

Westmorland & Furness Inclusion Strategy Guidance 2026

**Supporting Mainstream Settings to Develop Effective
Inclusion Strategies and Use Inclusive Mainstream Fund
(IMF) Resources**



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1. Introduction

This guidance has been produced to support Westmorland and Furness settings in producing high-quality Inclusion Strategies in line with Department for Education requirements for the Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF).

It is designed to support school to develop Inclusion Strategies that not only align with national expectations but also with the Westmorland & Furness Belonging and Inclusion Strategy 2026-2029. Settings are encouraged to view inclusion through the wider lens of belonging, recognising that children and young people achieve best when they feel known, valued, understood and connected to their school community

The guidance is intended to:

- Support settings to meet statutory requirements.
- Promote a consistent understanding of inclusion across the local authority.
- Help settings identify barriers to learning and participation.
- Support effective use of IMF allocations.
- Improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- Develop stronger mainstream inclusion.

The guidance should be used alongside:

- SEND Code of Practice.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Westmorland and Furness Local Offer.
- Ordinarily Available Provision Guidance.
- Westmorland and Furness Belonging and Inclusion Toolkit
- DfE Inclusion Mainstream Fund Guidance.



2. National Context

The DfE has introduced the Inclusive Mainstream Fund to strengthen inclusive mainstream education and support settings to develop sustainable approaches which benefit all learners. Settings must publish an Inclusion Strategy explaining how they will use the IMF alongside their core budget and notional SEND budget.

The strategy should:

- Identify barriers to learning.
- Explain planned activities.
- Demonstrate alignment with the Seven Principles of Inclusion.
- Outline intended outcomes.
- Be reviewed annually.

3. Westmorland & Furness Context

Westmorland and Furness became a unitary authority in April 2023 and covers one of the largest geographical areas in England. There are approximately 230,000 residents. Westmorland and Furness is England's most sparsely populated local authority area. Whilst many children and young people experience positive outcomes, the geography of the area creates additional challenges relating to access to services, transport, childcare and support. Rurality can also contribute to hidden disadvantage and social isolation for some families.

The authority has approximately 53,000 children and young people aged 0-24 years and around 43,000 aged 0-19 years. Westmorland and Furness has a strong education system, with the majority of settings and early years settings judged good or outstanding. Around 74% of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans are educated within mainstream settings, providing a strong foundation for further developing inclusive practice.

The SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies:

Key Local Trends

- Increasing prevalence of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).
- Increasing prevalence of ADHD.
- Growing communication and interaction needs.
- Rising SEMH need.
- Increased complexity of need.
- Greater demand for EHCP assessments.
- Challenges around access to services within rural communities.
- A projected decline in primary-aged pupil numbers by 2028

Our Local Vision

This guidance aligns with the Westmorland & Furness Belonging and Inclusion Strategy 2026-2029, which sets out a shared ambition to create an inclusive education system where every child and young person feels they belong, feels safe, valued and understood, and is able to achieve and thrive regardless of their background, need or starting point. The strategy recognises that a strong sense of belonging is fundamental to attendance, engagement, achievement, wellbeing and positive life outcomes. Inclusion is not viewed as an additional offer but as the foundation of everyday practice across all education settings.

The strategy is underpinned by the principle that strong relationships, early support and effective partnership working between settings, families and services are key to improving outcomes for children and young people. It reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that all learners can access high-quality education within inclusive environments where they are respected, supported and able to participate fully in school life.

Our Values

The Westmorland & Furness Council Plan and Belonging and Inclusion Strategy are underpinned by three core values:

- **Compassion** – understanding and responding to the experiences and needs of children, young people and families.
- **Inclusivity** – ensuring that every child and young person feels welcomed, valued and able to participate fully.
- **Aspiration** – maintaining high expectations and ambitions for all children and young people regardless of need or circumstance.

The Belonging and Inclusion Strategy highlights several key priorities for settings and partners:

- Strengthening inclusive cultures and relationships.
- Improving early identification and intervention.
- Increasing access to education and reducing barriers to participation.
- Reducing suspensions and exclusions.
- Strengthening partnership working with families and services.
- Ensuring sufficient provision to meet local need.



What This Means for Settings

Inclusion Strategies should therefore go beyond describing SEND provision and should demonstrate how settings are actively creating cultures of belonging and participation for all learners.

Settings should be able to evidence how they:

- Promote a sense of belonging for every child and young person.
- Develop strong, trusting relationships with families.
- Identify need early and respond effectively.
- Use evidence-informed approaches to improve outcomes.
- Remove barriers to attendance, engagement and participation.
- Provide meaningful access to enrichment, leadership and wider opportunities.
- Maintain ambitious expectations for all learners.
- Reduce the need for exclusion through relational and inclusive approaches.
- Work in partnership with health, care and community services.

Settings should ensure that their Inclusion Strategies reflect these values and demonstrate how they are embedded within the school's culture, leadership, curriculum and wider provision.

Alignment with the Seven Principles of Inclusion

The DfE's seven inclusion principles closely align with the strategic priorities identified within the Westmorland & Furness Belonging and Inclusion Strategy, creating a shared framework for improvement across settings and services. These common themes include:

- Ambitious leadership.
- Early intervention.
- High-quality teaching.
- Access to wider opportunities.
- Attendance and belonging.
- Family partnerships.
- Inclusive environments.

By aligning their Inclusion Strategies to both national expectations and local priorities, settings can contribute to the collective ambition that every child and young person in Westmorland and Furness experiences belonging, participation, achievement and success within their local community.

Settings are encouraged to reflect on the belonging and inclusion strategy principles within their Inclusion Strategies:

- Relationships First.
- Belonging supports achievement.
- Early help prevents escalation.
- Every child in their community wherever possible.
- Inclusion as a shared responsibility across settings, families and services

4. What Is an Inclusion Strategy?

Inclusion is the process of removing barriers to learning, participation and belonging. Effective Inclusion Strategies demonstrate how settings are developing cultures, environments and relationships which enable all learners to participate, achieve and thrive. Inclusion should therefore extend beyond SEND provision and encompass attendance, wellbeing, participation, enrichment and pupil voice for all children and young people.

An Inclusion Strategy explains:

- Who your pupils are.
- What barriers they face.
- How the school is responding.
- How funding is being used.
- What impact is expected.

An effective strategy should answer three questions:

Who are our pupils?

Understanding need through analysis.

What barriers exist?

Understanding challenges affecting learning and participation.

What are we going to do?

Planning effective responses and measuring success.

5. Understanding the Inclusive Mainstream Fund

The IMF is not intended to create separate provision. Instead, it aims to strengthen whole-school inclusion. Below are some examples of how principles can be evidenced and spend allocated.

Principle 1: Ambitious Leadership and Governance

Leaders create a culture where inclusion is everyone's responsibility.

Evidence Examples of how the setting does this

- Inclusion included in School Improvement Plan - how belonging and inclusion is explicitly included.
- Governor monitoring – linked governor with planned and structured monitoring.
- SEND reports.
- Staff accountability processes – how leaders communicate inclusion as everyone's responsibility.

Appropriate IMF Spending Examples

- Inclusion audits.
- SENCO development.
- SEND governor training.
- Inclusion reviews.

Principle 2: Early Intervention and Evidence-Based Support

Early identification remains critical.

Evidence Examples of how the setting does this:

- WellComm.
- NELI.
- Reading interventions.
- Early years assessments.

Appropriate IMF Spending Examples

- Intervention
- Speech and language support.
- Literacy intervention.
- Nurture groups.
- Emotional wellbeing provision.



Principle 3: High Quality Teaching

Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality teaching has the greatest impact on outcomes for SEND pupils.

Evidence Examples of how the setting does this:

- Learning walks with specific focus on adaptive teaching and vulnerable pupils.
- Coaching records of support given to staff.
- CPD programme and participation.
- Pupil progress data with clear analysis of patterns and trends with identified actions.

Appropriate IMF Spending Examples

- Adaptive teaching CPD.
- Coaching.
- Neurodiversity training.
- SEMH training.

Principle 4: Enrichment and Wider Participation

Participation rates for pupils with barriers in:

- Clubs.
- Sports.
- Residential.
- Music.
- School leadership opportunities.

Appropriate IMF Spending Examples

- Additional staffing and resources that enable pupils to participate.
- Development of inclusive extracurricular provision.
- Targeted programmes.
- Assistive technology to enable pupils to access activities.

Principle 5: Attendance, Culture and Belonging

Successful inclusion is demonstrated through:

- Attendance statistics especially for pupils with barriers.
- Participation rates in enrichment.
- Relational approaches behaviour strategies.
- Pupil voice – pupils self-reports on belonging, safety etc.

Appropriate IMF Spending Examples

- Staff training in relational practice, trauma-informed approaches, emotional wellbeing and neurodiversity.
- Attendance support, mentoring and early intervention programmes.
- Nurture, emotional literacy or wellbeing provision.
- Activities that strengthen pupil voice.

Principle 6: Families and Services

Parents should be viewed as partners in all aspects of the setting.

Examples

- SEND/FSM coffee mornings.
- Co-production examples from meetings and actions plans.
- Review meetings minutes.
- Parent surveys.

Appropriate IMF Spending Examples

- Parent workshops.
- SEND drop-ins.
- Family support programmes.

Principle 7: Inclusive Environments

Classrooms should minimise barriers and support pupil learning.

Examples

- Visual supports.
- Structured routines.
- Low-arousal spaces.
- Assistive technology.

Appropriate IMF Spending Examples:

- Assistive technology.
- Sensory resources.
- Environmental improvements.



6. Your School Inclusion Profile – Statement of Intent

It is recommended that your strategy should include a summary of school context. The Dfe template references areas you may want to include further in a statement of intent. Below are suggested data tables to show your school context and the examples in the appendices give further suggestions to support writing your statement of intent.

Data Table

Measure	ALL pupils	SEND	PP
Total Number on Roll			
SEND Support %			
EHCPs %			
FSM %			
Social Care %			
Attendance %			
Persistent Absence %			
Suspension %			

Areas of Need Table

Area of Need	Number	Percentage
Communication & Interaction		
Cognition & Learning		
SEMH		
Sensory & Physical		

Additional Data

Settings may also consider:

- Autism pathway prevalence.
- ADHD pathway prevalence.
- Looked after children.
- Mental health support.
- Young carers

A comparison to national data could also be included using data available from Nexus and [Release home - Special educational needs in England - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

e.g.:

Need Profile	Number	Percentage
Autism Assessment Pathway		
ADHD Pathway		
Speech & Language Involvement		
Early Help Involvement		
Young Carers		
Looked After Children		
EAL		

7. Identifying Barriers to Learning

Settings should identify barriers affecting participation. Examples are given below and in documents in the reference links:

Common Barriers in Small Rural Primary Settings

- Speech and language delay.
- Attendance.
- Access to services.
- Emotional regulation.
- Family hardship.

Common Barriers in Larger Primary Settings

- Neurodiversity.
- Literacy.
- SEMH.
- Attendance.
- Behaviour linked to need.

Common Barriers in Secondary Settings

- Literacy.
- Anxiety.
- Executive functioning.
- Attendance.
- Transitions.
- Preparation for adulthood.



Attendance is a commonly occurring barrier across all settings. Research and local evidence indicate that attendance difficulties are often linked to multiple interacting factors, including unmet SEND needs, emotional wellbeing, family circumstances, transitions, relationships, environmental factors and feelings of belonging. Settings should therefore view attendance as an inclusion issue rather than solely a compliance issue.

Settings should consider:

- Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA).
- Neurodiversity and attendance.
- Transition points.
- Sensory and environmental barriers.
- Peer relationships.
- Family engagement.
- Mental health and wellbeing.
- Community and socioeconomic factors

Barrier Analysis Template

Detail of barrier to learning	Baseline data used to identify barrier
1. Attendance	86% for SEN cohort; 87% for PP cohort
2. Literacy	Reading age gap data for learners with barriers.
3. SEMH	Increased incidents of mental health referrals.
4. Belonging and Participation	Data identifies limited participation in wider school life and enrichment.
5. System service barriers	Current waiting times for ADHD assessments



8. Planning Effective Inclusion Activity

Every activity should:

- Address an identified barrier.
- Be evidence-informed.
- Have measurable outcomes.
- Be reviewed regularly.

Activity Planning Table

Description of activity (noting evidence and barrier numbers addressed)	Activity Type (whether it is Universal or Targeted)	Cost
Adaptive Teaching CPD (2) – all staff will receive monthly CPD focused on embedding use of sections of Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP). “Evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation highlights that high-quality teaching is the most important lever schools have for improving outcomes for pupils with SEND. Regular professional development focused on adaptive teaching and OAP will strengthen classroom practice and improve access to the curriculum for all learners.”	Universal	
Reading Intervention (2) EEF - Structured literacy interventions have been shown to support reading attainment when targeted to identified need and delivered alongside high-quality classroom teaching.	Targeted	
Attendance Mentor(1) EEF - Attendance interventions are most effective when they identify and respond to the specific reasons behind absence. Attendance mentoring provides personalised support to improve engagement, attendance and participation in learning.	Targeted	

9. Example Intended Outcomes

One-Year

- Staff confidence in adaptive teaching and ordinarily available provision improves – measured by staff voice at start and end of academic year.
- Attendance improves to non-disadvantaged national %.
- Family engagement increases – 80% of families engage in at least one school event.
- Pupils report an increased sense of belonging and connection to their school community.

Two-Year Measures

- Progress data in Maths for PP pupils improves to national .
- Participation rates for learners with barriers continue to increase
- Attendance improvements are sustained through inclusive and relational approaches rather than short-term interventions.

Three-Year Measures

- Inclusive practice embedded throughout setting.
- Outcomes for SEND pupils show sustained improvement.
- Sustainable systems of early intervention are established.



10. Measuring impact – success criteria evidence support

Settings should collect both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Quantitative Measures

Attendance

- Whole school attendance.
- Learners with barriers attendance.
- Persistent absence.

Attainment

- Reading scores.
- Writing progress.
- Maths progress.
- Qualifications gained.

Behaviour

- Suspensions data.
- Behaviour incidents.
- Mental health referrals.



Qualitative Measures

Pupils

- Views from pupil surveys.
- Sense of belonging.
- Engagement in enrichment activities.

Parents

- Confidence in provision.
- Satisfaction with communication.

Staff

- Confidence in inclusion.
- Professional development impact



11. Publishing and Reviewing Strategies

The DfE expects Inclusion Strategies to be:

- Published annually.
- Accessible to parents.
- Reviewed regularly.
- Updated where required.

Suggested Review Timeline

Term Activity

Autumn Publish Strategy

Spring Mid-Year Review

Summer Annual Evaluation

12. Closing Statement

Westmorland and Furness settings have a strong tradition of inclusion and community partnership. By using the Inclusive Mainstream Fund strategically, settings can strengthen high-quality teaching, improve participation, reduce barriers and ensure more children and young people are successfully educated within their local mainstream school. The most effective inclusion strategies focus not simply on provision, but on culture, belonging and the ambitious expectation that every child can thrive. At its heart, every child and young person is known, valued and feels they belong



13. Appendices

Appendix A. Governor and Leadership Checklists

Have you considered:

- ✓ SEND profile?
- ✓ Attendance?
- ✓ Participation?
- ✓ Spending plans?
- ✓ Impact measures?
- ✓ Parent voice?
- ✓ Workforce development?
- ✓ Sustainability?

Belonging and Inclusion Questions

- ✓ How do we know pupils feel they belong?
- ✓ How do we measure inclusion beyond attainment?
- ✓ Which groups are least likely to participate in enrichment activities?
- ✓ How are attendance difficulties linked to unmet need?
- ✓ How are families involved in shaping inclusion priorities?
- ✓ How are we building sustainable inclusive practice rather than dependency on additional funding?



Appendix B: DfE-aligned examples of practice

Use this appendix to support understanding of the seven principles of inclusion. The examples are not exhaustive or prescriptive and should be adapted to local context.

DfE principle	Universal offer examples	Targeted support examples
Ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion	Inclusion embedded in strategic planning; clear leadership accountability; governor/ trustee scrutiny; data collection and analysis; specialist advice to support policy and planning; local professional networks; benchmarking against similar schools.	Targeted use of specialist expertise where additional support is needed to strengthen planning or evaluation.
Evidence-based support prioritising early intervention	Early identification; graduated response; use of evidence-informed approaches; flexible grouping; pre-teaching; effective deployment of teaching assistants; careful review of impact.	Small-group or one-to-one interventions; language development support; vocabulary pre-teaching; targeted support without waiting for diagnosis or statutory process.
High quality adaptive teaching with curriculum designed for all learners	Adaptive teaching; scaffolding; flexible grouping; curriculum design that anticipates learner variability; evidence-based professional development; appropriate use of technology.	Teacher-led small-group teaching; targeted literacy or numeracy support; evidence-based interventions aligned with the curriculum.
Enriching provision beyond the classroom that all children can access	Accessible clubs, trips, arts, sports, life skills and leadership opportunities; removing practical barriers to participation.	Staffing, equipment or appropriate accommodations to support pupils who need additional access to wider opportunities.
A safe and respectful culture fostering belonging, attendance, and participation in learning	Whole-school behaviour approaches; consultation with pupils and families; structured activities at breaks/ lunchtimes; belonging surveys; attendance support.	Attendance interventions that consider the needs of pupils with SEND; quiet spaces; targeted wellbeing or engagement support.
Strong partnerships with families and wider services	Family engagement; SEND parent carer forums; information evenings; transition support; signposting to wider services.	External agency workshops; specialist led support for families; multi-agency planning for pupils requiring targeted or specialist input.
Inclusive environments with continuous improvements to accessibility	Visual supports; improvements to acoustics, lighting, temperature and visual clutter; accessible classrooms and common spaces; communication aids; transition planning.	Enhanced onboarding; phased transitions; specialist advice on environmental adaptations; technology to support a range of needs.

Resources

[Inclusive mainstream fund: support for school leaders - GOV.UK](#)

[Developing an inclusion strategy using the inclusive mainstream fund - GOV.UK](#)

[Developing your Inclusion Strategy Support Session 20260914 160130 Meeting Recording - YouTube](#)

[Preparation-toolkit-for-Inclusion-Strategy-Development.pdf](#)

[IMF Planning Tool Primary.pdf](#)

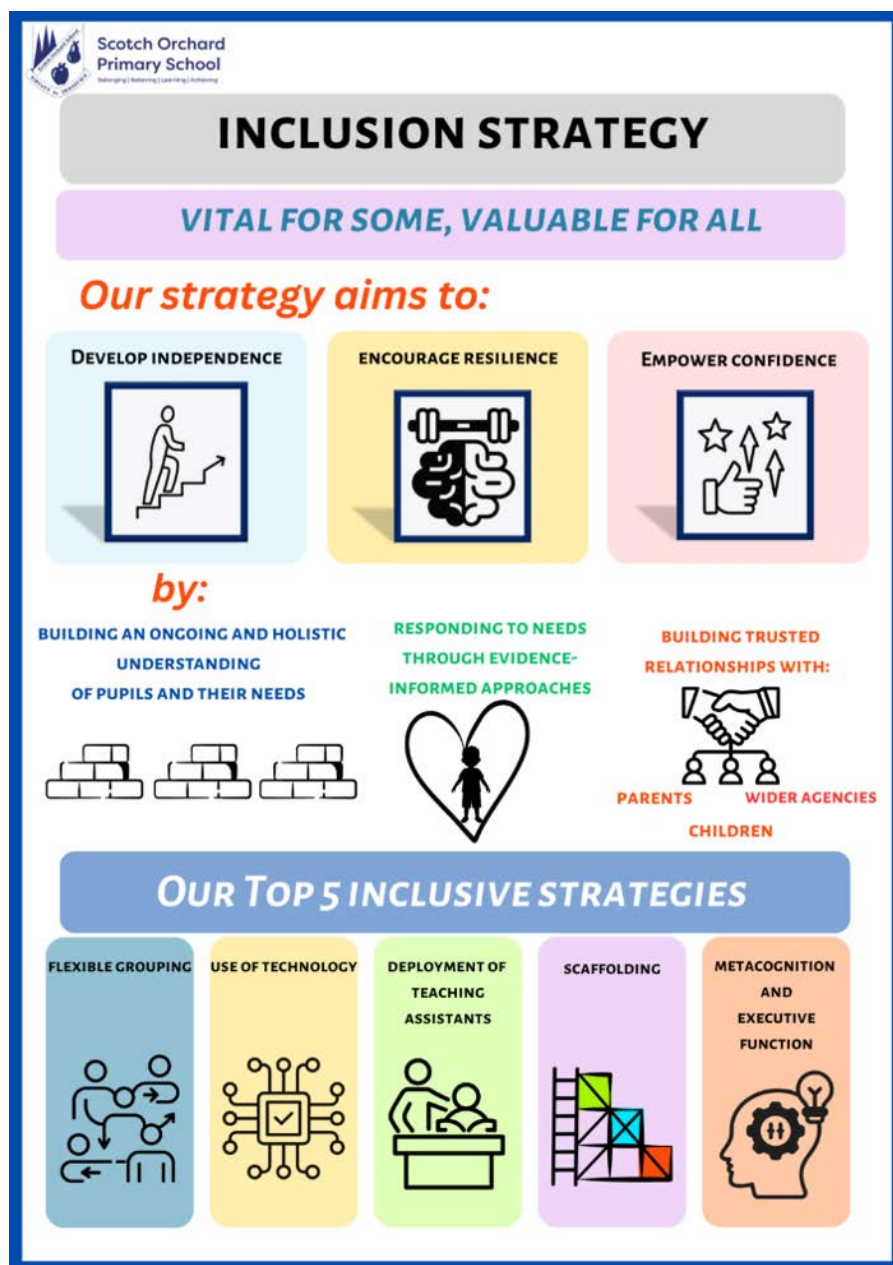
[IMF Planning Tool Secondary.pdf](#)

[The School Inclusion Strategy: How to Write and Publish Yours](#)

[Tips for schools to write their inclusion strategy statement | Tes](#)

[Guide to Inclusive Teaching | EEF](#)

[Inclusion Strategy 2026 – Scotch Orchard Primary School](#)





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