Inclusion strategy: questions to ask

For governors and trustees in single schools

November 2026

From December 2026, mainstream schools must develop and publish an inclusion strategy. The strategy outlines a school's plans to deliver inclusive whole-school approaches and evidence-based support to meet the needs of all of their pupils.

The government has committed £1.6 billion to the Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF). Grants from the IMF will be distributed to schools over a three-year period. As part of those funding conditions, schools must publish an inclusion strategy to outline how they will use their IMF grant.

The DfE has published guidance for school leaders. This includes an optional template for schools to use to develop their strategy.

Our guidance supports the governors' and trustees' oversight role over individual schools, and sets out key questions for three parts of the improvement cycle:

1. **Scrutinise** the strategy – do this once school leaders have developed the strategy.
2. **Monitor** the strategy – this is an ongoing process to determine how well the strategy is improving your school's universal and targeted SEND provision. Boards may schedule the strategy as a standing agenda item at meetings.
3. **Review** the strategy – at least annually.

9000 Lives

NGA would like to thank Aaron King, Inclusion Advisor at 9000 Lives for his expertise that informed this guidance.

Aaron works with schools, colleges and charities to improve inclusion for all.

9000lives.org

Academy committee members in MATs should refer to their scheme of delegation and/or terms of reference to determine their oversight functions. For example, this might include ensuring the inclusion strategy has been published, scrutinising current spending on inclusion and scrutinising the strategy's action plan.

1. Scrutinise your new inclusion strategy

You will scrutinise your first inclusion strategy in late 2026 or early 2027. This will be repeated each time a new strategy is developed (eg every 12 or 24 months).

Understand the needs of our pupils	Evaluate the planned approach	Impact and accountability
• How do leaders identify the needs of our current pupils? • What does evidence tell us are our most commonly occurring needs? • How has pupil data (eg attendance, enrichment) influenced our strategy? • How have the views of pupils, parents and staff influenced our strategy?	• How will the planned universal and targeted approaches improve inclusion? • What will pupils see change at break, lunch or elsewhere around school? • How have leaders identified the evidence-based approaches that are most likely to improve pupil outcomes? • How will we know whether the strategy is improving inclusion, rather than increasing the number of interventions?	• What impact will the strategy achieve (and by when)? • What risks could prevent our strategy from succeeding, and how will leaders mitigate these? • Who is accountable for implementing the strategy, monitoring it, and reporting progress to governors? • Who will ensure that our IMF grant is only spent on new activity and that it represents value for money?

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2. Monitor your inclusion strategy

Once the strategy is published, leaders will need time to get their actions underway. Allow at least eight weeks before you first monitor progress.

Monitoring is not the role of a SEND link governor alone: inclusion is everyone's duty. It might be monitored via a recurring agenda item at a committee meeting and as part of a range of governor visits.

Implementation and progress	Impact on pupils	Resources and accountability
• Which actions in our strategy were due to be completed by now, and are they? • What evidence tells us that the planned improvements are being made consistently in all classrooms? • How do leaders know whether any training is changing staff practice? • How are leaders checking that pupils who have SEND can access high-quality teaching and participate fully in all of school life?	• What evidence tells us whether the strategy is having an impact on pupils yet? • Where do we see the strongest impact on pupils, and what evidence supports this? • Are there any groups of pupils for whom the planned approaches have not yet had the intended impact? • What do pupils say has changed recently (in terms of inclusion)? • What do staff say about the effectiveness of our steps towards 'inclusion by design'?	• Where implementation is behind schedule, why is this and when will the actions now be accomplished? • How are leaders ensuring that staff have the time, training and resources needed to implement the strategy effectively and consistently? • What are the key priorities before our next meeting, and what progress should we see?

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3. Review your inclusion strategy

Towards the end of the cycle, you will review your inclusion strategy. This supports leaders to reflect on impact, success and what has not gone so well, in advance of the school's new strategy being developed.

Evaluating impact	Evaluating the use of resources	Agreeing next steps
• What has changed for pupils identified with commonly occurring and predictable needs compared to the start of the year? • Which activities had the greatest and least impact, and why? • What has the impact been for universal provision compared to targeted provision? • How do we know that any improvements are a result of the approaches in our strategy? • What do pupils, parents and staff say has changed (because of our strategy)?	• What does the evidence tell us about how effective our funding has been? • Has funding been used as planned? • Have the benefits justified the expenditure? • What improvements can be sustained beyond the current funding period, and what are the implications for our longer-term budget?	• Which approach(es) should we continue, expand or adapt, and what evidence informs these decisions? • What needs to happen next to ensure that the school becomes even more 'inclusive by design' in the next 12 to 24 months? • When will leaders bring the new strategy back to governors for scrutiny?

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