Hampshire County Council

Improvement and Advisory Service

SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS

Practical planning and development of inclusion strategy for Hampshire schools

In support of DfE *Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF)* *Inclusive mainstream fund for schools: methodology 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK*

October 2026

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Inclusion strategy

An effective inclusion strategy begins with understanding the unique context of the school and the potential barriers that could be experienced by its children and young people. Strategies are most likely to have impact when priorities, resources and capacity are informed by evidence, lived experience and a clear understanding of what is preventing participation, belonging, achievement and thriving.

The Department for Education's (DfE) *Inclusive Mainstream Fund* guidance[1] and its seven principles of inclusion provide a framework for creating an inclusive culture and reducing barriers to participation and learning.

The ***Hampshire approach to inclusion*** offers a local lens through which schools can interpret and implement these expectations with identified pillars which directly align to those from the DfE principles.

For schools receiving the Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF), publication of an inclusion strategy by 31 December 2026, is a condition of the grant and should demonstrate how investment is being used to reduce barriers to learning, participation, and achievement in order to enhance inclusion.

This resource is intended to support strategic reflection, planning, and improvement, for each individual setting to consider within their own context, not create an additional initiative or plan.

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-mainstream-fund-support-for-school-leaders/developing-an-inclusion-strategy-using-the-inclusive-mainstream-fund

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Inclusion as school improvement

Inclusion is not a separate strand of school development.

Some examples may include:

- the quality of teaching and learning
- relationships across the school community
- leadership and governance
- attendance and participation
- behaviour and wellbeing
- curriculum design
- family partnerships
- wider enrichment opportunities
- transition planning
- safeguarding of children
- tackling the impacts of economic disadvantage

Reflection

As you begin developing your strategy, consider: if inclusion improved significantly in our school over the next three years, what would young people, families, and staff experience and what would be the impact?

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The Hampshire inclusion lens

- The DfE inclusion framework provides the national structure for inclusion development.
- The *Hampshire approach to inclusion* provides the lens through which schools can interpret, implement, and evaluate inclusive practice.
- Aligning national expectations with Hampshire practice.

Department for Education Principle	Ambition reflected in the following Hampshire Approach to Inclusion pillars
1. Ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion	• Relational and strengths based • Proactive rather than reactive
2. Evidence-based support prioritising early intervention	• Consistent and evidence informed approaches to teaching and learning • Proactive rather than reactive
3. High-quality adaptive teaching with curriculum designed for all learners	• Consistent and evidence informed approaches to teaching and learning • Prioritises professional development and building specialism
4. Enriching provision beyond the classroom that all children can access	• Fosters difference and belonging • Prioritises professional development and building specialism
5. A safe and respectful culture fostering belonging, attendance, and participation in learning	• Relational and strengths based • Fosters difference and belonging • Proactive rather than reactive
6. Strong partnerships with families and wider services	• Welcomes feedback and community engagement
7. Inclusive environments with continuous improvements to accessibility	• Prioritises professional development and building specialism • Fosters difference and belonging

Note: DfE principle 4 needs schools should consider how opportunities for participation and enrichment beyond the classroom are reflected across several pillars, particularly *fosters difference and belonging*, *Relational and strengths-based* and *welcomes feedback and community engagement*.

The *Hampshire approach to inclusion* is not intended to replace the *DfE inclusion framework* or *Principles of inclusion*. Rather, it provides a locally developed lens through which Hampshire schools can interpret, implement, and evaluate inclusive practice within their own context, whilst identifying appropriate training offers that could support in the development of the area.

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Shared focus

The *Hampshire approach to inclusion* encourages schools to move beyond questions such as:

- *which pupils need additional support?*

Towards questions such as:

- *what barriers are preventing some students from participating, belonging, achieving, and thriving?*

This shift in thinking helps schools move beyond deficit-based approaches and towards inclusive, strengths-based practice when planning and developing their inclusion strategy.

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Using the seven principles of inclusion

The DfE expects schools to consider how their inclusion strategy aligns with the *Principles of inclusion* and how investment contributes to reducing barriers to learning, participation, and achievement through a whole-school approach.

Schools may find it helpful to use the seven principles as an additional lens when reviewing evidence, identifying priorities and planning implementation.

DfE Principles of inclusion	Key reflection questions
Ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion.	How is inclusion reflected within leadership, governance, and school improvement planning?
Evidence-informed support prioritising early intervention.	How effectively are barriers identified and addressed before difficulties become entrenched?
High-quality adaptive teaching with a curriculum designed for all learners.	How effectively does universal provision enable all students to participate, learn, and achieve?
Enriching provision beyond the classroom that all children can access.	Can all students participate fully in wider school life, enrichment, and leadership opportunities?
A safe and respectful culture fostering belonging, attendance, and participation.	Do students experience a genuine sense of belonging and mattering?
Strong partnerships with families and wider services.	How are children, families and wider partners contributing to planning, support, and decision-making?
Inclusive environments with continuous improvements to accessibility.	How effectively do physical, social, and learning environments support participation and achievement?

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Understanding your current position

Before identifying priorities, schools should develop a clear understanding of their current strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Effective Inclusion Strategies are informed by both evidence and lived experience.

Some examples may include

Quantitative evidence	Qualitative evidence
Attendance including a lens on serious and persistent absence, the use of reduced hours provision and alternative provision,	Pupil voice
Attainment and progress	Parent and carer feedback
Behaviour, suspensions, and exclusions	Staff feedback
Participation data	Learning walks
SEND and vulnerability data	Observations
Mobility and transitions	Case studies
Destination information	Stakeholder engagement

Looking beyond the data

Data can tell us what is happening.

Listening can help us understand why.

Schools are encouraged to explore:

- *which students are thriving?*
- *which groups experience fewer positive outcomes?*
- *which pupils participate least frequently?*
- *which children may feel least connected to their school community?*
- *what do pupils and families tell us about their experiences?*
- *what strengths already exist that can be built upon?*

Reflection

As you review your evidence, consider:

- *if we viewed our school through the eyes of our most vulnerable learners, what might we notice?*
- *what would they say helps them feel included?*
- *what might they tell us still needs to improve?*

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Identifying barriers and strategic priorities

The purpose of reviewing evidence is not simply to identify challenges.

It is to understand the barriers that may be preventing some students from engaging, participating, belonging, achieving, and thriving.

Barriers may relate to (not an exhaustive list):

- learning and cognition
- communication and interaction
- attendance and engagement
- social, emotional, and mental health
- curriculum access
- relationships
- transitions
- participation in wider school life
- family circumstances
- economic disadvantage.

Schools are encouraged to explore these barriers through a strengths-based lens, recognising existing successes whilst identifying opportunities for improvement.

Setting strategic priorities

Effective inclusion strategies focus on a small number of priorities that are likely to have the greatest impact.

Schools may find it helpful to ask:

Reflection question	Considerations
What matters most about the student's barriers to learning?	Which barriers currently have the greatest impact on students' outcomes?
What evidence supports this?	What patterns are emerging?
What is already working well?	How can strengths be built upon?
Who will benefit?	Which students are most likely to experience improvement?
What is sustainable?	Can this become embedded in everyday practice?

The strongest priorities are often those that:

- strengthen participation
- increase belonging
- improve achievement and outcomes
- build staff expertise.
- improve partnership working.
- become embedded in everyday practice.

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From priorities to action

Once priorities have been identified, schools can develop actions that are evidence informed, achievable and sustainable.

The most effective actions are often those that strengthen everyday practice for all students, making sure that vulnerable cohort needs and barriers are understood.

Planning for improvement

Question	Prompt
What are we trying to improve?	Define the intended change.
Why is this important?	Reference the evidence.
What will we do?	Identify the actions required.
Who will lead this work?	Establish accountability.
What support is needed?	Consider resources and professional learning.
How will we know it is working?	Agree success measures.

Strengthening universal provision

The *Hampshire approach to inclusion* encourages schools first to consider:

- Can this barrier be addressed through stronger universal provision?

Before asking:

- What additional intervention or specialist support is required?

Schools may wish to draw upon Hampshire's Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP)[2] guidance when considering how high-quality universal provision can support participation, belonging, achievement and thriving.

This helps ensure that inclusion remains everyone's responsibility and that improvements benefit the widest possible range of learners.

[2] https://documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/sen-support.pdf

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Resource planning

Schools receiving IMF funding are expected to demonstrate how planned activity contributes to reducing barriers to learning and participation. Resource allocation should therefore be linked to identified priorities and intended outcomes.

Schools are encouraged to work closely with:

- school business managers
- finance leads
- governing bodies
- trust leaders (where applicable).

This will ensure investment supports both identified barriers and sustainable improvement.

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Implementation, evaluation, and impact

Implementation is not simply about completing actions.

It is about improving experiences and outcomes for students.

Effective evaluation therefore considers both measurable outcomes and lived experiences.

Sources of evidence

Area	Examples
Outcomes.	Attendance, attainment, suspensions, exclusions and destinations, post key stage planning and pathways
Participation.	Clubs, enrichment, leadership opportunities, and wider school life
Belonging.	Pupil surveys, focus groups and pupil voice
Family partnerships.	Parent feedback and engagement
Provision.	Learning walks, quality assurance, and OAP implementation
Workforce development.	Staff confidence and professional learning

Reflection

- Participation.

Can more students participate meaningfully in school life?

- Belonging.

Do more students experience a genuine sense of belonging and mattering?

- Outcomes.

Can we evidence improved experiences and outcomes for students?

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Evidence base for inclusion strategy development

There is no single model for effective inclusion. However, a range of national guidance, research and professional publications highlight common themes that schools may wish to consider when developing, implementing, and evaluating their inclusion strategy, these align with *Hampshire's approach to inclusion* pillars.

High-quality teaching and universal provision

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) identifies high-quality teaching as one of the most important levers available to schools for improving outcomes, particularly for pupils who may be vulnerable to underachievement. DfE IMF guidance promotes a universal offer built upon high-quality teaching and adaptive practice, specifically referring to EEF's work on high-quality teaching.

Belonging, participation and relationships

The Department for Education's *School belonging case studies research report* (October 2026) has explored how high-performing schools successfully foster belonging while maintaining strong attendance and attainment. It identifies the following key themes:

- Relational practice and trusted adult relationships.
- Pupil voice and agency.
- Celebrating diversity and inclusion.
- Creating a strong school identity and culture.
- Individualised support.
- Partnership beyond the school gates with families and communities.

Inclusion as school improvement

Ofsted and the Department for Education increasingly present inclusion as a whole-school responsibility and a key component of school improvement, reflected through leadership, curriculum, teaching, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, and school culture. Recent DfE research has also highlighted belonging as a significant factor in pupils' social, emotional and academic development, and in supporting attendance and attainment.

Early identification and proactive support

Whilst national SEND reform remains ongoing, local and national developments continue to emphasise the importance of early identification, inclusive mainstream practice and timely support. The Department for Education's SEND review: right support, right place, right time set out an ambition for children and young people to receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

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Working in partnership with children, young people and families

Research and guidance from the Department for Education, Education Endowment Foundation and Ofsted emphasise the value of working collaboratively with children, young people, families and wider partners. Understanding lived experience through meaningful engagement and co-production can help schools identify barriers, build trust and develop solutions that are both inclusive and responsive to local need.

Parents and carers are key stakeholders in their child's outcomes. Hampshire's guidance for effective partnership with parents and carers reinforces that effective partnership is not an additional activity, but a core school improvement strategy grounded in relational practice, trust, belonging, and co-production.

Schools may wish to draw upon Hampshire guidance relating to:

- participation and pupil voice
- person-centred approaches
- parent partnership
- co-production
- effective partnership with parents and carers.

Building staff expertise

Implementation research from the Education Endowment Foundation, alongside recent resources from the Ambition Institute and findings from Department for Education SEND reviews, highlights that sustainable improvement is rarely achieved through isolated initiatives. Meaningful change is more likely when schools focus on a small number of priorities, develop staff expertise and implement change consistently over time.

Bringing the evidence together

Across the evidence base, several consistent themes emerge:

- high-quality teaching and universal provision matter
- ambitious expectations matter
- relationships, belonging, and participation matter
- early identification and proactive support matter
- staff expertise and professional learning matter
- partnership with children, young people and families matters
- sustainable implementation matters
- inclusion is most effective when viewed as a whole-school endeavour.

While these themes provide a useful evidence-informed starting point, effective inclusion strategies are developed within the context of individual schools and communities.

Schools should therefore use this evidence alongside their own data, self-evaluation and engagement with children, young people, families, and partners.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Hampshire inclusion self-review tool

Purpose

This tool is intended to support schools in bringing together evidence from a range of sources to identify strengths, barriers and strategic priorities for inclusion.

It should be used alongside existing Hampshire resources, including the Hampshire Approach to Inclusion, Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) guidance and audit tools Audit tool, Governor and Trustee monitoring questions Governor and trustee questions Hampshire approach to inclusion, attendance and participation data, stakeholder engagement activity, and school self-evaluation processes.

The purpose of this tool is not to duplicate existing audits, but to help leaders synthesise evidence and translate findings into meaningful school improvement priorities.

Use available evidence, stakeholder feedback and professional judgement to identify:

- What is working well.
- What barriers some children and young people may be experiencing.
- Areas requiring further development.
- Priorities for strategic action.

DfE framework principles as listed in appendix 5	Hampshire pillar	Current strengths	Areas for development	Evidence
Culture	Fosters difference and belonging			
Leadership	Relational and strengths-based			
Teaching	Consistent and evidence-informed approaches to teaching and learning			
Pupil support	Proactive rather than reactive			
Partnerships	Welcomes feedback and community engagement			

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Systems and structures	Prioritises professional development and building specialism			

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Appendix 2

Stakeholder engagement summary tool

Capture the views of children, young people, families, staff, governors, and partners to inform strategic priorities.

Summarise themes rather than individual comments.

Stakeholder group	What we heard	Strengths identified	Areas for development	Strategic implications
Students				
Parents and carers				
Staff				
Governors/trustees				
External partners				

Appendix 3

Belonging and participation review

Use evidence, engagement activity, and school knowledge to identify strengths and barriers.

Area	Evidence source	Strengths	Development priorities
Relationships			
Belonging			
Participation			
Pupil voice			
Equity and access			
Family engagement			

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Appendix 4

Success measures and impact indicators

Focus on outcomes for students, not simply the completion of actions.

Strategic priority	Intended outcome	Success indicators	Evidence source	Review date

Examples of success measures.

Impact areas	Possible measures
Achievement	Attainment, progress, destinations.
Attendance	Attendance, persistent absence.
Participation	Enrichment, clubs, leadership opportunities.
Belonging	Surveys, pupil voice, focus groups.
Family partnership	Parent feedback and engagement.
Teaching and provision	Learning walks, OAP implementation.
Staff development	Confidence, professional learning impact.

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Appendix 5

Inclusion strategy action plan

Focus on a small number of high-impact priorities. Align actions to identified barriers and relevant Hampshire and DfE principles.

Strategic priority	Hampshire pillar(s)	DfE principles	Desired outcome	Key actions	Lead	Timescale	Success criteria	RAG
Priority 1								
Priority 2								
Priority 3								
Priority 4								
Priority 5								

DfE principle reference

Reference	DfE principle
1	Ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion.
2	Evidence-informed support prioritising early intervention.
3	High-quality adaptive teaching with a curriculum designed for all learners.
4	Enriching provision beyond the classroom that all children can access.
5	A safe and respectful culture fostering belonging, attendance, and participation.
6	Strong partnerships with families and wider services.
7	Inclusive environments with continuous improvements to accessibility.

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Annex A

Mock worked example: translating evidence into strategic priorities

Important note

This mock worked example has been developed to demonstrate how a school might use evidence, stakeholder feedback, and self-evaluation to inform an inclusion strategy.

It is not intended to represent any Hampshire school, nor should it be used as a template to replicate.

Every school's inclusion strategy should reflect its own context, evidence, strengths, barriers, and priorities.

The purpose of this example is to demonstrate the thinking process that sits behind strategic planning and to illustrate how barriers, evidence and priorities may be connected.

Mock school information	Example
Mock school name	River View All Through School (fictional).
School type	All through (4-16).
Pupils on roll	1,350.
Strategy period	2027-2030.
Review arrangements	Annual review within school improvement cycle.

Context indicator	School profile
Pupil premium	42%
SEND support	22%
EHCP	5.8%
Mobility	Above national average
Persistent absence	Above national average
IDACI	High

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Context summary

River View All Through School serves a diverse community with higher than average levels of deprivation, pupil mobility, and additional need.

The school has invested significantly in positive relationships, pastoral support, and early help. Self-evaluation suggests that many students feel known and supported by adults.

However, leaders identified that attendance, participation, and curriculum engagement vary across pupil groups and that opportunities exist to strengthen inclusive practice through a more strategic and proactive approach.

What is working well?

Evidence source	Strength identified
Pupil voice	Positive relationships with staff.
Parent feedback	School is caring and supportive.
Self-evaluation	Effective pastoral systems.
Transition reviews	Strong support across phases.
Learning walks	Positive classroom relationships.
Attendance analysis	Attendance improving for several vulnerable groups.

What barriers have been identified?

Barrier	Evidence source
Lower attendance for some disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND	Attendance analysis
Uneven participation in clubs and enrichment opportunities	Participation data
Some pupils report feeling less connected to school life	Pupil voice
Variability in adaptive teaching and implementation of OAP	Learning walks and staff survey
Families would welcome greater involvement in planning and review processes	Parent consultation

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Stakeholder engagement

How have we engaged children, young people, families and staff?

Stakeholder group	Key Messages
Students	Positive relationships. More opportunities for participation and influence would be welcomed.
Parents and carers	Staff are supportive. More opportunities for partnership and co-production would be beneficial.
Staff	Strong commitment to inclusion. Additional development around adaptive teaching would be helpful.
Governors	Inclusion should remain a central school improvement priority.

Strategic Priority 1

DfE framework priority-strengthen belonging, participation and attendance	Worked example
Why is this a priority	Evidence suggests that some students experience barriers that affect attendance, participation, and their sense of belonging.
What evidence supports this	Attendance analysis, participation data, pupil voice, and parent feedback.
Hampshire pillar(s)	Fosters difference and belonging; relational and strengths-based.
Relevant DfE principle(s)	Principle 4, principle 5, principle 6.
Planned activity	Review participation data; strengthen pupil leadership opportunities; develop relational approaches to attendance; increase opportunities for pupil voice.
Lead staff	Deputy headteacher (inclusion), attendance lead, pastoral leaders.
Timescale	Year 1 implementation with ongoing review and refinement across Years 2 and 3.
Milestones	End of Year 1: baseline established and implementation underway. End of Year 2: Evidence of improved participation and attendance emerging. End of Year 3: Practice embedded and sustained improvements evident.

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DfE framework priority-strengthen belonging, participation and attendance	Worked example
Resource considerations	Attendance and pastoral capacity; participation resources; staff development; leadership oversight.
Intended outcomes	Improved attendance, increased participation, stronger sense of belonging and reduced persistent absence.
Success measures	Attendance data, participation records, pupil surveys, and focus group feedback.
Review arrangements	Termly review through attendance, participation, and pupil voice analysis.

Strategic priority 2

DfE template heading-strengthen high-quality universal provision	Worked example
Why is this a priority	Review activity suggests variability in adaptive teaching and implementation of OAP across phases and departments.
What evidence supports this	Learning walks, staff survey, quality assurance activities and SEND review processes.
Hampshire pillar(s)	Consistent and evidence-informed approaches to teaching and learning; proactive rather than reactive.
Relevant DfE principle(s)	Principle 2, principle 3, principle 7.
Planned activity	Review implementation of OAP; deliver professional learning linked to adaptive teaching; strengthen coaching and implementation support; share effective practice across phases.
Lead staff	Deputy headteacher (teaching and learning), SENDCo, phase leaders.
Timescale	Year 1 review and professional learning programme; Years 2 and 3 implementation and refinement.
Milestones	End of Year 1: OAP review completed and professional learning programme launched. End of Year 2: increased consistency in classroom practice evident. End of Year 3: strong universal provision embedded across all phases.
Resource considerations	Continuing professional development (CPD) budget, SENDCo and leadership capacity, release time for coaching and collaboration.

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DfE template heading-strengthen high-quality universal provision	Worked example
Intended outcomes	Increased consistency in practice, improved curriculum access, stronger universal provision, and reduced reliance on additional intervention.
Success measures	Staff surveys, learning walks, pupil engagement measures, and OAP review outcomes.
Review arrangements	Termly quality assurance activity and annual evaluation of implementation.

Strategic priority 3

DfE template heading-strengthen partnership with families and build staff expertise	Worked example
Why is this a priority	Feedback suggests opportunities to strengthen co-production with families and continue developing staff expertise in inclusive practice.
What evidence supports this	Parent consultation, stakeholder engagement, staff survey, and self-evaluation.
Hampshire pillar(s)	Welcomes feedback and community engagement; prioritises professional development and building specialism.
Relevant DfE principle(s)	Principle 1 and principle 6.
Planned activity	Establish regular family consultation opportunities; review engagement approaches; develop professional learning linked to inclusion priorities; increase opportunities for co-production.
Lead staff	Headteacher, SENDCo, family engagement lead.
Timescale	Family engagement structures established during Year 1 and embedded across Years 2 and 3.
Milestones	End of Year 1: new consultation and engagement structures established. End of Year 2: increased evidence of parent participation and co-production. End of Year 3: partnership approaches routinely embedded and positively evaluated.
Resource considerations	Administrative support, staff release time, professional learning budget, and family engagement resources.
Intended outcomes	Improved family engagement, stronger co-production, increased staff confidence, and stronger partnership working.

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DfE template heading-strengthen partnership with families and build staff expertise	Worked example
Success measures	Parent surveys, participation records, staff surveys, and evidence of family influence on decision-making.
Review arrangements	Annual stakeholder review and termly monitoring of engagement activity.

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Resource planning

How will resources support implementation?

Leaders will work closely with, school business managers, finance leads, governors or trustees, leadership teams, to ensure investment aligns with identified barriers, strategic priorities, intended outcomes and the wider school improvement plan.

Monitoring and evaluation

How will impact be monitored?

Review activity	Frequency
Attendance review	Termly.
Participation analysis	Termly.
Pupil voice activity	Termly.
Parent feedback	At least annually.
Learning walks and quality assurance	Termly.
Staff survey	Annually.
Full strategy review	Annually.

In this mock worked example, leaders did not begin by asking:

- What intervention should we introduce?

Instead, they asked:

- What barriers are some students experiencing, and what evidence do we have?

The resulting priorities focus on strengthening:

- belonging
- participation
- attendance
- universal provision
- partnership working
- professional expertise.

Schools may wish to use a similar process whilst ensuring that priorities remain firmly rooted in their own context, evidence, and community.

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