

Inclusive and Relational Approaches Working Group

SEND Reform Consultation Response

Q3: How can we ensure that children are best supported by the Universal offer (the baseline support available in all mainstream schools)?

The Working Group emphasises that a high-quality Universal offer must be **relational, inclusive, and preventative**.

Key recommendations:

- **Establish consistent national expectations and accountability**
Introduce clear minimum standards for inclusive practice across all schools, alongside robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
- **Embed a whole-school approach to inclusion**
Inclusion should be for **every child** and be a core strategic priority, led by senior leadership teams and governing bodies. It must not be delegated solely to SENCOs or treated as an “add-on”, but embedded within school culture, policies, and daily practice. Every child should have their needs understood and met.
- **Prioritise early identification and intervention**
Sustained funding should support early identification of need and timely intervention, reducing escalation and reliance on statutory processes. Schools should be supported to adopt **evidence-based tools for identifying social, emotional and behavioural needs at a universal level**, such as nurtureuk’s Boxall Profile® Online, which enables early identification, targeted support planning, and monitoring of pupil development over time.
- **Invest in workforce capability**
All staff should have a secure, core understanding of SEND and inclusive practice, aligned with the proposed shift towards identifying needs through key areas of development rather than broad categorical labels or clinically defined needs - a direction the working group welcomes. This core knowledge should include:
 1. Neurodiversity (including autism and ADHD)
 2. Speech, language and communication needs
 3. Social and emotional development, recognising how needs may present in behaviour and relationships
 4. Executive functioning (including attention, planning and organisation)
 5. Motor and physical development
 6. Sensory processing and integration differences
 7. Anti-racist and structurally competent practice, including how race, gender and class shape the interpretation of behaviour, distress and parental concern.
 8. Trauma-informed, attachment-aware and nurturing approaches

9. Relational practice, with a clear understanding of behaviour as communication
10. The principle that inclusion is for **every child**, underpinned by high expectations and adaptive teaching

This should be embedded in both initial teacher training and ongoing CPD. Workforce development should reflect the evolving SEND framework, equipping staff to identify and respond to underlying needs across these areas of development, rather than defaulting to broad or proxy categories.

There should also be investment in **training to help educators engage effectively with parents and carers.**

Many working group members have seen first hand that the most transformative inclusion work happens when **Teaching Assistants (TAs) are developed as professional practitioners** with structured pathways, yet the system continues to treat them as a contingency resource rather than a cornerstone of the workforce. The government must set out a **funded workforce strategy alongside the SEND reform programme**, including bursaries and incentives for SENCO and specialist TA pathways and a credible plan to address Educational Psychologist vacancy rates.

- **Strengthen inclusive pedagogy**
High-quality adaptive teaching and reasonable adjustments should be the expectation for all classroom teachers, not limited to specialist provision.
- **Enable inclusive environments**
Schools should be resourced to create flexible, responsive learning environments that support diverse sensory and learning needs and create a sense of belonging. Universal environmental adaptations (e.g. calm spaces, predictable routines, low-stimulation design) should be available without requiring formal diagnosis.
For example, Van Gogh Primary School (Stockwell) has implemented whole-school environmental adaptations, including calm classroom design and structured quiet spaces, to support regulation and engagement for all pupils.
- **Embed relational approaches**
Relational approaches should be at the centre of the whole-school universal approach to supporting all young people, enabling emotional and social safety and a sense of belonging in school. London's Inclusion Charter's sets out four guiding principles for universal inclusion:-
 - *Embedding equity and diversity*
 - *Children as active citizens*
 - *Being adaptable and reflective*
 - *Beyond academic achievement*
- **Strengthen multi-agency working**
Improved integration between education, health, and social care is essential to provide holistic, coordinated support.

- **Embed co-production**
Families and young people should be meaningfully involved in designing support at both individual and system levels.
- **Rebalance funding towards early support**
Funding mechanisms should prioritise early intervention and access to services (e.g. educational psychology, social and emotional development assessments, speech and language support), reducing over-reliance on EHCP processes. For example, early screening and speech and language support is key when it comes to closing gaps in communications skills, as evidenced by London Violence Reduction Unit's Talk Matters programme. The data suggests that oracy support, both universal and targeted, is improving children's wellbeing and engagement in school.
- **Ensure equitable responsibility across schools**
All schools should be expected and supported to engage with the needs of their local community and ensure these are fully understood within the school, addressing patterns of informal exclusion and unequal distribution of pupils with SEND, including the well-documented racial disproportionality in these patterns.
- **Align accountability measures with inclusion**
School accountability frameworks should give equal weight to inclusive practice and pupil outcomes beyond attainment, ensuring schools are not disincentivised from being inclusive. A reformed system must make visible what it values, or schools will continue to make rational decisions that produce irrational outcomes for children. The inspection and accountability framework must be rewritten so that inclusive schools are rewarded rather than penalised. For example, the Inclusive Multi Academy Trust in Watford is the first trust nationally to achieve nurtureuk National Nurturing Schools accreditation across all its schools, a foundational piece of its success in building an inclusive educational environment, and yet nothing in the current accountability framework recognises or rewards that achievement.

Q7: How do you think early years settings, schools and colleges can best support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people?

Supporting mental health and wellbeing requires a **whole-setting, relational approach**, underpinned by strong systems and workforce support.

Key recommendations:

- **Adopt a whole-setting approach**
Wellbeing should be embedded across the setting, rather than delivered solely through targeted interventions.
- **Increase access to specialist support**
Improve access to mental health professionals, including counsellors and

educational psychologists. Speech and language support is key as evidenced by London Violence Reduction Unit's Talk Matters programme.

- **Build staff confidence and capability**

Train staff to recognise and respond to early signs of distress, using relational and trauma-informed approaches. The training should equip staff to recognise how distress is interpreted differently across racial groups, and to counter the well-documented pattern of Black children's distress being misread as behaviour. Tools such as the Boxall Profile® Online can support staff to systematically understand and respond to pupils' social and emotional needs.

- **Address systemic pressures**

Reduce drivers of poor wellbeing, including high-stakes testing, exclusions, and inflexible behaviour policies, with particular attention to the racial disproportionality in how these pressures fall on Black and brown children, care experienced children, and other structurally marginalised groups.

- **Create inclusive, safe environments**

Foster **a sense of belonging** and reduce stigma through inclusive practice and positive relationships. Schools should foster emotional safety and ensure that every child feels welcomed and valued. This requires more than universal inclusive practice alone. Some children, including Black children and particularly Black boys, experience school environments through patterns of bias, heightened scrutiny and deficit-based behavioural assumptions, which can undermine trust, belonging and wellbeing. Settings should therefore take active steps to identify and dismantle these patterns through anti-racist practice, reflective leadership, culturally responsive approaches and staff training that strengthens understanding of bias, trauma and relational practice. A whole-setting culture of inclusion, fairness and relational trust is essential to supporting mental health and wellbeing.

- **Prioritise relational practice**

Settings should adopt flexible, child-centred approaches that adapt to need, rather than locating challenges solely within the child.

- **Support the workforce**

Staff wellbeing is critical. Provision of reflective supervision and safe spaces for staff to process emotional work can reduce burnout and sustain supportive environments. This is particularly important for staff (teachers, TAs, pastoral support staff, mentors) who are working with children with social, emotional and mental health needs and with safeguarding needs.

- **Strengthen family and community partnerships**

Engagement with families and local services improves outcomes. Schools should act as community hubs, supporting families and addressing wider barriers to learning through coordinated support. They should be supported to educate the adults around children (parents, carers, grandparents etc) in relational approaches.

For example, The Inclusive Multi Academy Trust (Watford), including Laurance

Haines School, has developed a strong model of family and community engagement. This includes practical support for families (e.g. accessing services, budgeting), partnerships with organisations such as the Salvation Army, and opportunities for parents to access adult education through local authority and voluntary sector partnerships. The trust's inclusive approach - such as translation services, culturally responsive engagement, and an open-door policy - demonstrates how relational practice can strengthen both wellbeing and inclusion.

Q11: What should the top three priority areas be for building and sharing evidence within the National Inclusion Standards?

The Working Group recommends the following three priority areas:

1. **Social and emotional development and early identification**
Develop a national understanding of children's social and emotional development, including effective approaches to universal and targeted identification. Universal screening approaches should be explored to ensure the needs of **every child** are identified early and equitably.
There is an opportunity to draw on established tools, such as the Boxall Profile® Online, to build consistent, comparable data on pupils' social and emotional development at scale.
2. **Effective early intervention and prevention models**
Build and share evidence on interventions that successfully prevent escalation of need, reduce exclusions, and limit reliance on EHCPs.
3. **Inclusive practice in mainstream settings**
Identify and scale evidence-based strategies that enable mainstream schools to successfully support diverse learners, including:
 - **Adaptive teaching approaches**
 - **Relational and trauma-informed practice**
 - **Environmental adaptations**

Cross-cutting evidence priorities:

- **Disparity analysis across all evidence areas**, disaggregated by race, gender, free school meal status, experience of the care system and English as an Additional Language (EAL), to ensure evidence on inclusion can be interpreted through an equity lens.
- **Race-disaggregated and intersectional outcome data.** National Inclusion Standards should be underpinned by race-disaggregated evidence on exclusions, EHCP refusal rates, Inclusion Base placements, part-time timetables, CAMHS referrals, transition outcomes and tribunal outcomes. Without this data, the

standards cannot determine whether inclusion is being delivered equitably, and reforms cannot be evaluated against their stated equity objectives.

- Outcomes beyond attainment (e.g. wellbeing, attendance, long-term life outcomes, preparation for adulthood)
- Impact of relational and nurturing approaches on engagement and attainment
- Workforce development and effective CPD models
- Long-term impact of early intervention on system demand
- **Collaborative expertise between specialist and mainstream settings**
Establish a national standard for how special schools and mainstream schools share evidence-based SEMH strategies, ensuring that specialist knowledge is systematically “unlocked” and embedded within the universal offer.

Q18: How can we make sure that every area can meet the full range of the needs of children and young people through Inclusion Bases?

Inclusion Bases should form part of a **strategic, locally planned continuum of provision**, designed to complement mainstream education.

Key recommendations:

- **Strategic local planning and commissioning**
Local areas should map need and plan provision accordingly, ensuring Inclusion Bases address gaps rather than duplicate existing provision.
- **Equitable funding and resource allocation**
Funding should reflect local levels of need and support sustainable provision across all areas. Consider an assessment process funding allocation and learn from existing models - eg Lambeth Exceptional Needs Granting (ENG) fund.
- **Develop a diverse range of provision**
Inclusion Bases should cater to a range of needs, including SEMH, communication, and sensory needs.
- **Ensure specialist expertise**
Bases must be staffed by appropriately trained professionals with expertise in SEMH, adaptive pedagogy, and inclusive practice. Ongoing professional development should be embedded for all staff, including support staff. The Experts at Hand approach should be fully resourced to enable all schools to have straightforward and timely access to specialist support staff, including, but not exclusively, educational psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and behaviour support specialists.

For example, Norbury Manor Primary School's Blossom House Deaf Unit demonstrates how specialist provision can be successfully integrated within a mainstream setting. Specialist expertise is combined with strong inclusive practice, enabling deaf pupils to access both targeted support and mainstream

classroom learning.

- **Promote flexibility and responsiveness**
Provision should be adaptable to local context, particularly within multi-academy trusts, allowing leaders to respond to community-specific needs.
- **Strengthen collaboration**
Inclusion Bases should operate in close partnership with mainstream schools, early years settings, and multi-agency services.
- **Ensure clear purpose and oversight**
Robust governance is needed to ensure Inclusion Bases are not used as a mechanism for exclusion, including monitoring of placements by race, gender, free school meal status and SEND profile to surface and address disproportionate placement.
- **Learn from effective local models and cross-UK good practice**
For example, Enfield Council has funded and supported a network of nurture groups across the borough, providing early intervention and relational support at scale. The provision has been found to be an effective, high-value early intervention that delivers strong educational and economic returns. Similarly, the Department of Education in Northern Ireland funds 62 nurture groups in primary schools across the nation, completed by a universal programme that builds whole school capacity through a nurturing approach. The provision has been found to be [highly cost effective](#), leading to improved attendance and attainment, as well as significant improvements in pupils' social and emotional development and positive knock-on effects for wider school culture.
- **Support early years pathways**
Improve support for early identification and referral from early years settings to ensure timely access to provision.
- **Understand what works**
Align with The Difference's research on the four tenets of effective Internal Alternative Provision.

Q19: How can we make sure that Inclusion Bases help children and young people succeed in mainstream settings?

Inclusion Bases should be designed with **reintegration and inclusion as core objectives**, not as standalone provision.

Key recommendations:

- **Maintain strong links with mainstream classrooms**
This may include shared teaching, dual placement, and gradual transitions.
- **Make Inclusion Base guidance statutory**
To ensure consistency, quality, and accountability across the system, forthcoming

guidance on Inclusion Bases should be placed on a statutory footing. This would support clearer expectations for local authorities and schools, reduce variation in practice, and help ensure that all Inclusion Bases operate with a strong and consistent focus on reintegration and mainstream inclusion. Statutory guidance should include mandatory racial and demographic monitoring of Inclusion Base placements, published annually at school and local authority level. This would ensure that the statutory framework supports the policy's stated inclusion objectives and surfaces any disproportionate use of Inclusion Bases by race, gender, FSM status, experience of the care system or SEND profile.

- **Ensure clear pathways and planning**

Each placement should include:

- A clear rationale for attendance
- Defined outcomes and support strategies
- Expected duration
- A structured reintegration plan

- **Focus on personalised, co-produced support**

Plans should be developed in partnership with families and young people.

- **Monitor outcomes robustly**

Evaluate both academic and social outcomes to ensure effectiveness, disaggregated by race, gender, FSM status, experience of the care system and SEND profile, to ensure effectiveness is being delivered equitably across the pupil population.

- **Share and scale effective practice**

Mechanisms should be established to disseminate learning across schools and local areas.

For example, Homewood School & Sixth Form (Kent) provides a strong model of an inclusion base offering a wide range of personalised, targeted interventions while maintaining a clear focus on integration within mainstream education. The school regularly advises other local settings.