervention, helping settings respond as needs emerge.

Timing and involvement

When will Experts at Hand be available?

Our ambition is to launch the first phase of the Hammersmith & Fulham Experts at Hand model during the Spring term 2027. The model will be informed by evidence, shaped by stakeholders and improved through learning and feedback. We will test, evaluate and refine the approach over time to ensure it delivers meaningful benefits for children, young people and families.

We are not starting from scratch. Hammersmith & Fulham already has a range of highly valued specialist services supporting children, young people, families and education settings. Experts at Hand will build on these strengths by increasing specialist capacity, strengthening partnership working and improving how services work together. Existing services and support arrangements will remain available while the new model is being developed.

How are families and partners involved?

Experts at Hand is being co-produced with:

- Children and young people
- Parents and carers
- Schools and education settings
- Early years providers
- Post-16 providers
- Health partners
- SEND professionals and specialist services

This collaborative approach will help ensure the model reflects the needs and experiences of local families and communities.

Our vision

Every child and young person should have access to the right support, at the right time, in the right place.

Experts at Hand aims to strengthen inclusive practice across Hammersmith & Fulham by bringing specialist expertise closer to children and young people, empowering education settings and improving outcomes through earlier intervention, stronger partnerships and greater collaboration. We want children and young people to thrive in their local communities, families to feel confident and supported, and schools and settings to have greater access to the expertise they need to deliver inclusive and effective practice.

Further information

You can read more about Experts at Hand on the Department for Education website.