

# Inclusive Mainstream Fund: Best Practice

From DfE, "Inclusive mainstream fund: best practice for schools" (25 June 2026)

**Introduction:** The inclusive mainstream fund supports mainstream schools to move towards an education system that is inclusive by design. Schools should use the funding to understand the needs of their cohort and plan whole-school approaches that remove commonly occurring, predictable barriers to learning for all pupils — as well as funding targeted, evidence-based support for pupils whose needs go beyond the universal offer.

**The universal offer:** The universal offer is the whole-school foundation of high-quality teaching and inclusive policies that every pupil benefits from — not just those with SEND — built around the 7 principles of inclusion below. Evidence shows this raises engagement, belonging and participation for the whole cohort. From December 2026, schools must publish an inclusion strategy reporting on how they use their IMF funding to strengthen this universal offer and remove barriers to learning.

## 1. Ambitious leadership & governance

*Leaders and governors put inclusion at the heart of planning and policy, with high expectations for every child — especially those with SEND.*

### Could be spent on:

- Strengthening systems for collecting and analysing pupil data, to better understand the needs across the school's cohort
- Securing specialist advice to improve school policies and planning around pupils' needs
- Joining or forming local professional networks with other schools to share resources, address CPD needs and access specialist expertise
- Benchmarking against similar schools to identify where inclusive practice could be strengthened
- Reviewing and refreshing planning and policies to embed high expectations for all children, particularly those with SEND

## 2. Early, evidence-based support

*Early, evidence-based, effective support can help children with SEND achieve better outcomes and reduce the gap in attainment with their peers.*

### Could be spent on:

- Small-group and 1:1 interventions to remove ongoing barriers to learning, delivered with fidelity and evaluated carefully for impact
- Flexible grouping of pupils to scaffold learning, deepen understanding, pre-teach vocabulary, or provide extra practice
- Teaching assistants deployed in line with best practice, to help pupils build independent learning skills rather than reliance on adult support

## 3. High-quality teaching

*Schools should continue to strengthen the quality of teaching in their schools, utilising evidence-based strategies which can be adapted to meet a range of needs and increase participation.*

### Could be spent on:

- Training and cover costs to strengthen adaptive teaching — for example flexible grouping, scaffolding, and use of technology
- Training so staff can be trained to, and then deliver, evidence-based interventions themselves
- Evidence-based professional development explicitly focused on improving classroom teaching
- Adapting the curriculum for different levels of prior knowledge and potential barriers to learning
- Drawing on the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit to guide which adaptations to prioritise

## 4. Enrichment beyond the classroom

*Every pupil should be able to participate fully in school life — trips, clubs and enrichment — not just those without barriers to access.*

### Could be spent on:

- Activities that build life skills and independence, including creative arts and sport
- Extra-curricular activities to engage pupils and increase participation in school life
- Staffing for subject teachers to develop the curriculum and extend the enrichment offer around it
- Staffing, equipment or accommodations for practical barriers to participation that go beyond standard reasonable adjustments

## 5. A safe, respectful, belonging culture

*Pupils who feel safe, respected and have a genuine sense of belonging show better behaviour, attendance and engagement.*

### Could be spent on:

- A coherent whole-school approach to managing behaviour, with staff trained to address challenging behaviour, disengagement, withdrawal and bullying
- Clearly explaining the rationale for behaviour expectations to staff, pupils and families, with authentic consultation at review points
- Quiet spaces for lunchtimes and breaktimes, plus a range of structured activities for pupils who need them
- A framework for understanding pupil, staff and family belonging — for example anonymous surveys, run regularly rather than once
- Attendance interventions that consider the specific needs of pupils with SEND

## 6. Strong family & wider partnerships

*Schools should seek to strengthen relationships with families and work in partnership to support children and young people, sharing information and plans for provision.*

### Could be spent on:

- A SEND parent-carer forum, or collaborating with other local schools to gather family perspectives on inclusive practice
- Information evenings or informal sessions for parents of children with additional needs, particularly around key transition points
- Workshops led by carefully selected external agencies and specialists, underpinned by evidence and best practice
- Written guidance for parents and carers, including signposting to wider services and support for learning at home

## 7. Inclusive environments

*All spaces in school should be designed to be accessible to aid learning, development and regulation, in a way that supports a range of common and predictable needs.*

### Could be spent on:

- Visual supports such as timetables and communication aids
- Improvements to classrooms, corridors and high-traffic spaces for sensory needs — acoustics, lighting, temperature, and removing visual clutter
- Enhanced, phased onboarding for new pupils and transitions into year groups
- Carefully selected and adapted technology to support a range of needs

## Targeted provision (beyond the universal offer)

*Where needs go beyond the universal offer, targeted support helps pupils achieve and thrive without needing formal assessment or statutory process.*

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- Written guidance for parents and carers, including signposting to wider services and support for learning at home



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