

SEND Reform and Improvement Lead

Full Time: 37 Hours per Week – 2 Years Fixed Contract

Salary: Cognus Band 5-6 starting salary £70,824 up to £80,723

Location: Cognus Office, First Floor, Cantium House, Wallington, SM6 0DZ / Hybrid working

Cognus Limited is a Local Authority Traded Company, which is commissioned by the London Borough of Sutton to provide education services to early years providers, mainstream schools and specialist education settings in Sutton. Wholly owned by the local authority, we deliver a wide range of high-quality services to deliver excellent practice that improves the lives of children, young people, and families in Sutton and beyond.

Transform lives. Shape services. Lead one of the most ambitious SEND Reform programmes in the country.

This is a unique opportunity to lead the strategic transformation of SEND services across Sutton and make a lasting difference to the lives of children, young people and families.

As our SEND Reform Transformation Lead, you will be at the forefront of a major programme of change that will reshape how support is delivered across education, health and care. You will provide strategic leadership for Sutton's SEND Reform Programme, driving innovation, strengthening inclusion and ensuring children and young people receive the right support at the right time.

A key part of this role will be leading Sutton's implementation of Experts at Hand, a key aspect of the SEND reform initiative. Experts at Hand is designed to bring specialist expertise directly into mainstream schools, early years settings and colleges, helping children access support earlier and enabling settings to become more inclusive and responsive to need.

Working closely with senior leaders across the London Borough of Sutton, Cognus, NHS partners, schools and the wider local area partnership, you will influence strategic direction, oversee delivery of a multi-million-pound transformation programme and help create sustainable improvements for future generations.

You'll join a partnership that is ambitious for its children and young people and committed to creating an inclusive borough where every child can thrive. Cognus exists to support schools, families and children to access, enjoy and succeed in education, and this role will be central to delivering that vision.

We're looking for an exceptional strategic leader with experience of transformation, partnership working and system change. Someone who can inspire others, influence across organisational boundaries and translate ambition into meaningful, lasting impact.

If you are passionate about inclusion, driven by purpose and ready to lead transformational change, we would love to hear from you.

Join us and help shape a SEND system where every child and young person has the opportunity to achieve, belong and thrive.



You will give us great commitment and in return we offer an excellent package including:

- i) Starting salary of £70,824 per annum (Cognus Band 5-6)
- ii) Workplace pension scheme 4% to 8% matched contributions
- iii) 28 days annual leave pro rata (plus Bank Holidays)
- iv) Regular manager support and supervision
- v) Hybrid and flexible working
- vi) Staff benefits package; currently including Employee Assistance Programme, life insurance, employee benefits platform and (upon completion of probation) health care *[Cognus reserves the right to adjust these additional discretionary benefits to improve quality of their services provided, maintain affordability for the Company and to ensure benefits remain fit for purpose with staff needs.]*
- vii) Staff EDI group and Mental Health First Aiders to support wellbeing and inclusion
- viii) Cognus Coaching Programmes
- ix) An ambitious culture with friendly and supportive colleagues

If you are interested and would like to be considered for this role, please apply to recruitment@cognus.org.uk with the completed application form, which can be [downloaded from our website](#), outlining your suitability.

The deadline for receipt is **Midnight on Sunday 30th August 2026**. Candidates are requested to be available for a face-to-face interview on **Wednesday, 9th September 2026**.

For an informal conversation about the role, please contact **Kieran Holiday, Director for Education, Integrated Support and Safer Communities** at Kieran.Holliday@sutton.gov.uk or **Joanna Cassey, Cognus Managing Director** at Joanna.Cassey@cognus.org.uk

All offers of employment are subject to successful completion of recruitment formalities which includes an enhanced DBS check. These checks must have been completed before the commencement of employment. We expect our staff to have due regard for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and to follow the child protection procedures adopted by the Company and Sutton's Local Safeguarding Partnership.

We are an equal opportunity employer and value diversity at our company. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, colour, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, veteran status, or disability status.



JOB DESCRIPTION

POSITION:	SEND Reform and Improvement Lead
DIVISION:	SEND Reform & Improvement
REPORTS TO:	Director for Education, Integrated Support and Safer Communities Accountable to: Managing Director, Cognus Limited (matrix relationship)
GRADE/PAY:	Band 5-6 SP82-SP91 £70,824 up to £80,723
LOCATION:	Cognus Office, First Floor, Cantium House, Wallington, SM6 0DZ

JOB SUMMARY

The SEND Reform Transformation Lead is the senior strategic lead responsible for shaping, directing and assuring the delivery of the London Borough of Sutton's SEND Reform Programme. This high-profile role provides leadership for one of the Council's most significant transformation priorities, driving system-wide change across education, health, social care and partner organisations to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND while supporting long-term financial sustainability.

Reporting to the Director for Education and with a dotted line to the Cognus Managing Director, the postholder will lead the development and implementation of Sutton's Local Area SEND Reform Programme, ensuring alignment with national policy, Department for Education reform requirements and the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan. The role will play a pivotal part in transforming local services, strengthening inclusion, improving the experience of children, young people and families, and contributing to the delivery of the Council's High Needs Block recovery strategy.

Operating with a high degree of autonomy and influence, the postholder will provide strategic advice, challenge and assurance to the Cognus Managing Director, Director for Education, Director of Children's Services (Senior Responsible Officer), Chief Executive, elected Members and system partners. They will be responsible for identifying opportunities, managing risk and ensuring that reform activity delivers measurable improvements in outcomes, service effectiveness and value for money.

The role requires exceptional leadership across a complex partnership landscape, including local government, education providers, NHS organisations, Cognus and the voluntary sector. Success will depend on the ability to build strong relationships, influence senior stakeholders without direct authority, navigate competing priorities and secure collective ownership of ambitious programmes of change.

The postholder will also provide strategic oversight of the SEND Reform Programme Management Office, ensuring robust governance, performance management, assurance and reporting arrangements are in place to support the successful delivery of a complex, high-profile and multi-million-pound transformation programme. In addition, they will provide strategic direction to the operational delivery of key reform initiatives, including the Experts at Hand programme, ensuring that programme activity translates into sustainable improvements across the local SEND system.

PRINCIPLE ACCOUNTABILITIES:

Strategic Leadership and Programme Direction

- Lead the strategic development, implementation and continuous refinement of Sutton's SEND Reform Programme, ensuring delivery of the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan and wider corporate priorities.



- Translate national SEND policy, legislation and Department for Education reform requirements into a coherent local transformation programme.
- Provide strategic advice and challenge to the Director for Education, Director of Children's Services, Chief Executive, Members and system partners on programme priorities, risks, opportunities and policy developments.
- Ensure programme activity delivers sustainable improvements in outcomes for children and young people with SEND whilst supporting long-term financial sustainability.
- Act as the strategic lead for the Experts at Hand programme, providing direction and oversight to the Head of Experts at Hand Operations and associated workstreams.

Programme Governance, Assurance and Performance

- Establish and maintain robust programme governance, assurance and reporting arrangements across the SEND Reform Programme.
- Ensure effective programme management disciplines are embedded across all workstreams, including risk, issue, dependency and benefits management.
- Oversee the SEND Reform Programme Management Office, ensuring delivery of high-quality programme support, reporting and performance monitoring.
- Provide regular assurance reporting to governance boards, senior leaders, elected members and the Department for Education.
- Ensure programme delivery remains aligned with agreed outcomes, milestones and statutory requirements.

System Leadership and Partnership Development

- Provide leadership across a complex partnership landscape including the London Borough of Sutton, Cognus, NHS partners, schools, further education providers, voluntary sector organisations and parent carer representatives.
- Build and maintain effective relationships with senior leaders across partner organisations to secure commitment to shared programme objectives.
- Influence, negotiate and broker solutions where organisational priorities differ.
- Promote a culture of collaboration, accountability and shared ownership of SEND reform across the local area.
- Represent Sutton at regional and national forums relating to SEND reform and transformation activity.

Transformation and Improvement

- Lead the development and implementation of transformational programmes designed to improve inclusion, strengthen mainstream provision and reduce reliance on specialist and high-cost placements.
- Ensure programme activity drives measurable improvements in service quality, user experience and outcomes.
- Challenge existing practice and promote innovation, continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making.
- Support senior leaders and workstream leads to embed sustainable system change across the local area.



Financial Strategy and Benefits Realisation

- Lead the strategic financial oversight of the SEND Reform Programme, ensuring programme investment delivers agreed outcomes and value for money.
- Support delivery of the High Needs Block Recovery Strategy and Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan.
- Develop and oversee programme benefits realisation frameworks, ensuring both financial and non-financial benefits are measured and reported.
- Advise senior leaders on programme affordability, investment priorities and financial risks.
- Ensure financial considerations inform programme design, implementation and decision-making.

Leadership and People Management

- Lead and develop the SEND Reform Programme Management Office.
- Provide line management to programme staff and strategic oversight of programme delivery leads.
- Build programme management capability across the partnership.
- Promote a culture of high performance, accountability, collaboration and continuous learning.
- Support and challenge workstream leads and senior managers to deliver agreed programme outcomes

Other

- To carry out other reasonable duties as required.

COMPETENCIES

Strategic Leadership and System Transformation

- Lead large-scale transformational change across complex systems and multiple organisations.
- Translate national policy and legislative reform into effective local strategies and delivery programmes.
- Provide strategic advice to senior leaders, elected members and partner organisations.
- Balance competing priorities and make decisions within politically sensitive environments.

Partnership and Influencing

- Develop productive relationships with senior leaders across education, health, local government and the voluntary sector.
- Influence without direct authority and secure commitment to challenging programmes of change.
- Build consensus across organisations with differing priorities and objectives.
- Provide constructive challenge whilst maintaining strong partnership working.

Governance, Performance and Assurance

- Establish effective programme governance and assurance arrangements.
- Monitor performance, risks, dependencies and benefits across complex programmes.
- Ensure robust reporting and accountability arrangements.
- Drive a culture of evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.



Financial and Commercial Awareness

- Lead strategic financial planning associated with large-scale transformation programmes.
- Evaluate investment proposals, affordability and value for money.
- Monitor delivery of financial and service benefits.
- Understand the relationship between transformation activity, statutory services and long-term financial sustainability.

Leadership and Organisational Development

- Lead and develop high-performing teams.
- Coach and support senior leaders and programme leads.
- Create a culture of accountability, innovation and collaboration.
- Drive organisational improvement and programme delivery excellence.

GENERIC OBJECTIVES:

Contribute to Cognus Limited's business objectives at the appropriate level by ensuring every child matters and has access to education and learning opportunities, including:

- a) Health and safety
- b) Safeguarding and protection of children
- c) Equal opportunities and management of diversity
- d) Data protection
- e) Outstanding Customer care

GENERAL:

SAFER RECRUITMENT:

Cognus is committed to safeguarding and protecting the children and young people that it works with. An offer of employment is subject to safer recruitment practices which include an enhanced DBS check, two professional references acceptable to Cognus Limited, proof of qualifications, proof of right to work in the UK, proof of personal address and employment history covering 5 years and, fitness to work with children (occupational health assessment). These checks must have been completed prior to commencement of employment. We have a range of policies and procedures in place which promote safeguarding and safer working practices across the organisation.

PROCESSING OF DATA:

- a) You ("the employee") consent to the holding and processing of personal data provided by you to the Company ("the Company") for all purposes relating to your employment, but not limited to administering and maintaining personnel records, paying and reviewing salary and other remuneration and benefits, undertaking performance appraisals and reviews, the compulsory Disclosure and Baring Services check (DBS) details in line with its statutory responsibility to safeguard and protect children and vulnerable service users; maintaining sickness and other absence records and taking decisions as to your fitness for work.
- b) You hereby acknowledge and agree that the Company may, in the course of its general and statutory duties as an employer be required to disclose personal data relating to you for legislative



purposes during or after the end of your employment. This does not affect your statutory rights under the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT:

- a) During the course of your employment, you will have access to and knowledge of Company confidential information and trade secrets.
- b) Disclosure of any of this confidential information and/or trade secrets could have serious financial consequences and/or create serious competitive disadvantages for the Company. There may be material damage, financial or otherwise, deliberate or otherwise, to the Company's legitimate business interest.
- c) Under the terms of this confidentiality agreement, you agree to keep secret and shall not at any time, either during employment or post-employment, use, communicate or reveal to any person any trade secret or confidential information relating to the Company or any Associated Company.
- d) You are aware of the Company's policies in relation to compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and undertake to act in accordance with these at all times. Any breach of these policies will be dealt with under the Company's disciplinary procedure and action taken can include dismissal without notice.

This job description and person specification outlines the summary of key accountabilities and is not an exhaustive list of duties and, is subject to periodical review and changes in line with the business needs.



PERSON SPECIFICATION

The main duties and responsibilities of the post holder are indicated below although other duties of an appropriate level and nature will also be required as necessary.

No	Description
A	Qualifications and Professional Experience Essential - Degree-level qualification or high equivalent professional qualification or significant Senior Leadership experience in education, children's services, public sector leadership, programme management, health, social care or a related field. - Experience of working within multi-agency environments involving education, health and care partners. - Significant programme or project management experience. Desirable - Professional qualification relating to SEND, education, health, social care, commissioning or organisational development.
B	Experience Essential - Significant experience of leading large-scale transformation programmes within complex public sector environments. - Experience of developing and implementing strategic programmes that deliver sustainable service and system change. - Experience of operating successfully at a senior leadership level, influencing executive leaders, elected members and partner organisations. - Experience of leading multi-agency programmes involving education, health, social care and wider stakeholders. - Experience of establishing and maintaining robust programme governance, assurance and reporting arrangements. - Experience of leading teams and developing high-performing programme or service functions. - Experience of managing organisational change and driving continuous improvement. - Experience of delivering programmes within politically sensitive and complex organisational environments. - Experience of overseeing programme budgets, benefits realisation and value-for-money assessments. - Experience of presenting complex information and recommendations to senior leaders, boards and governance groups. Desirable - Experience of leading SEND, inclusion, education or children's services transformation programmes. - Experience of working with the Department for Education, NHS organisations, Integrated Care Boards or government-funded reform programmes. - Experience of supporting High Needs Block recovery activity or Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management. - Experience of operating within a Local Area SEND partnership. - Experience of establishing or leading a Programme Management Office (PMO).



C	Knowledge Essential • Extensive knowledge of SEND legislation, statutory duties and national policy. • Thorough understanding of current SEND and Alternative Provision reforms and associated government priorities. • Knowledge of programme and portfolio management methodologies. • Understanding of governance, assurance, risk and benefits management frameworks. • Understanding of public sector financial management and value-for-money principles. • Knowledge of system leadership approaches and partnership working across organisational boundaries. • Understanding of organisational change, service redesign and transformational improvement methodologies. Desirable • Knowledge of local government decision-making and political processes. • Knowledge of education funding, High Needs Block arrangements and DSG management. • Understanding of commissioning, procurement and contract management. • Knowledge of the education, health and social care landscape within local area partnerships
D	Personal Attributes Essential The postholder will demonstrate: • A strong commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. • Strategic vision combined with a focus on delivery and impact. • High levels of personal credibility, integrity and professionalism. • Resilience and adaptability within complex and changing environments. • Political awareness and sound judgement. • Collaborative and inclusive leadership. • A proactive, solution-focused approach. • Commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. • Commitment to innovation, continuous improvement and organisational learning. • Work flexibly as required • Honours and upholds the Company's Equal Opportunity Policy, Dignity at Work Policy, Safeguarding and Protection of Children, Health and Safety and Data Protection Policy at all times.

