



Accredited by:



Department  
for Education



# Principal CANDIDATE INFORMATION PACK

March 2026

# INTRODUCTION

## *Thomas Keaney*

Welcome, and thank you for your interest in the role of Principal at National Online School (NOS).

NOS was established to meet the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who have not been able to access education through traditional routes. Many of our pupils have experienced significant disruption to their education, and our work is focused on re-engaging them through a carefully designed online model that prioritises strong relationships, effective regulation and highly personalised learning pathways.

In 2024, National Online School was accredited by the Department for Education (DfE) as the first online SEND school in the country. This accreditation reflects both the quality of our provision and the complexity of our work, operating as a fully regulated SEND school within an online environment.

This is a pivotal moment for the National Online School. As the provision continues to grow, we are seeking a Principal who can provide clear, values-driven leadership while ensuring the highest standards of safeguarding, education and care. The role requires both strategic oversight and strong operational leadership, with a clear focus on consistency, quality and impact for pupils.

The successful candidate will bring strong SEND leadership experience, alongside a clear understanding of online education and the ability to work confidently across national and international educational contexts. We are looking for a leader who understands complexity, leads with integrity, and can build trust across staff teams, families, local authorities and partners.

Above all, we are seeking someone who shares our commitment to ensuring that every pupil has the opportunity to succeed.

*“We feel like we’ve got our son back, our other children feel like they’ve got their brother back. Most importantly, our son has got his life back.”*

*– National Online School Parent*



Thomas Keaney,  
Founder & CEO

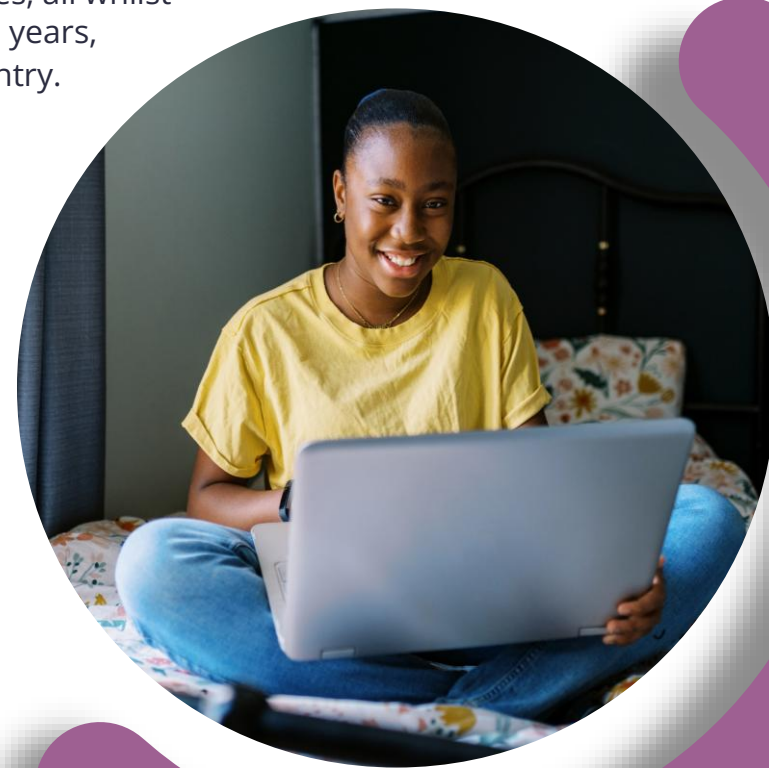
## ABOUT US

National Online School (NOS) is the UK's first Department for Education-accredited online SEND school, uniquely dedicated to educating children and young people with SEND in a fully therapeutic, inclusive environment.

With decades of experience, we have successfully educated thousands of students with special educational needs and disabilities, all whilst maintaining our legacy of zero exclusions for over 26 years, making us the most inclusive online school in the country.

Our trailblazing National Online School currently supports around 300 pupils nationally and continues to grow, with a steady pipeline of new placements requiring careful capacity planning and quality assurance. Our pupils have access to a dedicated multi-disciplinary team of SEND specialists, including educators, SENDCos, clinicians, therapists, pastoral support and family support workers.

This means that every child benefits from tailored therapeutic education, supported by our unique universal and targeted interventions, transforming pupils' perceptions of their own skills, strengths & abilities which have not been able to thrive in previous educational settings.



## OUR STUDENTS - AGES 9-25

### Common NOS Student Profiles:

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**  
Include traumatic events that occur during childhood impacting on their physical and mental health.

**Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)**  
Anxiety caused by pressures of school, social challenges, bullying, medical and/or mental health conditions which make it difficult for students to engage with learning.

**Medical Needs**  
Health challenges, including temporary or long-term medical conditions which make attending a traditional school setting difficult.

### Neurodevelopmental Needs

- Autism (ASC)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Specific Learning Needs (such as Dyspraxia)
- Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

**Social Emotional Mental Health Needs (SEMH)**  
Associated challenges affecting wellbeing, social interactions and ability to engage with learning.

**Pupils in Care and Other Challenging Contexts**  
Including Children Looked After and those in transition periods.



# OUR SCHOOL

## OUR CORE PRINCIPALS



An online SEND school that delivers everything that an on-site school can do, only much more.



Continuing the legacy of 25 years of therapeutic education, creating excellent outcomes for students.



Our commitment to **innovation, resilience and adaptability** has created our extraordinary culture – where we **never give up** on our SEND students.



Our **national mission** to **increase attendance and reduce exclusions** by re-engaging students with SEND and EBSA back into education.



We create, connect and support communities of learners to **make and sustaining friendships** and to succeed in future education and work groups.

## OUR COMMUNITY VALUES



**Expect the very best from each other.**



**Develop a strong work ethic.**



**Respect and appreciate all differences.**



**Include everyone and exclude no one.**



**Listen to and involve everyone.**



**Never give up on each other.**

# TRADITIONAL VS NATIONAL ONLINE SCHOOL

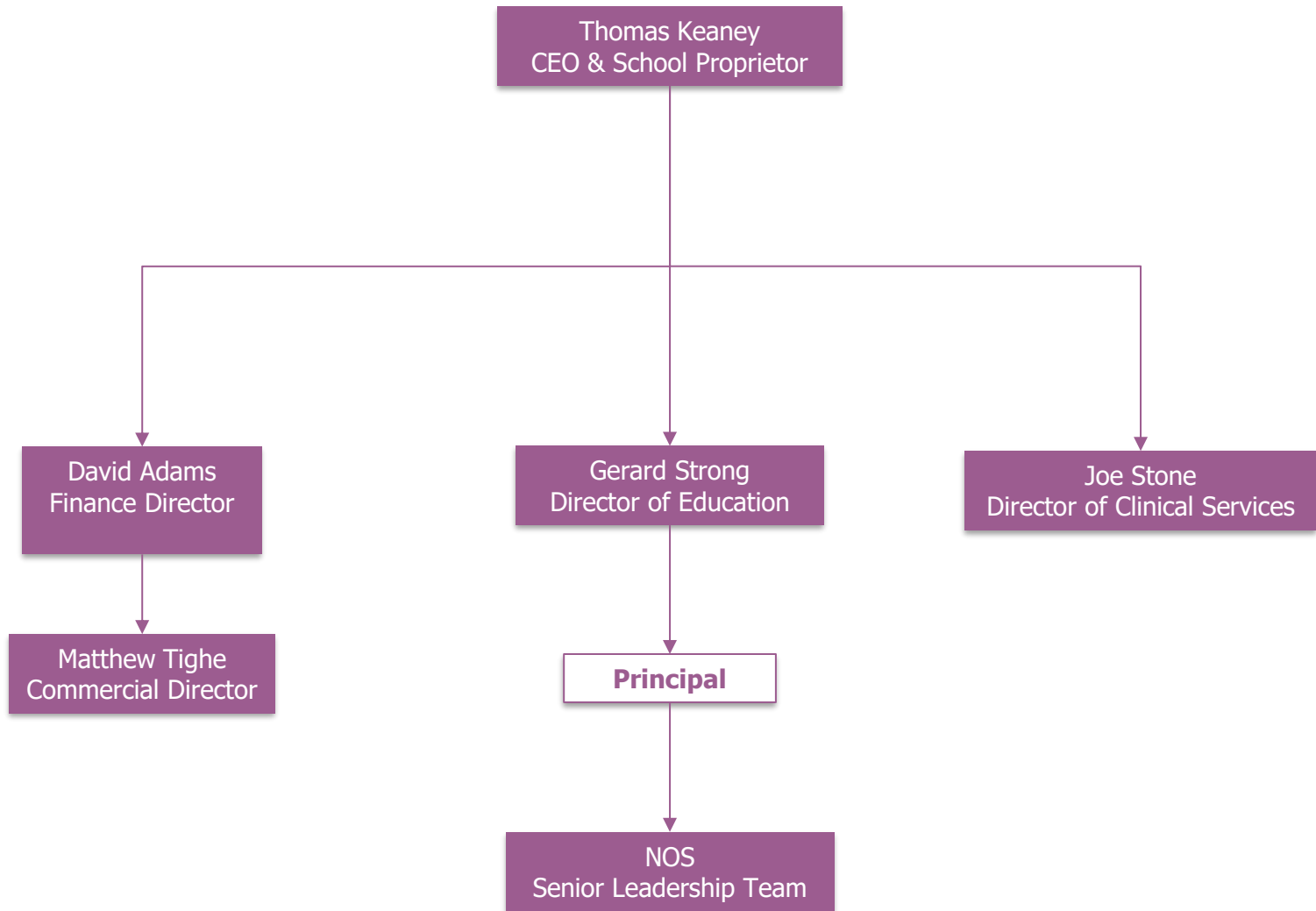
At the National Online School we have worked extremely hard to create a therapeutic classroom, where all our students feel safe and accepted.

We believe that by creating a positive classroom environment that caters to the needs of our neurodivergent students, we will empower them to thrive and make sustained progress.

This model represents a fundamentally different approach to education, designed specifically for pupils who cannot access traditional settings.

TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM	VS	NOS CLASSROOM
30 pupils in a class	→	5-8 pupils in a class
Lack of adaptation / flexibility	→	Flexibility and adaptations are individualised
<b>Exclusions - gaps in learning grow</b>	→	<b>Zero exclusions - gaps in learning are minimised</b>
Assumptions made based on paperwork history	→	A fresh start - we accept you just the way you are
Leadership roles only for pupils who display positive behaviour	→	All pupils are encouraged to apply for pupil leadership roles. For example: Student Parliament and Peer Mentors
Lack of SEND experience	→	Over 25 years of working with neurodiversity and SEND
1 hour lessons with no breaks	→	45 minute lessons with a 15 minute break after each lesson
Clinical staff & therapy have to be outsourced	→	Staff deliver therapeutic education and work closely with our team of therapists
Prescriptive engagement	→	Pupils are encouraged to engage 'on camera', but if you're not comfortable you can use the microphone only, or the Chat function
Parents tend to be contacted only when 'things have gone wrong'	→	Open communication with parents from the very beginning, understanding that we can only be successful together

# ORGANISATION CHART



# JOB DESCRIPTION

## Principal

Reporting to: Director of Education

Oversight of: NOS Leadership Team

Location: Wimbledon

Contract: Permanent, full-time

### Main Duties and Responsibilities:

#### Educational leadership and standards:

- Provide clear and credible educational leadership for the National Online School
- Ensure consistently high standards of teaching, learning and assessment across all online provision
- Maintain continuous inspection readiness in line with DfE accreditation, Ofsted frameworks and safeguarding requirements
- Act as the named educationally accountable leader for pupils, families and commissioning local authorities

#### Digital Pedagogy and Online Learning

- Lead the design and implementation of high-quality digital pedagogy that is purpose-built for online learning
- Ensure teaching approaches support regulation, engagement and psychological safety, particularly for pupils with EBSA, anxiety and trauma histories
- Oversee the effective and ethical use of EdTech platforms, ensuring technology enables inclusion and accessibility
- Use engagement data and analytics to inform support and intervention, rather than compliance or surveillance

#### Therapeutic & Trauma-informed Practice:

- Embed TCES's therapeutic education principles across curriculum, teaching and pastoral systems
- Work closely with Clinical Services to ensure clinical insight informs educational practice and decision-making
- Ensure staff are trained and supported in trauma-informed practice, co-regulation and attachment-aware approaches in a digital environment
- Promote a culture where emotional safety is recognised as foundational to learning

#### Inclusion, SEND and EBSA:

- Ensure provision meets the needs of pupils with SEND, EHCPs and complex mental health profiles
- Oversee personalised timetables, assess-plan-do-review cycles and step-down pathways
- Build strong, trusting relationships with families and local authorities, providing confidence in the provision and its outcomes
- Ensure inclusion is systematically designed into staffing, pedagogy and operational structures

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### Operational Leadership and Growth:

- Lead the effective day-to-day running of the National Online School
- Work with the Director of Education, Commercial Director and Finance Director on capacity planning and sustainable growth
- Take responsibility for operational decision-making within agreed educational and safeguarding guardrails
- Ensure growth does not compromise quality, safety or relational depth
- Lead strategies to reduce avoidable pupil exits, ensuring robust quality assurance, early intervention and strong relational practice to improve retention
- Act as the senior lead for Local Authority quality assurance processes, holding overall accountability for preparation, documentation, responses and follow-up actions
- Represent the school in tribunals and formal proceedings as required, overseeing the preparation of statements and evidence
- Build and sustain strong relationships with key commissioning authorities and partner organisations, supporting the onboarding of new placements and contributing to growth targets in collaboration with the Partnerships Manager.

### Leadership, Management and Culture:

- Lead and develop a multidisciplinary team including teachers, mentors and therapeutic education practitioners
- Set a calm, values-led culture that balances clarity, accountability and care
- Ensure high-quality CPD in digital pedagogy, therapeutic education and safeguarding
- Model reflective practice, emotional intelligence and ethical leadership
- Ensure clarity of roles, responsibilities and decision-making across NOS teams, embedding consistent processes, documentation and governance so that people, finance and operational functions work in a coordinated and accountable way
- Represent the National Online School at industry events, conferences, fairs and public-facing engagements as the lead representative of the school
- Contribute to webinars, seminars and thought leadership activity to strengthen NOS's profile, credibility and market positioning

# JOB DESCRIPTION

## Principal

### Financial and Commercial Strategy:

- Contribute to the financial planning cycle, working closely with the Finance Director to ensure the model is sustainable, scalable and aligned to future growth plans
- Lead and contribute to business modelling for online SEND provision, ensuring NOS remains competitive with sector benchmarks for online and SEND education.
- Maintain a clear understanding of cost drivers across online specialist provision and evaluate where service improvements, procurement choices or process changes can deliver better value.
- Use data and KPIs to anticipate financial risks early, escalating and reporting them appropriately to support informed operational decision making
- Oversee the development of scalable systems, processes and staffing structures that can support higher volumes without compromising educational or therapeutic quality
- Hold accountability for meeting agreed budget and pupil number targets, monitoring key commercial KPIs including retention and occupancy, and taking corrective action where required.

### Safeguarding and Wellbeing:

- Hold overall responsibility for safeguarding within the National Online School
- Ensure online safeguarding systems, reporting processes and staff vigilance are robust and consistently applied
- Promote pupil and staff wellbeing within a psychologically safe culture

### Selection Process

The selection process will include a panel interview, a leadership presentation and stakeholder engagement activities.



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# WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US

This is an opportunity to lead a nationally recognised provision at a critical stage of its development.

## **As Principal of National Online School you will:**

1. Lead a growing national provision with a clear purpose.
2. Shape the future of online SEND education.
3. Work within a strong therapeutic and relational model.
4. Make a meaningful difference to pupils with complex needs.
5. Contribute to the development of scalable, high-quality systems.

We offer a competitive salary and benefits package, alongside a strong commitment to professional development, wellbeing and leadership support.



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You can find further information about National Online School on our [website](#), including our [Prospectus](#).

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