

Writing Your Inclusion Strategy

Practical advice for senior leaders
Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) 2026 to 2027

Every mainstream school in England must publish an inclusion strategy statement for 2026 to 2027 by 31 December 2026. It is easy to treat this as a compliance return. The schools that get the most out of it treat it as something else: a genuine statement of intent about the school they are building, backed by evidence and honest reflection. This advice is built around the Department for Education's inclusion strategy template and the IMF conditions of the grant and includes worked examples throughout to show what strong sections actually look like in practice, not just what to avoid.

Before you start writing

The strategy will only be as good as the thinking that precedes it. Do this groundwork first.

- **Review first.** Look back before you look forward. If this is year two or later, review last year's work honestly against what actually happened before drafting anything new.
- **Widen the room.** Bring in your SENCO, pastoral leads, class and subject teachers, governors or trustees and - as far as possible - students and families. A strategy written solely by SLT in isolation tends to read that way.
- **Ground it in evidence.** Pull together attendance, attainment, exclusion and engagement data, alongside student and parent voice and staff observations. You need more than one source before you can credibly name a barrier.
- **Know your funding envelope.** Understand the full picture of what you can spend - IMF, notional SEND budget, core budget and how it might complement pupil premium before you commit to activity.

Working through the template, section by section



Statement of intent (aim for 500 words or fewer)

This is the section children, young people and parents are most likely to actually read, so accessible language matters more than fancy terms. Anchor your ambitions to the seven principles of inclusion rather than generic aspiration - a statement that could belong to any school probably needs sharpening. Show, don't just claim, how families and the wider school community shaped it; naming how you consulted people is more convincing than asserting a commitment to co-production.

Example: Weak: *"We are committed to inclusion for all"* could open any school's statement and tells a parent nothing.

A sharper version names what you are actually doing:

"This year we are prioritising reading support in Year 7 and a named attendance mentor, because students and parents told us these mattered most when we consulted them in the spring." The second version is more specific and shows real listening.

Barriers to learning and participation

This is where strategies most often go generic. "Some students have SEND" is not a barrier - it is a description of a cohort. A useful barrier statement is specific, evidenced and points somewhere: it should be obvious from reading it why particular activity follows.

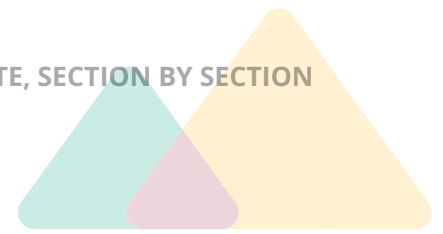
- Triangulate at least two or three data sources per barrier - attendance patterns, attainment gaps, exclusion data and student or family voice.
- Resist listing every possible barrier. A long list signals a lack of prioritisation and will be hard to resource meaningfully.

Example:

Weak: *"Some students struggle with reading."*

Strong: *"23% of our Year 7 cohort entered in September reading below their chronological reading age, which is restricting access to humanities and science texts and has been raised repeatedly in student voice surveys as a source of frustration in lessons."*

The strong version is specific, evidenced from two sources and makes the case for the reading intervention that follows in the activity section.



Activity for this academic year

You do not have to spend against all seven principles you should not try to. The strongest strategies concentrate IMF and core funding on a small number of high-impact, evidence-based activities clearly tied to the barriers you have identified, rather than spreading thinly across everything at once.

- Draw an explicit line from each activity to the barrier(s) and principle(s) it addresses. If you cannot draw that line, question whether the activity belongs in the strategy.
- Check every item of spend against the permitted use rules: IMF cannot fund general running costs, capital works, backfilling pre-existing activity or staff time unrelated to inclusion.
- If you are part of a multi-academy trust or federation pooling funding, remember each academy must still publish its own separate strategy.

Example: what a completed row in your activity table might look like.

Description of activity	Activity type	Total budgeted cost
Small-group reading intervention for Year 7 pupils reading below their chronological reading age (Barrier 2), delivered by trained teaching assistants, with reading age assessed before and after the intervention.	Targeted	£18,000 (IMF £14,000 / core budget £4,000)

- Notice what this does in a small space: it names the barrier it answers, says who delivers it and how and states how you'll know it worked. A reader - governor, parent, or DfE reviewer - does not have to guess why this activity is in the strategy.

Intended outcomes

Vague outcomes undermine an otherwise strong strategy. "Improved outcomes for SEND students" cannot be checked against anything. State what you expect to change, by when and crucially, how you will know, including the specific data or evidence you will use to judge it. Keep ambitions realistic for what one year of funding can plausibly achieve; overclaiming now makes next year's honest review harder to write.

Example:

Weak: *"Improved outcomes for students with SEND."*

Strong: *"Reduce the persistent absence gap between students with SEND and their peers from 9.2 to below 6 percentage points, measured termly through attendance data."*

The strong version names a baseline, a target, a timeframe and the evidence you'll use to check it.

Review of the previous academic year (from year two onwards)

This section builds or erodes trust with governors, trustees and Ofsted faster than any other. A credible review says plainly what worked, what did not and how that has changed this year's choices - not just what was delivered.

- Use multiple sources: national assessment and qualification data where published, in-school formative and summative assessment and wider indicators such as attendance, engagement, participation and students' sense of belonging.
- Where results are inconclusive or disappointing, say so and explain the adjustment you have made - that is a sign of a strategy that is actually being managed, not just produced annually.

Example: "Our reading intervention lifted average reading age by 8 months against a 9-month pilot, so we are expanding it to Year 8 this year.

Our attendance work made little difference — persistent absence for SEND students actually rose slightly, because support was only offered once absence had already become entrenched. We have used that finding to fund a dedicated attendance mentor this year, focused on earlier identification, rather than repeating what didn't work."

This kind of honesty, including naming what failed, is far more convincing to governors and inspectors than a strategy that only reports successes.

Further information (optional)

Use this space sparingly, for context that genuinely helps a reader understand your strategy. It is not a place to pad out the document or restate earlier sections.



Pitfalls worth avoiding

- Writing it as a compliance exercise or lightly editing last year's version rather than a genuine annual reflection.
- Generic, unevidenced barrier statements that could apply to any school.
- Spreading activity across all seven principles instead of prioritising where it will make the most difference.
- Outcomes with no stated way of measuring them.
- No visible student or family voice in how the strategy was developed.
- Spend that strays into ineligible territory — running costs, capital works or funding that simply backfills existing provision.

A few leadership reminders

- Start early enough that governors or trustees can properly scrutinise the strategy before publication — this is a named condition of the grant, not a courtesy.
- Keep a running record of spend and evidence through the year. DfE samples published strategies and Ofsted inspectors can view them when evaluating inclusion.
- Read this alongside your SEND information report and pupil premium strategy so the three tell a consistent story about the same students.
- Funding can be carried forward if unspent, but it must be used by 31 March 2028 and accounted for in the strategy for the year it is actually spent.

The strongest inclusion strategies read like an honest account of the school you are trying to build for every student — not a funding return with a compliance box ticked. Belonging, culture and environment carry equal weight to teaching and intervention in the seven principles; it is worth making sure your strategy reflects that balance, not just the parts that are easiest to cost and measure.



Discover how Satchel Pulse could support your school's Inclusion Strategy.

