

Developing an inclusion strategy:

Companion guidance to support completion of the DfE inclusion strategy template

Introduction

This guidance has been developed to support Headteachers, SENDCOs, senior leaders, governors and trustees in completing the Inclusion Strategy Template and developing an effective, evidence-informed approach to inclusion.

The Inclusion Strategy is an opportunity for schools to clearly articulate how they will remove barriers to learning and participation, strengthen their inclusive universal offer and improve outcomes for children and young people with additional needs and SEND.

An effective Inclusion Strategy is not simply a description of SEND provision. It is a strategic document that:

- Identifies the most significant barriers affecting pupils
- Sets clear priorities for improvement
- Demonstrates how resources are being used
- Describes intended outcomes
- Evaluates impact
- Embeds inclusion within wider school improvement

The strategy should be understandable to families, governors, staff and external partners while providing a clear framework for implementation and accountability.

Why inclusion strategies matter

Inclusive schools recognise that barriers to learning and participation can affect any pupil at different points in their educational journey.

While some pupils require specialist support, many experience barriers that can be reduced through:

- High-quality teaching
- Accessible learning environments
- Effective curriculum design
- Positive relationships
- Early identification
- Responsive leadership

An Inclusion Strategy enables schools to move beyond reactive approaches and establish a proactive, systematic framework for inclusion.

The strongest strategies focus on improving provision for all pupils while ensuring targeted and specialist support is available when needed.

Before you start

Gather evidence from multiple sources:

Quantitative evidence

- SEND register analysis
- Attendance data
- Persistent absence data
- Exclusion data
- Behaviour records
- Attainment outcomes
- Progress measures
- Intervention evaluations

Qualitative evidence

- Pupil voice
- Parent voice
- Staff feedback
- Learning walks
- Lesson observations
- Inclusion reviews
- External reports

Key questions

- What are our biggest barriers?
- Which barriers affect the largest number of pupils?
- Which barriers have the greatest impact?
- What trends are emerging?
- What do families tell us?
- What do pupils tell us?

Completing the strategy overview

This section is straightforward but important. Ensure that:

- Dates are accurate.
- Review arrangements are clear.
- Accountability is evident.
- Governance arrangements are stated.

Completing the statement of intent

The Statement of Intent should explain:

- What inclusion means in your school.

- Your aspirations for all learners.
- How your strategy supports those aspirations.

Keep the language accessible. Avoid extensive educational jargon.

Questions to consider

- What kind of school do we want to be?
- How do children experience inclusion here?
- What are our long-term ambitions?

Worked example: statement of intent

At Example Primary School, we believe every child has the right to belong, participate and achieve within their local mainstream school. We are committed to reducing barriers to learning through high-quality teaching, early identification, collaborative working and strong partnerships with families. Our Inclusion Strategy focuses on strengthening our universal provision while ensuring targeted support is available when needed so that all children can thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

Why This Works

- Clear vision
- Focus on inclusion
- Aspirational
- Understandable to parents
- Links to practice

Identifying barriers to learning and participation

This is often the most important section of the strategy. Barriers should be:

- Evidence-informed
- Clearly articulated
- Linked to educational impact

Common mistake

More pupils have SEND.

This describes a group. It does not identify a barrier.

Strong example

An increasing number of pupils are presenting with speech, language and communication needs that impact classroom participation, vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.

This identifies:

- A barrier
- The educational impact
- A rationale for intervention

Other examples

Weak

Lots of pupils have anxiety.

Strong

Increasing levels of anxiety are affecting attendance, engagement and participation in learning.

Weak

Children struggle with behaviour.

Strong

A growing number of pupils experience difficulties with emotional regulation, impacting learning relationships and classroom participation.

Planning activities

Activities are the actions the school will take to address identified barriers.

They may be:

Universal

These are available to all pupils.

Examples:

- Adaptive teaching training.
- Communication-friendly classrooms.
- Inclusive behaviour approaches.
- Visual supports.
- Curriculum adaptations.

Targeted

These are provided to identified groups.

Examples:

- ELSA programmes.
- Speech and language interventions.
- Attendance mentoring.
- Nurture provision.
- Executive functioning programmes.

Worked example

Barrier

Speech, language and communication needs.

Activity

Deliver a whole-school programme of communication-friendly classroom practice including visual supports, vocabulary instruction and staff development.

Type

Universal

Cost

£4,500

Why this Works

The activity:

- Directly addresses the barrier.
- Improves the universal offer.
- Benefits a broad range of pupils.

Universal and targeted provision examples

Universal provision

- Adaptive teaching training
- Visual timetables
- Inclusive curriculum design
- Communication-friendly classrooms
- Whole-school wellbeing approaches

Targeted provision

- Speech and language intervention
- ELSA support
- Attendance mentoring
- Nurture groups
- Therapeutic programmes

Writing intended outcomes

Outcomes describe impact. Activities describe actions. Schools often confuse the two.

Weak example

Outcome

Staff receive training.

This is an activity.

Strong Example

Outcome

Teachers consistently implement adaptive teaching strategies, resulting in improved engagement and participation for pupils with SEND.

This describes:

- Improved practice.
- Improved pupil experience.
- Expected impact.

Measuring success

Success criteria should be measurable. Examples include:

- Attendance rates
- Progress measures
- Attainment outcomes

- Behaviour incidents
- Participation rates
- Pupil voice
- Parent feedback
- Staff confidence surveys

Examples of strong success criteria

- SEND attendance increases from 93% to 95%.
- Pupil voice indicates increased participation and belonging.
- Pupils make expected or better progress in reading.
- Behaviour incidents reduce by 20%.
- 90% of staff report confidence in adaptive teaching.

Reviewing impact

The annual review should be honest and evaluative. Avoid simply listing activities completed. Instead consider:

- What changed?
- What evidence supports this?
- What worked well?
- What was less successful?
- What will happen next?

Worked review example

Intended outcome

Improve attendance for pupils with SEND.

What we did

Attendance mentoring and family support meetings.

Impact

Attendance increased from 91.8% to 94.1%.

Evidence

- Attendance data
- Parental feedback
- Case studies

Reflection

The approach was successful for many pupils but attendance remains lower for those experiencing emotionally based school avoidance.

Next steps

Develop additional reintegration and transition support.

Additional guidance

Example budget profile

Activity	Type	Cost
Adaptive teaching CPD	Universal	£8,000
Communication-friendly classrooms	Universal	£3,000
Speech and language intervention	Targeted	£7,000
ELSA support	Targeted	£9,000
Attendance mentoring	Targeted	£4,000
Executive functioning resources	Universal	£2,000

Total Budget: £33,000

Common pitfalls

Avoid:

- Listing every intervention
- Confusing activities with outcomes
- Using vague success criteria
- Focusing only on pupils with EHCPs
- Writing a SEND policy rather than a strategy
- Failing to use evidence

Governor and trustee challenge questions

- How have barriers been identified?
- How do we know these are the right priorities?
- How were pupils involved?
- How were families involved?
- How will success be measured?
- How will funding be monitored?
- What difference will pupils experience?

Quality assurance checklist

Before publication ensure:

- Priorities are evidence-based
- Barriers focus on educational impact
- Activities address identified barriers
- Outcomes are measurable
- Success criteria are realistic
- Family voice is evident

- Pupil voice is evident
- Budget allocations are proportionate
- Review arrangements are clear
- Template guidance has been removed

Example inclusion strategy

Strategy overview

Detail	Date
Academic Years Covered	2026-27
Date Published	September 2026
Review Date	July 2027
Authorised By	Headteacher and Governing Body

Statement of intent

At Example Primary School, we believe every child has the right to belong, participate and achieve. Inclusion is central to our vision and underpins all aspects of school life. We are committed to identifying and reducing barriers to learning through high-quality teaching, strong relationships and effective partnership working.

Barriers to learning and participation

1. Increasing speech, language and communication needs
2. Growing levels of anxiety and emotional regulation difficulties
3. Reduced independence and self-regulation for some pupils
4. Lower attendance amongst a small group of pupils with SEND

Activities

Activity	Type	Cost
<i>Adaptive teaching CPD</i>	<i>Universal</i>	<i>£8,000</i>
<i>Communication-friendly classrooms</i>	<i>Universal</i>	<i>£3,000</i>
<i>Speech and language intervention</i>	<i>Targeted</i>	<i>£7,000</i>
<i>ELSA support</i>	<i>Targeted</i>	<i>£9,000</i>
<i>Attendance mentoring</i>	<i>Targeted</i>	<i>£4,000</i>
<i>Executive functioning resources</i>	<i>Universal</i>	<i>£2,000</i>

Total budget: £33,000

Intended outcomes

- Improved classroom participation
- Improved communication skills
- Improved emotional wellbeing
- Increased attendance
- Increased staff confidence

Success criteria

- SEND attendance reaches 95%
- Staff confidence exceeds 90%
- Reduced behaviour incidents
- Improved pupil engagement
- Expected or better progress for identified pupils

Review of previous academic year

Outcome: improve attendance for pupils with SEND

Impact: Attendance improved from 91.8% to 94.1%.

Evidence: Attendance data, family feedback and pastoral records.

Reflection: Mentoring and family engagement were effective, although attendance remains lower for pupils experiencing emotionally based school avoidance.

Next Steps: Strengthen reintegration support and continue attendance mentoring.

Further information

For further information, please refer to:

- SEND Information Report
- SEND Policy
- Accessibility Plan
- Behaviour and Relationships Policy
- Attendance Policy
- School Development Plan