



**NASS**  
**AWARDS**  
2024

# 2024 Finalists

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# Celebrating the difference you make

Seeing the entries for the NASS Awards is one of the best parts of the NASS year. There is no better reminder of the difference that our schools make to children and young people and of the many creative ways in which they seek to do that.



The shortlisted entries celebrate all that is good about special schools and the people who work in them. We hope that they will be a source of inspiration. If you read them and think that your school is doing something similar or better, that's great! We hope that they will motivate you to get your school to enter next year and have your chance to bask in the glory!

I want to thank everyone who entered this year – we literally couldn't do this without you! I want to give particular thanks to our judges – Deirdre, Matt, Sharon and Will. They generously volunteered their time to assess all entries and make well-reasoned judgments about the winners.

Finally, I want to give huge thanks to our sponsors, The Edwin Group. Their support has enabled us to give our shortlisted schools a real chance to celebrate their success.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Dorer".

## Inspired to enter next year's NASS Awards?

Mark your calendars and prepare to showcase your excellence! The 2025 NASS Awards will open for entries on Thursday 1st May 2025.



# Breaking Barriers

## Breaking Barriers judge

**Matt Keer, SEND parent & contributor to Special Needs Jungle**



*It was a real pleasure to judge the 'Breaking Barriers' category for this year's NASS Awards. All of the nominations made new things possible for children and young people with SEND, often in highly imaginative ways, opening up opportunities and relationships that wouldn't have otherwise been possible. Congratulations to everyone involved!*

## Mary Hare

### Little Hares

Little Hares is a parent, baby and toddler group supporting families of deaf children with monthly themed sessions held at the school and led by specialists including music and speech and language therapists.



Parents gain tools, information and support to help their children thrive. The group also connects families with older deaf students from Mary Hare, offering valuable role models and fostering high aspirations. This initiative, which was established in 2023 by two members of staff at Mary Hare School, helps to normalise deafness and provides a safe, understanding community. The group is supported by the National Deaf Children's Society who come along to answer questions and run information sessions on topics like, how to access BSL classes, the EHCP process and books that promote deaf awareness and identity.

## Treloar School

### Increasing accessibility and inclusivity for students with a physical disability

In March 2024, Treloar students took part in Dance Live a national dance competition at Glive venue in Guildford. Whilst for many schools this journey would be fairly straight forward, Treloar's journey was not. The Treloar community and supporting partners had to overcome substantial barriers. However, the innovation, grit, and perseverance of all involved made this possible, leading to positive and sustainable outcomes not only for aspiring students but also for improving accessibility in venues. This further promotes the arts and encourages future opportunities for wheelchair users to perform.



## Great Howarth School

### Poetry by Heart Project

Delivered in partnership with the Poetry Society, the Poetry by Heart Project is designed to support pupils with special educational needs by helping them develop confidence and use poetry as a powerful form of expression.



Through this partnership, Great Howarth School set out to break down barriers to communication and foster a more inclusive and expressive learning environment. The benefits of this collaboration have been significant, with many of its students discovering a newfound love for literature, sparking a lifelong interest in reading and writing. It led to four pupils receiving high commendations for their entries in the Poetry By Heart national poetry speaking competition for schools and colleges in England.





# Innovation

## Innovation judge

**Deirdre Fitzpatrick - Special school consultant,  
trainer & inspector**



*I was enormously honoured to be asked to judge the 'Innovation' category. And the submissions lived up to expectations: schools planned creative new strategies, resources and pedagogies that would enable the young people to thrive not just now but into the future. Many had taken into account the latest research evidence and all had the individual needs of the student at heart. They were wonderful to read, all should be commended but a few, particularly, made a lasting impression.*

## The Children's Trust

### Sensory Careers Project

The Sensory Careers Project (SCP) was established to provide realistic and meaningful career and work-related activities for learners with PMLD and complex medical needs. Prior to COVID-19, such activities often felt tokenistic.



By aligning with the Gatsby Benchmarks, the SCP reintegrated PMLD students into the community after long periods of shielding, offering sensory-rich experiences and challenging preconceptions about their workforce capabilities. Innovative methods like pop-up shop market research inform classroom activities where sensory products are crafted using accessible methods, leading to a sustainable income (£4,283.42 to date). Monitored through EHCPs and ASDAN qualifications, the SCP enhances aspirations, prepares students for adulthood and celebrates their unique career paths focused on happiness and wellbeing.

## Arc Oakbridge

### Music Technology and Podcast Project

At Arc Oakbridge School, which supports autistic students, two students led the creation of 'Kedleston's 18th Poddy' for their Music Technology BTEC coursework.



This groundbreaking podcast, featuring live performances and showcasing the school's talents, significantly boosted the boys' confidence and social skills. Their professional approach inspired peers and highlighted the transformative impact of technology on learning. The project also played a crucial role in helping them secure college placements to study IT.

## Aurora Hanley School

### Children's Community Cooking Project - Tackling food waste and food poverty

Based in an area of high deprivation, Aurora Hanley has been working towards making students more aware of sustainability and community issues. It developed an innovative project to collect waste food from local shops and supermarkets, transforming them into nutritious meals for those in the local community facing food poverty.



The project has so far provided over 290 meals and has not only fostered students' cooking skills but also their community engagement and real-life application of academic skills. Students participate in every stage, from designing the project logo to preparing meals, gaining independence and a meaningful sense of purpose through hands-on learning and positive community action.



# Outstanding Impact

## Outstanding Impact judge

**Sharon Gray OBE - Education Consultant,  
Wholehearted Learning**



*I was honoured to have served as a judge for the ‘Outstanding Impact’ category. The submissions were inspiring, showcasing exceptional performance and innovative practices that have profoundly impacted outcomes for children and young people. Each entry was driven by a deep commitment to fostering improvement and maintaining excellence. The innovative strategies, multidisciplinary collaborations, and heartfelt dedication to addressing the individual needs of students were clear. Each submission deserves commendation, but a few stood out for their sustainable impact.*

## Undershaw Education Trust

### The Undershaw Diploma

The Undershaw Diploma is described as a “ground-breaking” development in SEND provision, featuring a unique, skills-based curriculum and accredited qualification. Designed and delivered to unlock new attainment pathways, it tracks and records progress in the eight essential life and employability skills identified by industry leaders. Based on the Skills-BUILDER Partnership framework and accredited AQA unit awards, the curriculum ensures students develop essential skills at their own pace, in line with their EHCP and personal development targets. Undershaw says that the diploma has transformed its students' lives, with 28 achieving the bronze level and progressing to silver. As a flagship setting, they also support other SEND settings nationally and internationally, advocating for this innovative approach to education.





## **Gretton School**

### **The embedding of Relational Practice at Gretton School**

For three years, Gretton has worked to embed a Relational Practice approach to reduce or eradicate physical intervention, demonstrating commitment to the Restraint Reduction Network. This method supports emotional regulation for autistic children and, as the school roll doubled, physical interventions more than halved. By focusing on understanding and support rather than fixing and changing, Gretton replaced its traditional behavior policy with one centered on positive relationships, reflection, restoration and aspiration. Gretton evidences that this innovative approach has been life-changing for learners, families, and staff, redirecting students from exclusion and criminality to positive futures, with achievements including GCSEs and university offers.



## **Dovecote School**

### **Outstanding achievement and educational practices within the first year**

Dovecote School is an independent SEN provision, which opened in September 2022 and within its first year achieved an Outstanding rating by Ofsted. The achievement highlights the school's exceptional impact on children and families. Dovecote's holistic approach includes therapeutic learning through horticulture, a small farm, forest school, and the Thrive Approach, earning it Thrive Ambassador School status. The school focuses on social, emotional, and mental health, enabling students to achieve their aspirations. With a unique curriculum and strong family support, Dovecote evidences comprehensive care and education, resulting in rapid student progress and successful transitions to further education and work.





# Special Contribution



## Special Contribution judge

**Will Washington - Commercial Director,  
The Edwin Group**

*Judging the Special Contribution category in the 2024 NASS Awards proved to be extremely difficult. The entries were of an incredibly high standard, and I was inspired and often moved by their individual stories. The vulnerable young people and families in our care deserve the very best support possible, and despite the numerous challenges the sector faces, this category pays testament to the positive impact individuals can make when they decide to make a difference.*

## Jenny McConnell

### Principal, Dawn House

In nominating Jenny, the team at Dawn House School described her as “a beacon of light in our school community”.

For 30 years, Jenny has been a transformative force at Dawn House School. Her dedication and creativity have revolutionised speech and language therapy, fostering independence in students. In her roles as Deputy Head, Head of the Speech & Language Therapy team, and now Principal, Jenny has offered unwavering support to both students and staff. She has unified the school, championed mental wellbeing and integrated therapeutic practices across all grade levels.



*“Her commitment to the wellbeing of our school community, her unwavering support, and her visionary leadership have left an indelible mark on generations of students and staff. We are incredibly fortunate to have her as part of our school family, and her contributions deserve the highest recognition.”*

## **Richard Nancollis**

**Interim Head Teacher, Ashcroft School & Deputy Head for Post 16, Inscape House School**

In his nomination, his colleagues said *“Richard’s tenacity and unwavering commitment to student and staff success make him a truly remarkable educator and leader.”*



His transformative leadership has enhanced student outcomes, enriched educational experiences and strengthened community ties. Richard has revolutionised the employability and work experience programme at Inscape by linking with local employers and integrating advanced opportunities into the curriculum. Richard’s dedication and support significantly impact both students and colleagues, driving remarkable success.

## **Dr Mimi Kirke-Smith**

**Head of HEART and Therapy, West Heath School**

The team at West Heath School say that Dr Mimi *“truly is a SEND champion”*.



Dr Mimi is a passionate clinical psychologist advocating for SEND learners whenever possible, including professional advocacy at the House of Lords and publishing on neurodiverse issues. In 2015, she founded HEART (Health, Education, Assessment and Revitalising Therapy) at West Heath School to aid students transitioning from psychiatric hospitals. HEART now supports 35 students with various complex diagnoses, providing tailored education and therapeutic care. Mimi’s expertise and commitment have transformed the lives of many students, and although she stepped back from full-time work earlier this year, her legacy continues to inspire through HEART.



# **Congratulations to all our finalists!**

**With thanks to our judges**

**Matt Keer**

**SEND parent and contributor to Special Needs Jungle**

**Deirdre Fitzpatrick**

**Special school consultant, trainer and inspector**

**Sharon Gray OBE**

**Education Consultant, Wholehearted Learning**

**Will Washington**

**Commercial Director, The Edwin Group**