



Department
for Education

Inclusion bases in schools guidance

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Summary

Inclusion bases are provisions within mainstream settings for children and young people with additional needs. Typically, they support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or requiring support for behavioural or pastoral reasons, including those at risk of exclusion or low attendance. Inclusion bases are part of the mainstream setting; they are not registered as educational institutions in their own right. They typically require a dedicated space in the setting, which might be separate classes, specialist facilities, or a base where professionals with particular expertise are located. They deliver specific interventions, teaching, or support, often in place of or in addition to mainstream classes. Children and young people might access the base for a specific period of time, or access might be ongoing. They will normally be designed with a specific cohort or provision offer in mind.

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to help settings and local authorities set up and deliver high-quality provision in inclusion bases, as well as support improvement of existing bases. We have worked closely with the sector and a wide range of stakeholders to develop the guidance. It covers commissioning of bases and the six key principles of effective practice for inclusion bases identified by experts:

1. Supporting inclusion in the school or local area
2. High-quality curriculum design
3. Effective data, assessment and outcomes
4. Effective workforce and leadership
5. Effective partnership working
6. Inclusive and accessible physical environments

Inclusion bases operate on a continuum, delivering high-quality teaching, bespoke learning environments and flexible access to specialist education or health support, helping children thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Bases should be designed with a particular target cohort of children and young people in mind, and the needs and strengths of these children and young people will drive the specification of the base and the operating model. Settings will need to reflect on their own context when establishing a base. However, there are consistent principles of good practice settings need to consider. The following text box provides a summary of good practice under the six principles, drawing on examples from schools with inclusion bases. The principles and spotlight schools are further explored in the main body of this document.

Summary: Six principles of effective practice in inclusion bases

1. Supporting inclusion in the school or local area

- children and young people are active members of the mainstream school community, with time in mainstream classes maximised and carefully planned
- the base strengthens inclusion across the whole school, for example through shared strategies, peer integration, and staff collaboration

Waterville Primary School's base supports inclusion as its defining principle, enabling children to access mainstream classes independently and regularly. Integration is seamless, with strong collaboration between staff and well-supported transitions, helping children confidently increase their time in mainstream classes. Children participate fully in school life and experience a high level of belonging.

2. High-quality curriculum design

- children and young people access a broad, ambitious curriculum, aligned with mainstream, but adapted to remove barriers rather than reduce expectations
- curriculum planning balances breadth, focussed delivery of key learning, appropriate adaptations, and specialist support and interventions

Carlton le Willows Academy's base delivers an inclusive curriculum aligned with mainstream learning to support reintegration and minimise learning loss. Key Stage 4 curriculum 'pathways' enable children and young people to study GCSEs with a strong focus on progression, supplemented by high-quality therapeutic components. Mainstream class teacher involvement, a focus on personal development and structured routines ensure ambitions are high while addressing academic, emotional, and regulation needs.

3. Effective data, assessment and outcomes

- expectations are high, with progress tracked against clear baselines and regularly reviewed
- provision is responsive and adjusted based on evidence of what works and robust evaluation

Allen Edwards Primary School's base uses assessment across academic, social, emotional, communication and sensory areas to monitor progress. Small-step gains are tracked and reviewed frequently with multidisciplinary input. The approach prioritises progress, with strong improvements in engagement, independence, regulation, and communication.

4. Effective workforce and leadership

- a skilled, teacher-led team, often including specialist or multi-disciplinary expertise, deliver high-quality teaching and specialist support
- the base acts as a centre of expertise, building capacity across the whole school

Miles Coverdale Primary School's base is led by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and Head of Base (a qualified teacher), overseeing strategy and delivery. A multidisciplinary team, including specialists and a speech and language therapist, integrates therapy into teaching. Ongoing training, strong leadership and a shared ethos ensure consistent, high-quality, reflective and inclusive practice.

5. Effective partnership working

- strong partnerships are in place with families, staff, and external professionals
- there is collective ownership of provision in the base, avoiding siloed working

Aylsham High School's base works with the local authority and specialist services to deliver integrated provision, including speech and language programmes and staff training. Early family engagement regarding transition and learning opportunities builds trust, reduces anxiety and strengthens inclusive relationships with the wider community. Strong employer partnerships support progression and preparation for work.

6. Inclusive and accessible physical environments

- environments are inclusive, integrated and close to mainstream spaces, supporting accessibility, smooth transitions, and connection to everyday school life
- bases are flexible, well-resourced and purposeful spaces, supporting varied activities while improving wellbeing, engagement and accessibility

Peacehaven Community School's base provides a calm, structured environment for children and young people with a separate entrance to support transitions and reduce anxiety. Three classrooms and a breakout space enable teaching, interventions and regulation. A dedicated outdoor area supports wellbeing, while strong links to mainstream ensure inclusion, connection and readiness for learning.

Who this publication is for

This guidance is for:

- school leaders, school staff, governing bodies, trust boards and proprietors in maintained schools, academies and free schools in England
- local authorities

This guidance might also be useful for:

- further education colleges and sixth form colleges
- early years providers in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors that are funded by the local authority
- relevant health services and other professionals including health organisations such as Integrated Care Boards and local health providers
- parents, carers, young people and children and their representative groups

Introduction

The schools white paper '[Every child achieving and thriving](#)' set out proposals to reform the system based on five reform principles:

- early
- local
- fair
- effective
- shared

These reforms aim to create a more inclusive mainstream school system where more children can be educated in a local mainstream school, as part of their local community, with flexible, timely, and accessible support. We expect most children and young people will thrive full time in mainstream classes with the support of a strong universal offer. For those with additional needs they will have flexible access to additional Targeted, Targeted Plus and Specialist layers of support.

As part of the Targeted Plus and Specialist tiers, some children and young people will benefit from targeted teaching and support through an inclusion base that bridges the gap between mainstream and specialist settings. In the past there has been a lack of focus on the role of inclusion bases, leading to instances of inconsistent practice and quality. However, there are many examples of inclusion bases in mainstream settings that offer high-quality teaching, bespoke learning environments and flexible access to specialist education or health support, helping children to achieve and thrive academically, socially and emotionally. We want to scale up this excellent practice to deliver consistent high-quality provision nationally. As a core component of the government's high needs capital investment, at least £3.7bn between 2025 and 2030, we

are funding a transformational expansion of inclusion bases, so they become a core part of every local education offer¹.

An expansion of high-quality inclusion bases will allow children with additional needs, beyond those which can be met through a strong universal offer or other interventions, to receive the specialist support they need whilst remaining in their local communities, close to their families and friends. High-quality inclusion bases have specialisms, providing tailored and expert teaching and support for specific groups of children. This includes those with SEND, or requiring support for behavioural or pastoral reasons, including those at risk of exclusion or low attendance. Knowledge flows outwards from these bases into all classrooms. They are a source of expertise for teachers, educators and leaders, a place informed by specialist insight, where evidence-based practice is strengthened.

For some children, support from a base enables them to gradually transition or reintegrate to full participation in mainstream classes. For others, ongoing support from the base helps them access mainstream learning, education and their wider community in a way that works for them. There will be times when bases are used flexibly throughout the day, and some children may work away from the classroom to access support in a different environment. This should always be planned and needs-led. Access to an inclusion base, even for behavioural or pastoral support, should never be used as a sanction or for removal from the classroom². Our goal is to deliver the right support in the right place, so that every child in a mainstream school can achieve and thrive.

The term inclusion base replaces the terms SEN unit, resourced provision, and pupil support unit (sometimes referred to by some schools as ‘internal or in-school alternative provision’) as well as incorporating settings’ own SEND units³. Annex B provides definitions of these terms. Inclusion bases are underpinned by two models:

- Support bases - commissioned and funded by individual settings, academy trusts or local groups of schools; and
- Specialist bases - commissioned and funded by the local authority

The SEND reform consultation set out proposals that, following the introduction of the National Inclusion Standards and Specialist Provision Packages, inclusion bases will align with new national layers of support. Support bases will typically deliver Targeted Plus support, with specialist bases delivering Specialist support. As more detail is set out

¹ [SEND reform: putting children and young people first](#)

² [Behaviour in schools](#)

³ Schools and local authorities might use a variety of terms to describe their base. For example, resource base, internal provision, or Nurture Group.

following the consultation, commissioners⁴ should consider how their inclusion base offer will transition to the new system. This guidance reflects the existing evidence base, the views of frontline practitioners, and existing statutory frameworks, it will support schools to move towards the principles set out in the SEND reform consultation document.

Bases can operate across a variety of setting types, for example in schools, early years or further education providers. All of these sectors should be considered by local authorities when allocating high needs capital funding. This guidance is primarily intended for school-based inclusion bases. For the purpose of this document, we refer to 'schools' but early years and further education settings may also find the principles and examples helpful.

Inclusion bases are part of a mainstream school; they are not registered as educational institutions in their own right. Inclusion bases are distinct from general learning resource areas in schools. For example, the special educational needs (SEN) department space or areas where children and young people might go for universal or targeted support on an ad hoc basis are not inclusion bases. Specialist bases will generally need to go through a formal set-up process, in line with the relevant guidance⁵.

High-quality teaching benefits all children and young people. An inclusive and high-quality universal offer across the whole school is a key pre-requisite for developing an effective base offer that promotes inclusion. Schools should ensure they draw on evidence-informed approaches to develop both their universal offer and their inclusion base offer⁶. Schools should carefully consider and guard against the risks of children receiving a lower-quality or less-expert offer than their peers by not being full-time in mainstream classrooms. Building on the excellent practice we are aware already exists in parts of the system, this guidance provides advice to help guide schools to deliver consistent high-quality practice in inclusion bases nationally.

This non-statutory guidance should not be taken as a complete or definitive statement of the law nor as a substitute for the relevant legislation. Legal advice should be sought as appropriate.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Schools, local authorities and relevant organisations and agencies must have regard to relevant

⁴ Commissioners are involved in strategic decision making. For example, deciding to open a base, establishing funding arrangements, and service specification. This might include local authorities, local health services, responsible bodies, local groups of schools, or senior leaders within schools.

⁵ [Making significant changes to academies](#) and [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools](#)

⁶ For example [EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#), [Identifying and supporting the needs of children with SEND in mainstream settings](#), and [RISE support for inclusive mainstream education](#)

statutory guidance when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children⁷.

The process of developing this guidance

In moving to a more inclusive mainstream system, it is important that practice is evidence-based. Whilst there are several academic studies that identify strong benefits associated with inclusion bases as a form of provision, their scale and scope are limited⁸. We are funding new research into what works, with several research projects underway, building on the progress made through greater adoption of evidence-based practice in education. This research will inform future updates to this guidance.

To support schools while the evidence base develops, the Department for Education (DfE) has worked with the Council for Disabled Children and National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen) to engage widely with the school, SEND, and Alternative Provision (AP) sectors in producing this guidance.

The production of this guidance has been informed by:

- a working group of lead practitioners identified by nasen as being experts with frontline experience of running a base
- focus groups with selected lead practitioners actively working in schools and settings, held in all regions of England
- focus groups with a range of wider stakeholders, including children and young people with experience of accessing bases, social care and allied health professionals, school and trust leaders, support staff, local authority SEND leads and organisations in the third sector
- survey responses from settings and parents and carers
- review of relevant practice documents from leading sector groups, including Inclusion in Practice, The Difference and Speech and Language UK
- review of existing evidence and research
- an advisory group, with representation across the sector, including children and young people and parents and carers, which met regularly to give feedback and iterate the guidance.

In total, across our focus groups and advisory group, this guidance is informed by the views of staff from over 500 schools and settings, over 20 local authorities, over 100 expert lead practitioners actively working in settings, 30 parents and carers, 34 children

⁷ [Keeping children safe in education](#) and [Working together to safeguard children](#)

⁸ For example [Cook & Boddy \(2026\)](#), [Cook et al \(2020\)](#), [Hebron & Bond \(2017\)](#), [Jalkhi & Rowley \(2024\)](#), [Lindsay et al \(2016\)](#), [Norwich \(2021\)](#), [Sloan et al \(2020\)](#), [Strogilos & Ward \(2024\)](#), [Warren, Buckingham, & Parsons \(2021\)](#)

and young people and a wide range of experts from education, health, local government, social care and academia.

We are very grateful to the organisations listed in annex A for their support in the development of this guidance.

Where this guidance recommends that schools “should” follow a principle or consider a strategy, this is a recommendation informed by the extensive stakeholder engagement and research described above. Where the text uses the word “must” this refers to a statutory requirement.

The continuum model

Inclusion bases typically operate on a continuum, characterised by two main approaches: as an inclusive service, where children and young people access the majority of mainstream classes, or as a specialist space, where children and young people do the majority of their learning in the base⁹. The position of an individual base on the continuum is distinct from whether the base is school commissioned (support base) or local authority commissioned (specialist base).

At one end of the continuum, bases enable children and young people to spend most of their learning time in mainstream classes, sometimes supported by staff from the base. Children and young people may also access individual or small-group sessions in the base for a few hours each week. In this model, staff in the base do more than offer direct support, they also plan closely with classroom teachers and teaching assistants to adapt teaching, enhance inclusive practice and ensure that children and young people participate and make progress in mainstream lessons.

At the other end of the continuum, the base is primarily positioned as a separate learning area within the school. Children and young people spend most of their time within this space, joining mainstream classes or the whole-school environment only for selected subjects or activities. In some schools, children and young people will access these bases for a time-limited period before beginning full reintegration to mainstream lessons¹⁰.

In many schools the distinction between these two models is not always clear-cut. Instead, bases tend to operate along a continuum, with practice leaning more towards either end. Both approaches can benefit children and young people. Schools should

⁹ [Strogilos & Ward \(2024\)](#)

¹⁰ [Exploratory research aiming to understand the models and uses of in-school support units \(ISU\) by mainstream secondary schools in England](#) and [Understanding the use of internal provision | EEF](#)

reflect on where their base currently sits within this continuum (see Figure 1), regularly review their arrangements, and prioritise movement towards models that support children and young people to spend more time in mainstream classes, whilst recognising that for some children and young people long term access to a base as a bespoke learning area is most appropriate.

Figure 1: Continuum model



Source: adapted from [Strogilos & Ward \(2024\)](#)

The continuum can be applied not only to provision design but also to the experiences of each child and young person accessing a base. At times, children and young people might require more support and time in the base, at others, they might gradually reintegrate to full participation in mainstream classes. Again, schools should prioritise movement along the continuum to mainstream classes, whilst recognising that for some children and young people, long-term access to a base as a dedicated learning area is appropriate.

In this guidance, this is referred to as the continuum model.

The principles of effective practice for inclusion bases

Working with the sector and a wide range of stakeholders, six key principles of effective practice for inclusion bases have been identified.

1. Supporting inclusion in the school or local area
2. High-quality curriculum design
3. Effective data, assessment and outcomes
4. Effective workforce and leadership
5. Effective partnership working
6. Inclusive and accessible physical environments

1 - Supporting inclusion in the school or local area

Inclusive practice in schools with bases is driven by a whole-school culture, where leadership promotes high-quality education, high expectations, and a strong sense of belonging and opportunity for all children.

High-quality practice in a base means staff actively look for what is getting in the way of a child or young person taking part and making progress, and then adjust or remove it. This might include adapting the environment, routines, communication supports, teaching approaches and adult responses, so children and young people can participate fully.

Achieving, participating, and belonging

There should be high expectations for teaching and learning for all children and young people accessing a base. High-quality teaching benefits all children and young people.

Effective inclusion supports educational progress and high-quality learning for children and young people. In line with the continuum model, schools should aim to maximise the time children accessing a base spend in mainstream classes and whole-school activities, regularly reviewing and identifying opportunities for greater inclusion where appropriate¹¹. For some children and young people, where other options have been fully explored, long term access to a base as a dedicated learning area is fully compatible with being included in a mainstream school and community. Where this is the case, schools should carefully explore opportunities for social and learning interaction with mainstream peers¹². As much as possible the child or young person and their family should be

¹¹ [GCSE outcomes for pupils with EHCPs: comparison of mainstream and special schools](#)

¹² [Lindsay et al \(2016\)](#)

involved in this decision¹³, whilst recognising that attending mainstream classes might flex from day to day and over time.

Schools should be aware of the risks of children and young people being educated separately, and guard against making children and young people who use the base feel, or seem as though, they are less valued than their mainstream peers¹⁴. Schools should celebrate and promote the base and the children and young people that access it.

Alongside securing strong educational progress, an overarching aim of any base should be to promote a sense of belonging to a whole-school community¹⁵, underpinned by a culture of inclusion across all areas of school life¹⁶. For example, children and young people accessing the base take part in extra-curricular and community activities, events, and trips. Mainstream schools must ensure they meet relevant statutory duties for all children in a school to engage in activities together and promote participation¹⁷. Schools should consider how they support children and young people accessing the base to develop friendships across the wider school and also as a peer group.

There should be careful planning to ensure children feel safe and supported during the transitions they make within the school day.

A whole-school approach to inclusion

Schools should focus on developing an inclusive and high-quality universal offer across the whole school before setting up an inclusion base. This is a key pre-requisite for developing an effective base offer that promotes inclusion.

Senior leaders should ensure that the base is embedded within wider whole-school policies, processes and practice. Where appropriate, schools should consider extending evidence-informed interventions and adaptations that are used in the base across the wider school to support greater inclusion.

Leadership, vision and strategic intent for promoting inclusion of children and young people accessing the base should be clear, both in individual schools and, where relevant, across multi-academy trusts. For example, the arrangements for monitoring the

¹³ [SEND bases in mainstream schools parent views](#)

¹⁴ [Cook & Boddy \(2026\)](#)

¹⁵ [Understanding the use of internal provision | EEF](#) - interviewees across schools with internal provision recognised the importance of creating a sense of belonging for students at risk of persistent absence and exclusion as a crucial part of improving their outcomes

¹⁶ [SEN units and resourced provision insights from expert interviews](#)

¹⁷ For example section 149 of the [Equality Act 2010](#) and section 35 of the [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

quality of education in an inclusion base should be as rigorous as those used for mainstream classes.

Schools should ensure that all the children and young people who attend the school and their families understand the purpose of the base and the strengths and needs of those accessing it. Schools should consider how relevant skills and awareness to support this could be taught across the whole school¹⁸. For example, where schools have a base supporting children with speech, language and communication needs who are using a specific communication strategy, the whole school might be encouraged to learn to use this¹⁹.

Supporting children and young people and their families

The voice of children and young people is important and schools should ensure opportunities for children accessing a base, and their families, to share their views on the provision. This may include training and specialist advice around the use of tools and strategies for children who do not communicate verbally. School staff should listen to these views and use them to inform decision-making.

Families of children and young people accessing a base should have the same opportunities to access wider-school support, activities, celebrations and events, regardless of the arrangements for their child's educational provision.

Schools should always engage with families when considering whether a child or young person accesses a base. Schools should not place children in a base without involving their parents or carers in this decision.

¹⁸ [Cook & Boddy \(2026\)](#)

¹⁹ [Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)

Supporting inclusion in the school

Schools will need to consider what works in their context, however, these are examples of strategies schools may wish to consider:

Whole school approaches

- where appropriate, interventions and adaptations that work well in the base are extended across the wider school
- teaching of communication systems used in the base might be extended to children across the mainstream school (e.g. visual timetables)
- children and young people not formally accessing the base are able to spend time there - 'reverse integration' - to promote inclusion

Peer relationships and belonging

- accessible opportunities are sought for children and young people who access a base to participate in - for example, school plays and school trips - and children and young people accessing the base are involved in the wider school, such as school council and prefect roles
- children and young people accessing the base have the opportunity to bring a friend to the base at an appropriate time, outside of lesson time
- a well-structured 'buddy system' could help children accessing the base to feel better supported when accessing mainstream provision. For example, children in the base are paired up with a peer in their mainstream form class who acts as a familiar face when they are transitioning from the base to mainstream activities and classes
- welcome packs are produced for when children and young people access a base for the first time

Communication and engagement with families

- all parents, carers and children and young people receive information about the base, and its value for the whole school community is shared
- parents evenings are held at same time for children who access the base and peers in mainstream classes. Appointments might be longer or held in a different location (for example away from a busy hall)

2 - High-quality curriculum design

High-quality curriculum design should take an evidence-informed approach that satisfies any relevant legal requirements regarding the school's curriculum²⁰, ensuring children and young people can access learning that is rich and broad, feel a sense of belonging, and make meaningful progress. Schools should consider the position of their base on the continuum model when determining their approach to developing a high-quality curriculum offer.

Relationship with whole-school curriculum

All children and young people, including those accessing a base, should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum²¹ and teachers should set high expectations for every child or young person, whatever their prior attainment. Mainstream lessons should be planned to address potential areas of difficulty and to remove barriers to pupil achievement. In many cases, such planning will mean that children and young people with SEND, or those facing other barriers to learning, will be able to study the full national curriculum²².

For schools with bases that, in line with the continuum model, support high levels of access to mainstream classes, the vast majority of curriculum delivery will take place in mainstream classes. Where children and young people still access some classes in the base, schools should aim to ensure:

- the base and mainstream class timetables align as much as possible. For example, maths lessons in the base might take place at the same time as maths lessons for that year group in mainstream classes, to maximise the potential for children and young people to join mainstream classes whilst minimising disruption to the rest of their timetable
- mainstream and base teachers work collaboratively to jointly design the curriculum to reduce barriers to learning and support all children and young people in accessing the mainstream curriculum²³

Where bases offer time-limited placements, it is vital that curriculum planning supports successful reintegration to mainstream classes. Where this is the case, it is especially important that mainstream class teachers are closely involved in curriculum planning, design, and delivery.

²⁰ For example requirements to deliver the National Curriculum in local authority maintained schools set out in Part 6 of the [Education Act 2002](#)

²¹ [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK](#)

²² [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#)

²³ [SEN units and resourced provision insights from expert interviews](#)

Curriculum in the base

The approach to the curriculum in a base should be underpinned by a belief that all children and young people can engage with the mainstream curriculum²⁴ with access to high-quality and expert provision, including specialist input, advice and training. Bases should not be areas that lack clear curriculum intent and purposeful teaching and learning.

Schools will need to consider trade offs in curriculum design by balancing:

- delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum offer that aligns to the curriculum in mainstream classes;
- focussed delivery that supports reintegration to mainstream classes. For example, a focus on literacy, core concepts, and prioritising learning the knowledge and skills that are required for future mainstream curriculum topics;
- where applicable, significant adaptations to the national curriculum with specialist input, and
- delivery of specialist interventions, for example therapeutic or medical support

In line with the continuum model, where children and young people are using the base as their main learning area, some children and young people will need access to specialist equipment and different approaches to curriculum²⁵. In some cases, the curriculum in the base will need to be significantly adapted and supported by specialist staff such as speech and language therapists or specialist teachers to ensure the curriculum offer in the provision is matched to children and young people's strengths and needs, and reflects their starting points. The curriculum offer in the base should be evidence-informed and regularly reviewed. For some groups the evidence base may be limited, and expert or specialist advice should be sought.

Where curriculum adaptation is required, this should be planned to create as many opportunities as possible for inclusion with mainstream peers. For example, the base could cover the same topics, foundational skills, and key texts as the child's mainstream class, with adapted learning activities and pace within these. Where curriculum adaptation is required to support children and young people who are working significantly below age related expectations, schools should still ensure that the curriculum prioritises purposeful teaching and learning. For example, some schools adapt the Early Years Foundation Stage framework to support high-quality curriculum development²⁶.

²⁴ [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#)

²⁵ [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#)

²⁶ [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#)

The curriculum offer in the base should be responsive and able to evolve as the strengths and needs of the cohort change²⁷.

Families of children and young people accessing the base should be kept regularly informed about the intended outcomes and content of the curriculum being delivered, for example, through newsletters and posting curriculum content on the school's website.

Alongside securing educational progress, an important aim of the curriculum in many bases should be for children and young people to develop their wellbeing, confidence, independence and sense of belonging in the mainstream school and wider community, with emphasis on broader life skills. For example, preparation for adulthood should be embedded from the earliest stages of children and young people's education.

Where the child or young person has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, the curriculum in the base should be informed by their targets and outcomes, and designed to support progress towards them. The special educational provision for any pupil specified in an EHC plan may exclude the application of the national curriculum or modify the national curriculum²⁸.

Schools might need to explore alternative assessment approaches with the strengths and needs of the children and young people accessing the base in mind. In many cases, smaller steps of progress will need to be measured to ensure that children and young people's achievements can be understood and celebrated, including by the children and young people themselves and their families. Schools should consider the risks and evidence base before developing their own assessment tools or using other available tools that break down the pre-key stage standards and the communication, early cognition and personal development skills necessary for future learning and preparation for adulthood²⁹.

When selecting alternative assessment and curriculum resources schools might consider:

- an evaluation of the evidence base that supports the resource
- the strengths, needs, and individual targets of children and young people that will access the resource
- advice and recommendations from multi-disciplinary teams and external specialists

²⁷ A tailored support offer emerged as the most frequently cited key feature of internal provision by interviewees [Understanding the use of internal provision | EEF](#)

²⁸ [Education Act 2002](#)

²⁹ For example [The engagement model](#), [Pre-key stage 1 standards](#) and [Pre-key stage 2 standards](#)

- alignment with mainstream class and whole-school approaches
- regular reviews of the effectiveness of tools and resources put in place, across a range of data and outcomes
- information and guidance from other schools in networks with similar inclusion bases

High-quality curriculum design

Schools will need to consider what works in their context, however, these are examples of strategies schools may wish to consider:

- the curriculum in the base is part of wider subject short, medium and long-term plans
- teachers from the base and mainstream classes jointly design the curriculum to reduce barriers to learning and support all pupils in accessing the mainstream curriculum
- the curriculum timetable in the base follows the mainstream timetable as much as possible to facilitate reintegration
- keeping topics and foundational skills in the base and mainstream classes the same enables staff in the base class to provide intensive teaching and support around key vocabulary, using visual and object supports to reinforce this, which then supports children in the base to access and use this core vocabulary when they are in the mainstream class
- where the curriculum is adapted it retains links to the mainstream curriculum, adapted for pace and starting points
- expert and specialist advice is sought to adapt the curriculum
- regular curriculum reviews are carried out, including establishing what children and young people have engaged well with, and where the adaptation of the curriculum needs to be different
- strategies are used to support children and young people with hearing and/or visual impairments to access the curriculum - for example use of large print, high contrast materials, adopting total communication approaches

3 - Effective data, assessment and outcomes

High-quality inclusive practice in bases is underpinned by robust and purposeful use of data and assessment to secure strong progress, positive outcomes for children and young people, and ensure the base delivers a high-quality offer.

Individual children and young people

High aspirations and outcomes

Schools should maintain high expectations for children and young people accessing the base. Teachers should use appropriate assessments, alongside their whole school approaches, to set targets which are deliberately ambitious. Potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset³⁰.

Schools should carefully consider their qualification offer and aim to follow pathways towards a broad and ambitious range of qualifications, in line with the intent of the base.

Schools should use a range of assessments and data, including children and young people's strengths and aspirations, to set appropriately ambitious outcomes for children. Schools should regularly review progress against these long-term outcomes using appropriate and evidence-informed assessments. In addition, they should make adjustments in relation to these assessments, reflecting children and young people's own growth, development and changing interests.

Accurate identification, baselining and ongoing assessment

Practice should include:

- robust baselining at point of accessing the base
- use of validated, reliable assessments to track progress
- regular review of progress against intended outcomes

Where required, schools might carefully consider use of:

- qualitative assessments - these can be valuable if carefully identified in relation to a specific intended outcome and where there are clear baselines and review points against the stated outcome
- carefully selected adapted assessment tools - for example, following the recommendation of a specialist teacher, education professional, or health professional

Schools should take a timely and multi-layered approach to gathering evidence of progress across a range of sources. Through processes of assessment, the voices of

³⁰ [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#)

children and young people and the perspectives of their parents and carers should be considered.

Assessment approaches in the base should align with the entry and exit criteria for the base, so that progress against entry criteria can be demonstrated and evidence can support decisions to exit the base.

Where appropriate, assessment should be joint across education, health, social care, advisory services and teams.

Progress that reflects the individual child or young person

Progress for many children and young people accessing a base involves small-step, non-linear trajectories and may not map neatly to age-related expectations. Progress should be understood in the context of strengths and needs, through specialist assessment frameworks where appropriate. Where appropriate they should track progress across areas including:

- EHC plan outcomes
- academic outcomes and attainment
- attendance, and extracurricular participation

Schools might also consider how they can understand:

- engagement, wellbeing, confidence, social relationships, sense of belonging, and behaviour
- progress across relevant areas of development. For example, speech, language and communication, social and emotional, and sensory
- independence, life skills and preparation for adulthood
- time spent in the base

The school should consider opportunities for reintegration into mainstream where appropriate, with clear, evidence-informed criteria for increasing time in mainstream schools and decreasing support from base staff. This may involve small-step monitoring, reviews of independence, and adaptation of support according to progress.

Schools should communicate regularly with families about the progress their child is making.

In the base

Data-informed provision and strategic planning

Bases should maintain clear entry and exit criteria, supported by information on expected starting points, needs and progress. The progress of individual children and young people should be reviewed against these criteria.

Schools, trusts and local authorities, where relevant, should use data and information from observations by specialist staff of teaching and learning or support, in the base to understand and review the effectiveness of the base.

Destinations data and post-base tracking should be used to support the long-term development plans for the base.

Quality assurance

Regular review of suitability, quality and capacity to meet the strengths and needs of children and young people accessing bases is important.

Schools, commissioners, and responsible bodies³¹ should ensure that timely and rigorous quality assurance processes are in place. Quality assurance processes should build upon existing whole-school arrangements put in place by the relevant responsible body.

Local authorities should assure themselves that appropriate quality assurance processes are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of specialist bases.

Where a school has an inclusion base this is inspected by Ofsted as part of the school inspection³².

Reviewing practice

Children and young people with certain characteristics (for example race or gender) or affected by socioeconomic disadvantage are more likely to be identified with special educational needs, excluded from mainstream schools, or access provision outside of mainstream classes³³. Where local authorities or schools and responsible bodies set up a specialist or support base respectively, they should regularly review the profile of children and young people accessing the base to identify any potential trends, and consider how the interconnected nature of social categorisations shape children and young people's and families' experiences of education.

All practice must be consistent with the duties set out in the Equality Act 2010.

³¹ responsible bodies are legally responsible for governance and include governing bodies (maintained schools), academy trusts and proprietors.

³² [School inspection: toolkit, operating guides and information](#)

³³ [Special educational needs in England](#), [Outcomes by ethnicity in schools in England](#), [Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#) and annex A in [SEND reform: equalities impact assessment](#)

Effective data, assessment and outcomes

Schools will need to consider what works in their context, however, these are examples of strategies schools may wish to consider:

Individual children and young people

- progress is tracked digitally
- progress and next steps are presented to families in a clear, simple and regular format
- a single unified system records assessments in one document, which is used to demonstrate progress over time
- progress continues to be tracked for a period of time after children are no longer accessing the base to make sure it's sustained
- preparation for adulthood and life skills outcomes are tracked

In the base

- 'you said / we did' is used alongside pupil voice to feedback how children and young people's views are taken into account
- duplicative systems are minimised where existing school systems can be used
- at least 3 different sources of quality assurance are sought each year, options might include
 - review by responsible bodies e.g. academy trust or governing body
 - workforce self and peer evaluation
 - child, young person, and parent and carer voice
 - local authority review, where appropriate
 - review from peer schools, special schools or external specialists
- schools have a working relationship with a relevant local system leader to review practice. For example, a special school, health professional, alternative provision provider, or local authority
- reports to governors and trustees fully include the base. For example, a curriculum report on mathematics includes both mainstream provision and provision in the base

4 - Effective workforce and leadership

High-quality, inclusive practice is underpinned by strong school leadership, a skilled workforce and a shared commitment to securing positive outcomes for children and young people who access the base.

Workforce planning

Sustainable workforce planning is essential to maintain high-quality provision over time. This includes anticipating future needs, developing staff expertise and ensuring that staffing models remain responsive, resilient and aligned with inclusive values.

Local area partnerships should consider how the development of their Experts at Hand offer will support high quality inclusion bases³⁴. This should include how specialist expertise is deployed across schools, for example through outreach, coaching, consultation and joint working, so that inclusion bases act as part of a wider system of support rather than operating in isolation.

School workforce planning should prioritise high-quality expert teaching and support in the base.

While the precise composition of the workforce will vary depending on local context and the needs of the children and young people who access the base, a key feature of many effective bases is a skilled multi-disciplinary and specialist staffing model³⁵, particularly those at the end of the continuum where children and young people are using the base as their main learning area.

Schools should consider staff workload and wellbeing when designing and operating the base. This includes ensuring expectations for planning, assessment, collaboration and movement between mainstream and the base are proportionate and manageable; that staff have access to supportive line management, supervision or mentoring; and that professional development is planned in a way that strengthens practice without creating undue burden. Clear role expectations, protected time for liaising between base and mainstream class staff, and opportunities for staff reflection can help create sustainable models of practice. Prioritising staff wellbeing not only supports recruitment and retention, but also underpins consistent, high-quality support for children and young people accessing the base.

Workforce composition

Operational (day to day) responsibility for the base should lie with a teacher. The expectation is that where curriculum content or interventions are delivered, this will be led

³⁴ [Supporting SEND reform: developing the Experts at Hand offer](#)

³⁵ [SEND bases in mainstream schools parent views](#)

by a teacher and that children and young people accessing a base should not have less access to a qualified teacher than peers in mainstream classes. Where more specialist input is required, for example therapeutic, pastoral or medical, this should be led by an appropriately qualified professional.

Senior leaders should maintain a positive, visible presence in the base. A member of the senior leadership team should have overall strategic responsibility for the base. Where this is not the SENCO, and the base is intended to support children and young people with SEN, the SENCO should also be involved in the strategic oversight of the planning, teaching and assessment in the base.

Schools should carefully consider the deployment of support staff, ensuring they are well equipped and feel confident carrying out tasks³⁶. Teaching assistants delivering well-evidenced structured interventions to individual pupils or small groups can have sustained positive impacts on pupil outcomes³⁷. Areas of responsibility should be clearly delineated between support staff and teachers, with support staff given clear role expectations and protected time for planning and liaison with teachers. Schools should consider how they best use the strong relationships teaching assistants often build with individual children and young people³⁸.

Practice and training

Approaches to provide additional support within the base should be well-evidenced and draw on high-quality teaching practice.^{39 40}

Schools must have regard to relevant statutory guidance that sets out approaches to practice. For example, for all children receiving targeted support, the graduated approach (“assess, plan, do, review”) should be implemented, as set out in the SEND Code of Practice⁴¹.

All staff, including those in leadership roles, should receive ongoing high-quality professional development⁴². Professional development should be planned purposefully, identifying intended impact and outcomes for children and young people, and should

³⁶ [Deployment of Teaching Assistants | EEF](#)

³⁷ [Deployment of Teaching Assistants | EEF](#)

³⁸ [Lindsay et al \(2016\)](#) and [Sloan et al \(2020\)](#) and [Understanding the use of internal provision | EEF](#)

³⁹ [Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools | EEF](#)

⁴⁰ [Identifying and supporting the needs of children with SEND in mainstream settings](#)

⁴¹ [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#)

⁴² [Effective Professional Development | EEF](#)

have well-designed and evidence-informed resources and frameworks underpinning it. The impact of training over time should be evaluated.

To teach a class of pupils with hearing impairment, vision impairment, or multi-sensory impairment, a teacher must hold a mandatory qualification. This qualification is required in addition to qualified teacher status⁴³. Where possible, school staff should be supported to have specialist qualifications that match the needs of the children and young people accessing the base.

To ensure high-quality education, support and safety, schools should aim to:

- ensure staff working in the base receive ongoing, evidence-based advice, training and resources. This may be delivered by health professionals, educational professionals, and specialist teachers, and school staff should work collaboratively with these professionals to ensure that training and resources meet the needs of the staff working in the base as well as the children accessing the base
- plan so that staff in the base have a role in building whole-school capacity and upskilling the wider workforce, for example, modelling and advising on effective strategies. In addition staff in the base should have opportunities to learn from mainstream class teachers
- position their base as a site of professional learning, coaching and modelling, to support practice across the school
- prioritise the quality of staff-pupil relationships, focussing on psychological safety and understanding the needs expressed through a child or young person's behaviour. For example, allocating consistent key adults
- implement appropriate staff-to-pupil ratios to meet individual and group needs
- ensure their recruitment and training policies support the assumption that mainstream teachers should expect to teach children accessing the base
- enable the workforce to remain flexible to adapt to the evolving needs of the children and young people accessing the base. For example, regularly reviewing the needs of the children in the base and ensuring that professional development for all staff is relevant and up to date
- prioritise staff wellbeing and resilience through proportionate workload expectations and supportive structures, including mentoring, coaching and access to supervision, particularly for staff working with children and young people with complex needs

⁴³ [Mandatory qualifications: specialist teachers](#)

Effective workforce and leadership

Schools will need to consider what works in their context, however, these are examples of strategies schools may wish to consider:

- a named member of the senior leadership team has overall responsibility for the base
- senior leaders and key decision makers regularly spend time in the base
- whole staff continuous professional development to support the base takes place regularly
- updates from the base team are a regular part of whole school meetings
- schools allocate protected time for staff to reflect on their professional practice and to engage with, and learn from, practices implemented in other schools
- experienced staff coach newer staff in supporting complex needs
- time is protected for supervision and mentoring
- feedback from staff around the school about the base is used to inform school development priorities
- where appropriate, movement of staff between mainstream and base environments is facilitated to support flexibility within the continuum model and an inclusive culture across the whole school
- new teachers in the base receive additional time to learn on the job
- staff model social interactions as an important means of developing peer awareness and positive peer relationships

5 - Effective partnership working

Strong collaboration across all stakeholders is vital for bases to work effectively, requiring regular, active communication and a clear shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and accountability.

Working with families

Schools must have regard to relevant statutory guidance that sets out approaches for effective working with families. For example, the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents or carers, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions in the SEND Code of Practice⁴⁴.

Schools must involve parents and carers in planning and reviewing progress of their child⁴⁵. Parents and carers should be involved in decisions about their child accessing a base, how much time they will typically spend there, the curriculum and support planned and plans for reintegration. Where pupils are directed offsite to improve their behaviour, by accessing support from an inclusion base for their additional needs, the governing board must provide written notification to parents.

Schools should ensure that planning is collaborative and informed by what children and families share with them about the child or young person's strengths and needs⁴⁶. There should be a shared responsibility between families, school staff and relevant professionals to support the progress of children and young people accessing a base. Where appropriate, this should also include local authority and/or multi-academy trust leads.

Family-centred planning should always take into account any barriers that families may face in engaging with these conversations, for example where English is not the (primary) language spoken at home, and where parents or carers are disabled or have additional needs, and overcome these barriers to support positive relationships between the base and the child and their family.

Schools should communicate regularly with families about the support their child is receiving in the base, and their child's progress. For example, base and mainstream class staff should keep families informed about the topics and activities that their child is taking part in.

Schools should signpost relevant resources and sources of support for families, as well as share strategies that are effective in supporting the child or young person at school

⁴⁴ [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#)

⁴⁵ [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#)

⁴⁶ [Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning | EEF](#)

which could also be used at home⁴⁷. Staff should encourage families to also share strategies that are effective in supporting their child or young person at home which could be reflected in school practice, creating a collaborative home-school partnership.

Schools should actively facilitate opportunities for families of children and young people accessing the base to connect and build supportive relationships both within the base and across the whole school.

Family engagement should be high-quality and sustainable, supported by clear processes that help manage staff workload and wellbeing. For example, agreed communication approaches, shared templates, and access to reflective support where appropriate.

Working with children and young people

Children and young people accessing an inclusion base should be provided with key information about the base before joining. For example, the location, structure of the day or sessions in the base, the number of children and young people, and the names and roles of staff. This information should be provided in formats that reflect what children and young people need to make them accessible, for example, including photos, visuals or easy read formats.

While accessing a base, children and young people should be kept informed about key events and any changes in their mainstream class and the wider school, for example, staff changes and key whole-school events.

Working with health professionals and specialists

Where health professionals are an integral part of the commissioned provision they should be involved in the planning, target setting, and provision of support at the earliest possible stage.

Health professionals should have a clear role in communicating with the senior leadership of the mainstream school, and they should support implementing a whole school approach.

Health professionals should be able to provide support to whole classes and groups in the base, as well as individual children and families. For example, schools could organise shared professional development opportunities delivered by health professionals to mainstream class and specialist staff to support children who access the base across the whole school.

⁴⁷ [Sloan et al \(2020\)](#) and [SEND bases in mainstream schools parent views](#)

Where the base supports children looked after by the local authority, schools should work closely with Virtual School Heads to promote children's educational achievement and progress⁴⁸.

School collaboration

There should be strong communication channels between staff working in the base and mainstream class staff, and all staff in the school should take a collaborative approach to supporting children and young people accessing the base.

There should be clear and consistent structures and systems in the base⁴⁹, and these should be explained to all staff in the mainstream school. For example, the timetable, how children are supported by staff, and the system for supporting communication and behaviour.

There should be careful transition planning with children and young people and families to ensure children feel safe and supported. For example, at phase transition, there should be strong communication between both schools to avoid 'cliff-edges' in support, ensuring schools know children and young people's starting points and prior knowledge to facilitate a smooth and gradual transition.

Where children access the base (host school) on a short-term or part-time basis from another school (main school), careful consideration should be given to:

- understanding of the child or young person's progress and strengths so the curriculum is appropriate from day one
- regular communication with the main school
- ensuring effective strategies to support children are embedded across both schools, and that provision is a partnership
- clear understanding of accountability, safeguarding, and transport responsibilities
- approach to uniform
- exit criteria to end the placement and reintegration strategies to ensure the child or young person's successful return to their main school
- ensuring the child or young person is admitted in line with the host school's published admissions arrangements and the School Admissions Code
- accurate completion of the admission and attendance registers⁵⁰

Where placements in a base are time-limited for behavioural or pastoral support⁵¹, schools should have a clear reintegration strategy in place⁵². This may involve

⁴⁸ [Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children](#)

⁴⁹ For example [Warren, Buckingham & Parsons, \(2021\)](#)

⁵⁰ For example [The School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)

⁵¹ [Sloan et al \(2020\)](#)

⁵² [Behaviour in schools](#)

reintegration meetings between the main school, host school, child or young person, parents, carers and, if relevant, other agencies. Schools should consider what support is needed to help the child or young person return to mainstream classes and meet the expected standards of behaviour and review reintegration plans at regular intervals. Access to an inclusion base is never a form of sanction. Support from an inclusion base should aim to meet the child or young person's additional needs so that they can meet expected standards of behaviour.

Peer network collaboration

Schools should support staff, particularly those who work in a base, to access and engage with peer support networks, including with special and AP schools. These can support high-quality practice in bases, and they are an important method through which staff and schools can collaborate, share knowledge and help ensure that the base is building on peer feedback and national guidance to consistently provide high-quality support. Examples of these include national networks, local authority commissioned groups and outreach networks.

Effective partnership working

Schools will need to consider what works in their context, however, these are examples of strategies schools may wish to consider:

Families

- families have a consistent point of contact in the base
- schools have in person contact with families
- schools regularly capture the view of parents through surveys, actively seeking the views of all parents and engaging with the findings
- schools celebrate the successes of children and young people accessing the base and communicate this with home. Families are invited into the base to celebrate success. For example attending a 'cafe morning' run by the children or watching a production the children have created

Children and young people

- schools regularly capture the voice of children and young people accessing the base, providing appropriate support to help with understanding and communication
- children and young people are involved in creating their own targets
- children and young people decide whether they want to go to their form or the base in the morning
- children and young people who access the base support the transition of new children and young people joining the base
- children and young people who leave the base are considered 'alumni' and receive post-exit monitoring so reintegration is sustained
- schools 'heatmap' where issues arise around the school that inhibit integration and address them

Specialists and peers

- information, training, and advice from health professionals and education professionals are shared across the whole school
- staff are supported to develop specialist expertise, they are encouraged to identify gaps in practice and seek support from specialist providers
- staff are supported to take part in local and national peer networks

6 - Inclusive and accessible physical environments

High-quality physical environments are shaped by thoughtful, adaptable and purposeful design that meets individual children and young people's needs, while also keeping them connected to mainstream classes and shared spaces.

Inclusive by design

All spaces used in a child or young person's day should be within the school premises, unless otherwise a specific requirement to meet the needs of the children and young people accessing the base. In line with the continuum model, schools should consider whether the base requires dedicated space in a single zone, dispersed spaces across the school, or if the required space can be fully integrated into shared mainstream areas.

Schools should prioritise locating the base close to mainstream classes and shared spaces such as playgrounds and sports halls, ideally within the same building⁵³. Careful thought should be given to the location of the base so that it promotes maximum inclusion in mainstream classes and smooths transitions, as well as to how shared spaces can be made more accessible for all children and young people, particularly those who find noisy, busy spaces difficult.

The base's key identifying features should be linked to the strengths and needs of the children and young people it's intended for, and the physical design of the base should support practitioners to plan and implement specialist activities and curriculum delivery. Where appropriate, the space should be designed to support children and young people across the whole school. For example, multi-purpose spaces rather than those with permanently installed sensory facilities can support a broader range of learning and sensory experiences than simply creating a "calming" space.

Flexibility should be part of the design, with sufficient space for different types of activities as the needs of the cohort change. For example, a small area of the base may be used for sensory learning activities, whilst another might support small group interventions.

Spaces used by the base and the resources provided should demonstrate that the children and young people who use it are valued. The spaces should be well-resourced, purposeful, and evidence based⁵⁴.

Schools must satisfy themselves that any decisions about the physical environment meet any relevant legal requirements in relation to the premises of the institution.

⁵³ [SEN units and resourced provision insights from expert interviews](#)

⁵⁴ [Identifying and supporting the needs of children with SEND in mainstream settings](#)

Physical environment

The physical environment can have a significant positive impact on the wellbeing and engagement of children and young people, including those who have SEND, or face other barriers to learning. For example, by supporting physical accessibility, creating breakout spaces, and cultivating a more comfortable sensory environment ⁵⁵.

Schools should consider how they can make the whole school environment more inclusive to support children and young people maximising time in mainstream classes.

Schools and local authorities should refer to the relevant guidance⁵⁶ for more information on improving and adapting the physical environment in mainstream schools, to enhance inclusivity and accessibility, as well as other evidence-based resources that describe what works for particular cohorts⁵⁷. For example, acoustic design measures and adaptations to support visual and lighting comfort as described in the department's inclusive education estates guidance.

Planning the layout

Inclusion base design will be led by the provision intent and target cohort. However, considerations might include:

- teaching spaces, where children will spend a significant amount of time in the base
- appropriate support spaces for interventions, such as small group, one-to-one, sensory, assessment, emotional regulation and therapy activities
- grouping spaces in a zone, ideally central and integrated into the wider school, dispersing the space across the school, or fully embedding the space within shared mainstream areas
- a dedicated drop-off, entrance and play area may be appropriate to meeting the needs of the children and young people accessing the base, with careful consideration to how they support an inclusive approach
- direct access to purposeful outside space
- relevant specialist equipment and facilities. For example, medical, therapeutic, hygiene, changing, physical, and sensory

⁵⁵ [The British Standards Institution \(2022\), Design for the mind – Neurodiversity and the built environment – Guide, PAS 6463:2022](#)

⁵⁶ [Inclusive education estates](#) and [High needs provision capital allocations guidance](#)

⁵⁷ [Identifying and supporting the needs of children with SEND in mainstream settings](#)

All new and refurbished settings delivered by DfE follow design specifications, delivering internal spaces and external places that support equitable and accessible provision as set out within the school and college design and construction standards and guidance⁵⁸.

Where health professionals and other specialists will be involved in supporting the children who access the base, their views on the physical environment should be sought at the outset to inform scoping and design.

Inclusive and accessible physical environments

Schools will need to consider what works in their context, however, these are examples of strategies schools may wish to consider:

- the space is designed to support children and young people's sensory needs, regulation, and learning
- equipment is matched to children and young people's individual needs. For example, braille, touch typing, printing, sensory, physiotherapy equipment
- accessible toilets and changing spaces are available, as appropriate
- schools use developmentally-appropriate predictability resources, such as visual supports, timetables and 'Now and Next' boards
- on the door to the base, signs let children and young people know how many people are in the space at any one time
- children and young people are involved in the decoration and design of the space
- outdoor space is designed flexibly so it can merge into mainstream areas or remain a dedicated space
- where appropriate, effective strategies to support the physical environment in the base are shared across the school

⁵⁸ [School design and construction](#)

Commissioning

Strategic commissioning of bases across a local area

Strategic commissioning ensures sufficient high-quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people, including those with SEND across the local area. Local authorities and partner commissioning bodies must jointly plan, commission and review services. Local partners across education, health and social care should work together to establish what targeted commissioning is needed to address the needs identified.⁵⁹

Support bases are commissioned and funded by individual schools, responsible bodies, for example academy trusts, and local groups of schools, whilst specialist bases are commissioned and funded by the local authority. Schools, responsible bodies, and local authorities should work together to ensure the right balance of specialist and support bases is in place, recognising both types of base are interconnected in how they collectively meet the needs of children and young people across a local area.

New specialist bases, and certain changes to existing specialist bases, likely need to go through a formal process⁶⁰. Responsible bodies setting up support bases are unlikely to be required to go through the same formal process. However, they are expected to ensure transparent decision-making, appropriate stakeholder engagement where relevant, and regard to the relevant guidance for their type of school⁶¹.

For local authorities

Assess local need and future demand

Local authorities must engage in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) to understand current and projected need, including SEND, other vulnerable groups and those requiring alternative provision.

The SEND Code of Practice (Chapter 3) explains partners' legal responsibilities for joint commissioning and use of local data.

The need and future demand for inclusion base provision across a local area should form part of this assessment.

⁵⁹ [SEND Code of Practice](#) and [Joint Strategic Needs Assessments guidance](#)

⁶⁰ [Making significant changes to academies](#) and [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools](#)

⁶¹ Responsible bodies should note that the creation of an inclusion base may, in some cases, also involve other changes to premises or provision which could require following the significant change or prescribed alteration process. They should therefore refer to the relevant guidance.

Local authorities should consider how regional commissioning arrangements might facilitate the development of bases that support lower incidence needs. For example, where children and young people with particularly low incidence needs, such as sensory impairment or physical disability, who would benefit from access to a base, are spread across neighbouring local authorities, those authorities might jointly commission a specialist base.

Develop an area wide strategic plan

Commissioning plans informed by the JSNA should include a detailed provision map identifying sufficiency gaps, overcapacity, and emerging needs. Strategic joint commissioning should be intentional, based on evidence of need, and desired outcomes.

Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and Health providers should be engaged early in the process of strategic commissioning to consider implications for provision of health services and to inform workforce planning.

Whilst local authorities are not directly involved in the commissioning of individual support bases, as much as possible they should work with schools, responsible bodies, and local groups of schools, to develop plans that include the long-term strategy for area commissioning of specialist and support bases, recognising their interconnectedness in meeting local need.

Commissioning of specialist bases

Local authority strategic plans for specialist bases should define target cohorts, staffing expectations, curriculum access, progression routes, and projected outcomes. Plans should ensure that both the appropriate volume and types of specialist base places are commissioned. They should follow recognised commissioning cycles and outcome-focussed approaches as described in the SEND Code of Practice.

Local authorities should be clear about how individual specialist bases contribute to meeting the goals set out in the local area strategic plan and communicate this to schools.

Early dialogue with DfE should be sought, particularly where making significant changes to academies may be required to open a specialist base⁶².

Local authorities should set out a clear and transparent process for selecting schools to deliver their strategy for area commissioning of specialist bases. For example, via expressions of interest assessed against evaluation criteria.

⁶² [Making significant changes to academies](#)

Strategic plans for bases should be considered alongside local authorities' plans for arranging or overseeing placements in AP, where local authorities must have regard to statutory guidance⁶³.

Enable meaningful collaboration

Local authorities must involve children and young people, their parents and carers, schools, health partners, and social care, in commissioning design and review.

Local authorities must review their provision, taking into consideration the experiences of children, young people and families (including through representative groups such as Parent Carer Forums).

Local authorities should publicise commissioned specialist base provision in the SEND Local Offer⁶⁴.

Quality assurance and oversight

Local authorities should have clear processes for oversight of each specialist base – visit at least annually, review outcomes, monitor use of places, and ensure the offer remains appropriate and high quality. This should include observation of practice by a suitably qualified practitioner.

Local authorities should put in place support to ensure consistent high-quality provision across all specialist bases in their area and extend this offer to support bases as appropriate, for example, local area networks for base leads to develop practice.

For schools and responsible bodies

Engage in local area strategic planning

Where requested schools should contribute data about emerging education, health and social care needs, trends and provision⁶⁵.

Schools, responsible bodies, and local groups of schools should engage in local area strategic planning. This is particularly important where schools are considering opening a support base. Schools should notify the local authority when opening a support base.

Schools, responsible bodies, and local groups of schools should be clear about how their base contributes to meeting the goals set out in the local area strategic plan.

⁶³ [Alternative Provision](#)

⁶⁴ [SEND Code of Practice](#)

⁶⁵ [SEND Code of Practice](#)

Schools have a duty to cooperate with local authorities regarding their place planning functions⁶⁶.

Enable meaningful collaboration

Schools and responsible bodies should regularly review their provision, taking into consideration the experiences and views of children, young people and families as well as other relevant parties, for example local authorities.

Schools should publicise their base provision on their website, and, where it supports children and young people with SEN, as part of their SEN Information Report⁶⁷. Schools should ensure their Get Information About Schools record is accurate and up to date in relation to their base provision.

Quality assurance and oversight

Where bases are being commissioned across a group of schools, for example a multi academy trust or a local partnership, the group should make arrangements for regular oversight of each base – visit at least annually, review outcomes, monitor use of places, and ensure the offer remains appropriate and high quality. This should include observation of practice by a suitably qualified practitioner.

Commissioners should put in place support to ensure consistent high-quality provision across all support bases. For example, commissioners might convene local peer networks or commission relevant training for all support bases in the local area.

Operational commissioning of individual bases

Operational commissioning concerns the specific arrangements needed to design, establish and run an individual base.

Clear service specification

Commissioning arrangements should detail a clear specification, including but not limited to:

- intended cohort profile and developmental stage
- entry/exit criteria, including approach to reintegration where appropriate
- staffing model, role of school leaders, and access to relevant specialists and health professionals
- physical environment and operational capacity
- curriculum and intervention offer

⁶⁶ [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026](#)

⁶⁷ [SEND Code of Practice](#) and [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

- approach to inclusive practice and compliance with related statutory duties
- expected outcomes
- quality assurance processes
- funding arrangements
- governance arrangements

Where the commissioner is distinct from the host school, for example a local authority, these arrangements should be set out in a Service Level Agreement. However, where the commissioner and the host school are the same entity, for example as part of a multi academy trust, it is still good practice to set out a clear service specification.

Responsible bodies should agree the specification of the base with the commissioner. Where the establishment of a specialist base is subject to the prescribed alteration or significant change processes, responsible bodies will be required to undertake consultation in line with those processes⁶⁸.

Governance and accountability

Governance arrangements should define responsibilities for:

- safeguarding
- quality assurance
- data monitoring
- commissioning of specialist services
- financial oversight
- admissions processes, transition arrangements, and review of placements

Wherever possible commissioners should provide schools with a single point of contact.

Admissions arrangements

Admissions processes must align with relevant statutory frameworks, for example where a school is named in an EHC plan⁶⁹ or where a placement is made via offsite direction powers⁷⁰. When a local authority is considering making a placement through an EHC plan, section I of the EHC plan must name the mainstream school. The way the special educational provision is described in section F of the EHC plan will normally indicate provision which will be delivered through the base.

⁶⁸ [Making significant changes to academies](#) and [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools](#)

⁶⁹ [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

⁷⁰ [Education Act 2002](#)

Where pupils accessing the base do not have EHC plans, referrals and access to the base should be informed by data and follow an agreed process that references entry and exit criteria and involves relevant professionals.

Where placements are short term or part time between the host school and other schools, accountability, safeguarding, attendance and transport responsibilities should be agreed and clearly understood by both schools.

Where placements are from another school (main school), the child or young person must be dual registered with their main school and the school hosting the base (host school). The host school must ensure the child or young person is admitted in line with the host school's published admissions arrangements and the School Admissions Code.

Where a child accesses a base in a school which is not their home school, consideration should be given to how they will get there. Long or complex journeys may have an impact on their wellbeing or readiness to learn. Where the child is dual registered with their main school and the host school, they will be eligible for free home to school to travel to the host school if they meet the statutory eligibility criteria⁷¹. The schools will need to work with the local authority to make sure suitable travel arrangements can be made and will need to factor in any time the local authority may need to put the arrangements in place.

The start time for the base should coincide with that of the wider school. Schools may wish to consider what arrangements they might put in place to support children and young people arriving into school so that time spent learning is maximised. For example, avoiding busy areas and crowds where possible. In exceptional cases, where there is a need for the school to provide a pupil with a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs, this should be done in line with the relevant statutory guidance⁷².

Funding

Commissioners should ensure funding arrangements support:

- staffing and training
- environmental adaptations
- lead-in periods prior to opening
- long-term sustainability

Agreed annual funding review mechanisms are recommended. Funding approaches should comply with relevant guidance⁷³.

⁷¹ [Home-to-school travel](#)

⁷² [Working together to improve school attendance](#)

⁷³ For example [High needs funding guidance](#)

Operational readiness

Commissioners should take an evidence-based approach to the implementation of new bases. They should provide sufficient lead-in time and ensure readiness for opening, allowing for:

- staff recruitment and induction
- training and professional development of both mainstream class and base staff as appropriate
- environment setup
- communication with families and the community
- safeguarding and curriculum planning and assessment, including input from professionals such as specialist teachers and therapists where appropriate
- pre-opening review by the commissioner

Where possible commissioners should provide long lead-in times for placing new children or young people to support successful transitions.

Commissioners and schools must ensure that, where required, the base, and where applicable children and young people accessing the base, is accurately recorded in local and national data collections. For example, in the school census.

Spotlights

The following examples showcase different approaches to setting up and operating an inclusion base. They span the full spectrum of the continuum model, with different specialisms supporting specific groups of children and young people with SEND, or requiring support for behavioural or pastoral reasons, including those at risk of exclusion or low attendance. Both specialist base and support base models are included, and the spotlights demonstrate how schools put into practice some of the key principles, the impact the base has, and their plans for next steps.

Each spotlight includes:

- where the base sits on the continuum model, the local name for the base, and whether it is a specialist or support base
- school context and origin of the base
- explanations of how the three principles of effective practice and commissioning are put into practice
- examples of the impact the base has
- planned next steps in the school's development of their base

time in mainstream classes

“Resource base”
(specialist base)

Context and origin

Allen Edwards Primary School has developed a highly individualised, autism-specialist, 35-place base that combines a bespoke curriculum, integrated therapeutic support and a strong emphasis on emotional regulation, communication and independence. Their model prioritises a sense of belonging in their resource base classrooms and across the wider school community, ensuring children can access a consistent, low arousal environment while still engaging with the wider school through carefully considered inclusive opportunities with their individual needs at the centre to ensure success. Speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, psychotherapy and specialist teaching are embedded within daily practice. Staff adapt provision flexibly based on each child's presentation, enabling steady progress from starting points. The school's inclusive ethos ensures meaningful relationships with families, collaborative assessment and responsive support that evolves with need. The school is in Lambeth.

Origins: The resource base originally operated as a speech and language centre. As the profile of children changed over time, the school recognised that pupils required an adapted, sensory-considered environment and a more bespoke curriculum offer. Six years ago, they worked with the local authority to transform and redesign the base to meet this emerging profile.

Principles in practice

High quality curriculum design: The curriculum is bespoke, broad and balanced, designed around progression, overlearning and life-skills within a six-year rolling model. All pupils access the full curriculum alongside therapeutic input, ensuring opportunities aren't narrowed. Baseline and continuous observation shape planning so sensory, developmental and regulation needs are integrated into each lesson. Interventions from speech and language therapists (SaLT), occupational therapists (OT), and other therapists run throughout the week, with the SaLT playing a central role in modelling, training staff and embedding communication strategies. Classroom structures vary across the four base classrooms: early phase rooms are play based and exploratory, while older groups follow structured, repetitive routines with clear sensory anchors embedded within discrete subject learning. Consistency, predictability and visual supports underpin implementation.

Effective data, assessment and outcomes: Progress is monitored through a combination of academic, social, emotional, communication and sensory measures. Small-step progress is captured through B Squared, combined with frequent pupil progress meetings to refine provision. Targets are reviewed half-termly with input from the whole team, and specialists such as SaLT and OT review clinical targets termly. In older key stages, children reflect on their own goals to shape next steps. The model prioritises progress over attainment, acknowledging that many pupils work significantly below age-related expectations. Most pupils make strong improvements in engagement, regulation, independence and communication.

Inclusive and accessible physical environments: The base spans both the main school building and a newly designed specialist building. Facilities include multiple classrooms, sensory rooms, an OT room, intervention spaces, offices and accessible toilets. Dedicated outdoor areas, separate from the mainstream playground, offer climbing frames, mud kitchens and quiet zones for pupils who need reduced stimulation. Classrooms are structured for low-sensory

environments, with clear visual timetables, regulation zones, sensory circuits and personalised workstations. Spaces are intentionally calm but not stimulus-free, helping pupils gradually adapt to varied environments. The design ensures safety, belonging and readiness to learn, while still preparing children to cope with real-world sensory demands.

Impact

The resource base demonstrates substantial impact on pupils' emotional regulation, engagement and independence. Children experience a strong sense of belonging, enabling them to learn, without masking, how to navigate both good and difficult days with the support of highly-attuned staff. Flexible adaptation of routines based on daily need leads to improved regulation, reduced anxiety and increased willingness to engage in learning.

Academic progress: While often below age-related expectations, progress is consistently positive relative to starting points, especially in communication, interaction, sensory processing and learning behaviours. Robust assessment systems show clear small-step improvements across developmental domains.

Social integration: Pupils increasingly participate in whole-school events, leadership roles and selected mainstream lessons where appropriate.

Progression: Data shows that some pupils transition fully back into mainstream, while others move confidently to specialist provisions with strong preparation.

Families: Report reduced stress and improved home routines due to close partnership and practical support.

Next steps

Next steps include supporting the introduction of a mainstream Inclusion Classroom for children that would benefit from some additional support within the mainstream but who do not require a specialist base, and providing more direct outreach for local schools opening inclusion bases.

time in mainstream classes

“The Eagles”
(support base)

Context and origin

Aylsham High School’s ‘Eagles’ provision offers a nurture-based, highly supportive environment for 60 students across Year 7, 8 and 9 identified as disengaged, struggling with attendance, or experiencing social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). The school reintegrates students into the community through a calm, relationship-centred base that removes SEMH-related barriers to learning. Students receive a blended academic and nurture curriculum, delivered by a primary-trained and Nurture Group-trained teacher, with continuity provided by learning support assistants who accompany them into mainstream lessons. The approach prioritises emotional regulation, readiness to learn, and gradual reintegration across Key Stages 3 and 4. The school is in Norfolk.

Origin: The ‘Eagles’ provision was created to support approximately 10% of students the school identified as disengaged from learning, had poor attendance, and presented with SEMH needs. Instead of relying on external alternative provision, school leaders sought to re-integrate these students into the school community. A classroom within the heart of the school was transformed into a dedicated safe space to reduce barriers to learning caused by social and emotional factors. In the original model, Year 7 students spent 70% of their curriculum time in the base, with this gradually reducing in Years 8 (15%) and 9 (5%) to support reintegration into mainstream lessons.

Principles in practice

Effective partnership working: The school’s strong collaboration with the local authority has been central to developing the Eagles provision. Due to the positive impact on students’ outcomes, the local authority agreed to fund three bases, enabling students in Years 7-9 to access 70% of their curriculum from within the base. To strengthen the offer the school worked closely with the local Speech and Language Therapy Service, which recommended targeted programmes such as Secondary Language Link (Key Stage 3) and Talk for Work (Key Stage 4). Speech and language therapists also trained staff to deliver these interventions, ensuring sustained support. The school further partners with local employers to help prepare students for interviews and future employment.

Family engagement is a core part of the nurture approach. Through early identification in Year 6, families are invited to a ‘nurture evening’ before transition and later take part in ‘family learning days’ involving practical, creative activities. The base’s separate entrance helps reduce anxiety for parents who may find mainstream school settings intimidating. The school also offers adult learning opportunities, including academic and creative courses, to build positive, welcoming relationships with families and the wider community.

High-quality curriculum design:

The base delivers core curriculum subjects for Years 7–9, including English, Maths, RE, Computing, PSHE alongside a tailored Social and Emotional Learning curriculum focused on emotional regulation and skills needed for success in mainstream classes. Students attend mainstream lessons for specialist subjects such as science, PE and Design and Technology, supported by learning support assistants from the base.

In Year 9, foundation learners can take the school’s bespoke ‘I.C.E’ course, which develops independence, confidence and employability. At Key Stage 4, the school offers a construction course, and many former Eagles students choose to complete the two year Gateway qualification.

Inclusive and accessible physical environment: After six years operating from a classroom, the Eagles provision is now housed in a purpose-built centre located five metres from the main school building, ensuring students remain integrated rather than isolated. The new space has been designed around Nurture Group principles, offering internal toilets and a small kitchen to create a home like, low anxiety environment. Biophilic features, such as green carpets and bi fold doors opening to a private outdoor area, provide calming, low stimulus spaces for breaks. The centre also includes dedicated intervention rooms, enabling targeted support like phonics within a safe setting, which has increased pupils' engagement and progress.

Impact

The Eagles provision has led to significant and sustained improvements for students previously disengaged from school.

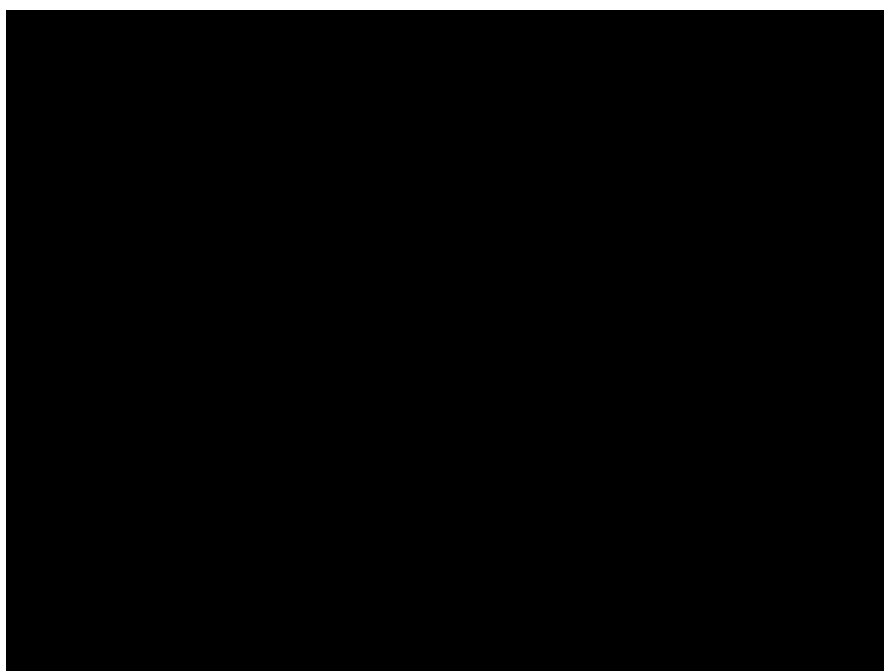
Attendance and engagement: There have been significant increases in attendance for students who previously struggled to access school. Students share that they have a clear, accessible and enjoyable educational pathway from Year 7 to Year 11.

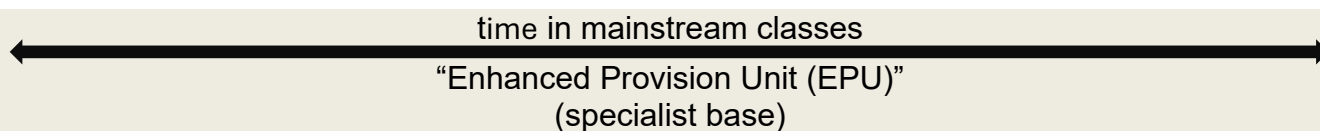
Behaviour: The school reports exceptional behaviour with minimal permanent exclusions and suspensions. Having access to the Nurture Centre before school and during all social times creates a predictable and safe environment. This lowers stress levels, with staff able to facilitate strategies for self-regulation.

Attainment: Evidence of progress in reading, maths and speech and language scores demonstrates that removing SEMH barriers facilitates academic growth.

Next steps

In the future the school would like to explore the feasibility of a dedicated base for Years 10 and 11 to provide continued consistency for students who require more specialist support.





Context and origin

Carlton le Willows Academy (secondary school), part of Delta Academies Trust, hosts a 16-place base which provides a flexible, therapeutic, academically aligned model for pupils with emotional barriers to attendance (EBA) and associated SEMH needs. It delivers a blended offer that mirrors mainstream curriculum expectations while providing a reduced-arousal environment, relational practice, and the structured support children and young people need to re-engage with education. The base emphasises early intervention, personalised timetables, strong family partnerships and close work with specialists such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and the Health-Related Education Team. Mainstream teachers deliver core subjects within the base, ensuring curriculum consistency and enabling reintegration. The model prioritises safety, stability and sustained improvements in attendance, confidence and wellbeing. The school is in Nottinghamshire.

Origins: The Key Stage (‘KS’) 4 base was established in 2020 to support pupils experiencing EBA, later expanding in 2024 with a KS3 base enabling earlier intervention. Designed by a specialist teacher drawing on research and professional experience, the provision was created with light-touch local authority support. It now forms a key element of the school’s inclusion strategy.

Principles in practice

High quality curriculum design: The curriculum is flexible, inclusive and aligned closely with mainstream to minimise learning loss and support seamless reintegration. KS4 pupils study GCSEs across core, EBacc and personal development pathways, while KS3 pupils focus on literacy, numeracy, emotional regulation and personal development. Curriculum entitlement includes English, Maths, Science and PSHRE, with mainstream subject specialists delivering lessons in the base to ensure consistency. Therapeutic components like CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) sessions, art therapy, forest school and targeted life-skills programmes such as ASDAN, are embedded. The structure mirrors the mainstream day, with flexibility around start and finish times. This balanced model maintains ambition while addressing the academic, emotional and regulation needs of learners.

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Inclusion is built around short, targeted placements with clear pathways back to mainstream. Personalised initial placement meetings establish expectations, goals and reintegration plans. Pupils begin with blended timetables, gradually increasing mainstream time as confidence grows. Teaching Assistants (TAs) support transitions by accompanying pupils into lessons. Consistent relationships, transparent communication and a relational approach reduce anxiety and support belonging. Wearing school uniform in the KS3 base reinforces identity, while CPD for mainstream staff strengthens whole-school capacity. Reintegration is scaffolded through staged visits, increased lesson exposure and ongoing family meetings. The base’s presence has reduced dysregulation in mainstream, improved attendance school-wide and strengthened the school’s graduated SEMH response.

Effective workforce and leadership: The base is overseen by the SENCo with daily leadership from a Lead Specialist Teacher, supported by a team of TAs and an HLTA (higher level TA).

Recruitment prioritises emotional intelligence, calm relational practice and adaptability. Staff receive targeted CPD including counselling approaches, Neuroinclusive Education Network training, precision teaching and safeguarding. This is supplemented by whole-school training. Mainstream teachers deliver subject-specialist lessons within the base, maintaining links to curriculum pathways alongside high-quality subject knowledge. Strong partnerships with CAMHS, the Health-Related Education Team, and Springboard provide on-site therapeutic and specialist support. This integrated staffing model ensures stability, specialist intervention, academic continuity and a smooth pathway back into mainstream.

Impact

The base demonstrates strong, sustained impact across attendance, academic outcomes and emotional regulation. The provision also improves whole-school climate by reducing dysregulation in mainstream and strengthening SEND systems across the school.

Attendance: Pupils typically enter with attendance between 0-25%, yet show substantial and sustained improvement once placed, supported by personalised timetables and therapeutic interventions.

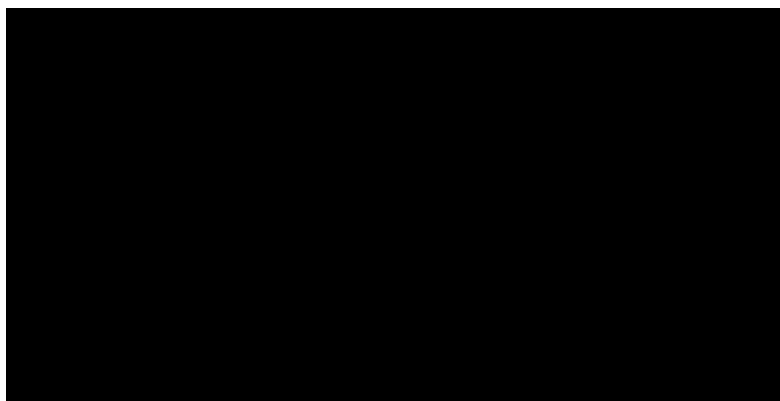
Attainment: Academic outcomes at KS4 are strong: 100% of pupils are entered for GCSE English, Maths and Science, with 80% achieving grade 9–5 in English and Maths.

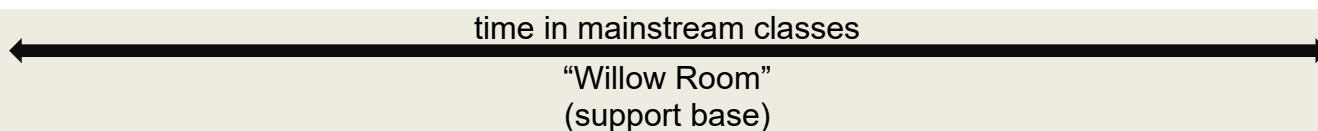
Reintegration: Outcomes are consistently positive, with many pupils progressing to mainstream lessons, their home school's sixth form, or appropriate post-16 destinations. No suspensions have been issued in six years, demonstrating strong behaviour and effective regulation.

Families: Parent and pupil voice evidences improved confidence, wellbeing and engagement both at school and at home. Earlier intervention through the KS3 EPU has significantly reduced the number of pupils becoming severely disengaged or requiring specialist placements.

Next steps

Next steps will prioritise strengthening the KS3 provision to enable earlier identification and targeted intervention, ensuring pupils receive appropriate support before reaching KS4. A more established KS3 offer will promote a proactive, preventative approach, increasing access to mainstream learning over time and better preparing pupils for transition into KS4. Ongoing collaboration with clinical specialists and educational psychologists will ensure consistent therapeutic support. Expansion of KS3 provision will be explored to widen early access, support hybrid KS4 timetables, increase capacity, and benefit more pupils across the locality.





Context and origin

Chalgrove Primary School's Willow Room is part of Barnet's SEND Spaces project. The support base operates as a flexible, school-funded provision embedded within mainstream. It is designed to support pupils with complex SEND whose needs cannot be met consistently within the busy classroom environment alone. The model prioritises predictability, emotional regulation, communication and independence, while maintaining strong links to mainstream learning. Pupils access a structured, sensory-informed curriculum alongside carefully planned reintegration into their mainstream classes. Provision is highly responsive, with movement between mainstream and the Willow Room determined by ongoing assessment and individual need, rather than fixed placement.

Origins: The SEND Space was established in 2024 in response to two pupils whose complex needs were not being met through 1:1 support in mainstream classes. A strategic review identified further pupils who would benefit from a calmer, more predictable environment, leading to the development of the Willow Room model as part of Barnet's SEND Spaces project.

Principles in practice

High quality curriculum design: The SEND Space curriculum combines EYFS and National Curriculum content with targeted interventions addressing communication, regulation and social development. Learning is structured through clear routines, small-group teaching and sensory-friendly environments. Interventions include attention-building activities, Zones of Regulation, language-focused literacy approaches and targeted numeracy support. Assessment draws on EHCP and support-plan targets, National Curriculum assessments, speech and language outcomes and small-step progress measures. Both academic and non-academic indicators inform planning, ensuring curriculum pathways remain ambitious while meeting pupils' developmental needs.

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Inclusion is achieved by ensuring all pupils remain members of their mainstream classes alongside accessing the SEND Space. Every child has a named place in their class, attends assemblies, trips and whole-school events where appropriate, and most access mainstream learning daily. Mainstream and SEND Space staff co-plan curriculum, support plans and next steps, ensuring coherence and shared responsibility. Inclusion is carefully scaffolded using reverse integration (where their peers access the base), structured peer interactions and supported transitions. This approach has reduced reliance on 1:1 support, increased independence and strengthened relationships across the school community.

Effective commissioning of bases: Barnet's SEND Spaces Project provides an effective four-phase commissioning framework that has directly shaped the development of Chalgrove Primary School's support base. Through Phase 1 (strategic planning), senior leaders were supported to design a SEND space aligned to their school context, moving away from unsustainable 1:1 support towards a planned, group-based model. Phase 2 (operational implementation) translated this strategic intent into practice through bespoke on-site support and specialist training, enabling staff to develop consistent routines, curriculum adaptations and assessment approaches tailored to pupil need. Phase 3 (peer support) strengthens system coherence through borough-wide SEND Spaces networks, allowing Chalgrove to share practice, access expert input and refine provision through peer learning. Phase 4 (review and refine) supports sustainability through

structured self-evaluation, quality-assurance activity and evidence-informed action planning. Together, these phases have enabled Chalgrove to embed a robust, responsive support base that strengthens inclusion while contributing to borough-wide capacity building.

Impact

The SEND Space has delivered significant and, in some cases, transformational impact.

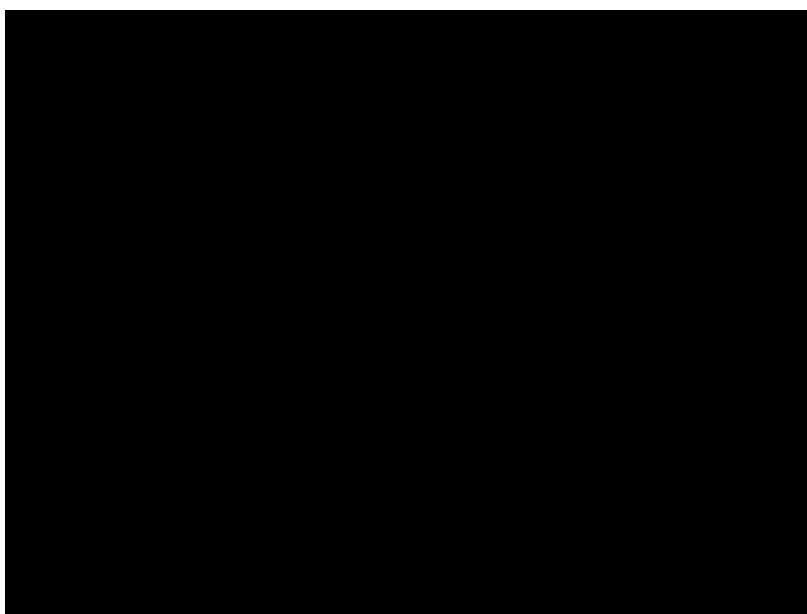
Ready to learn: Pupils show marked improvements in emotional regulation, attention, listening and the ability to transition between activities.

Strong progress: Speech, language and communication progress is evident and increasingly transferred into mainstream learning contexts. Behaviour for learning has improved, enabling pupils to access curriculum content more consistently and with greater independence. Academic progress is demonstrated through ongoing assessment, book scrutiny and termly reviews. For pupils with SEMH needs, a reduction in incidents of dysregulation provides a clear indicator of impact.

Wider school benefits: The wider school has also benefited, with calmer classrooms, reduced disruption to learning and strengthened inclusive practice. Moving from individual 1:1 support to a group-based SEND Space model has supported independence, peer interaction and sustainable inclusion.

Next steps

The school will continue to work closely with the local authority through the SEND Spaces project, focusing on developing specialist expertise and sharing effective practice. Capacity will be strengthened by deploying skilled practitioners from the Willow Room to support staff across the school, enhancing inclusive practice. Clear entry and exit criteria will be embedded, alongside longer-term ambitions to extend provision to a full-day model and increase capacity for Key Stage 2 pupils, particularly those with SEMH needs.



time in mainstream classes

“Integrated Resource”
(specialist base)

Context and origin

King Ecgbert School (secondary school), part of Mercia Learning Trust, hosts a base providing long-term, highly inclusive support for autistic children and young people so they can access mainstream learning with the right scaffolding. Operating as a fully embedded part of the school, the 30-place base emphasises belonging, continuity and high expectations rather than separate provision. Pupils typically access 80-100% of lessons in mainstream with tailored support from base staff. The base offers a nurturing “family-style” environment for social times, intervention sessions and emotional regulation. Its culture is built on collaboration between base staff, mainstream class teachers and parents, ensuring academic progress, strong pastoral care and personalised responses to pupils’ needs. The school is in Sheffield.

Origins: Established in 1994 as a pioneering integrated resource, the base was created to bridge the gap between mainstream and special schools for autistic children and young people to access a mainstream curriculum with support. Starting with 2 places, it has gradually expanded to 30. It remains oversubscribed and deeply embedded within the school’s ethos.

Principles in practice

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Inclusion is the defining feature of the base, which does not run a separate curriculum but supports pupils to access mainstream learning wherever possible. Belonging is nurtured through a cross-year “family” model, with pupils spending social time together and using the base as a safe place. Staff anticipate sensory and emotional challenges and accompany pupils to clubs or mainstream social opportunities with planned strategies for support. Transitions - whether into secondary school, between lessons, or linked to changes at home - are monitored closely with gradual, personalised approaches. The base is celebrated as a whole-school strength, fostering pride, inclusion and positive relationships across the community.

Effective partnership working: Partnerships with parents are essential to the base’s success. Families have direct lines of communication with base staff to share day-to-day information, especially when mornings are challenging. Each child or young person has a named adult who provides regular updates - weekly as standard, and daily if they are struggling - ensuring parents can prepare for transitions home. Staff often ask parents to reinforce key messages given in school to support consistency. The base also provides emotional support to parents, drawing on extensive experience to reassure families about their child’s developmental trajectory, particularly during early years (Y7–Y8) when routines and expectations are still bedding in.

Effective commissioning of bases: Children and young people are placed by the local authority (LA), and the base remains a core part of the city’s SEND offer. Admissions typically occur at Year 7, with pupils staying through Year 11 or beyond. The LA is relatively hands-off in day-to-day operation, while the trust oversees quality assurance through its Gold Standard SEND framework, incorporating external validation. Children and young people accessing the base are monitored through the same systems as mainstream students - attendance, behaviour, attainment and progress - augmented by specialist oversight from the SENCO and base manager. Parent voice, staff dialogue and daily teacher-base communication further strengthen quality assurance.

Impact

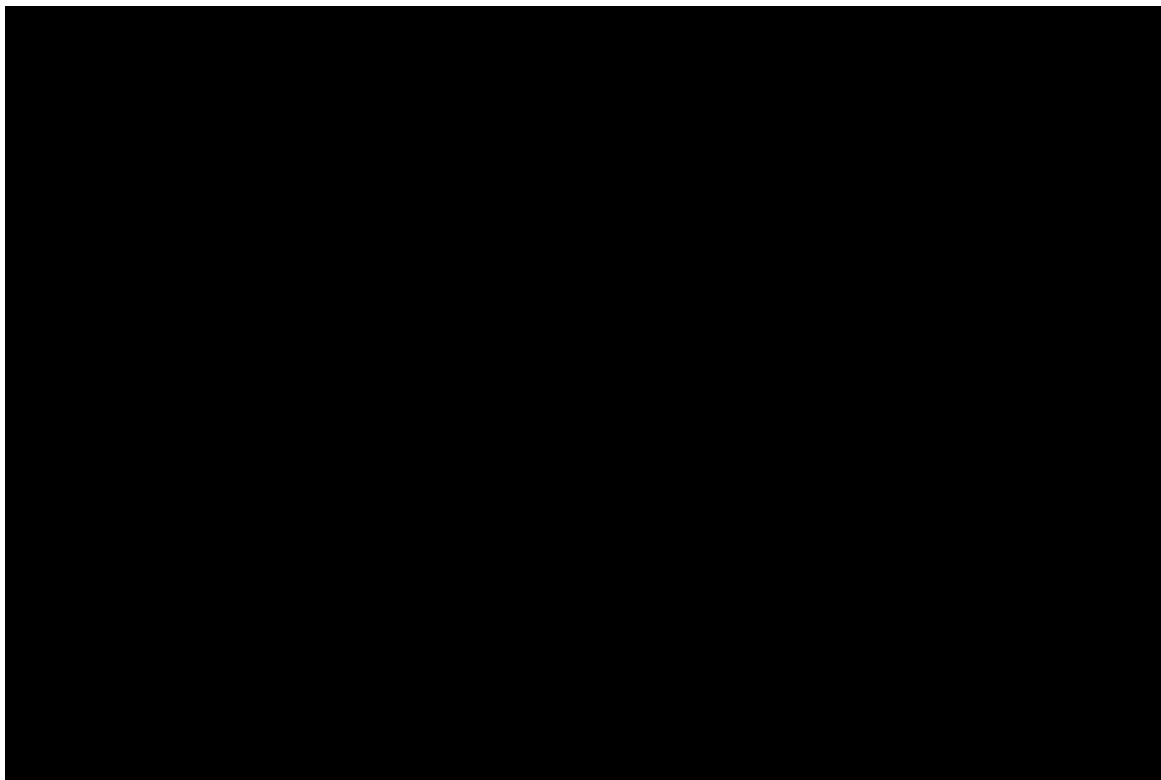
The base consistently enables autistic children and young people to access mainstream education successfully, with strong academic and personal outcomes. Students' progress is monitored through the same systems as the wider school, ensuring high expectations and early identification of needs.

Attainment and progress: Data shows above-average academic progress for many pupils, despite the cohort's diversity. Pupils develop improved communication, confidence and social skills, supported by close parental collaboration. The base's long-term, stable model helps pupils sustain progress over years rather than short placements, resulting in impressive destination outcomes, including A-levels, university pathways, vocational training and work-based learning. Crucially, the school reports zero NEETs (not in education, employment or training) due to personalised planning and robust transition support.

Integration: Integration strongly benefits the wider school: mainstream staff benefit from base expertise, whole-school inclusion strengthens, and friendships form across the base-mainstream boundary. The "Integrated Resource" is widely regarded as a "jewel in the crown," enhancing school culture and enriching opportunities for some of the school's most vulnerable learners.

Next steps

The school is aiming to help the wider community, including those who support and advise parents on secondary school placements, to better understand their model. By providing this clarity, it will enable more informed decision-making during the transition process.



time in mainstream classes

“Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP)”
(specialist base)

Context and origin

Kingston Park School is a two-form primary school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, part of the SMART multi academy trust. It has a specialist base commissioned by the local authority (LA) for up to 16 children with complex physical and health needs, known as the Additional Resourced Provision (ARP).

Origins: Located in Newcastle upon Tyne, the ARP was opened in 1998, following a restructure in the local authority of specialist schools and settings. The aim of the base at that time was to provide access to the mainstream curriculum, with wraparound health and medical support. The current head teacher was the SENCO at that time, and the school, which is an entirely open plan, one-floor building, has never had a separate learning space or class for the children attending the ARP.

Principles in practice

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Inclusion is described as “the beating heart” of the school. The school strategic vision for SEND is to see solutions not obstacles, and the high-quality support of the ARP provides a model for this. Parents choose the school because of the academic, physical and emotional support that children, some of whom have life-limiting conditions, receive through the ARP, and because children accessing the base have the opportunity to make friends both with others in the ARP, across their mainstream class and wider school community.

Effective workforce and leadership: At Kingston Park, it is key that all staff are on board for the vision of inclusion to be successful. Every teacher is seen as a specialist teacher who is the class teacher for children accessing the base. While support is available to deliver adaptations and medical treatment, for example from the local special school and with therapy and nursing teams, year groups are organised so that all staff teach all children. This provides wider opportunities for sharing of expertise and skills, as well as providing breaks for staff from some of the more demanding aspects of complex SEN support and medical care. The school has a system of “yoking” (or pairing) more and less experienced members of staff to provide support. Alongside regular 1:1 meetings between the Deputy Head Teacher, base lead, and all staff. There is often a real buzz in the staffroom about what children can and have achieved, both those who access the ARP and those that don’t.

Inclusive and accessible physical environments: The physical environments and approach to the ARP at Kingston Park are a key element in delivering support. The base group does not have a separate learning area, they remain with their mainstream classes, unless working on specific interventions and therapies. This is extended even when barriers are significant, for example hydrotherapy sessions are used to support and prepare children in the ARP to access swimming lessons with their class peers in year 4 and 5. This approach is strengthened by the open plan layout of the school, which supports a collaborative, team approach and a sense that teaching and learning in the ARP does not happen “out of sight”. The design also brings a greater sense of togetherness across the school community.

Impact

The ARP at Kingston Park School has generated long-lasting and meaningful impact for pupils, staff, and the wider community.

Physically included: Maximising the opportunities of the open plan nature of the school, removing the barriers of a separate physical classroom for children and staff in the ARP, brings a greater sense of togetherness across the school community.

Belonging and relationships: A child who accessed the ARP recently obtained a master's degree, and the family, who have stayed in touch with the school, contacted the Head Teacher to let her know.

Support for staff: The focus on supporting less experienced staff through pairing them with more experienced teachers who have overcome their own anxieties around supporting children's more complex learning and medical needs, means staff confidence is high, as is retention year on year.

Attainment: Outcomes are consistently higher on average than local and national metrics.

Next steps

School leaders would like to share their ambition for all children with complex needs and experience of real success more widely.

time in mainstream classes

“Resource Base”
(specialist base)

Context and origin

Miles Coverdale Primary School’s Speech and Language Resource Base provides a highly specialised, language-led model within a mainstream primary setting. It combines adapted curriculum delivery, integrated speech and language therapy and inclusive practice to support pupils with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and related speech and language needs. Pupils access a structured, language-rich environment for most of the school week, alongside carefully planned opportunities for inclusion in mainstream classes. The provision is underpinned by strong leadership, specialist staff expertise and robust use of data to monitor progress. Central to the approach is a commitment to belonging, ensuring pupils are fully included in wider school life. The school is in Hammersmith and Fulham.

Origins: The Resource Base was established in 1994 to meet the needs of pupils with severe language difficulties who were not well served by existing provision. Originally focused on early years and Key Stage 1, it expanded in 2022 to include Key Stage 2, enabling continuity of specialist support across primary education.

Principles in practice

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Inclusion is central to the model, with pupils fully participating in all aspects of school life, including assemblies, playtimes, clubs and enrichment activities. Planned and flexible integration into mainstream lessons, such as science and phonics, supports the application of language skills in meaningful contexts. Communication-supportive strategies are used consistently across the school, creating continuity between base and mainstream classrooms. Integration is both structural, through planned opportunities, and relational, through supported peer interaction. This approach ensures pupils develop confidence, independence and a strong sense of belonging within the wider school community.

Effective workforce and leadership: The Resource Base is led by the SENCo and Head of Base, a senior leader responsible for strategic direction and day-to-day delivery. The multidisciplinary team includes specialist teachers, trained teaching assistants and a fully embedded speech and language therapist with clinical expertise in DLD. This integrated model ensures therapy targets are consistently embedded within teaching. Ongoing professional development is a core strength, with weekly training, specialist input and access to wider CPD opportunities. Strong leadership and a shared inclusive ethos ensure consistency, high expectations and skilled, reflective practice across the provision.

High quality curriculum design: The curriculum is aligned to the National Curriculum but is carefully adapted to prioritise explicit teaching of language. Evidence-based approaches such as Shape Coding, signed support and cued articulation are embedded across subjects. Teaching is highly structured, breaking learning into manageable steps and reinforcing language targets throughout the day. Speech and language therapy is fully integrated into classroom practice through joint planning, modelling and direct intervention. This ensures pupils develop communication skills alongside academic knowledge, enabling access to a broad and ambitious curriculum while supporting readiness for increased inclusion.

Impact

Progress is monitored through a robust, multi-layered assessment framework combining academic tracking, bespoke speech and language measures, and regular review of EHCP outcomes. Data is reviewed termly through structured pupil progress meetings, enabling timely adjustments to provision.

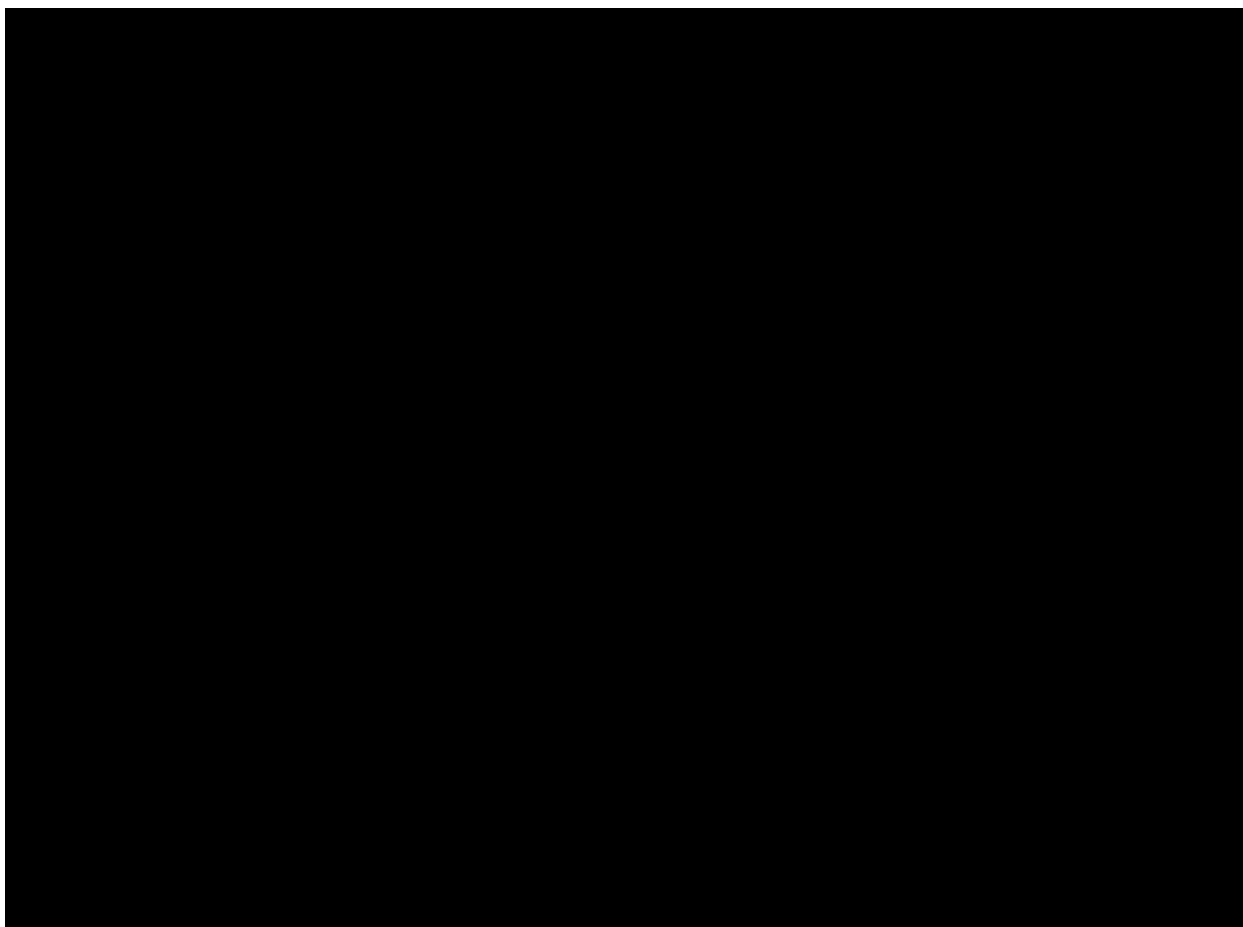
Progress: Pupils make strong progress in receptive and expressive language, speech intelligibility and independence.

Inclusion: Many successfully transition from the Resource Base into mainstream classes, both within school and at secondary level. In some cases, pupils are discharged from speech and language therapy or no longer require an EHCP.

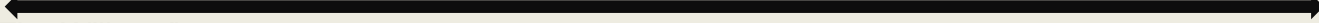
External assurance: These outcomes are reinforced by external evaluation, that highlight that pupils with SEND are very well supported and that the school's strong focus on language and communication has a significant positive impact on learning, confidence and inclusion.

Next steps

Future priorities include strengthening outreach and system leadership, supporting other schools to develop effective speech and language provision, and contributing to local and national work on DLD. The school also aims to further develop transition pathways into secondary education to ensure continuity and sustained outcomes.



time in mainstream classes



“The Willows”
(support base)

Context and origin

Part of the River Learning Trust ‘The Willows’ is a locality-based, teacher-led provision for 16 pupils with significant communication and interaction needs, many of whom are preverbal. The base provides a highly structured, communication-rich and visually supported environment with personalised targets rooted in VB MAPP (Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Program) and PIVATS (Performance Indicators for Valued Assessment and Targeted Learning). Pupils follow an adapted National Curriculum through carefully planned lessons that are layered and purposeful sessions. This sits alongside strong routines and targeted interventions. One day per week is spent in their mainstream “home” school, with additional mainstream opportunities during the week at New Marston Primary School. The model emphasises communication, independence, sensory regulation and carefully planned reintegration. The school is in Oxfordshire.

Origin: The Willows was established in response to growing numbers of pupils with profound communication and developmental needs for whom fragmented 1:1 TA support was ineffective. The school had a strong desire to serve not only its own cohort but also the local community. River Learning Trust chose to repurpose spare space at New Marston Primary School to host the Willows due to its strong inclusive ethos, experienced leadership and above national outcomes across EYFS, KS1 and KS2.

Principles in practice

Effective workforce and leadership: The Willows operates with a teacher on the leadership scale, another teacher (main scale) and four teaching assistants (TAs), maintaining a 1:3 staffing ratio aligned to pupils’ EHC plans. This ensures consistent, targeted support and stable relationships for pupils who rely heavily on predictable adults. Staff have been upskilled through outreach from a local specialist school and participate in the trust’s “Aspiring Specialist Mainstream Teacher” CPD programme. Leadership oversight is strong: the headteacher has oversight alongside the trust Director of Inclusion, who contributes expertise in specialist and resource-based provision. Protected staffing consistency and a clear leadership structure enables high-quality practice, strong collaboration with mainstream schools and well-coordinated reintegration planning. Staffing structures allow the children to be taught by the same adults throughout the week, with staff taking PPA and leadership time on Friday when children return to their home schools. Staff from The Willows are then able to provide outreach to improve provision at the child’s named school.

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Pupils are fully part of the school community: they arrive and leave with peers, wear school uniform, take part in assemblies, themed days, sports day and school trips. They participate in break and lunchtimes where appropriate, supported by staff to generalise social and communication skills. Mainstream pupils are taught about equity and equality, taught explicitly about empathy and inclusion, and taught skills such as BSL. This enables thoughtful interactions between pupils. Each child spends one day per week in their home school, supported by regular visits both ways to maintain continuity and prepare for reintegration. Year 6 prefects work in the Willows, reinforcing belonging and visibility. Pupils feature in newsletters and ClassDojo, helping the wider community understand and celebrate their progress.

High-quality curriculum design: The National Curriculum forms the foundation, adapted into a thematic, vocabulary-rich programme with structured routines and frequent, high-quality 1:1 interventions. Curriculum planning begins with New Marston Primary School's whole-school curriculum and early learning goals to identify gaps in foundational learning. The outcomes for pupils across subjects are thoughtfully designed to be specific yet ensure access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils follow layered sessions that incorporate vocabulary, fine and gross motor skills, sensory elements, triple and quad coding for all language, and independent access to modelled activities, intensive interaction, and targeted 1:1 support. There is an intentional underlying focus on personal development skills in order to develop social skills, such as waiting, eating in a group setting, noticing others, communicating with others, sharing resources and toileting. English is delivered through a text-based curriculum with strong emphasis on vocabulary acquisition and sensory storytelling. Targets are individualised using VB MAPP, and three flexible learning zones plus an outdoor area supports group learning and independence.

Impact

Since opening in September 2024, the Willows has enabled pupils who previously struggled to attend or engage to participate in full-time education.

Attendance: The average attendance of pupils was 93.46% in 2024-25. This showed an increase for all pupils from 2023-24. Attendance was 83.33% for 2023-24.

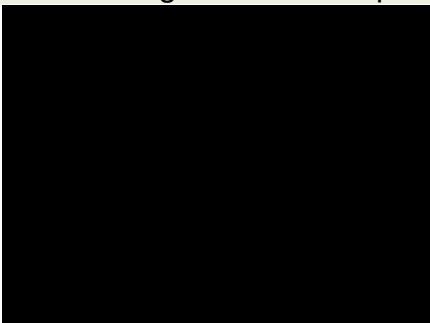
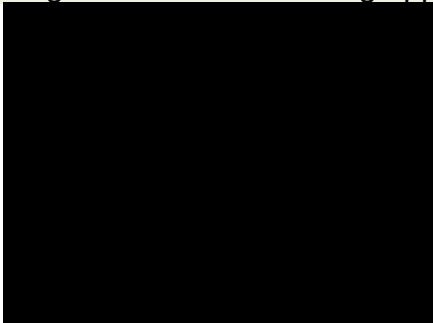
Progress: Assessment data using VB MAPP and PIVATS shows all pupils making statistical progress, with notable gains in engagement, communication, sensory regulation and independence. Qualitative evidence from families highlights transformative changes at home. For example, children being able to sit in restaurants, wait appropriately and participate more confidently in family activities.

Reintegration: Outcomes demonstrate the model's effectiveness - some pupils have returned to their mainstream home school full-time, others continue to access blended provision, and some move on to specialist settings when appropriate. The provision has eliminated long-standing part-time timetables, pupils working in isolation, and has increased mainstream access.

Whole school expertise: The base also positively influences the wider school, strengthening inclusion, developing staff expertise and supporting a culture where pupils with complex needs can thrive. It has further developed the ethos and staff consider what we 'can' do for pupils with SEND. Pupils and the wider staff team see the pupils as complete individuals with their own strengths and characters. They have learnt to understand what progress can look like, and celebrate this.

Next steps

To continue to share the expertise with local schools through offering CPLD sessions on specific aspects of planning, assessment, and intervention. To maximise the recruitment of TAs into this space, offering networks and training opportunities for those working in bases and potential staff.



time in mainstream classes

“ELEVATE”
(support base)

Context and origin

Peacehaven Community School (secondary school) is part of the Swale Academies Trust. ELEVATE is a proactive 20 place base designed to prevent students from disengaging from education and support those at risk of exclusion. It provides a six-week, full-time, highly structured programme that blends academic continuity with therapeutic, relational and behaviour-support interventions. Staff focus on belonging, regulation, readiness to learn and identifying unmet needs masked by behaviour. Mainstream teachers are timetabled into the base, maintaining curriculum alignment while specialist staff deliver targeted interventions. Daily check-ins, structured routines and personalised plans support reintegration into mainstream learning. The model acts as an early, high-impact “circuit breaker”, reducing suspensions, strengthening relationships with families and improving consistency in students’ emotional, social and academic development. The school is in East Sussex.

Origins: ELEVATE was established in 2020 as a strategic shift from reactive sanctions to proactive intervention and support. It aimed to break cycles of repeated suspensions, reduce permanent exclusions and address unmet underlying needs. Designed as a bridge between mainstream and specialist support, the model ensures vulnerable students remain connected to their school community.

Principles in practice

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: A strong sense of belonging is fostered through consistency with key staff and small-group relational practice. Children and young people remain part of the school community, attending whole-school visits, activities and clubs with appropriate scaffolding. Mainstream staff build relationships by teaching within the provision, supporting continuity when children and young people transition back into classes. Reintegration follows a structured, clearly communicated plan, ensuring staff understand each student’s needs and strategies. Even when reintegrated, children and young people continue daily intervention slots. The model has significantly reduced suspensions and maintained extremely low rates of permanent exclusion while improving school-wide behaviour patterns.

Effective workforce and leadership: ELEVATE is staffed by two full-time Higher Level Teaching Assistants, supported by mainstream teachers timetabled to deliver a broad curriculum. Staff hold Thrive, ELSA and positive handling training, with additional CPD offered regularly. Leadership oversight is provided by an Assistant Headteacher, who collaborates closely with the Deputy Head, Headteacher, SENCO and safeguarding team. This triangulated leadership model ensures every student’s academic, pastoral and safeguarding needs are monitored holistically. Outreach partnerships - such as local youth clubs, Brighton & Hove Albion in the Community, and specialist community organisations - enhance the offer through personal development programmes and bespoke intervention spaces.

Inclusive and accessible physical environment: Located at the front of the school and attached to the main building, ELEVATE offers a separate entrance for calm, supported arrivals and departures. This reduces anxiety and creates a transitional bridge between home and school. The facility includes three classrooms - two for teaching and small-group interventions and one breakout room for regulation, 1:1 sessions or professional meetings. A dedicated outdoor area

enhances opportunities for movement breaks and therapeutic activity. The environment is intentionally structured to support readiness for learning, providing predictability, safety and routine while maintaining strong links to the mainstream site, ensuring students do not feel removed or segregated.

Impact

ELEVATE demonstrates significant, quantifiable impact across behaviour, engagement, academic participation and post-16 outcomes. The structured six-week model provides a clear change in trajectory for students at risk of disengagement, improving outcomes both academically and socially.

Engagement: Students' attendance, behaviour points, achievement points and lesson engagement are tracked from entry to exit. Data shows a rise in successful lessons from 72.4% (Term 6 2024/25) to 97.75% (Term 2 2025/26).

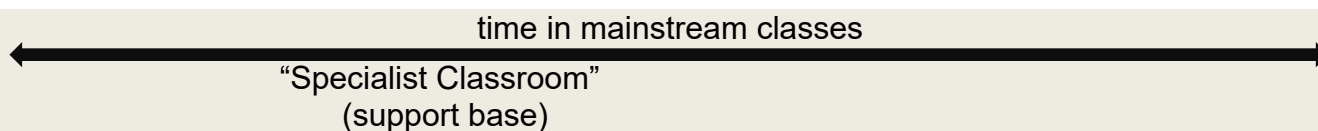
Behaviour: Behaviour points have decreased, and achievement points have increased, evidencing improvements in conduct, motivation and classroom engagement. The provision has been instrumental in reducing suspensions across the school, and only one permanent exclusion has occurred since 2018, reflecting its preventative and relational effectiveness.

Progression: All students leaving ELEVATE have transitioned successfully to post-16 destinations, including colleges and apprenticeships.

Families: Parent, pupil and staff voice is routinely gathered to adjust reintegration plans and provision design, ensuring responsiveness and sustained progress.

Next steps

The school are looking at providing further development and training for staff to support delivery of bespoke literacy interventions. This is to address identified gaps and the needs of students within the base.



Context and origin

Stepney Park School is a three-form local authority primary school in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It has two bases commissioned and supported through the Phoenix School Specialist Classrooms project, where a local special school works with the local authority to deliver bases for autistic pupils in a number of its primary and secondary schools. Places in the base are allocated by the school, largely from its existing population, and the school uses high needs top up funding to deliver the provision. The school has two inclusion bases supporting 16 children. While some children spend time in mainstream classes, most spend most of their time in the specialist base.

Origins: The school had an existing small, mixed-age class for autistic pupils prior to the Specialist Classrooms project. This class was organised internally, supported by regular visits from an outreach teacher from the special school, and was led by the Assistant SENCO.

Principles in practice

High quality curriculum design: Base class teachers have access to the local special school curriculum, and outreach teachers work with them to help plan their curriculum and adapt it, for example to cover mainstream class topics. All whole school processes that support a high-quality curriculum, including lesson observations and book monitoring, include the bases. The special school's assessment tool is shared and used to identify the next steps for pupils and plan learning.

Effective workforce and leadership: Both the specialist classrooms are led by a qualified teacher. The training and support offer provided by the special school includes a training programme and resource evening; buddy weeks for any member of staff at Stepney Park to visit the special school (including senior leaders) and buddy teachers who meet regularly. There is also a programme of peer reviews involving the special school and other schools with specialist classrooms.

Effective partnership working: Staff in the base work closely with their outreach teacher from the special school who visits 3-5 times per half term. Specialist speech and language therapists are part of the offer for all schools with a specialist classroom in the project, offering two visits per half term to focus on environmental support and whole class strategies. Stepney Park also buys in extra specialist support through a service level agreement, and this work includes assessments, setting up strategies and modelling for support staff.

Impact

The specialist bases at Stepney Park School have led to clear, measurable improvements in communication, engagement and family experience.

Speech and language support: Specific therapies have increased progress with early stages communication for children attending the base e.g. in using communication boards or the Picture Exchange system (PECs).

Specialist-advised assessment framework: At review meetings with parents, having the steps to explain and celebrate progress is identified as very supportive by teachers and parents.

Included in the mainstream school: Siblings can attend the same local school, travelling there together and using the same entrance and exit, with informal communication happening at the beginning and end of the day for all families. Specialists supporting families are under the same roof, and parents and carers report that attending meetings and other events is more straightforward.

Part of a network: Mainstream teachers working in the base report feeling supported by the wider network of schools that are part of the project across the local authority and appreciate the opportunities for sharing experiences and expertise.

Next steps

A need has been identified to do more work with parents around their understanding of the assessment framework used with children accessing the bases.

time in mainstream classes

“Cognition & Learning Needs Base
Visual & hearing impairment provisions”
(specialist bases)

Context and origin

The King's Academy (secondary school), part of the Emmanuel Schools Foundation trust, operates three integrated specialist bases for vision impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI) and Cognition and Learning Needs (CLN), embedded fully within a mainstream secondary school. The CLN base supports 60 pupils with significant learning delays (typically working at R/KS1/KS2 levels), while the VI and HI bases enable high levels of mainstream access (around 90%) with specialist adaptations, technology and targeted tutorials. The entire model avoids segregation: CLN classes move around the school like any other “set,” sharing the same curriculum structure, uniform and routines. Curriculum adaptations, specialist teaching and strong pastoral oversight ensure pupils can access mainstream experiences, qualifications and wider school life. The school is in Middlesbrough.

Origins: The school opened in 2003, incorporating a former school for the deaf and designing the new building around inclusive VI/HI provision. A small MLD base evolved into today's CLN provision as pupil needs increased. Over time, all three bases have gained a strong local reputation, supporting 92 pupils with EHC plans. A further 43 students with EHCPs access mainstream provision within the school.

Principles in practice

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Inclusion is embedded structurally and culturally - CLN classes have no separate base, using mainstream rooms and following a full timetable across the building. Pupils move freely between CLN and mainstream classes due to aligned timetabling, with early departure from lessons used to avoid crowded corridors. VI and HI pupils spend around 90% of their time in mainstream lessons, supported by mobility training, technology, tutorials, tactile/braille resources and adapted teaching strategies (e.g. subtitles, radio aids). All groups join tutor time, trips, house events, extracurricular activities and residential. Supervised social spaces ensure safety without segregation. Teachers' strong adaptive-teaching practice benefits SEND, EAL and wider cohorts alike.

Effective workforce and leadership: The school employs 37 LSAs across its provisions, with specialist roles including a primary-trained maths teacher for CLN, English staff trained in phonics, and mainstream subject teachers who volunteer to deliver CLN classes. The VI provision is staffed by a Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI) and trained LSAs, while the HI provision includes a Qualified Teacher of the Deaf, with LSAs supported to undertake BSL training up to Level 6. ELSAs, psychotherapists, the educational psychology service and Early Help partners provide targeted input. Leadership ensures whole-school induction covers VI/HI/CLN needs, and adaptive teaching is a core quality assurance strand.

High quality curriculum design: CLN pupils access a modified curriculum based on the national curriculum but adjusted at developmental level, reducing humanities content while increasing life-skills, food tech, ASDAN, Duke of Edinburgh and bespoke options. Students are dual-entered for GCSE and Entry Level to maximise opportunity. Small, single-year-group classes allow precise sequencing and specialist input from mainstream subject teachers. VI pupils drop one option subject to accommodate interventions such as braille, touch typing and QTVI tutorials, supported by adapted equipment (e.g., talking scales). HI pupils similarly adjust one option to

allow tutorials advised by QTOD/SALT and delivered by specialist LSAs. All adaptations focus on maintaining mainstream access while meeting specialist needs.

Impact

Impact is demonstrated through consistent progress across varied cohorts with significant and complex needs. Leaders contextualise outcomes transparently, evidencing strong individual progress within a fully inclusive model. Parents regularly praise the development of independence skills for students accessing provisions.

Attainment and progress: HLN pupils all leave with Entry Level qualifications in core subjects, humanities, Duke of Edinburgh, Arts Award and bespoke options, with some achieving GCSEs where appropriate - for example, a 2025 leaver who gained GCSE Art grade 6 alongside Entry Level in other subjects. Destinations span specialist sixth forms, vocational colleges and sector-specific routes such as animal care, horticulture and hospitality. VI and HI pupils achieve strong outcomes through high mainstream access, specialist technology and targeted tutorials, enabling participation in full range of qualifications. Mobility training and adaptive teaching support independence and reduce barriers. Pupil progress is monitored through mainstream-style termly reports, ELQ trajectories and EHC plan outcomes.

Social integration: Students accessing the bases participate fully in all aspects of school life; including the school production, house competitions and extra-curricular clubs.

Next steps

Providing additional opportunities for work experience and community links (beyond the 1 week in Year 10).

Further development of the enrichment programme for students attending the bases.

time in mainstream classes

“Big Base and Little Base”
(specialist base)

Context and origin

Waterville’s Communication Base provides specialist provision embedded within a mainstream school, supporting 12 pupils with EHC plans whose primary need is speech, language and communication (SLC) but who can also experience autism or SEMH. The base is structured into “Little Base” and “Big Base,” offering a highly flexible approach for younger children and an age-appropriate, broad curriculum for older pupils. Staff work continuously with mainstream teachers to determine the right balance of support and integration, with many pupils accessing the majority of mainstream classes. Reintegration is central, with the base viewed as an intervention rather than a destination. The school is in North Tyneside.

Origins: The base was established over 20 years ago as one of North Tyneside’s two specialist speech, language and communication provisions. Its purpose was to offer targeted SLC support within a mainstream environment for pupils requiring specialist input while still being able to access elements of the mainstream curriculum.

Principles in practice

Supporting inclusion in the school and local area: Inclusion is the base’s defining principle: it is explicitly “an intervention, not a destination.” Pupils walk independently to mainstream classes, supported by the school’s single-corridor layout, and there are high levels of integration across lessons. Base pupils regularly attend mainstream English, phonics and wider curriculum sessions. Pupils participate fully in trips, performances and whole-school events. Many do not realise they are part of a base, reflecting the seamlessness of integration. Class teachers and base staff collaborate closely to tailor participation, and transitions, whether between year groups or into secondary school, are supported through visits, reviews and ongoing communication.

Effective workforce and leadership: The base is funded for one teacher and three TAs, recruited primarily for their character, resilience, humour, emotional intelligence and reflective practice. Mainstream TAs also support the base, ensuring consistency across the whole school. Training is largely in-house, with external CPD adopted and shared when impactful. Leadership involvement is strong, with the headteacher and SENCO visiting potential pupils in their host schools to support the right placements. Specialist input is embedded: a speech and language therapist works in the base two days per week, and educational psychology support is used specifically for transitions to secondary placements. The result is an integrated, well-supported multidisciplinary model.

High quality curriculum design: Curriculum design is tailored across two settings: the “Little Base,” which delivers a pre EY, play led, flexible curriculum that adapts to each child’s communication level, and the “Big Base,” which offers a year appropriate, broad curriculum aligned with mainstream expectations. Decisions about curriculum placement are collaborative, some pupils attend higher year phonics or specific subjects where appropriate. Adaptations are made based on conversations between base staff and mainstream teachers to ensure relevance, access and challenge. Mainstream integration is maximised where possible, and curriculum pathways are fluid, prioritising what enables each child to thrive academically, socially and communicatively across both settings.

Impact

Waterville's model demonstrates impact through sustained reintegration, breadth of destinations and strong inclusion outcomes.

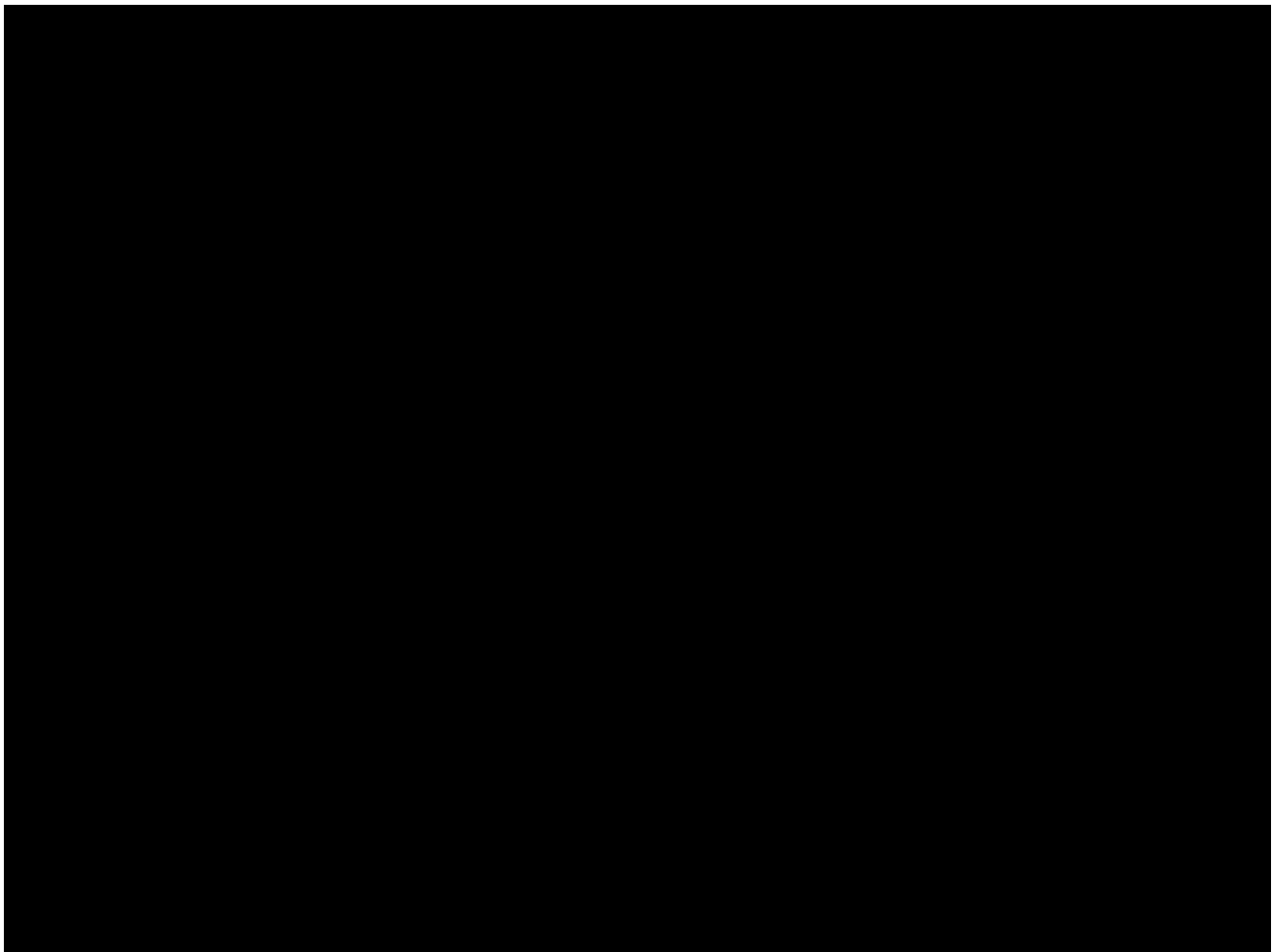
Progression: Pupils typically remain in the base until the end of Year 6, after which they transition into a range of settings - mainstream schools, specialist bases and special.

Integration: Evidence is strong - pupils confidently access mainstream classes across subjects, with many unaware they are part of a base, demonstrating successful inclusion.

Local community: The base's longstanding reputation and ongoing local authority investment in expanding provision illustrate recognised, system-level impact.

Next steps

The school have recently opened a new specialist base also with a speech and language specialism. They are working to align both bases, with a focus on curriculum development, enabling smooth transition between the two bases, and developing a complementary professional development offer.



Annex A

We are very grateful to the following organisation for their support in the development of this guidance:

Council for Disabled Children

National Association for Special Educational Needs

Association of Educational Psychologists

Association of School and College Leaders

Essex County Council

Frances Akinde (InclusionHT)

Local Government Association

London Borough of Barking & Dagenham Council

Manchester City Council

National Association of Head Teachers

National Deaf Children's Society

National Development Team for Inclusion

National Network of Parent Carer Forums

National Sensory Impairment Partnership

NHS England

Olive Academies

pdnet

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

SEND consultants André Imich and Natalie Packer

Sensory Integration Education

Speech & Language UK

Square Peg

TCES Great Minds Therapy & Training

The Difference

Unity Schools Partnership

University of Derby

University of Southampton

The Department for Education's SEND inclusion in education expert group

Barnet Education and Learning Service

Whole School SEND Regional Leads Matt McArthur, Amelie Thompson and Sarah Watson

And the following schools:

Allen Edwards Primary School
Aylsham High School
Carlton Le Willows Academy
Chalgrove Primary School
King Egbert School
Kingston Park Primary School
Miles Coverdale Primary School
New Marston Primary School
Peacehaven Community School
Stepney Park Primary School
The King's Academy
Waterville Primary School

Annex B

Inclusion base

Inclusion bases are provisions within mainstream settings for children and young people with additional needs. Typically, they support children and young people with SEND, either on SEN support or who have an EHC plan, or children and young people requiring support for behavioural or pastoral reasons, including those at risk of exclusion or low attendance.

An inclusion base is part of a larger mainstream setting, not an institution in its own right. Inclusion bases typically require a dedicated space in the setting. This might be separate classes, a base, or specialist facilities. They deliver specific interventions, support, or teaching, often in place of or in addition to mainstream classes. Children and young people might access the base for a specific period of time, or access might be ongoing. An inclusion base will normally be designed with a specific cohort or provision offer in mind. They typically support children and young people who are already pupils at the mainstream setting, but sometimes children and young people who normally attend other settings are also admitted to the school so that they can access the base on a part-time dual-registration basis.

Specialist bases are formally recognised by the local authority and typically receive high needs funding.

Support bases are commissioned by individual settings or academy trusts. They are not formally recognised by the local authority, and they do not typically receive dedicated high needs funding (although funding used to secure provision in a child or young person's EHC plan may sometimes be used).

The terms inclusion base, specialist base, and support base replace the terms below:

SEN unit

SEN units are special provisions within a mainstream school where the pupils with SEN are taught within separate classes for at least half of their time. SEN units:

- are designated by the local authority specifically for making SEN provision, and sometimes accommodate pupils registered at other schools on a part-time basis
- receive funding of £6,000 or £10,000 per place, and usually top-up funding for any additional costs of support required by individual pupils
- cater for a specific type or types of SEN (for example autism)
- are usually for pupils with an EHC plan (but may also provide support for pupils with SEN support).

Schools should only use this indicator (in data collection) where the SEN unit has been formally recognised as such by the local authority where the school is located.

Resourced provision

Resourced provisions are places that are reserved at a mainstream school for pupils with a specific type of SEN, taught for at least half of their time within mainstream classes, but requiring a base and some specialist facilities around the school. Resourced provisions:

- are designated by the local authority specifically for making this kind of SEN provision
- receive funding of £6,000 or £10,000 per place, and usually top-up funding for any additional costs of support required by individual pupils
- cater for a specific area or areas of SEN (for example specific learning difficulties)
- are usually for pupils with an EHC plan, but could include pupils with SEN support.

Schools should only use this indicator (in data collection) where the resourced provision has been formally recognised as such by the local authority where the school is located.

Pupil support unit

A pupil support unit is a planned intervention occurring in small groups and in place of mainstream lessons. The purpose of this unit can be two-fold:

- as a planned intervention for behavioural or pastoral reasons
- as a final preventative measure to support pupils at risk of exclusion.

In both circumstances, the underlying ambition should be to improve behaviour and maintain learning with the goal to successfully reintegrate children into mainstream lessons.

Most in-school units provide support and interventions for children who were already on their own admission register before being referred to the unit, but some units are also set up to take children from other local schools.

In-school units, even those that take children from other schools, do not receive specific high needs funding in the same way as SEN units or resourced provision (see above). All places are therefore funded from the funding that the school receives for its pupils through the national or relevant local funding formula. However, if the local authority or a school other than the 'host' school is commissioning a place at the unit, they may pay an amount for each placement.

Schools' own SEND unit

Many schools include their own provisions for children and young people with SEN or disabilities. Many names are used, for example 'enhanced provision'. These often provide a targeted, enhanced offer for children and young people with SEN or disabilities, usually in a separate, dedicated space.



Department
for Education

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