Together Notts

For children, young people and families

November 2026

Developing your school Inclusion Strategy

A practical guide for school leaders

SEND Partnership

Nottinghamshire County Council

Nottinghamshire Parent Carer Forum – Championing the voice

NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire

Introduction

As a condition of receiving the Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF), all schools must publish an Inclusion Strategy on their website by 31 December 2026.

Your strategy should:

- Follow the Department of Education's five-step process.
- Demonstrate how funded activities support one or more of the seven principles of inclusion.
- Be based on a clear understanding of your school's strengths, challenges and priorities.
- Show how funding will improve inclusion and how impact will be measured over time.

The strategy should be grounded in a robust analysis of your school's inclusion needs, identifying barriers to learning and participation, strengths within current universal and targeted provision, and areas for development.

Your published strategy should clearly set out:

- priorities for improvement
- planned activities
- intended outcomes
- budgeted costs
- success measures
- review arrangements

Use measurable evidence and data to show how funding is expected to improve inclusion and how it has improved outcomes over time.

Useful resources

- DfE Guidance: Download Developing an inclusion strategy using the IMF for school leaders
- DfE template: Download the Inclusion Strategy Template
- MAPS Strategy Builder: Open the MAPS Strategy Builder which follows the DfE template, helps connect barriers, activities, outcomes and spending, and can be exported as an editable strategy.

The seven principles of inclusion

All activities included within your strategy should support one or more of the following principles:

1. **Ambitious leadership and governance** that embeds inclusion.
2. **Evidence-based support** that prioritises early intervention.
3. **High-quality adaptive teaching** with a curriculum designed for all learners.
4. **Enriching provision beyond the classroom** that all children can access.
5. **A safe and respectful culture** that fosters belonging, attendance and participation in learning.
6. **Strong partnerships** with families and wider services.
7. **Inclusive environments** with continuous improvements to accessibility.

Before you start: build your evidence base

Before identifying priorities, you should gather evidence to understand:

- what is working well
- what barriers exist
- where gaps in provision remain
- how available funding can be used to improve inclusion and address priorities.

Evidence to gather

- **Funding available**: IMF allocation for ages 5–16 and, where applicable, 16–19; the notional SEN budget; Pupil Premium; and any other relevant funding streams.
- **Pupil profile**: numbers of pupils receiving SEN Support or with an EHCP, including information about primary needs.
- **Attendance and inclusion data**: attendance, persistent absence, suspensions, behaviour incidents, part-time timetables and time spent out of class, including patterns for pupils with SEND.
- **Attainment and progress**: attainment data, progress measures, reading ages, phonics screening outcomes, and other baseline assessments.
- **Participation and experience**: participation in lessons, transitions, enrichment and access to wider school life.
- **Pupil and family voice**: evidence from surveys, forums, panels and other feedback.
- **Staff evidence**: staff feedback, observations, work scrutiny and local intelligence.
- **Current provision**: the provision map and evidence of what is working well across universal, ordinarily available and targeted support.
- **Gaps and barriers**: areas where current provision is not yet consistently meeting needs or removing barriers to learning and participation.

- **Plans and policies**: school improvement plan; SEND information report; and accessibility, inclusion, behaviour and attendance policies.
- **Previous activity**: earlier inclusion work, spending and any previous inclusion strategies.
- **Practical arrangements**: the available budget, staffing, named leads, timescales, baseline measures and review dates.
- **Proposed use of funding**: how funding will address the identified barriers and gaps, including the intended outcomes, planned costs and measurable evidence that will be used to review impact.

The DfE five-step process

Step 1: Identify barriers to learning and participation

Build a clear picture of your pupils before deciding what to do.

- Collect and analyse data on attainment, progress, attendance, suspensions, behaviour, SEND, participation, transitions, wellbeing, and access to wider school life.
- Gather wider evidence through pupil and family voice, staff knowledge, classroom observations, work scrutiny.
- Look for patterns across year groups, subjects, lessons, different groups of pupils and time periods.
- Explore the cause behind the identified patterns, do not assume that pupils with the same label have the same needs.
- Identify areas to focus on and describe each priority as a clear barrier to learning or participation.
- Establish baseline measures before beginning any activity to help measure impact.

Broad examples: pattern of lower attendance linked to particular times or transitions; pupils reporting that instructions are difficult to follow; uneven participation in lessons, clubs or trips; staff identifying inconsistent use of agreed inclusive practice.

Step 2: Use evidence

- Use research, DfE and EEF guidance and evidence from your own school to select inclusive approaches. Start with the universal offer, then consider adaptations and additional support where needed.
- Record why the approach was selected, which barrier it addresses and which of the seven principles it supports.

Step 3: Develop the strategy

Turn evidence into a small number of clear, manageable priorities

- State the barrier and evidence why it matters.
- Describe the intended change for pupils you want to see in clear, measurable terms.
- Set out the activity, named lead, timescale and budgeted cost.
- Identify whether the activity strengthens universal provision or provides additional targeted support.
- Name the evidence source and the principle or principles of inclusion addressed.
- Agree the baseline, success measures and review date before delivery begins.

Broad example: avoid vague statements such as "improve inclusion" instead state the identified barrier, the planned activity, the change pupils should experience and how success will be measured and when it will be reviewed.

Step 4: Deliver and monitor

Check that the plan is being put into practice before judging whether it works

- Make expectations clear: who will do what, how often and for how long.
- Prepare staff through briefing, modelling, resources, coaching or training where needed.
- Use short implementation checks to see whether agreed practice is happening consistently.
- Gather early feedback from pupils, families and staff and address practical barriers quickly.
- Monitor a small number of pupil measures alongside delivery measures.
- Set a baseline before activity begins and check both delivery and pupil impact.
    - Delivery measures might include staff training completed, agreed classroom practice being used consistently or pupils accessing provision.
    - Impact measures might include changes in attendance, progress, participation, incidents, belonging, pupil or family feedback, classroom evidence or independence.
- Monitor progress throughout the year rather than waiting until the final review.

Broad example: delivery evidence might include whether agreed routines are visible across classrooms or whether staff are using an approach consistently. Pupil evidence might include changes in attendance, participation, independence, progress, incidents or sense of belonging.

Step 5: Evaluate and sustain

Compare what happened with what you expected, then decide the next step.

- Compare current evidence against baseline data.
- Review intended outcomes and actual outcomes, consider what changed, for whom, in which context and how do we know.
- Confirm activities were delivered as intended before concluding they were ineffective.
- Include pupil and family voice, staff feedback, observations alongside quantitative data.
- Decide what to continue, strengthen, adapt or stop, and record the rationale, responsible lead and next review date.
- Embed effective practice into everyday provision.
- Refresh and republish the strategy annually.

Broad example: overall positive outcomes can sometimes mask variations in impact for different pupils. Analyse data at group and individual level alongside pupil experiences to understand who has benefited and where further support may be needed.

Worked example

This worked example is designed to support reflection and discussion, and it follows the DfE template. Please remember that effective practice will look different in different contexts, and you should avoid using them as a template for your schools' strategy.

Statement of intent

Use this section to summarise:

- **Current strengths:** what is already working well?
- **Identified priorities:** what are the key areas to improve?
- **Intended difference:** what impact do you expect the strategy to have?

Clearly show the links between:

- Insight and feedback from school community informed priorities.
- The barriers you identified using data.
- The priorities you have chosen.
- How success will be measured.

Step 1: Barriers to learning and participation

Example barriers

	Barrier	Evidence
1	Some pupils cannot consistently access teacher explanations and independent tasks because agreed inclusive classroom approaches vary between lessons.	• Inclusive practice observed in 9 of 18 classrooms during learning walks. • Only 58% of pupils receiving SEN Support reported that instructions were usually easy to follow.
2	A small group of pupils with SEND experience anxiety around arrival, transitions and changes to routine, contributing to reduced attendance.	• Persistent absence rate of 40% for pupils receiving SEN Support compared with 14% across the school.
3	Some pupils with SEND face practical and confidence-related barriers to accessing clubs and wider school activities.	• 31% of pupils with SEND attended a club in the previous two terms, compared with 70% of all pupils.

Step 2: Use evidence to decide on the activity in this academic year

Step 3: Develop the strategy

Use research, DfE and EEF guidance and evidence from your own school to select inclusive approaches.

Start with the universal offer, then consider adaptations and additional support where needed. Record why the approach fits the identified barrier and which of the seven principles it supports.

Example activities

Description of activity (noting evidence and barrier numbers addressed)	Activity type (whether it is universal or targeted)	Total budgeted cost (this should account for spend from IMF and core budget allocations)
Strengthen inclusive classroom practice What will happen? • Agree a small set of inclusive classroom approaches. • Deliver staff training. • Provide modelling and coaching. • Complete half-termly learning walks. • Gather pupil feedback. Links to: Barrier 1 Linked principles: • High-quality adaptive teaching • Evidence-based support Lead: Deputy Headteacher and SENCO Timescale**:** January-July 2027	*Identify appropriate support level.*	*Indicate levels of spend to address the barrier identified in the left-hand column.*
Improve attendance through relational support What will happen? • Explore attendance barriers with pupils and families. • Introduce named-adult check-ins. • Establish supported arrival plans. • Use predictable transition resources. • Hold fortnightly family reviews. Links to: Barrier 2 Linked principles: • Safe and respectful culture • Strong partnerships with families and wider services Lead: Attendance Lead and Family Support Worker Timescale: January-July 2027	*Identify appropriate support level.*	*Indicate levels of spend to address the barrier identified in the left-hand column.*

Increase access to clubs and enrichment What will happen? • Offer supported introductions. • Provide visual information. • Develop staff mentoring. • Adapt activities where required. • Use a participation fund to remove practical barriers. Links to: Barrier 3 Linked principles: • Enriching provision beyond the classroom • Inclusive environments • Strong partnerships Lead: Inclusion Lead Timescale: February-July 2027	*Identify appropriate support level.*	*Indicate levels of spend to address the barrier identified in the left-hand column.*

Priority	Intended outcome	Success criteria
Inclusive classroom practice	Pupils can access teaching and independent learning more consistently.	• Agreed routines evident in at least 16 of 18 classrooms. • At least 80% of pupils receiving SEN Support report instructions are easy to follow.
Attendance	Pupils feel less anxious about arrivals, transitions and routine changes.	• Improved pupil confidence reported through feedback. • Persistent absence for pupils receiving SEN Support reduces in line with national SEND figures.
Participation	More pupils with SEND participate in clubs and wider school activities.	• Participation increases from 31% to at least 48%. • At least 75% of participating pupils report feeling welcomed and able to take part.

Step 4: Deliver and monitor

Implement the planned activities and monitor regularly.

Check that activities are being delivered as intended, staff have the support they need, and pupils are experiencing the planned changes. Review implementation and impact throughout the year using data and feedback from pupils, families and staff.

Step 5: Evaluate and sustain

Review impact and use the findings to inform next steps.

Compare outcomes against your baseline and intended outcomes. Use the evidence to decide what to continue, strengthen, adapt or stop, and update your Inclusion Strategy and template for publication.

Review the previous academic year

Your review should focus on impact, rather than a list of activities completed. Think about:

- which outcomes improved and which did not
- what evidence demonstrates this
- which activities delivered the greatest impact
- which need adapting or stopping
- what are the priorities moving forward

You can use guidance from Schools Guide to Implementation, see page 45, for useful questions and further prompts about how to review and act on the first year of your plan.

Use findings from the review to update your Inclusion Strategy and identify next steps and future priorities.

Final checklist before publishing

Do	Don't
✅ Follow all five steps ✅ Link every activity to identified barriers ✅ Map activities to one or more of the Seven Principles of Inclusion ✅ Include intended outcomes, evidence and budgeted costs ✅ Measure delivery and impact ✅ Review and publish annually	❌ Start with spending or a preferred intervention ❌ Rely on a single source of evidence ❌ Assume all pupils within a group have the same needs ❌ List activities without explaining why they were chosen ❌ Use vague or unmeasurable outcomes ❌ Wait until the end of the year to review progress ❌ Continue activities without evidence that they are benefiting pupils

Remember

A strong Inclusion Strategy clearly presents an evidence informed plan that identifies barriers, explains why chosen activities are likely to help, and demonstrates how improved inclusion will be measured and sustained over time.