

Inclusion bases: reflective questions

There is no single model for an effective inclusion base: effective inclusion bases can look very different. But there are key decisions you can take to make sure an inclusion base gives the best possible support to children and young people with additional needs.

The school, trust and local authority leaders who shared practical insights and experiences of designing, developing and refining an inclusion base identified six themes that we recommend you explore when considering your own inclusion base.

Use these reflective questions to think about how you could apply the principles for effective inclusion bases in your setting. They are suitable for school and trust leaders, governors and trustees.

Building the right cohort

Define who the base is for

- > How well do you understand the needs and context of your school community, and how does this shape the group of pupils for your inclusion base?
- > What criteria and processes do you use to identify which pupils the base is designed to support?
- > How robust and transparent are your admissions processes, and how do you ensure decisions are based on multiple sources of evidence?

Group pupils intentionally

- > How do you decide on groupings within your inclusion base to ensure they are tailored to pupils' needs?
- > How do you balance the need for targeted support with opportunities for age-appropriate peer relationships?
- > How do you plan and review staff ratios to support both individual and group needs?

Engage families throughout the journey

- > How do you build relationships with families before, during and after a pupil joins the base?
- > In what ways do you involve families in shaping and supporting their child's experience in the base?

Review, respond and refine

- > What systems are in place to regularly review the makeup of your cohort?
- > How do you track progress and review personalised targets for pupils, and how does this inform provision?
- > How do you ensure all staff share an understanding of the cohort and are alert to issues with cohesion or suitability?

Setting aims and measuring success

Define the rationale

- > What is the rationale for your inclusion base, and how clearly is it expressed?
- > What other options have you considered for meeting pupils' needs, and how do they compare to your proposed or existing inclusion base?

Measure what matters

- > How ambitious are your aims, and how well are they understood by all stakeholders?
- > How accurately will your measures of success allow you to evaluate your aims?
- > How well do your measures of success balance academic, social, emotional, physical and life skills development?
- > Is the base as a whole set up to measure success in a range of ways?
- > Do measures of success for individual pupils account for a range of areas?

Review regularly

- > What systems do you use for assessment and monitoring, and how do they inform improvement planning?
- > How do you assess and monitor the effectiveness of the base as a whole?
- > How do you use formative assessment to track and respond to individual pupils' progress?
- > How do you involve all stakeholders in reviews and target-setting?
 - What does this look like at a whole-base level? Who needs to be involved and how?
 - What does it look like at an individual pupil level? How are families and other adults around the child brought into the process?

Designing physical spaces

Define the environment intentionally

- > Does your cohort need a specific kind of space?
- > What is the goal of the space: is it learning or regulation?
- > How have you thought about the sensory experience of pupils in your base?
- > What role do routines and expectations play in creating a sense of ownership and pride in the environment?

Group pupils thoughtfully

- > Are pupils learning alongside peers with similar needs and developmental stages?
- > How flexible are your groupings as cohorts change or grow?
- > How does your physical space support you to group pupils effectively and flexibly?

Prioritise hygiene, care and safety

- > How do you adapt resources and classroom design to ensure all pupils can access developmentally appropriate experiences safely and with dignity?
- > What facilities and procedures are in place for hygiene, care and safety, and how are these tailored to individual pupils?
- > How do you involve staff and external partners in sourcing and maintaining specialist resources?

Build consistency with mainstream spaces

- > How consistent are routines, supports and expectations across the base and mainstream classrooms?
- > What strategies are in place to support smooth transitions and a sense of belonging for pupils moving between spaces?

Designing an ambitious curriculum

Design the cohort with care

- > How do you ensure the way you design your cohort enables access to a meaningful, ambitious curriculum for all?
- > How flexible are your groupings as needs and pupil profiles change?

Set high, personalised expectations

- > What processes are in place to set and review ambitious, personalised goals for each pupil?
- > How do you ensure that all staff hold and communicate high expectations?

Guarantee a broad and rich curriculum offer

- > How do you ensure your curriculum remains as broad and rich as possible for every pupil?
- > When the curriculum is narrowed, how do you make, document and review the decision?
- > How do you support all pupils to access enrichment and wider curriculum opportunities, both within the base and in the mainstream?

Root the curriculum in strong pedagogy

- > How is your curriculum planning informed by strong pedagogy, and how do you support staff to deliver it effectively?
- > How do you develop staff expertise in both curriculum content and pedagogy, including specialist approaches?

Embedding high quality teaching

Champion expert and empowered teaching

- > How do you identify, recruit and retain highly qualified teachers for your inclusion base?
- > In what ways do you empower teachers to take proactive ownership of the base's work?
- > What opportunities exist for teachers in the base to model, coach and collaborate with mainstream colleagues?

Apply a sound understanding of child development

- > How do you support staff to deepen their understanding of child development, both generally and in relation to specific needs?
- > In what ways do teachers and teaching assistants adapt their approaches to suit each pupil's developmental stage?
- > How do you use knowledge of child development to inform curriculum planning, lesson design and assessment?

Harness specialist expertise through collaboration

- > What systems are in place to provide ongoing professional development in specialist areas such as communication, sensory needs, and autism?
- > How do you include regular input from specialists to improve teaching?
- > How do teachers and support staff work together to integrate specialist advice into everyday practice?

Build whole-school expertise

- > How do you ensure that specialist expertise is not siloed, but benefits pupils across both the inclusion base and mainstream classrooms?
- > What professional development opportunities are available for mainstream staff to develop their expertise in SEND?

Developing a high performing staff team

Bring together complementary expertise

- > How does your leadership team ensure a high-performing team is central to the vision and success of your inclusion base?
- > What processes are in place to recruit, retain and develop staff with the right expertise and values?

- > How do you structure your team to bring together staff with diverse and complementary expertise?
- > How frequently do you create opportunities for collaboration and shared decision-making among staff working in and around the base?

Get the right expertise in the right place

- > How do you guarantee that every pupil in the inclusion base is taught by a qualified teacher, with clear accountability for progress and outcomes?
- > How do you determine and review staffing ratios to ensure pupils have access to suitably qualified adults throughout the school day?
- > How do you deploy support staff to provide targeted, responsive support without substituting for the teacher's role?

Embed ongoing, whole-school professional development

- > How do you identify and address the professional development needs of all staff, including teaching, support, pastoral and office staff?
- > How do you ensure professional development is practical, evidence-informed and responsive to emerging priorities?
- > What systems are in place to monitor the impact of professional development on staff confidence and expertise, as well as pupil outcomes?
- > How do you support staff progression, including routes to higher qualifications and leadership roles?
- > How do you ensure that professional development builds expertise both within and beyond the base, supporting inclusion across the whole school?

About our inclusion base insights series

Our inclusion base insights series brings together the experiences and insights of schools and trusts that have already designed, reviewed and refined an inclusion base. Read the insights to find out how leaders have approached these questions in practice at www.ambition.org.uk/inclusion-base/insights