

# Inclusive practice

The role of mainstream schools and local authorities in supporting children with SEND





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# Recommendations

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1. Local authorities should consider what more they could be doing to effectively support, challenge and empower schools to improve their inclusive practice, replicating some of the best practice set out in this report.
2. National government should sustain sufficient levels of high needs funding allocations in line with rising demand and costs.
3. National government should provide a clearer policy steer on inclusion of children with SEND in mainstream schools and introduce a specific inclusion fund to facilitate more inclusion in schools.
4. London Councils should secure a pan-London commitment from key education partners, including Ofsted, all 33 London local authorities and the 3 Regional Schools Commissioners, to champion inclusion in schools and tackle any incidents of non-inclusive practice that are identified.
5. Building on the new focus on inclusion in the new School Inspection Framework, Ofsted should further prioritise inclusion in school inspections by:
  - Challenging schools that have a below local average number of children on the SEN register at a school, taking into account any specific characteristics of the school, such as selective admissions criteria, that may impact on the school's intake
  - Examining the admissions policy to ensure it does not discriminate against children with SEND
  - Seeking to understand how schools support and nurture children with SEND, with a focus on how independence and life skills are developed
  - Ensuring that schools without evidence of inclusive SEND practice are not awarded an outstanding Ofsted rating.
6. National government should update the SEND Code of Practice to stress and clarify schools' duties in relation to supporting children with SEND, including providing a clear definition of off-rolling.
7. National government should support the design and creation of one EHCP template for all local authorities to use.
8. Schools should remain financially accountable for children and young people that they permanently exclude.
9. National government should clarify the specific responsibilities for Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in providing and contributing to support for children with SEND, including Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT).

# Executive Summary

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The Children and Families Act 2014 secures the presumption of mainstream education in relation to decisions about where children and young people with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) should be educated. Inclusive practice enables all children to attend their local school, supporting children with SEND to develop independence and life skills and encouraging acceptance and kindness in other children.

London boroughs are concerned about the disparity in levels of inclusion across schools in London. Boroughs told us that some mainstream schools are supporting a much larger number of children with SEND than others, and that some schools are deterred from supporting children with SEND due to financial and performance-related pressures facing their schools.

London Councils conducted this qualitative research into inclusive practice in mainstream schools in response to local authority concerns. The data is based on responses from face-to-face interviews undertaken by London Councils with local authority staff and senior school leaders (predominantly headteachers and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators).

The local authorities interviewed considered that most mainstream schools in their area were inclusive. However, local authorities and schools both highlighted that levels of inclusivity in schools varied significantly. Schools and local authorities believe that the level of inclusive practice in schools depends heavily on what has historically been expected of the schools and what they see happening around them in other schools.

Many schools, and some local authorities, highlighted that some children currently being educated in mainstream may be better supported in specialist provision but were being supported in mainstream due to parental preference or lack of specialist places. On the other hand, some schools said that more children could be attend mainstream if schools were better supported – and if other schools, according to their perception, “took their fair share”.

Facilitating and encouraging more mainstream schools to be as inclusive as possible of children with high needs could help to reduce high needs spend in this area whilst also helping to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND, for example by promoting more integration and providing access to wider opportunities in comparison with special schools.

The research identified three key phases of developing an effective approach to supporting children with SEND in mainstream schools:

- **Developing an inclusive culture**

Prerequisites to developing an inclusive culture include the school having a vision of what it wants to achieve, taking a whole school approach to supporting children with SEND, and funding.

- **Developing expertise, models and structures**

This would involve constant upskilling of all staff, flexible use of Teaching Assistants, access to a range of available interventions and strategies to support children with SEND, and an appropriate physical environment.

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- **Developing individualised responses**

Information sharing and staff briefings around the needs of children with SEND, student profiles, flexible behaviour policies, flexible ways of helping children with SEND to access mainstream classes, and catering for children's needs outside the classroom.

The research also identified three aspects to the role local authorities could play in encouraging inclusive practice in schools:

- **Providing schools with support that enables them to effectively include children with SEND**

This support can include training for staff, setting up school networks, and providing standardised resources.

- **Challenging schools to ensure that they are taking responsibility for offering appropriate provision**

This may include creating a sense of collective identity, empowering parents to better understand the rights and entitlements of their children, and clarifying schools' duties around supporting children with SEND.

- **Empowering schools to respond flexibly to children's needs**

This may include giving schools financial flexibility, enabling schools to access timely external support for children, ensuring that schools have the flexibility to meet children's needs, offering schools the opportunity of setting up an Additional Resourced Provision (ARP), and better involving schools in decisions relating to SEND.

This research highlights some of the excellent work in London's schools and local authorities to enable a significant number of children with SEND to benefit from a mainstream education.

It is also intended as a prompt to schools, local authorities and national government to scrutinise their own practice and think about what more they could be doing to ensure that all children can access mainstream education where appropriate.



# Introduction

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## Background to the research

This research into inclusive practice in mainstream schools was developed in response to concerns raised by London boroughs about the disparity in levels of inclusion across schools in London. Boroughs identified that some mainstream schools are supporting a much larger number of children with SEND than others, and that some schools are deterred from supporting children with SEND due to financial and performance-related pressures. A number of local authorities have suggested that facilitating and encouraging more mainstream schools to be as inclusive as possible of children with high needs – while not being the answer to the significant shortfall in funding – might be one way in which high needs spend could be reduced while increasing positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND for example by growing independence.

The purpose of this piece of research is to showcase some of the excellent work that London schools and local authorities are doing to enable a significant number of children with SEND to benefit from a mainstream education. This research was conducted on a qualitative basis. The data is based on responses from face-to-face interviews undertaken by London Councils with local authority staff and senior school leaders –predominantly headteachers and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) – see Appendix 1 for full methodology. This research is also intended as a prompt to schools, local authorities and national government to scrutinise their own practice and think about what more they could be doing to ensure that children can access mainstream education where appropriate.

## What is inclusion?

Inclusion “is described by some as the practice of ensuring that people feel they belong, are engaged, and connected. It is a universal human right whose aim is to embrace all people, irrespective of race, gender, disability or other attribute which can be perceived as different.

It is about valuing all individuals, giving equal access and opportunity to all and removing discrimination and other barriers to involvement.”<sup>1</sup>

The most common definition of inclusion expressed by both local authorities and schools was “children with SEND being able to attend their local school.” The government’s SEND Code of Practice sets out commitments around inclusive education and removal of barriers preventing children and young people with SEND from learning and participation in mainstream education.

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1 <http://www.keystoinclusion.co.uk/what-is-inclusion-2/>



## SEND Code of Practice (2015)

Para 1.26: As part of its commitments under articles 7 and 24 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UK Government is committed to inclusive education of disabled children and young people and the progressive removal of barriers to learning and participation in mainstream education. The Children and Families Act 2014 secures the general presumption in law of mainstream education in relation to decisions about where children and young people with SEN should be educated and the Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination for disabled people.

Para 1.31: The leaders of early years settings, schools and colleges should establish and maintain a culture of high expectations that expects those working with children and young people with SEN or disabilities to include them in all the opportunities available to other children and young people so they can achieve well.

Ofsted recognises that inclusive education, by enabling pupils who have SEND to study alongside their peers, allows young people with SEND to build up independent living skills required to prepare for adulthood – skills such as managing relationships with people and learning to make decisions. However, HMI Mick Whittaker stated that mainstream provisions need to be active in removing the barriers that get in the way of children who have SEND being fully included in all areas of school life<sup>2</sup>.

Across London there is a significant number of boroughs and schools enabling children to attend their local school even where their needs are complex, either by supporting children to access mainstream provision in a flexible and tailored way or by setting up Additional Resourced Provisions (ARPs). ARPs are units attached to mainstream schools which support children with specific needs (e.g. Autism or dyslexia). Children usually spend part of their time in the

unit, and part of their time in mainstream provision. Many interviewees, both boroughs and schools, believed that inclusion could only be achieved if children are integrated into the mainstream school environment in some way.

### How inclusive are our schools?

The local authorities interviewed tended to believe that most mainstream schools in their area were inclusive. However, local authorities and schools both highlighted that levels of inclusivity in schools varied significantly, and several school leaders said that they often admitted children who had been rejected by other schools. Councils tended to view primary schools as being more inclusive of children with SEND than secondary schools overall. There was no evidence to suggest a difference in inclusivity between maintained schools and academies, though some interviewees believed that some academies were less inclusive based on their local experience.

<sup>2</sup> HMI Nick Whittaker, 10 September 2018, <https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2018/09/10/inspecting-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-provision/>

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There was a belief amongst schools and local authorities that how inclusive a school is depends heavily on what the school is used to – both in terms of what has historically been expected of them as a school, and in terms of what they see happening around them in other schools.

London Councils undertook a snapshot survey for the second half of the Autumn Term 2018 (29th October- 21st December) to get a better understanding of the scale of informal exclusive admissions practice in London. Across 17 London local authorities 124 incidents of schools refusing or resisting admission to specific pupils were reported. 88 of these cases were in schools where there was a history of this type of behaviour and in 25 cases, because of action taken by the local authority (through the Fair Access Panels, informal negotiation or formal warning letters) the child was admitted into the school. These figures do not provide the complete picture of admissions

issues, as many cases are not reported to the local authority and the data we have only represents half of the boroughs in the capital. However, they do show that a significant number of schools across London are engaging in poor admissions practice to informally exclude pupils from even starting at their school, which should not be happening. Clearly this evidence shows that many schools across London are not fostering an inclusive culture.

Many schools, and some local authorities, highlighted that some children currently being educated in mainstream may be better supported in specialist provision but were being supported in mainstream due to parental preference or lack of specialist places. On the other hand, some schools said that more children could attend mainstream schools if schools were better supported – and if other schools, according to their perception, “took their fair share”.



# How mainstream schools are supporting children with SEND

## An overview

Thematic analysis of interviews with both local authorities and schools suggests that a successful approach to supporting children with SEND effectively in mainstream schools could be split into three distinct phases (as pictured in Figure 1).

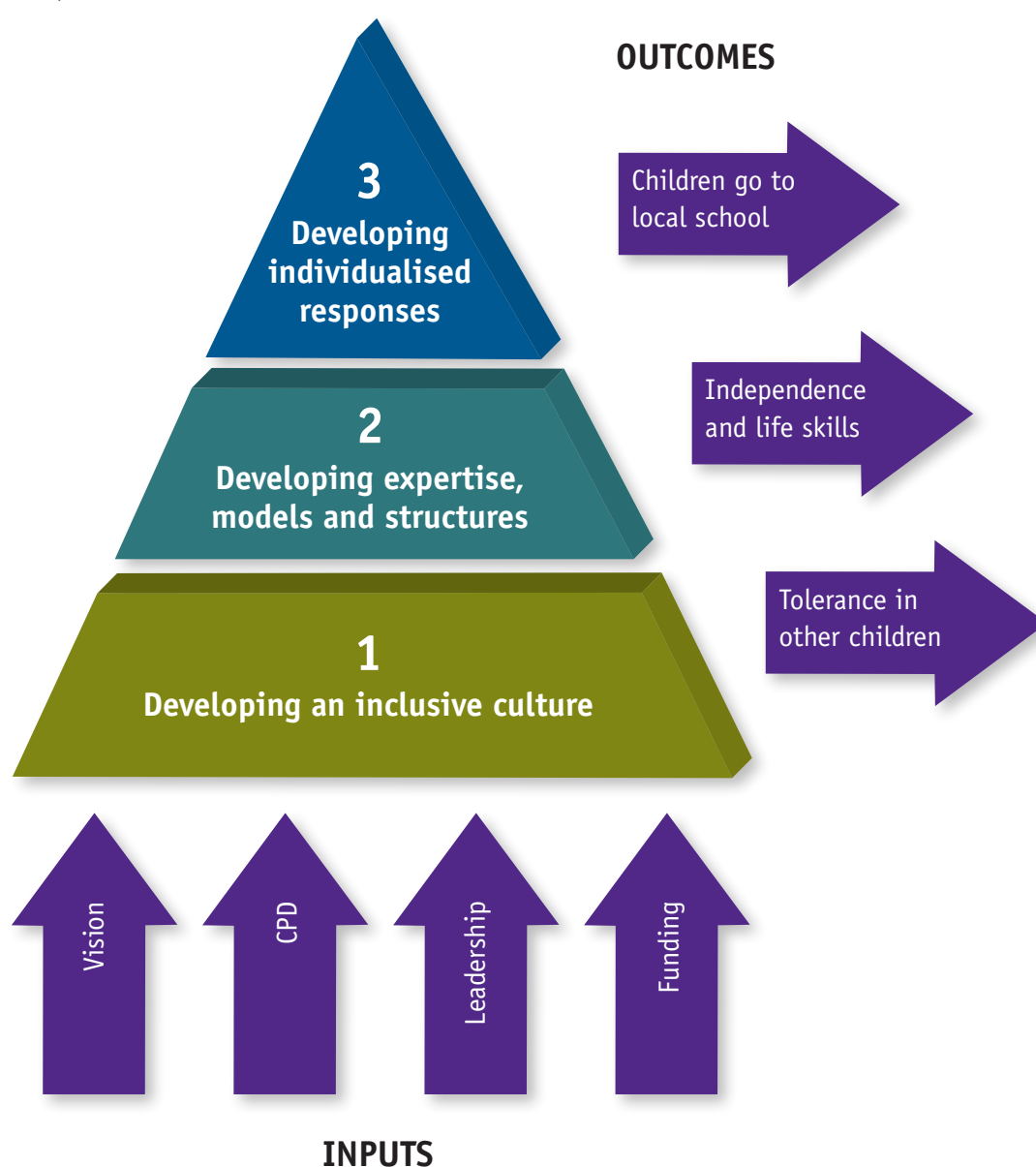


Figure 1: Three stages for supporting children with SEND in mainstream schools



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Firstly, it is essential that schools develop a vision of inclusion and sense of responsibility for supporting all children, both with and without SEND, and embed this across all tiers of staff in the school and Governors. Secondly, schools need to develop structures and systems that support inclusion, including getting the right staffing structure in place, developing expertise in staff, and finding the right models and strategies to support children with a variety of needs. Once this structure is in place, the next step is to ensure that individual children's needs are responded to in a flexible and personalised way.

This chapter will take each of these aspects in turn, highlighting ways of developing an inclusive culture, expertise, models and structures, and individualised responses that were common across the schools that took part in the research.

### Stage 1 - Developing an inclusive culture

The first stage in a successful inclusive approach is creating a culture in which all staff understand the importance of inclusion and are driven to achieve it. Figure 2 shows the most common viewpoints and approaches highlighted by schools as being indicative of an inclusive culture.

*Figure 2: What beliefs are indicative of an inclusive culture in a mainstream school?*

Good provision for children with SEND is good provision for all children

All children should be able to access mainstream schools as much as possible

Schools have a duty to meet the needs of children with SEND, irrespective of policy or funding developments

All staff are bought into the inclusion model and believe that children with SEND are the responsibility of all staff (not just Teaching Assistants)

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## Inputs

While interviewees found it a challenge to define clearly how an inclusive culture is fostered, some key themes emerged across the interviews with schools and local authorities. The following aspects were most commonly raised as prerequisites for an inclusive culture:

- **Vision:** The first prerequisite for an inclusive culture is for the school to have a vision of what it wants to achieve in terms of inclusion, along with the drive to make that happen. Some schools referred to a “culture of optimism” and many talked about the importance of trial and error and a belief in the importance of constant improvement. This vision is essential to ensuring that staff feel motivated and supported to continue adapting their practice to support children with high needs as effectively as possible. A few schools said that they also specifically recruited staff (teachers, TAs or SENCOs) who had values which matched the inclusive nature of the school.

At Orion Primary School in Barnet, language is an important part of developing aspirations in staff and challenging preconceptions. For example, teaching assistants were recently renamed ‘teaching accelerators’. The idea behind this was to change the perception around the role of TAs and their relationships with children with SEND – by emphasising a culture of ambition for all children and appreciating the important role of a TA in helping children attain to the best of their ability.

## • Leadership Team involvement:

Involvement, support and challenge from Governors and the senior leadership team (SLT), especially the headteacher, was frequently raised as a prerequisite for the development of an inclusive culture. Interviewees said that teaching and support staff needed to see that SEND was a priority of the SLT so that they continue to feel motivated to undertake sometimes quite challenging work. They also said that the SLT needed to provide hands-on support for teaching and support staff when they were struggling and to celebrate successes so that staff felt supported and part of a common cause.

## • Whole school approach to CPD (Continuing Professional Development):

Most of the schools took a ‘whole school approach’ to training staff to support children with SEND, where teachers and other staff took part alongside teaching assistants. This helps foster the ethos that SEND is everybody’s business. CPD serves to create or support an inclusive culture by increasing awareness, understanding and confidence in staff.

- **Funding:** Funding was raised as a key prerequisite for successful inclusion. It was also highlighted as the most significant barrier to inclusion in the current financial climate. The schools that took part in the research were all extremely passionate about inclusion, but identified that the funding they were allocated did not cover the costs of supporting the children in the school with SEND. Some senior leaders took the stance that they should support any children with SEND that they possibly could – but in order to do this they were making drastic cuts in other parts of their

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budget which was affecting those children that did not have SEND. Other schools did not feel that it was fair to make budgetary decisions that could impact on the education of children without SEND and therefore kept their numbers of children with SEND more limited than they would if they had more financial support.

### **Outcomes**

Interviewees talked about the benefits of effectively supporting children with SEND in mainstream. The key benefits that came up in the interviews were:

- Allowing all children to attend their local school
- Supporting children with SEND to develop independence and life skills
- Encouraging acceptance and kindness in other children

These threads run through the work that schools are doing to support children with SEND, which is highlighted in the sections below.

## **Stage 2 - Developing expertise, models and structures**

Once the culture and the aspirations for inclusion are in place, the expertise, models and structures of the school need to be developed in order to ensure that the school is equipped to support children with a wide range of needs.

### **Constant upskilling of all staff**

As well as increasing awareness and a sense of joint responsibility, regular training for staff also helps give teaching and support staff the expertise necessary to effectively support children with SEND. Nearly all interviewees emphasised constant upskilling of staff as a crucial way of developing and maintaining an inclusive approach.

Most of the interviewees spoke about the importance of developing expertise across all staff in the school, including teachers – as they are the experts in their subjects and should be interacting directly with all students, including those with SEND. Many interviewees said that teachers enter the profession with insufficient experience of working children with SEND and differentiating lessons for children with a range of needs and need regular training to enable them to support these children as effectively as possible.

It was evident that the schools interviewed regularly upskilled TAs and teachers to various extents. Some TAs and teachers were supported to become experts in speech and language therapy (SaLT), educational psychology (EP), or even occupational therapy (OT). Schools in which this was the case argued that specialisation had significant advantages. Firstly, it enabled



children with EHCPs to receive support in school that can often be difficult to access. Secondly, the support was also given in some cases to children without EHCPs who are not formally entitled to it, which may well help meet their needs without the need for a plan. Thirdly, this approach empowered and motivated TAs by building up their expertise and given them the opportunity to have an even greater impact.

### **The right staffing structures**

The use of teaching assistants (TAs) was a common topic for discussion in the interviews. While TAs have historically been used (and, in some cases, are still being used) to support students with high needs predominantly on a one-to-one basis, many of the schools interviewed are using TAs in a more flexible way. Senior leaders cited allocating TAs to subjects, year groups, or small groups of students, rather than individuals. Some schools spoke about allocating TAs depending on the needs of the students not only in particular subjects, but also in particular topics. For example, one school discouraged TAs from supporting students too much in drama so that they would interact more with other students and the teacher instead. Another school leader spoke about assigning students a TA when studying particular topics that might prove a challenge and removing the TA once the topic changed to something with which the student felt more comfortable.

The most commonly cited reason for using TAs in this way was to encourage the development of independence and resilience in students by reducing overreliance on and attachment to a specific adult.

The second most commonly cited reason was for the benefit of the TAs themselves. Several schools said that mixing up TAs gave them respite from supporting a child with specific challenges/ needs. Others said that working with a variety of children allowed TAs to gain experience of supporting children with different needs.

Implicit in the conversations was, of course, the fact that using TAs in this flexible way enables stretched resources to go further – but this did not appear to be the main driver in most cases.

Orleans Park in Richmond uses a flexible approach to deploying teaching assistants. The school calculates the amount of funding it will receive through high needs funding and employs the corresponding number of TAs, or Learning Support Assistants (LSA), as they are called at Orleans Park). Children with very complex needs might have an LSA who supports them full time, but generally the school tries not to allocate LSAs in this way in order to encourage independence. The SENCo will plan a varied timetable for the LSAs, ensuring that they are supporting all high needs students in the core subjects. For the remainder of the time, the LSAs will be allocated to support groups of children depending on a combination of the complexity of need, the year group, and the subject area. The SENCo will aim to place children on SEN support in classes with children with EHCPs, so that they can also benefit from some extra support from an LSA.

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### **Access to a range of available interventions and strategies**

All of the schools had interventions available which they could use to support individual children as necessary. These included curriculum interventions (for example, numeracy or literacy groups), as well as interventions relating to 'softer' skills such as life skills, wellbeing, and resilience.

Some schools paid for specialist support out of their own budget, such as EP, SaLT or art therapy. In some cases, professionals supported and monitored TAs to deliver some of this support.

One of the strategies used by Monega Primary School in Newham is a 20/10 timetable. Children might spend 20 minutes on a focused work task in the classroom; then 10 minutes in sensory play; then 20 more minutes at focus work task followed by a 10 min physical break. Monega does not have an Additional Resourced Provision so there are quite a few children with very severe needs who are educated full time in mainstream. This strategy acknowledges that some children with high needs, particularly those with autism, need regular changes in activities and expectations, and enables those with severe needs to effectively access mainstream classes.

Christ Church Surbiton in Kingston has recently started using precision teaching as a short term intervention for specific children. Precision teaching is an approach to helping children develop fluency and accuracy in literacy skills. Students do very short exercises on a regular basis for a set period of time and progress is carefully monitored. TAs are trained up and supported by EPs to undertake precision training with students that are finding reading and writing a challenge.

### **An appropriate environment**

The physical environment of the school is also important to think about when considering how best to include children with SEND. Some interviewees highlighted the importance of small, flexible spaces that can be used to support children in different ways. Some schools had invested in a sensory room where children with SEND could go to change their focus. Pastoral areas had been set up in some schools as safe spaces for vulnerable children to spend some time.

One local authority highlighted the importance of the SEND team working closely with the council places planning team to ensure that school builds and renovations were designed with children with SEND in mind. A small amount of capital investment to improve facilities for children with SEND in mainstream settings, can mean the difference between a child with SEND being able to attend the local mainstream school or requiring specialist provision.

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### Consistency

The concept of consistency was raised frequently in interviews with school leaders. Some schools spoke about the importance of consistent timetables so that children (especially those with autism) knew what to expect each day. Some referred to the importance of consistent models for assessment and monitoring, so that children could be understood if they moved on to other schools. Some highlighted that a consistent approach to teaching was necessary to ensure that children knew what to expect when they moved classes or worked with different members of staff. Whatever systems the school uses to support children, whether it be visual timetables, workstations, or choosing boards, these should remain in place throughout the child's journey through the school so that students feel safe and supported. If staff can quickly understand a child's needs and knows which teaching strategies to use, staff members can be used flexibly without negatively impacting on the child's learning.

## Stage 3 – Developing individualised responses

Once the expertise, strategies and structures are in place, it is important that these are adjusted and tailored to meet the needs of individual students. A few specific examples of ways of ensuring that the response to children with SEND is individualised are as follows.

### Information sharing

Several schools said that regular opportunities for sharing information about the needs of specific pupils were embedded into the school's routine. Many had regular meetings for TAs and/or teachers to share feedback about what was working well or not so well for specific pupils.

Hendon School in Barnet has a teaching and learning briefing once a week, which all teachers and TAs attend. Approximately every third briefing is led by the SENCo, who picks a couple of children with high needs for discussion. The SENCo might talk about what the latest assessment has found, as well as highlighting what teaching strategies work well or not so well for the specific students. Teachers and TAs have opportunities to feed back and discuss what has worked for them. It is a requirement for all teaching staff to attend, even if they do not teach the students involved (in fact, staff don't know which students will be discussed at each briefing). This helps teachers and TAs learn a broader range of strategies that will help them work with students with different needs in the future.



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### **Student profiles**

Some school leaders also talked about developing student profiles for each individual student to help the staff who work with them understand how they like to learn.

Orleans Park in Richmond has developed an online system where staff working with children can see their needs and ability. The SENCo attaches teaching strategies tailored to the individual child. These strategies are refreshed and refined as teachers and LSAs are encouraged to feed back on what does and does not work. Meanwhile, at Tolworth School in Kingston, children on the SEN register write postcards to their teachers telling them what they find helpful or challenging.

### **Allocated adults**

A common approach, especially for schools which have moved away from one-to-one TA support for the majority of children with high needs, is to allocate each vulnerable child a specific adult who can look out for them. This approach was common across both primary and secondary schools. The allocated adult might meet the student on a regular basis, spend time reading with them, or just be there for when they need support. This was generally seen as good way of helping students feel supported and safe, especially where they did not have one-to-one support. A couple of schools also talked about the benefit for the TAs, who could develop a connection to a particular student and feel a sense of personal responsibility.

### **Flexible behavioural policies**

Most of the schools interviewed said that their policy for exclusions took account of children with SEND and each incident was managed on a case by case basis. For children with SEND it is important to understand the causes of certain behaviour; how the behaviour is related to their specific needs; and how they might have been affected by other children. Schools cited different strategies for avoiding exclusions, including redeploying staff; moving children to different classes; providing pastoral support and a space students can go to in order to reflect; or putting in place an appropriate intervention.

Staff at Snowfields Primary School in Southwark described how important it is to understand the context and triggers for behavioural issues at an early stage, to prevent exclusions as far as possible. Each time a child misbehaves, he or she must come out of class, talk to someone from the senior leadership team, and fill out a reflection sheet. The team then use this information to try and spot patterns – for example, does a particular child usually come out at a certain time of day? Do behavioural issues occur more often with a specific teacher or TA? This way, the staff can try and get to the bottom of potential triggers, such as hunger, concentration lapses after a series of lessons, or difficulties with a particular subject. They will then see what changes can be made that could reduce this behaviour in the future.

### **Flexible ways of helping children with SEND access mainstream**

Most of the schools spoke about the importance of an individualised

approach to helping children with SEND access mainstream. Several spoke about the importance of a balance between mainstream classes and tailored interventions. Depending on the needs, some children in ARPs access mainstream lessons most of the time and are taken out of class for a few sessions a week (e.g. students who have dyslexia or are deaf), while others may spend a significant amount of time in the ARP learning core skills that they can then take to the classroom.

Barking and Dagenham has provided specialist education in mainstream settings in Additional Resourced Provisions (ARPs) for nearly twenty years. ARPs are an important strand of specialist provision in the borough. Over a third of Barking and Dagenham schools now host an ARP. The Council commissions just under 400 places across 25 ARPs. Each of the ARPs meets a dedicated SEND need including Autism, Deaf, Speech, Language and Communication, Moderate to Severe Learning Disabilities and SEMH. ARPs were developed to support inclusive practices in schools and so that pupils with high levels of need can remain part of a mainstream school community. Over time, many pupils are supported to access mainstream activities and to take part in the daily life of their school alongside their peers. ARPs have become increasingly popular with parents.

Barking and Dagenham's ARPs employ staff with specialist knowledge and skills and create appropriate specialist environments which support pupils' complex learning needs. ARPs develop expertise which support inclusive practice right across the school and local area via peer support and increasingly outreach services

Personalised timetables were also used frequently to allow children to feel part of the class but have breaks and undertake different activities when they are no longer able to benefit from the class environment.

Children with autism at Orleans Park in Richmond learn in mainstream classes. They have a card that they can hold up if they need a break from the lesson. Then they are able to walk around the school; go to the learning support area for a break; or speak to a member of the pastoral team – and then return to the lesson when they are ready.

While most interviewees talked about the importance of ensuring that teaching staff could differentiate their lessons for children with different needs, some highlighted that this was not enough for children with the most significant needs, who often needed completely different material and topics to be able to access learning. A couple of schools mentioned that they had created their own curriculum for children within the school who could not access the national curriculum.



Orion Primary School in Barnet has a buddy system for children in reception. Each child with high needs who is learning in the ARP has a buddy who can help them navigate around the school and access mainstream classes. Some of the children with high needs also take their buddies to the sessions they themselves attend, such as Attention Autism. The buddy changes each day so that one child doesn't have to support a child with challenging needs for too long. This approach has several advantages. It helps children with high needs feel safe in a mainstream environment; it can support them to feel accepted and develop personal relationships; and it teaches children without SEND how to support and accept other children's needs.

### **Catering for students' needs outside the classroom**

The interviews revealed several examples of schools ensuring that children with a wide range of needs can attend school trips and take part in extra-curricular activities.

Orleans Park in Richmond has a high number of children with medical needs. The school is passionate about all children having the same opportunities for taking part in extra-curricular activities and attending school trips. All children can sign up for the Duke of Edinburgh award, irrespective of their needs, and the school will find a way of ensuring that they can participate. The school's sports department has also developed a range of pathways for sports, so that children with physical disabilities are always able to take part in some way. Children without SEND are also able to choose to participate in the pathways designed for those with physical disabilities, improving general accessibility of sports classes and allowing children with SEND to participate in sports alongside their peers. The school has formed a boccia team (a Paralympic sport similar to bowling) for children with physical disabilities. The way of playing and equipment is adapted for each student so that everyone can take part. The team has competed with boccia teams in other schools and the school is now the national boccia champion – something that is celebrated across the school.



# How local authorities are facilitating inclusive practice in mainstream schools

## An overview



Figure 3: The local authority role in encouraging inclusive practice in schools

Local authorities have a role in facilitating inclusive practice in mainstream schools. The research suggested that there are three aspects to the role: providing schools with support that enables them to effectively include children with SEND; challenging schools to ensure that they are taking responsibility for offering appropriate provision; and empowering schools to respond flexibly to children's needs. These are shown in Figure 3.

### Strand 1 - Support

The most common way in which the local authorities involved in the research encouraged inclusive practice in mainstream schools was through providing direct support to help them work effectively with children with SEND. The following means of support came out in the interviews:

### Training for schools

All the councils involved in the interviews offered training for schools – which fits well with the importance of CPD as highlighted in the previous chapter. The aim of investing in training is to equip school staff, particularly SENCos, to support children with SEND effectively, and to ensure high levels of inclusion in mainstream schools. Several interviewees spoke about the value of 'train the trainer' approaches where people who have attended training share their learning and upskill colleagues. Some local authorities emphasised that providing training and support was important to maintaining a trusting, open and two-way relationship with schools.

The amount of training provided to schools varied by local authority, and some local authorities had a core offer alongside a



traded offer. Training is offered in a variety of areas depending on the local authority, including autism, SaLT, EP, sensory, physical difficulties, attachment, and complex needs.

There were also examples of local authorities working with health colleagues to coordinate and/or fund training.

Barking and Dagenham has worked with local health partners to jointly fund and offer 'Thrive' training to schools. 'Thrive' is based on an attachment theory model for supporting children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. They take a cascading approach, where SENCOs or other senior leaders in SEND attend the training and then upskill other staff in their schools. There has been a significant amount of interest in this training – around 30 schools have been trained and more schools are interested in attending future sessions.

There was positive feedback from most of the schools on the training offer available from their local authority (particularly the offer around autism in a few local authorities). However, senior school leaders cited examples of training that they had to source externally or could not access easily, which differed depending on the borough.

### Running networks

Most local authorities spoke about the networks they run for school staff (SENCOs, headteachers or different audiences depending on the topic), where they share information and build a relationship with senior leaders in schools.

### Advice for schools

Some local authorities said that they offered advice on inclusion as well as training. Employing inclusion advisors who do outreach work in schools, both supporting them and challenging their practice, was seen as an effective way of supporting schools. However, in some cases, it appeared that this area had taken a funding reduction as a result of stretched budgets and increased administration around the EHCP process.

Greenwich has a large autism outreach service with 19 members of staff, made up of TAs with a background in special schools, teachers, and occupational therapists. Every school in the borough is allocated a member of staff from the outreach service to support them to improve their practice in relation to autism. If a school decides to set up an ARP, a teacher from the outreach service will work with them from the beginning of the process to identify and address any gaps in expertise in the school staff and think about changes that need to be made to the school environment. The advisor will come into the school regularly over the next year to support and track how they are getting on.

### Resources

Although providing standardised resources that schools could use to help them assess and monitor needs and outcomes was not commonly raised by interviewees in local authorities, this was highlighted by a few schools as an area in which the council – or national government – could provide some support.

Barnet has produced an online toolkit for SENCOs, which includes documents around assessing needs and setting outcomes. SENCOs in Barnet had highlighted that a toolkit would be useful to encourage consistency across schools and reduce duplication of effort. Therefore, a working group was set up over a 6 month period, where SENCOs and the council coproduced the toolkit.

### **An appropriate structure**

Some local authorities mentioned the fact that the way in which they were structured was designed to help foster a sense of trust and support between them and schools.

In Greenwich, the SEND team now sits within school improvement in the management structure. This means that school improvement is well placed to take a holistic view of the school's performance in terms of both attainment and inclusion, which do not always go hand in hand. It also means that correspondence and meetings with schools can be coordinated so that the response is joined up. Furthermore, the early years inclusion team (which consists of five area SENCOs and 2 inclusion officers) has been moved from early years to sit within the SEND team. This means that SEND experts can help decide which children receive support in the early years, to support consistency in the transition phase to school and ensure that those with significant needs have an EHCP in place before they start primary school.

## **Strand 2 - Challenge**

Some local authorities said that challenging schools to support children with SEND more effectively, and driving up schools' expectations of one another, was a key way in which they facilitated inclusion.

### **Creating a sense of collective accountability between schools**

Achieving for Children (AfC), which covers Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead, is setting up a peer review programme for secondary schools in Kingston and Richmond focusing on inclusion. Senior school leaders including Sencos will offer support and challenge to one another to improve inclusion practices across secondary schools. The idea behind this programme is twofold: firstly, to enable schools to receive support and the opportunity to reflect with peers whom they trust and respect; secondly, to inspire a sense of joint accountability between schools so that all schools provide a consistently high quality offer to meet the needs of the full range of learners

Barnet works with its SENCO and headteacher networks to create a sense of collective accountability. For example, the local authority has recently shared data with headteachers on the proportion of pupils on the SEN register at each of the schools. While this data is not comprehensive (it does not include children residing out of borough), it does offer a picture of the variety in proportions of children supported by different schools. This approach has

started a discussion between schools and created a sense of peer challenge and partnership working. Other boroughs have also shared, or are planning to share, school-level data in this way.

Barnet holds moderation meetings where SENCos can share components of their work and seek peer feedback. For example, they may be reflecting on support plans or EHCP applications. This leads to peer reflection and practice sharing, which drives improvement and expectations. Schools in Barking and Dagenham complete a self-evaluation where they RAG rate how well they are performing on a range of indicators relating to inclusion, driving a sense of individual accountability.

### Empowering parents

Barnet puts a lot of emphasis on informing and equipping parents of children with SEND to understand their rights and challenge schools to support their children as effectively as possible. The council provides free training and events for parents, as well as regular drop ins and newsletters. All the resources available to schools are also accessible to parents, so that they can better understand advice and best practice. Barnet also developed and published (on Local Offer page) a number of supporting tools and documents, for example the 'Ordinarily Available' document which provides information to both parents and schools on what provision a setting should be

providing for each type of need. The aim of creating this document was to encourage accountability in schools and to enhance the resources at school level before parents and/or schools look to an EHCP as the way forward. This improved the quality of information and evidence provided to the council, which resulted in a reduction in the number of EHCP applications and an improvement in the quality of information and evidence provided to the council.

### Clarifying expectations of schools

Greenwich and Barnet have both produced documents clarifying what schools should be doing to support children on SEN support. In Greenwich, completed copies of this document (the profile) are used when requesting a needs assessment. The panel then initially considers if a full assessment is required, using the graduated response alongside other documentation, and then again when the full assessment is completed, will decide whether it is necessary to issue a plan, or if the child's needs can be met at SEN Support. This approach serves to ensure that schools are using a graduated response to intervention in collaboration with other professionals and services.

Some interviewees suggested that national government could also play a helpful role here by amending the Code of Practice to clarify the duties of schools, as the current wording can be ambiguous about schools' legal obligations and can leave room for

schools to act in a non-inclusive manner. This is covered further in the 'Challenges and recommendations' section.

### **Strand 3 - Empower**

Many of the senior leaders in schools spoke about the importance of taking a flexible approach to supporting children with SEND. However, some schools felt limited in their ability to be as flexible as they would like, due to funding constraints, the bureaucracy and duration of the EHCP process, and the prescriptive nature of some EHCPs.

Some local authorities gave good examples of taking steps to empower schools and allow them to take a flexible approach to supporting children with EHCPs.

#### **Giving schools financial flexibility**

Delegating some high needs funding to schools is an approach taken by some local authorities as a way of incentivising schools to be more inclusive and allowing them to use funding creatively.

Greenwich tops up the £6,000 notional SEND funding with an additional element from the high needs budget, so that schools have resources available to meet the needs of children who do not have EHCPs. The aim of this approach is to invest more in support at school-level, enabling some children's needs to be met at SEN support. Greenwich believes that this gives schools more flexibility to invest in initiatives and approaches that will support children with SEND across the school, resulting in timely interventions and better outcomes for children, without the need for an EHCP.

#### **Enabling schools to access support quickly**

Achieving for Children has recently set up an early intervention panel to allow schools to access support for children who do not yet have an EHCP. The threshold for referral to the panel is that the school will have sought and implemented advice from the Education Inclusion Support Service; the Educational Psychology service; and implemented the locally agreed threshold agreement. The multi-agency panel includes representation from local authority staff in the early intervention, early years and SEND teams, as well as from EP, OT, SaLT, CAMHS professionals. The panel meets every half term and discusses what time-limited support could be quickly put in place to enable the school to meet children's needs sustainably. While it is too early to evaluate the impact of this initiative, the aim is to allow schools to access support quickly so that children's needs are met without having to wait for the EHCP process, and so that applying for an EHCP is not viewed as the only way of accessing support.

Newham and Barking and Dagenham also put an emphasis on allowing schools to access support and funding quickly to reduce the time it takes for pupils' needs to be met.

#### **Ensuring that EHCPs allow schools as much flexibility as possible**

Some local authorities are adapting EHCPs to ensure that their structure and wording allows schools some flexibility. Some interviewees (both in schools and local



authorities) highlighted that stipulating the number of hours of support that a child requires is not necessarily the right way forward, as this may hinder steps towards independence and restrict the flexibility that schools have to use the money creatively (for example, by pooling high needs funding to set up an ARP or invest in employing an EP or SaLT).

### **Offering schools the opportunity of setting up an Additional Resourced Provision (ARP)**

ARPs were common in many of the areas visited as part of the research. ARPs were generally believed to be an effective way of supporting children with high needs to access mainstream provision in a balanced and tailored way. Interviewees highlighted the following advantages of ARPs (in order of the number of times they were raised):

For schools:

- Many schools were very supportive of the principle of ARPs and wanted to play a part in supporting this model. This is because ARPs allow children to develop independence and confidence, to learn from their peers, and to be accepted – while also accessing tailored support and interventions where necessary.
- The specialist support and expertise gained through the ARP can be used to drive improvement and inclusion across the school.
- Funding for children who study in ARPs is higher than funding for children with SEND who study fully in mainstream, meaning that schools can be inclusive without putting their general budget at risk. However, this was not always the case.

- The other children in the school benefit from being around children with significant needs, as they learn to better understand and accept other needs and perspectives.

For local authorities:

- Local authorities can support parents' preference for mainstream education, even where children have significant needs.
- While several local authorities highlighted that the revenue funding that they provide for children in ARPs is not necessarily lower (or significantly lower) than the revenue funding they provide for special schools, the capital cost for setting up an ARP is less.
- Where there are insufficient special schools within the borough, placing a child in an ARP is likely to cost less than placing a child in an out-of-borough or independent special school.

### **Involving schools in decisions relating to SEND**

Some local authorities talked about involving schools in forums and panels that decided where resources should be directed (in addition to the Schools Forum). Local authorities thought this was important for helping schools feel listened to and respected, and for creating a sense of joint accountability. A comment was made by one headteacher that the local authority could make better use of the skills and local knowledge of SENCOs when making decisions.

# Recommendations

The interviewees were asked what would help them to continue to deliver inclusive schools and promote inclusion more widely to other schools. The following recommendations are taken from their responses.

## **1. Local authorities should consider what more they could be doing to effectively support, challenge and empower schools to improve their inclusive practice, replicating some of the best practice set out in this report.**

While the interviews highlighted examples of local authorities taking positive and effective action to facilitate inclusion in mainstream, there is considerable variation between the numbers of children studying in mainstream across the London boroughs. This is clearly influenced by local context, culture, and demographics – but the report findings suggest that there is good practice that could be replicated elsewhere in London. Schools were appreciative of the support provided by their local authority, but several school leaders said that they would appreciate greater support. Furthermore, supporting schools appeared to be a much more common approach to facilitating inclusion than either challenging or empowering.

## **2. National government should sustain sufficient levels of high needs funding allocations in line with rising demand and costs.**

All the interviewees (both schools and local authorities) highlighted the fact that high needs funding allocations from the government did not currently meet the costs of providing support to children with SEND. Schools gave multiple examples of reductions

in support for children with SEND or for others in the school that had to be made to in order to balance the books. Even those schools, that were determined to continue supporting as many children with SEND as possible despite the funding pressures, identified funding as a significant barrier to supporting these children effectively. The government has announced a funding boost for special educational needs but sufficient levels of funding must be sustained in the long term to allow all schools to continue to deliver, and improve, provisions for children with SEND

## **3. National government should provide a clearer policy steer on inclusion of children with SEND in mainstream schools and introduce a specific inclusion fund to facilitate more inclusion in schools.**

The Children and Families Act 2014 secures the presumption of mainstream education for children with SEND. It is important that the government leads this agenda from the front, which will encourage more schools to prioritise inclusion. There are also insufficient incentives for schools to be inclusive of children with SEND and too much is dependent on the personality and values of the headteacher and senior leadership team. Pressures on high needs budgets are so acute that local authorities are being forced to prioritise funding placements for individual children, which leaves little room for more general support for mainstream schools to drive inclusion. A specific inclusion fund could help schools to take forward initiatives to foster more of an inclusive culture. This would allow more children to go to their local school as well as reducing the need for more expensive specialist placements.

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**4. London Councils should secure a pan-London commitment from key education partners, including Ofsted, all 33 London local authorities and the 3 Regional Schools Commissioners, to champion inclusion in schools and tackle any incidents of non-inclusive practice that are identified**

This report highlights excellent inclusive practice in many schools across London, but there are still many that are not inclusive. It is important that all the education partners in London work together to hold these schools to account and are clear on the responsibilities of all schools to provide appropriate levels of support to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.

**5. Building on the new focus on inclusion in the new School Inspection Framework, Ofsted should further prioritise inclusion in school inspections by:**

- Challenging schools that have a below local average number of children on the SEN register at a school, taking into account any specific characteristics of the school, such as selective admissions criteria, that may impact on the school's intake
- Examining the admissions policy to ensure it does not discriminate against children with SEND
- Seeking to understand how schools support and nurture children with SEND, with a focus on how independence and life skills are developed
- Ensuring that schools without evidence of inclusive SEND practice are not awarded an outstanding Ofsted rating.

After funding, the most commonly raised barrier to inclusion was the potential impact on the school's performance and, therefore, its Ofsted rating. A few interviewees suggested that the new Ofsted School Inspection framework should help increase recognition for the support provided by some schools to children with SEND, but many highlighted the need for a stronger focus on inclusion in Ofsted inspections.

**6. National government should update the SEND Code of Practice to stress and clarify schools' duties in relation to supporting children with SEND, including providing a clear definition of off-rolling.**

There is some confusion about what duties schools have in relation to supporting children with SEND. Schools' responsibilities are often phrased as recommendations rather than duties, which allow some schools to take a non-inclusive approach. Clarity around the use of reduced timetables and the definition of off-rolling would be particularly helpful as these are areas that are currently open to interpretation.

**7. The DfE should support the design and creation of one EHCP template for all local authorities to use.**

At present each local authority is expected to co-produce a local EHCP template with, for example, their parent carer forum, whilst adhering to a statutory minimum framework. Having one standardised template, co-produced with parent and young people representatives, would help reduce the administrative burden for schools. Staff would only have to familiarise themselves with one set of paperwork and there would be more consistency in EHCPs. This consistency would

also be beneficial for families, particularly for those who move between local authorities. However, this would require support from DfE (and possible legislative change), therefore London local government is offering to trial a regional template in the shorter term, working with the DfE, parents and young people.

**8. Schools should remain financially accountable for children and young people that they permanently exclude.**

Schools currently do not retain any responsibility for pupils that they exclude, which include many children with SEND. Putting in place a bespoke package of support is expensive for schools, whereas permanently excluding costs the school nothing. However, reintegrating children in another suitable provision can prove a big expense for the local authority and can take some time, which puts the child's progress and wellbeing at risk. Requiring schools to fund the costs of the child's reintegration into another provision would disincentivise schools from permanently excluding before trying other options. This would help create a more inclusive culture within schools.

**9. National government should clarify the specific responsibilities for Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in providing and contributing to support for children with SEND, including Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT).**

There is significant variation in the amount that CCGs contribute to and work with local authorities on EHCPs, despite health being a key statutory partner in delivering EHCPs. Integration of education and health support for children with SEND was a central tenet of the reforms set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, but at present this is not

working in many areas of London. Speech and Language therapy (SaLT) was commonly cited as a type of support that was difficult to access from CCGs.

**10. National government should hold Regional School Commissioners to account for tackling poor admissions practice and off-rolling in Academies, where identified by local authorities, Ofsted, parents and other partners.**

Poor admissions practice and off-rolling pupils with SEND are not exclusive to academies but local authorities have very few levers to tackle these issues where they do occur, despite having a range of duties relating to SEND. With maintained schools local authorities are able to work closely with schools to ensure they foster an inclusive culture. At present this means that academies are not being held to account when they refuse to admit a child with SEND or off-roll them. The Regional School Commissioner is well placed to be able to do this.



# Appendix 1: Methodology

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This research was conducted on a qualitative basis. The data is based on responses from face-to-face interviews undertaken by London Councils with local authority staff and senior school leaders (predominantly headteachers and SENCos).

## Sampling

In total, fifteen interviews were undertaken: 5 interviews with local authority staff; 5 interviews with senior leaders in primary schools; and 5 interviews with senior leaders in secondary schools. Interviews with schools covered six local authorities with different political control from a mix of inner and outer London areas.

The majority of local authorities who took part in the research were directly approached due to the high proportion of children with SEND that were supported in mainstream schools in their borough. All local authorities were also invited to participate if there was a particular approach or activity they wished to discuss.

Schools were approached on recommendation from their corresponding local authority. All of the schools were interviewed because their local authority saw them as being good examples of inclusive schools.

## Scope of the interviews and analytical approach

The interviews took place in December 2018 and January 2019. All interviews were undertaken at schools or local authorities and lasted approximately one hour.

The interviews were semi-structured. The primary aim of the interviews was to gather examples of positive practice from schools and local authorities in relation to facilitating inclusion of children with SEND in mainstream education. The interviews also aimed to capture any challenges that schools might face in being inclusive of children with SEND. All interviewees were asked for recommendations that might alleviate these challenges, and the recommendations presented in the report are based on suggestions from the interviewees.

A thematic approach was taken to the analysis of the interviews to ensure that the report accurately captures the key themes that emerged in the discussions.



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