

November 2025

FREE

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Preface

Colin Cattanach, Editor Inclusion Pop-Up Magazine
Powered by Attendance Magazine

Inclusion is one of those words that can appear comforting and complete at first glance; a word that sits neatly in strategy documents, mission statements and policy paragraphs. Yet true inclusion is never tidy. It is complex, emotional and profoundly human. It is the daily work of noticing, listening, adapting, and believing that every child matters, even and especially when the system makes that hard.

To be included is not the same as being present. Inclusion is the moment a young person realises that school is not just a place they are allowed to attend, but a community built with them in mind. It's when a child who once stood on the edges begins to feel seen, valued and understood. It's in the adjustments we make without fanfare, the relationships that weather challenge and the persistence to ensure that no one is left behind.

This Inclusion Pop-Up Edition is both a celebration and a call to action. It is for leaders who are restless for change; those who want to move beyond compliance culture and design education that genuinely works for all. It's for those who believe inclusion is not an initiative, but a mindset; not a separate strand of work, but the golden thread that weaves through everything a great school does.

We also recognise that this moment in education matters. The Ofsted 2025 framework brings a new lens to inclusion; one that looks beyond provision and policy and asks whether schools are truly designing for belonging. Inspectors will want to see how inclusion is evident in curriculum design, attendance strategy, behaviour culture, leadership accountability and the lived experiences of children themselves. They will ask not only what we do, but how consistently, deliberately and equitably we do it.

That is why this edition goes further than theory. It offers practical tools, frameworks and examples aligned to the new Ofsted inclusion criteria. You'll find guidance on evaluating practice against expected standards, building evidence portfolios and embedding inclusive leadership at every level. You'll also find real stories of teachers who never gave up, schools that redesigned systems around children and Trust leaders who made inclusion their moral compass. At its heart, this issue is a space for courageous reflection. It challenges us to ask:

Whose voices are missing? Who still feels unseen? And what can we redesign to make education a place of genuine welcome?

Inclusion is not soft. It is strong, strategic and unrelenting. It demands that we think systemically and act compassionately; that we hold data in one hand and dignity in the other. When we do, attendance improves, behaviour stabilises and achievement follows naturally. Because belonging is the soil from which all learning grows.

So, as you turn these pages, I hope you find both inspiration and challenge. Take what resonates, share it freely and keep the conversation alive.

No paywalls. No noise. Just purpose. Welcome to Inclusion. Designed for presence, powered by belonging.

Inclusion Matters

A Pop-Up Magazine powered by Attendance Magazine

Turning data into action to meet and exceed the Inclusion judgement in the Ofsted framework. This comprehensive pop-up magazine provides school leaders with the tools, strategies and evidence-based approaches essential for demonstrating strong inclusive practice during inspection and more importantly, for transforming outcomes for your most vulnerable learners.



Why this magazine matters so much now.....

Inclusion is not merely a compliance requirement; it is the cornerstone of educational excellence. As school leaders navigating the updated Ofsted inspection framework (September 2025), you face unprecedented scrutiny of how effectively you identify and support pupils facing barriers to learning.

This pop-up publication translates the State-funded School Inspection Toolkit into actionable strategies, data-driven approaches and leadership behaviours that will transform your provision from adequate to exceptional. It provides the evidence base, systematic processes and practical tools you need to demonstrate that inclusion isn't an add-on initiative but the lens through which all school improvement must be viewed.

"This evaluation area considers how leaders and staff identify and support: socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, pupils who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, and pupils who may face other barriers to their learning and well-being."

— Ofsted Inspection Toolkit, September 2025



Your journey towards strong inclusion begins with understanding that every policy, every lesson, every intervention must be designed with inclusion at its heart. This is not about creating parallel provision; it's about ensuring mainstream teaching removes barriers whilst maintaining the highest expectations for all.

The Inclusion Imperative



Legal Obligation

The Equality Act 2010 and SEND Code of Practice establish clear legal duties. Schools must make reasonable adjustments and ensure equal access to education for all pupils. Non-compliance carries significant legal and reputational risks.



Moral Imperative

Every child deserves to reach their full potential regardless of background, ability, or circumstance. Inclusion is about fundamental justice, dignity, and ensuring that no pupil's life chances are limited by barriers that schools can remove.



Inspection Reality

Failing to meet the expected standard for inclusion will result in your school being judged as Requires Improvement—regardless of other strengths. There is no compensation mechanism.

The inspection framework makes unequivocally clear that leaders must demonstrate high expectations for pupils facing barriers. This isn't about lowering standards or making excuses, it's about removing obstacles and providing targeted support that enables every pupil to achieve at the highest levels. Your commitment to inclusion will be measured not by your intentions or policies, but by the tangible **outcomes** you deliver for your most vulnerable learners.

Understanding the Ofsted Standards

From 'Expected' to 'Strong': The Critical Difference

Expected Standard

Leaders identify pupils' needs quickly and accurately. Support reduces barriers to learning and well-being.

- Basic identification systems in place
- Some evidence of targeted support
- Periodic review of provision
- Staff awareness of vulnerable groups
- Pupil Premium strategy exists
- SEND provision meets statutory requirements

At this level, schools demonstrate competence in recognising need and providing appropriate responses. However, the approach may be reactive rather than proactive and evidence of impact may be limited or anecdotal.

Strong Standard

Well-analysed, quantitative and qualitative data underpins leaders' decisions. Strategies are systematically and skilfully adjusted.

- Comprehensive data dashboards drive decisions
- Regular, systematic monitoring and refinement
- Evidence-based interventions with clear impact measures
- Deep integration with school improvement priorities
- Staff expertise and confidence in inclusive practice
- Demonstrable closing of gaps over time

Strong schools don't just respond to need, they anticipate it, monitor it rigorously and prove impact through systematic evaluation and continuous refinement.

The leap from expected to strong requires a fundamental shift in how you approach inclusion. It's the difference between knowing who your vulnerable pupils are and demonstrating precisely how your actions have improved their outcomes. Strong schools don't just collect data, they interrogate it, act on it and prove impact through rigorous evaluation. They create cultures where every adult takes responsibility for vulnerable pupils' success.

The Ofsted Inclusion Criteria Matrix

Understanding precisely how Ofsted will judge your inclusion provision is essential for targeted improvement. The matrix below shows the descriptors across 4 grades, enabling you to benchmark your current practice and identify specific areas for development. This is a best fit model as there are very few Inspections to benchmark against and we have not included 'Exceptional'.

Aspect	Strong	Expected	Needs Attention	Urgent Improvement
Identification	Proactive systems identify needs very early with highly effective assessment	Pupils' needs identified quickly and accurately	Some delays in identification; assessment gaps exist	Pupils' needs not identified; significant gaps in assessment
Support Quality	Highly effective, evidence-based support removes barriers and accelerates progress	Support reduces barriers; pupils make good progress	Support inconsistent; some pupils underachieve	Poor quality support; vulnerable pupils significantly underachieve
Data Analysis	Sophisticated analysis of quantitative and qualitative data drives all decisions	Well-analysed data underpins decisions; strategies adjusted	Data collected but analysis superficial; limited adjustment	Data not used effectively; no evidence-based decision making
Specialist Input	Expert advice secured, implemented with fidelity, and impact rigorously monitored	Specialist advice obtained and implemented appropriately	External input sometimes sought but implementation patchy	Specialist advice not sought or ignored; recommendations not implemented
Pupil Premium	Strategy fully integrated with improvement priorities; significant gap closure evidenced	Strategy aligns with school priorities; gaps narrowing	Strategy exists but limited integration; gaps persist	No coherent strategy; gaps widening
Expectations	Exceptionally high expectations for all; barriers never used as excuses	High expectations maintained; ambitious curriculum for all	Expectations inconsistent; some lowering of ambition	Low expectations; deficit thinking evident

Use this matrix as a diagnostic tool with your senior leadership team. For each aspect, honestly assess your current position and identify specific evidence that would demonstrate the next grade up. Outstanding schools don't just meet the descriptors—they exceed them consistently across all vulnerable groups and in all contexts.

The Six Core Inclusion Principles

01

Identify Pupils with Barriers

Systematically identify all pupils facing disadvantage, SEND, social care involvement or other barriers to learning and well-being. Use multiple data sources including assessment, observation, staff referrals and family insights. Update registers termly and ensure information is accessible to all staff.

03

Assess, Plan, Do, Review

Implement the graduated approach with early, accurate assessment followed by structured cycles of planning, implementation, and evaluation. This isn't reserved for SEND; apply it to all vulnerable groups. Reviews should lead to decisive action: continue, adapt or stop.

05

Evidence-Based Strategies

Align Pupil Premium strategy with whole-school improvement, using research-informed approaches with clear theories of change. Reference the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit and other robust evidence. Avoid expensive interventions with weak evidence bases.

These principles form the foundation of outstanding inclusive practice. They represent the minimum expectation, but achieving them consistently across all year groups, subjects, and contexts requires strategic leadership, robust systems and unwavering commitment from every member of your team. The best schools don't just understand these principles; they live them in every decision and action.

02

Maintain High Expectations

Ensure ambitious goals for all pupils, refusing to accept that barriers are excuses for lower achievement or limited aspirations. Challenge any deficit thinking about what vulnerable pupils can achieve. Set targets that are aspirational yet achievable with the right support.

04

Deploy Specialist Input

Engage external expertise when needed such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, social care, health professionals and ensure recommendations are implemented effectively and monitored rigorously. Track whether specialist advice translates into changed practice.

06

Monitor and Adapt

Continuously track impact, celebrate success, identify what's not working, and have the courage to stop ineffective interventions. Build termly review cycles into your operational rhythm. Use data dashboards to spot patterns early and respond swiftly.

Your Inclusion Health Check

Use this diagnostic tool to identify strengths and priority areas for development. Rate each element as green (strong evidence of impact), amber (developing with gaps) or red (requires immediate action). Complete this audit with your senior leadership team quarterly.

1

Accessibility and Planning

Clear, published accessibility plan reviewed annually with governing body. Evidence of implementation, resource allocation, and tangible impact on removing barriers for pupils with disabilities.

2

SENDCo Empowerment

SENCo is part of senior leadership team with protected non-contact time, appropriate resources, budget influence, and genuine power over whole-school decisions affecting SEND pupils.

3

Pupil Premium Knowledge

Comprehensive understanding of every disadvantaged pupil including their starting points, specific barriers, family contexts, aspirations, and previous interventions—not generic assumptions about poverty.

4

Staff Confidence

All teachers trained and confident in inclusive teaching strategies, making reasonable adjustments, using scaffolding approaches, and deploying support staff effectively. Regular CPD delivered.

5

Strategic Alignment

Pupil Premium strategy explicitly aligned to school improvement plan priorities with clear golden thread through all planning. Inclusion features in all subject and year group plans.

6

Progress Monitoring

Systematic tracking of SEND, Pupil Premium, looked-after children, and other vulnerable groups with termly review cycles. Data analysed by group with narrative explanations and actions identified.

📋 Action Planning from Your Audit

For each amber or red rating, identify one specific action with a named lead, resource implications, and deadline. Your improvement plan should prioritise areas that will have the greatest impact on pupil outcomes, not simply the easiest quick wins. Schedule follow-up reviews to monitor progress and maintain accountability.

Building Your Data Architecture

Achieving the **strong standard** requires sophisticated data systems that provide real-time insights into the experiences and outcomes of vulnerable pupils. Inspectors will expect to see well-analysed, quantitative and qualitative data that demonstrably informs your decisions and drives continuous improvement.

Your data architecture should comprise **six interconnected dashboards**, each serving a distinct purpose whilst contributing to a comprehensive picture of inclusion across your school or trust. These aren't static documents produced for governance meetings; they're living tools that inform daily decision-making by leaders at all levels.

1. Barrier-to-Learning Profile

School-wide view of all pupils facing barriers, with trend analysis and breakdown by type of need, enabling strategic resource allocation.

2. Progress and Outcomes

Comparative analysis of attainment and progress for different vulnerable groups against peers, identifying gaps requiring action.

3. Intervention Effectiveness

Detailed tracking of every intervention's cost, intended outcomes, and actual impact with RAG ratings and adaptation decisions.

The remaining three dashboards: **4. Inclusion in the Classroom, 5. Voice and Well-being, and 6. Transitions** complete the picture. Together, they enable you to tell a compelling story about how you identify need, deploy resources, measure impact and continuously refine your approach. **This is the evidence base that distinguishes strong schools from those merely meeting expectations.**

Dashboard One: Barrier-to-Learning Profile

What to Track

This foundational dashboard provides an at-a-glance view of every pupil who may face barriers to learning or wellbeing. It's your starting point for all inclusion planning and resource allocation.

- Number and percentage identified as disadvantaged (Pupil Premium eligible)
- SEND pupils—separate figures for SEN Support and EHC plans
- Looked-after children and previously looked-after children
- Children in need or subject to child protection plans
- Primary barrier types: attendance, SEMH, language/communication, mobility, poverty indicators
- Pupils with multiple overlapping barriers (intersectionality)
- Trend analysis showing movement into/out of categories over past three years
- Comparison with national and local authority averages

Why It Matters

You cannot support pupils effectively if you don't know who they are and what challenges they face. This dashboard enables strategic resource allocation, helps identify emerging patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed, and provides the foundation for all other inclusion monitoring.

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

STUDENT DATA

Student Data Sheet

student ID	Name	gender	date of birth	Faculty
2002121	Wang Wei	male	1983/2/1	IT Academy
2002324	Jiang Yuwei	female	1982/2/5	school of Humanities
2002345	Wang Wei	female	1985/12/3	school of Humanities
2002136	Yin Nan	male	1980/11/1	IT Academy
2002524	Liu Xiaolin	female	1982/11/12	a
2002130	Chen Xi	female	1984/5/3	IT Academy
2002021	Hu Jun	male	1980/11/4	Department of Mathematics
2002128	Li Jie	male	1979/10/5	IT Academy
2002621	Wang Xiaoying	female	1985/7/6	Foreign Language School
2002624	Liu Xiaolin	female	1983/3/7	Foreign Language School
2002323	Joe Wheat	female	1980/11/4	school of Humanities
2002632	Scarlett Scarlett	female	1982/10/5	Foreign Language School
2002522	Chen Xi	female	1985/7/16	a
2002538	Chen Hao	male	1983/4/7	a
2002030	Yang Qingqing	female	1984/11/4	Department of Mathematics
2002626	Chen Lu	female	1983/3/27	Foreign Language School
2002327	Zeng Yuner	female	1980/11/9	school of Humanities
2002639	Du Yuanyuan	female	1982/12/5	Foreign Language School
2002592	Chen Xi	female	1985/7/1	a
2002548	Zhao Zhen	male	1983/4/17	a

Student table with the same name

student ID	Name	gender	date of birth	Faculty
2002130	Chen Xi	female	1984/5/3	IT Academy
2002522	Chen Xi	female	1985/7/16	a
2002592	Chen Xi	female	1985/7/1	a
2002524	Liu Xiaolin	female	1982/11/12	a
2002624	Liu Xiaolin	female	1983/3/7	Foreign Language School
2002121	Wang Wei	male	1983/2/1	IT Academy
2002345	Wang Wei	female	1985/12/3	school of Humanities

Pro Tip: The Vulnerability Matrix

Create a heat map showing pupils with multiple barriers. A child who is disadvantaged, has SEND, and is known to social care requires coordinated, intensive support across multiple agencies. Your most vulnerable 10% should be named and known by senior leaders personally.

Update this dashboard termly at minimum but ideally ensure your MIS can generate it on demand. Use stacked bar charts to show proportions of different groups and line graphs to illustrate trends over time. The narrative you build around this data, explaining increases in certain categories, celebrating successful early identification, flagging concerns about emerging barriers is as important as the numbers themselves.

Dashboard Two: Progress and Outcomes by Group

This dashboard answers the fundamental question that inspectors will ask repeatedly: Are pupils facing barriers achieving as well as their peers? It provides the evidence of impact that distinguishes strong schools from those merely providing support without demonstrable effect.

7%

Achievement Gap

Difference between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils meeting expected progress in your current Year 11

3yrs

Trend Analysis Period

Minimum timeframe for meaningful pattern identification and evaluation of strategic impact

85%

Aspirational Target

Percentage of vulnerable pupils who should meet or exceed expected progress—never accept lower standards

Key Metrics to Monitor

- Attainment data by vulnerable group compared to non-vulnerable peers (KS1, KS2, KS4, KS5)
- Progress measures showing value-added for each group
- In-year assessment data tracking progress termly
- Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
- Phonics screening check pass rates by group
- Times Tables Check performance for Pupil Premium pupils
- Subject-specific breakdowns identifying where gaps are largest
- Year group analysis showing which cohorts need targeted intervention

Critical Success Factors

Track internal assessment data termly and published data annually where available. Break down by year group, subject, and type of need. Crucially, don't just report gaps—explain them. What barriers are preventing progress? What interventions are in place? What impact are they having?

Your narrative should demonstrate sophisticated analysis and a clear theory of change. For example: "The Maths gap for SEND pupils widened from 12% to 15% this term. Analysis shows this is driven by Year 8 pupils with working memory difficulties. We have implemented pre-teaching of key vocabulary and dual coding strategies. Impact will be measured through next half-term's assessments."

Dashboard Three: Intervention Effectiveness

This is perhaps the most powerful dashboard for demonstrating the systematic approach that characterises strong schools. It transforms interventions from well-intentioned activities into evidence-based strategies with clear accountability for impact. Every intervention should justify its existence through demonstrable outcomes.

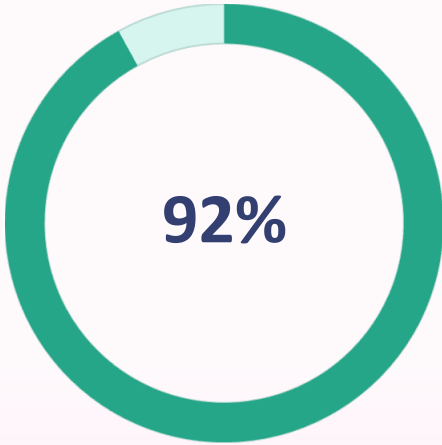
Intervention Name	Cohort Size	Intended Outcome	Cost (Annual)	Actual Outcome	Status
1:1 Reading Support	12 pupils	+6 months reading age gain	£4,800	+7 months average; 10/12 met target	GREEN
Maths Mastery Catch-up	18 pupils	Gap closure by 50%	£6,200	Gap closed by 35%; inconsistent attendance	AMBER
SEMH Nurture Group	8 pupils	Reduce behaviour incidents by 75%	£12,000	Reduced by 82%; reintegration successful	GREEN
Phonics Intervention (daily)	15 pupils	Meet phonics screening standard	£3,500	Only 6/15 met standard; approach changed	RED

For each intervention, track both quantitative outcomes (test scores, attendance rates, behaviour incidents) and qualitative evidence (pupil voice, teacher observations, confidence levels, engagement in lessons). Calculate cost per pupil and cost per successful outcome to inform resource allocation decisions.

Crucially, you must demonstrate that you stop or adapt interventions that aren't working. Strong schools don't persist with ineffective approaches out of institutional inertia; they have the courage to pivot based on evidence. Red ratings should trigger immediate review meetings and alternative strategies.

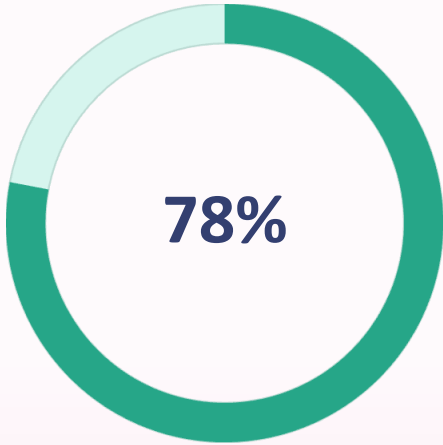
Dashboard Four: Inclusion in the Classroom

Outstanding inclusion happens primarily in classrooms, not through withdrawal groups or parallel provision. This dashboard tracks the quality of everyday inclusive teaching practice the foundation upon which all other support is built. No amount of intervention can compensate for poor quality first teaching.



Effective Differentiation

Lessons observed with effective differentiation that maintains high expectations whilst removing barriers



In-Class Support

Support staff deployed in-class working with groups rather than withdrawal or velcroed to individuals



Inclusion CPD

Hours of inclusion-focused professional development per staff member annually (minimum target)

Key Metrics to Monitor

- Percentage of lessons where vulnerable pupils access age-appropriate curriculum
- Deployment patterns of support staff (in-class collaborative vs withdrawal vs individual velcro)
- Average group size for additional adult support
- Frequency of reasonable adjustments made and reviewed for SEND pupils
- Staff confidence ratings in inclusive practice (from termly surveys)
- Quality of differentiation observed in learning walks and formal observations
- Use of scaffolding, modelling, and pre-teaching strategies
- Explicit vocabulary instruction for disadvantaged and EAL pupils

Gathering Evidence

Collect this data through targeted learning walks with inclusion focus, lesson observations using inclusion criteria, work scrutiny examining differentiation and staff surveys measuring confidence and training needs.

The emphasis should be on **quality first teaching** ensuring that classroom practice removes barriers before resorting to interventions. Track whether teachers pre-teach vocabulary to disadvantaged pupils, whether scaffolds maintain cognitive challenge, whether support staff foster independence, and whether vulnerable pupils engage actively in lessons.

Dashboard Five: Voice, Well-being and Belonging

Data without humanity is meaningless. This dashboard ensures that the experiences and perspectives of pupils and families inform your inclusion strategy, not just outcome measures and adult judgements. The best schools listen to vulnerable pupils and families, then act on what they hear.

Pupil Voice

Survey responses about belonging, confidence, support effectiveness, and aspirations analysed by vulnerable group with comparison to non-vulnerable peers. Include questions about whether pupils understand their targets and feel their views are valued.

Parent Engagement

Satisfaction rates, attendance at consultation evenings and family events, response rates to communications particularly for disadvantaged, SEND, and children in care families. Track whether engagement levels differ between vulnerable and non-vulnerable families.

Behaviour and Attendance

Exclusion rates (fixed-term and permanent), behaviour incidents recorded, attendance patterns, and persistent absence figures broken down by vulnerable groups. Analyse whether SEND or disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately represented.

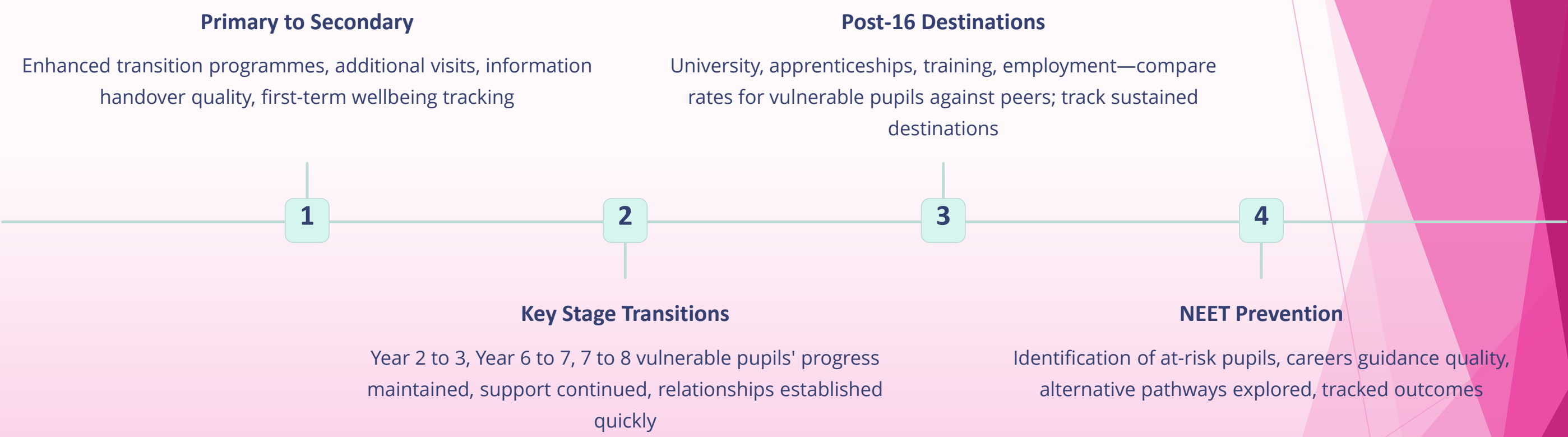
Strong schools don't just collect voice, they demonstrate how it influences decisions. **Create a feedback loop: survey → analyse → act → communicate changes → resurvey to check impact.** When pupils or parents raise concerns about provision, show evidence of your response. When they celebrate successes, use those testimonials to reinforce effective practice and share with governors.

The Belonging Question

Ask every pupil termly: *"Do you feel you belong at this school?"* Track responses by vulnerable group. Schools where disadvantaged or SEND pupils report lower belonging than peers must interrogate why and take immediate action. Belonging isn't a soft outcome; it's foundational to achievement, attendance and mental health.

Dashboard Six: Transitions and Destinations

Inclusion extends beyond your school gates. For schools and trusts, tracking where vulnerable pupils go and how they fare reveals whether your inclusive practice has equipped them for long-term success. The best schools remain invested in pupils' journeys beyond their own phase.

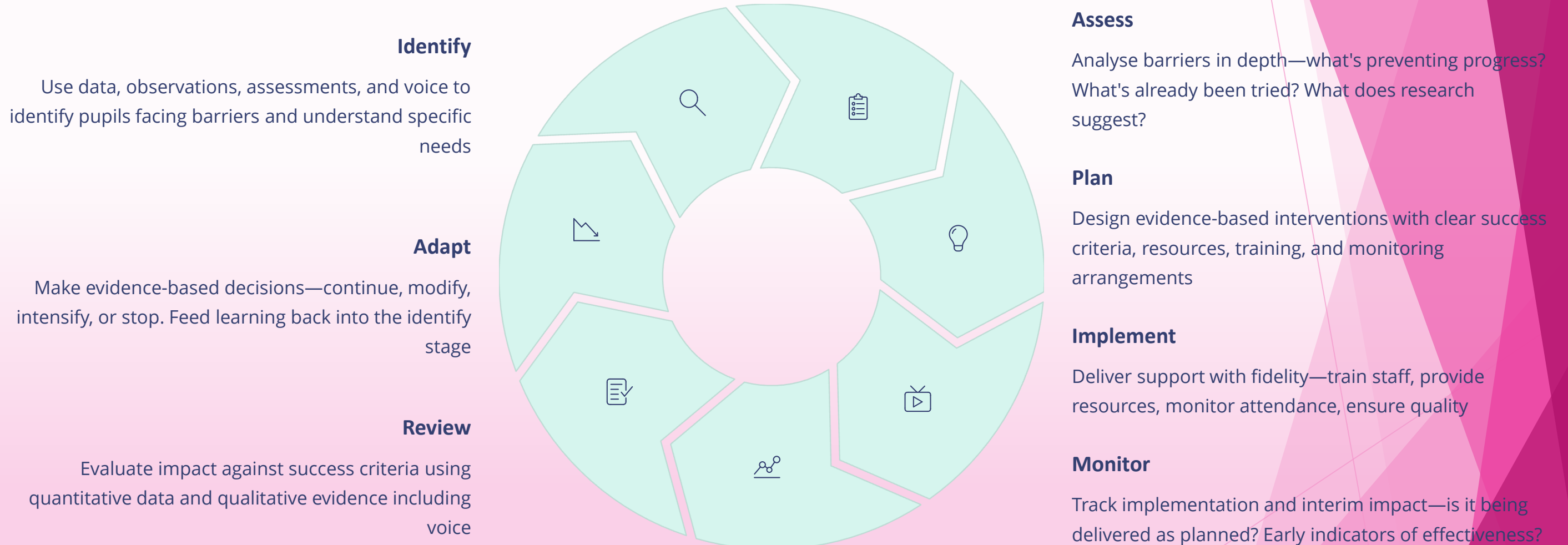


Track vulnerable groups separately at each transition point. Calculate the percentage who remain in education or training compared to their peers. Identify pupils at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment, or training) and implement targeted support from Year 9 onwards. Strong schools know their leavers' destinations for at least two years post-departure and can evidence that pupils with SEND or disadvantage achieve appropriate progression; not lower aspirations disguised as realism.

For primary schools, work closely with feeder secondaries to ensure smooth handovers. Track how many of your Year 6 vulnerable pupils are thriving in Year 7. This accountability beyond your own phase demonstrates the long-term impact of your inclusive practice and helps you refine your approach based on longitudinal outcomes.

The Seven-Step Inclusion Cycle

Data dashboards provide the **what**, but effective inclusion requires a systematic **how**. This seven-step cycle translates data into practice, creating a continuous improvement loop that characterises strong schools. It operates at whole-school, year group, class and individual pupil levels simultaneously.



This isn't a linear process completed once and ticked off. It's a continuous cycle where each review informs the next identification phase. **Senior leaders oversee the cycle strategically whilst middle leaders and class teachers implement it operationally.** The key is ensuring consistency of approach across all contexts whilst remaining responsive to individual needs and emerging evidence.

Leading an Inclusive Culture

Systems and data matter, but culture **trumps** everything. Schools with truly inclusive cultures are led by senior teams who model inclusive practice, maintain relentlessly high expectations and refuse to accept that barriers are excuses for lower achievement. Culture is built through hundreds of small leadership behaviours, not policy documents.

Leadership Behaviours That Build Inclusion

- **Model inclusive practice**—Senior leaders know vulnerable pupils by name, celebrate their successes publicly, visit their lessons regularly, and demonstrate that inclusion is everyone's priority, not the SENCo's job
- **Distribute knowledge**—Ensure every teacher knows the specific needs, barriers, starting points, and previous interventions for their disadvantaged and SEND pupils at the start of each term
- **Maintain high expectations**—Challenge any deficit thinking about what vulnerable pupils can achieve; push back against lowering curriculum ambition
- **Focus learning walks on inclusion**—Look for evidence of differentiation, scaffolding, pupil engagement, reasonable adjustments, and high expectations in every observation
- **Celebrate inclusive teaching**—Share examples of outstanding practice that removes barriers whilst maintaining curriculum ambition in staff briefings and newsletters

"Inclusive high-quality teaching is the most effective starting point rather than over-reliance on withdrawal."

— Ofsted Inspection Toolkit

Strong inclusive cultures are characterised by a shared understanding that every teacher is a teacher of SEND, every teacher is responsible for disadvantaged pupils' outcomes, and quality first teaching—not interventions—is where the impact happens.

Leaders must also address exclusionary practices that disproportionately affect vulnerable pupils: rigid behaviour systems that don't account for SEND, homework policies that disadvantage pupils without resources at home, parental engagement expectations that exclude working-class families, and curriculum narrowing that limits vulnerable pupils' opportunities.

Pupil Premium Strategy: Getting It Right

Your Pupil Premium strategy will be scrutinised intensively during inspection. Inspectors expect to see a clear, evidence-based approach that's integrated with whole-school improvement priorities, not a bolt-on list of interventions or generic spending plan copied from another school.



Understand Barriers

Secure knowledge of disadvantaged pupils' specific needs, contexts, and starting points—not generic assumptions about poverty or disadvantage



Strategic Alignment

Pupil Premium spending explicitly linked to school improvement plan priorities with clear golden thread through all planning



Implementation Quality

Staff trained in delivery, clear roles assigned, monitoring systems embedded, leadership oversight rigorous and frequent



Review and Adapt

Termly evaluation of impact, courage to stop ineffective approaches, refinement based on evidence not sentiment

Your Strategy Must Answer Five Critical Questions

1. **What barriers do our disadvantaged pupils face?** Be specific, don't assume; use data and voice. Consider attendance, prior attainment, SEND overlap, literacy levels, cultural capital, family circumstances, and aspirations.
2. **What approaches will address these barriers?** Reference evidence (EEF toolkit, research) and explain your theory of change. Why will this intervention work for these pupils with these barriers?
3. **How will we implement with fidelity?** Detail training requirements, monitoring arrangements, leadership time allocation, and how you'll know it's being delivered as intended.
4. **How will we know if it's working?** Define success criteria, interim milestones, data sources, and review points. Include both quantitative outcomes and qualitative evidence.
5. **What will we do if it isn't working?** Demonstrate flexibility and commitment to evidence over sentiment. Strong schools pivot quickly when approaches don't deliver expected impact.

Report termly to governors showing intervention costs versus outcomes, gap trends by cohort, staff training investments, and adaptations made based on evidence. Make your strategy a living document; review it every term, update based on what you're learning, and ensure every member of staff can articulate how their work contributes to closing gaps.

SEND: The Graduated Approach in Action

The toolkit emphasises the assess-plan-do-review cycle as the foundation of effective SEND provision. This graduated approach must be embedded in everyday practice, not reserved for formal annual review meetings. Outstanding schools implement this cycle at class, year, and whole-school levels continuously.

Assess Clear analysis of needs using baseline data, classroom observations, specialist input, pupil voice, and parent insights. Identify specific barriers to learning.	Plan Specific, measurable targets with named interventions, reasonable adjustments, responsible adults, resources required, and review dates agreed with parents.
Do Quality first teaching with adjustments in every lesson, plus targeted interventions delivered with fidelity by trained staff. Monitor attendance and engagement.	Review Evaluate impact against targets, gather voice from pupil and parents, analyse data, decide next steps—maintain, adapt, intensify, or stop provision.

Critical Success Factors

SENDCo Empowerment

Your SENCo must be part of the senior leadership team with protected non-contact time (minimum 2.5 days for large primaries, full-time for secondaries), appropriate resources, genuine budget influence, and the authority to drive change across the school. If your SENCo is also a full-time class teacher or their influence is limited to compliance paperwork, you're not meeting the expected standard.

Early Identification

Use screening tools (working memory, phonics, reading comprehension, motor skills), baseline assessments, teacher referrals, and parental insights to identify needs before pupils fall significantly behind. Waiting for formal diagnosis or external specialist input delays support and widens gaps. Act on school-based assessment.

Quality First Teaching

Ensure inclusive approaches in every classroom before increasing adult dependency through withdrawal. The best intervention is great teaching that pre-empts difficulties through scaffolding, pre-teaching, explicit instruction, modelling, and reasonable adjustments embedded in daily practice.

Specialist Expertise

Access external specialists when needed, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, autism support teams but crucially, monitor implementation of their recommendations. Schools fail when advice sits in a file rather than changing classroom practice. Create accountability: who will implement? By when? How will we know?

Supporting Pupils Known to Social Care

The inspection toolkit specifically highlights pupils who are known or previously known to children's social care as a distinct vulnerable group requiring tailored support and leadership oversight. These pupils often face the most complex, multiple barriers yet can be overlooked if school systems don't track them separately.

01

Maintain Current Knowledge

Keep an up-to-date register of looked-after children, previously looked-after (adopted, SGO, CAO), children in need, and those subject to child protection plans. Ensure designated teachers/leads have protected time, appropriate training (Designated Teacher status for LAC), and senior leadership support. Senior leaders should know these pupils by name and review their progress termly.

03

Track Outcomes Rigorously

Monitor attendance, behaviour incidents, exclusions (which should be extremely rare for LAC), and progress specifically for pupils known to social care. Break down data by category—LAC, PLAC, CIN, CP. These pupils often face multiple overlapping barriers; your data should reflect this complexity and inform coordinated, wrap-around support with other agencies.

These pupils require consistency, stability, and adults who understand trauma-informed approaches. They need patient, nurturing relationships that rebuild trust, not rigid behaviour systems that re-traumatise. Outstanding schools create safety, predictability, and high expectations whilst recognising that traditional consequences may not be appropriate for pupils whose behaviour communicates unmet needs.

02

Personal Education Plans

Every looked-after child must have a PEP reviewed at least termly (oftener for very vulnerable pupils), with clear SMART targets, appropriate support identified, and Pupil Premium Plus funding (£2,530 per child) used strategically with demonstrable impact. PEPs should be working documents that drive provision, not bureaucratic exercises completed for compliance.

04

Partnership Working

Build strong relationships with virtual schools, social workers, foster carers, residential care staff, and other agencies. Attend core group meetings, contribute to child protection conferences, share information appropriately under data protection guidance, and ensure the child's educational needs are prioritised and advocated for in multi-agency planning.

Identifying and Removing Barriers

Effective inclusion requires sophisticated understanding of the multiple, intersecting barriers that pupils face. Generic approaches fail—you must identify specific barriers for individual pupils and deploy targeted, evidence-based responses. One size does not fit all.

Attendance Barriers

Persistent absence, lateness, school refusal, medical needs—often linked to anxiety, transport difficulties, caring responsibilities, safeguarding concerns, or disengagement from learning. Requires root-cause analysis, family partnership, and removal of practical barriers, not punitive responses.

SEMH Challenges

Social, emotional, mental health needs—trauma, anxiety, depression, attachment difficulties, ASD, ADHD. Needs safe spaces, trusted key adult relationships, therapeutic approaches, predictability, co-regulation support, and understanding that behaviour is communication, not wilful defiance requiring punishment.

Language and Communication

EAL (English as Additional Language), speech and language difficulties, limited vocabulary, processing difficulties. Requires explicit vocabulary teaching, visual supports, pre-teaching, additional processing time, dual coding, and high-quality talk opportunities with peer and adult modelling.

Poverty and Disadvantage

Limited resources, digital poverty, food insecurity, housing instability, lack of cultural capital, limited experiences beyond locality. Requires practical support, removal of financial barriers to participation, provision of essentials, enrichment opportunities, and protective factors at school that build resilience.

The Barrier Matrix Tool

Create a simple spreadsheet tracking every pupil with identified barriers. Include: pupil name, year group, barrier type(s), prior attainment, current support in place, named key adult, and next review date. Update termly through SEND/pastoral/pastoral/inclusion meetings. Use this to identify pupils with multiple barriers who need coordinated provision across pastoral, academic, and external agencies, and ensure no vulnerable pupil slips through gaps between systems.

Making Monitoring Routine, Not Reactive

Strong schools don't wait for annual data drops, Ofsted notification, or complaints from parents to review inclusion. They build systematic monitoring into their operational rhythm, creating a predictable cadence of review that enables agile responses to emerging needs and swift celebration of success.



Build inclusion as a standing agenda item in senior leadership meetings, middle leader briefings, department meetings, and staff briefings. Use RAG traffic-light systems for quick visual summaries of each dashboard, but always follow with narrative—what's behind the red rating? What specifically will you do differently this week?

"Strategies are systematically and skilfully adjusted based on well-analysed data." — Strong Standard, Ofsted Inspection Toolkit

Classroom Inclusion: Where Impact Happens

Outstanding inclusion happens in classrooms, in hundreds of small adjustments and high-expectation interactions every day. This is where policy becomes practice, where dashboards become lived experience for pupils, and where the quality of teaching determines whether vulnerable pupils thrive or struggle.

Essential Inclusive Teaching Practices

Know Your Pupils

Every teacher should know their vulnerable pupils' starting points, specific barriers, previous interventions tried, current targets, and what helps them learn best. This information should be easily accessible in your MIS, regularly updated, and actively used in planning every lesson.

Deploy Support Staff Strategically

Teaching assistants should build independence, not dependency. They should work with groups (including non-SEND pupils), not velcroed to individuals. Their deployment should be planned to maximise impact on learning through pre-teaching, targeted intervention, and facilitating peer interaction—not simply supervising or scribing.

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

Pre-teach tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary to disadvantaged and EAL pupils before lessons, provide visual supports and word mats, model correct usage in context, create low-stakes opportunities for practice, and check understanding regularly. Language is the gateway to curriculum access.

High Expectations with Scaffolding

Teach the same ambitious curriculum to all pupils—don't water down content or lower ceilings. Instead, provide the scaffolds, models, worked examples, pre-teaching, and additional processing time that enable vulnerable pupils to access challenging material. Differentiation by support and scaffold, not by ceiling or content.

Check for Understanding

Use retrieval practice, targeted questioning, mini-whiteboards, and frequent in-lesson assessment to identify gaps immediately. Adapt in real-time—don't discover misunderstanding three weeks later in a summative test. Plan time for re-teaching and additional practice where needed.

Reasonable Adjustments

Plan proactively for individual needs—coloured overlays, enlarged print, additional time, scribing, movement breaks, fidget tools, alternative recording methods. Review whether adjustments are working through pupil voice and observation, refining accordingly.

The Inclusion Lesson Observation Tool

Use this tool for self-audit, peer observations, or formal lesson observations to ensure every lesson is designed with inclusion at its heart. Outstanding schools don't observe "SEND lessons" and "normal lessons"—they observe all lessons through an inclusion lens.

Inclusion Criterion	Not Evident	Developing	Secure	Outstanding
Teacher knows which pupils face barriers and their specific needs				
Learning is accessible to all whilst maintaining high expectations				
Reasonable adjustments and scaffolds are in place and effective				
Support staff deployment is purposeful and builds independence				
Vocabulary is explicitly taught and checked for understanding				
Teacher checks vulnerable pupils' understanding frequently during lesson				
Vulnerable pupils actively engaged in learning throughout				
Behaviour is managed positively with understanding of individual needs				

After each observation, the key question is: *"Will the teacher know during this lesson if vulnerable pupils are learning?"* If the answer is no—if assessment is left until homework or the end-of-unit test—then checking for understanding needs strengthening.

Share examples of outstanding inclusive teaching in staff meetings and briefings. Video short clips (with permission) showing excellent scaffolding, vocabulary instruction, or support staff deployment. Build a culture where inclusive teaching expertise is celebrated and shared, not left to specialists.

Voice: Including Pupils and Families in Decisions

The toolkit explicitly requires that pupils' and parents' views and aspirations are included in decision-making about support. This isn't tokenistic consultation—it's meaningful partnership that shapes provision, builds trust, and ensures that support meets real needs rather than adult assumptions.



Pupil Voice Strategies

- Regular one-to-one conversations with key adults about progress, barriers, what helps, and aspirations
- Termly surveys asking about belonging, confidence, support effectiveness, and whether they feel listened to
- Student voice groups specifically for SEND or disadvantaged pupils to influence policy
- Pupil contribution to review meetings, IEPs, PEPs, and provision planning (age-appropriate)
- Opportunities to co-design interventions, adjustments, or support strategies



Family Partnership Approaches

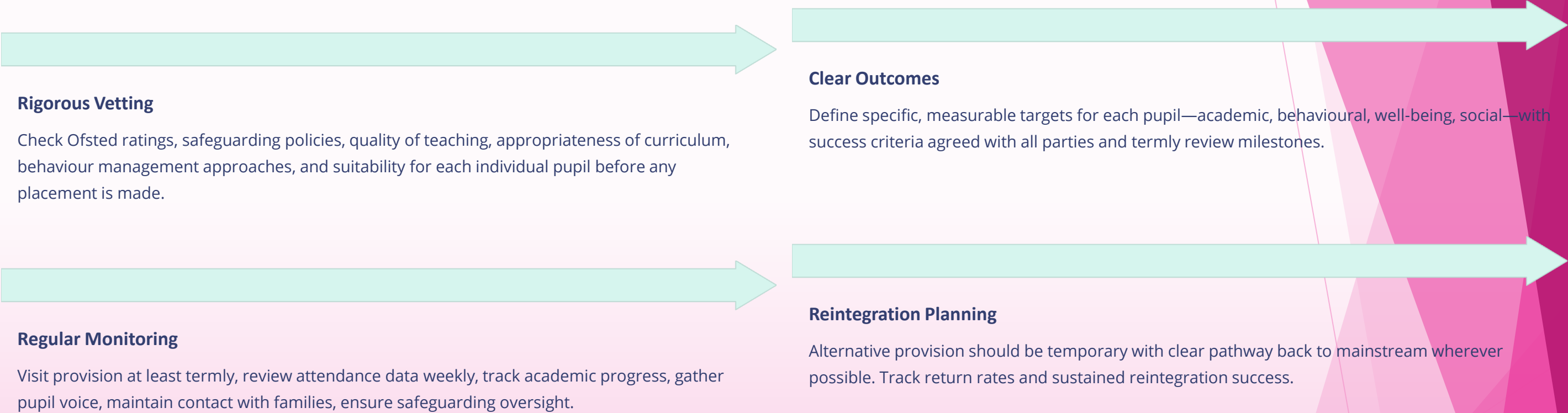
- Termly structured conversations focused specifically on vulnerable pupils' progress and well-being
- Coffee mornings, workshops, or drop-in sessions specifically for SEND/disadvantaged families
- Accessible communication—translations, plain English, multiple formats, phone calls not just letters
- Proactive outreach to hard-to-reach families rather than waiting for them to come to you
- Parent surveys specifically about inclusion and support, not just generic satisfaction

Crucially, you must demonstrate that voice leads to tangible action. Create a visible feedback loop: gather voice → analyse themes → implement changes → communicate what you've done → resurvey to check impact of changes. When parents request specific support or pupils identify barriers, show evidence of your response within a reasonable timeframe.

Track attendance at family events and survey response rates by vulnerable group if disadvantaged families are less engaged than others, you must address why. Consider barriers: timing of meetings, childcare, transport, previous negative experiences, feeling blamed rather than supported. Adapt your approach based on what families tell you they need.

Alternative Provision: Maintaining Oversight

When schools use off-site or alternative provision, the inspection toolkit requires evidence that decisions are made in pupils' best interests, that provision is suitable and safe, and that outcomes are monitored rigorously. You remain accountable for these pupils' progress and well-being—you cannot abdicate responsibility by placing them elsewhere.



The Alternative Provision Dashboard

Maintain a tracker showing: number of pupils in alternative provision, reasons for placement, intended outcomes defined at outset, attendance rates, progress data in core subjects, cost per pupil, provider quality ratings, safeguarding concerns, and planned return dates. Review monthly with senior leaders and governors. Report annually on outcomes achieved.

Never allow alternative provision to become a dumping ground for pupils you find challenging or whose needs are complex. Every placement decision must be evidence-based, demonstrably in the pupil's best interest, and time-limited with clear reintegration goals. Strong schools use alternative provision sparingly and strategically, not as a long-term solution to systemic issues with behaviour management or inclusive practice.

Transitions: Supporting Vulnerable Pupils Through Change

Transitions are points of vulnerability where support can fracture, relationships reset, and pupils can regress academically or behaviourally. Strong inclusive schools anticipate these risks and plan proactive, intensive support that ensures continuity and prevents the "fresh start" becoming a "false start".

- 1

Early Planning
Identify vulnerable pupils requiring enhanced transition support at least one full term in advance (ideally two terms). Don't wait until July.
- 2

Information Sharing
Comprehensive handover including barriers, what works, relationships, triggers, previous interventions, adjustments. Use consistent formats between settings.
- 3

Additional Visits
Extra induction days beyond standard programme, opportunities to meet new staff, familiarisation with environment, peer buddies, social stories for anxious pupils.
- 4

Early Support
Ensure interventions and adjustments are in place from day one in new setting. Don't lose critical weeks "getting to know" pupils—use transition information.
- 5

Follow-up Monitoring
Track attendance, engagement, behaviour, and well-being intensively in first half-term. Early identification of difficulties enables swift responsive action.

For Secondary Schools: Post-16 Transitions

Track destinations data for vulnerable pupils separately from whole cohort. What percentage of your disadvantaged or SEND pupils continue in education or training? How many achieve appropriate progression to university, apprenticeships, employment, or further training? How many are NEET six months after leaving?

Schools with strong inclusive practice see vulnerable pupils achieve similar progression rates to peers—not systematically lower aspirations dressed up as "realistic options" or "knowing their place". Challenge any suggestion that disadvantaged or SEND pupils should aim lower. Provide excellent careers guidance, work experience, mentoring, and aspiration-building from Year 7 onwards.

Building Staff Expertise and Confidence

Your inclusion provision is only as strong as your staff's knowledge, skills, and confidence in implementing inclusive practice. Outstanding inclusive teaching requires investment in professional development that goes beyond one-off training sessions or sending the SENCo on external courses whilst other staff remain uninformed.



Comprehensive CPD Programme

Structured training covering inclusive pedagogy, specific SEND needs (dyslexia, autism, ADHD, attachment, speech and language), Pupil Premium strategy, behaviour as communication, effective deployment of support staff, and data-informed teaching. Minimum 12 hours per year focused specifically on inclusion, not general teaching and learning.



Coaching and Mentoring

Pair teachers working with complex needs pupils with coaches who can observe practice, model strategies, provide feedback, and build confidence. Use your best inclusive practitioners as in-house experts leading learning walks and team teaching. Make expertise visible and accessible, not locked in one person's classroom.



Action Research Projects

Encourage teachers to trial new approaches with vulnerable pupils, gather evidence of impact through data and voice, and share findings with colleagues. Build a culture where inclusive practice is researched and refined, not just implemented because "we've always done it this way" or because a training provider sold it to you.

Track staff confidence through termly surveys using a simple rating scale for different aspects of inclusive practice. Link training to performance management—inclusion should feature in all teachers' objectives, not just SENCo's. Ensure teaching assistants receive high-quality CPD, not just attendance at staff meetings where they're expected to absorb information designed for teachers. Your Dashboard 4 should show trends in staff expertise and confidence over time, demonstrating investment in workforce development.

The Annual Inclusion Roadmap

Strong inclusion requires orchestrated activity across the year, not reactive responses to immediate crises or issues raised in complaints. This roadmap shows how to sequence your actions for maximum impact, building predictable rhythms that enable proactive support rather than firefighting.

Term	Key Inclusion Activities
Autumn 1	Baseline all pupils; update pupil information; identify new vulnerable pupils; induct staff on individual needs; review Pupil Premium strategy following summer data; plan interventions; establish monitoring rhythm
Autumn 2	First formal progress reviews; evaluate early interventions; adjust provision maps; complete autumn term data analysis for governors; plan spring interventions; parent consultation focus on vulnerable pupils
Spring 1	Mid-year inclusion deep dive; comprehensive dashboard review; intervention cost-benefit analysis; staff CPD on identified gaps; begin transition planning for Year 6/11; review alternative provision placements
Spring 2	Spring data analysis; adapt interventions based on evidence; intensify support for underachieving groups; parent workshops on supporting learning; begin enhanced transition programmes; destination tracking for Year 11
Summer 1	Final progress reviews before exams/assessments; ensure exam access arrangements in place; complete transition information handovers; evaluate year's inclusion strategy; plan next year's provision
Summer 2	Analyse end of year outcomes by vulnerable group; evaluate all interventions against cost and impact; update SEND Information Report; complete annual Pupil Premium statement; plan September's provision and staffing

Build this rhythm into your operational calendar at the start of the academic year. Schedule SLT meetings, data review points, governor reports, and parent communications in advance. Make inclusion predictable and systematic, not an afterthought squeezed between other priorities. Strong schools treat inclusion with the same rigour and regularity they apply to curriculum development, assessment cycles, and behaviour systems.

Quick-Win Strategies for Immediate Improvement

Whilst comprehensive inclusion transformation takes time, sustained effort, and systemic change, these high-impact, low-cost strategies can yield rapid improvements and build momentum whilst longer-term initiatives take effect. Choose three to implement in the next half-term.

1 **Barriers Breakfast Sessions**

Run a one-hour breakfast meeting for each year group with their teachers. Identify the top five barriers facing disadvantaged or SEND pupils in that cohort. Set one specific, actionable response per barrier with a named lead and review date within two weeks. Implement immediately and review impact at next meeting.

2 **Multiple Barriers Mapping**

Create a list of pupils with multiple overlapping barriers (e.g., SEND + disadvantaged + social care involvement + attendance below 90%). These are your highest-priority pupils requiring coordinated support. Ensure each has a named key adult for weekly check-ins, a coordinated support plan involving all relevant staff, and fortnightly senior leader oversight.

3 **Monthly Inclusion Learning Walk Theme**

Focus each month's learning walks on one specific aspect of inclusive practice: October = scaffolding in every lesson, November = deployment of support staff, December = pupil voice and agency. Share findings in staff briefings, celebrate excellent practice publicly, and provide coaching for areas needing development.

4 **Vulnerability Tags in Your MIS**

Ensure your management information system has clear, visible flags for disadvantaged, SEND, looked-after, previously looked-after, and other vulnerable groups. Train all staff to filter data by these tags so they can quickly analyse outcomes, behaviour, and attendance by group. Make vulnerable pupils visible in every data conversation.

5 **Fortnightly Inclusion Bulletin**

Create a simple one-page staff bulletin: one tip from research (EEF toolkit), one case study of great practice in your school with photo, one data snapshot from dashboards showing progress or concern. Keep inclusion visible, practical, and grounded in your context. Email every Friday; archive on staff shared area.

6 **Parent Partnership Workshop**

Host a Saturday morning session: "Understanding Pupil Premium and SEND—what you can do at home to support your child's learning". Provide breakfast, practical strategies, resources to take away, and opportunity for families to connect. Target disadvantaged and SEND families specifically through personal phone invitations, not just letters.

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